

'Fear not, Joseph'.

The exact expression 'Fear not' occurs over 60 times in the King James Version of the Bible.¹

I want us to focus on one of the three occasions when it is found in the narratives which tell of the first advent of our Lord Jesus. In each case, the words were spoken by an angel.²

My spotlight falls upon the first occurrence of the expression in the New Testament, upon the declaration made to Joseph in a dream:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary³ was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit.⁴ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately.

But while he thought about these things, behold,⁵ an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David,⁶ fear not to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name⁷ Jesus,⁸ for He will save His people⁹ from their sins'.

So all this was done that it might be fulfilled¹⁰ which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin¹¹ shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel', which is translated, 'God with us'.¹²

We know the story so well.

Some short time before, the angel Gabriel's had revealed to Mary that 'the power of the Highest' would overshadow her, and that the child to be born would 'be called ... the Son of God'.¹³

The angel made it clear to her that the babe's conception would be supernatural. He was to be born in the normal way. What was unique¹⁴ was not *how He left* his mother's womb but *how He entered* it, for when He was born she would still be a virgin.¹⁵

Following a hint given by Gabriel,¹⁶ Mary then immediately left her home town of Nazareth and travelled some 60 miles to a town in the hill country of Judea to visit her near relative Elizabeth, then in the sixth month of her pregnancy. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for some three months, until the time of the birth of Elizabeth's child who later became known as John the Baptist, and then returned to her family house in Nazareth.¹⁷

It is at this point that our passage takes up the story. For as soon as she returned home her condition was obvious to Joseph. She was, our passage tells us, 'found to be with child' ... 'discovered to be pregnant', that is.¹⁸ As Joseph saw it, he faced only two options (both allowed by Jewish law at the time), namely: (i) to hold her up as an example, having the matter exposed in an open court and having Mary publicly disgraced and possibly punished;¹⁹ or (ii) to cancel their betrothal privately by handing her a letter to that effect in the presence of just two witnesses.²⁰

Although strongly disposed to cancel their bond of betrothal quietly,²¹ Joseph was still pondering his dilemma when God intervened to change his plans dramatically. An angel appeared to him, telling him that he wasn't to 'fear' to 'take' Mary, the word translated 'take' being the technical word for receiving a bride from her parents.²²

By Jewish law, as Mary was then 'betrothed' to him,²³ she would already be referred to as his 'wife',²⁴ and the angel assured Joseph that she had done nothing unworthy of the name.

But, as the angel made clear, of far greater importance than Mary's name was the name to be given to her child. In confirmation of what Gabriel had told Mary some three months before,²⁵ Joseph is now told, 'you shall call His name Jesus', but this time with the added explanation, 'for He will save His people from their sins'.²⁶

In passing, we should note that 'by naming Mary's son, Joseph will be accepting legal paternity'.²⁷ The child would therefore legally be Joseph's son and thus legally son of David.

We know that the name 'Jesus' was by no means either a new name or an unusual name. We can trace it back at least as far as the successor of Moses, whose name was changed (by Moses himself) from Hoshe/ua (meaning 'salvation') to Joshua, the Hebrew form of Jesus.²⁸ It was also the name of the last High Priest mentioned in the Old Testament.²⁹ And I

note that the name 'Jesus' even appears in our Lord's own genealogy as the name of one of His ancestors.³⁰ It was also a very common and popular name in New Testament days; scholars refer to over 100 other men of roughly that period who bore the name 'Jesus'.³¹

Mary's Son was also, Matthew adds, to be called 'Immanuel', which means (as Matthew translated it for his readers), 'God with us'. It was not that our Lord would actually be called 'Immanuel' by the men of His day (any more than He would actually be spoken of or to as 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'³²), but that the name would accurately describe His nature and His character.

But the child *would* be known to all as 'Jesus', and this, not (i) because of what He had always been ('the Son of God'),³³ nor (ii) because of what He would become ('God manifest in the flesh'),³⁴ but (iii) because of what He would one day do; namely, die to 'save His people from their sins'.

For, although, as witness the meaning of His name 'Immanuel', the *birth* of Christ *brought God to man*, it would be, as witness the meaning of His name 'Jesus', the *death* of Christ which *brought man to God*.

I don't usually pay much attention to advertisements. But, many year ago, I did smile at one Press Notice issued by the former Somerfield food chain in early April 2007. The advert, aimed at boosting their sale of Easter Eggs that year, read, 'Brits are set to spend a massive £520 million on Easter eggs this year ... but over a quarter don't know why handing them out symbolises the birth of Jesus ...'³⁵ Not, you note, 'symbolises the resurrection of Jesus', but symbolises the birth of Jesus! An article about this Press Release appeared in the Times newspaper the following day which carried the well-chosen headline, 'Store gets egg on its face'.³⁶

Alas, many people in our day really do confuse what happened at the first Christmas with what happened at the first Easter ... what happened at Bethlehem with what happened thirty years later at Calvary.

It is perhaps significant that Jesus actually received His name at the time of His circumcision.³⁷ To give a baby its name at such a time was the common custom. But our Lord's name of 'Jesus' was most appropriately given to Him at the time His blood was first shed who would one day shed His blood for the remission of sins.³⁸

It is true, of course, that, whereas the birth of Jesus was in itself a momentous and wonder-filled event, it is not His birth which saves us from our sins ... it is His death.

But I should not want us to lose anything of the sense of wonder at what happened at Bethlehem. Here is profound mystery indeed.

'The framing, forming, and miraculous conception of the body of Christ, in the womb of the blessed virgin, was the peculiar and special work of the Holy Ghost . . . It was effected by an act of infinite creating power, yet it was formed or made of the substance of the blessed virgin'.³⁹

I love to think that, whereas the Old Testament began with the account of how man wanted to be as God,⁴⁰ and recounted the disastrous consequences which followed, the New Testament begins by telling how He who was God stooped to become a man, and tells of the marvellous consequences which followed.

Truly, the time of our Lord's coming into the world was marked in *red* on heaven's calendar! It was, we read, 'when the fulness of time had come' that 'God sent forth His Son ... to redeem'.⁴¹ It is in Him whom God sent forth that 'we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins'.⁴²

And, therefore, the angel announced, 'You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people *from their sins*', where the word 'He' is emphatic – 'He Himself, and no other'.

And I want you to hold in your minds those words '*from their sins*' while I relate a comparatively recent (and also true) story.

It is two weeks to the day since the anniversary of the infamous⁴³ attack by Imperial Japan upon the American naval base and Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.⁴⁴ It was that act of aggression which brought both Japan and the United States into the Second World War.⁴⁵

The man who led and commanded the Japanese air raid was 39 year-old Mitsuo Fuchida.⁴⁶



As the senior commander he was the first over Pearl Harbor and the last to leave it.

Later Fuchida wrote about that morning at Pearl Harbor: 'Seating myself in the first plane, I led the whole squadron of 360 planes into Pearl Harbor, and having established that the main force of the American Pacific fleet, comprised of eight warships, was at anchor . . . I gave the order, "Whole squadron, plunge into attack!"'

Fuchida was one of Japan's most experienced pilots and took part in most major battles. One Japanese news cameraman had unofficial nicknames for all the senior officers. Fuchida's was 'Hitler', which gives you some idea of the sort of man he was ... he even grew a toothbrush moustache out of admiration for Adolf Hitler.

Just before the Battle of Midway he had an operation for appendicitis. He struggled up from the sick bay to the deck of the aircraft carrier to wave off his fellow pilots. An American plane dropped a bomb which broke both his legs, but had he not been on the deck he would have burned alive with the other 30 men trapped down below in the sick bay. He was blown into the sea and rescued.

By the end of the war he was the sole survivor of the seven commanders and 32 squadron leaders whom he had led at Pearl Harbor.

On August 5th 1945, he was in Hiroshima attending a week-long military conference. An urgent order came through ordering him to leave and report to Tokyo. The next day the atom bomb was dropped.

In all there were six events during the war where he survived in what we might call 'unusual circumstances'.

With Japan's defeat, Fuchida became a bitter, disillusioned man. He took up farming, which gave him time to think, and to ask himself why he had survived a war which had cost the lives of almost all his comrades.

It was then the period of the Cold War (a period of enormous tension between the Communist world and the Western World) and it looked as if another war might start. He wrote a book called 'No more Pearl Harbor', during the writing of which it struck him that the mess the world was in was due to human nature. 'But who or what can change people?' he asked.

It was at this point that he was called to give evidence in war crimes trials which the Americans were conducting. As he passed through Tokyo railway station a missionary gave him a tract called 'I was a prisoner of Japan'. In this tract the American, Jacob De Shazer, described how he had read the Bible while a prisoner of war and how he turned to Christ as a result.

Almost in spite of himself, Fuchida bought a Bible, and, when reading Luke's account of the crucifixion of our Lord, he read His prayer: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'. He thought of the many men he had killed in battle with his heart full of hatred.

In his own words: 'Right at that moment I seemed to meet Jesus for the first time. I understood the meaning of His death for my wickedness, and so in prayer I requested Him to forgive *my sins* and change me. That ... day I became a new person ... Jesus became my personal Saviour'.

Media reaction was not slow in coming. 'Pearl Harbor hero converts to Christianity' was one typical headline.

Men who had fought for Japan wanted him to give up what they called 'this crazy idea'. One even attacked him with a knife claiming that he had embraced Christianity only to impress the American conquerors.

But time proved them wrong. Fuchida decided to serve the Lord full time, and so turned down a well-paid job with the new Japanese government, advising them on defence issues.

He travelled widely as an evangelist, particularly in the United States. At one point, he returned to Pearl Harbor to make a documentary film in which he is seen over the spot where an American battleship sank and became a permanent tomb for hundreds of men. When the American film company Twentieth Century Fox produced the film, 'Tora! Tora! Tora!' 40 years ago, Fuchida supplied Japanese technical information and attended the London premiere.

Often he would say: 'I would give anything to retract my actions at Pearl Harbor, but it is impossible. Instead, I now work at striking the death blow to the hatred which ... causes such tragedies. And that hatred cannot be uprooted without Jesus Christ ... He is the only answer'.

Eventually he settled back in Japan, serving the Lord and working alongside Jacob De Shazer, the missionary whose own story was the starting point in Fuchida's conversion.



Mitsuo Fuchida and Jacob De Shazer

When reading of our Lord's sacrificial suffering, Mitsuo Fuchida was brought to the point where, in his own words, 'I understood the meaning of His death *for my wickedness*'. Henceforth, he committed his life to following the One who, as we read at the outset, was given the name 'Jesus', because He had come to 'save His people *from their sins*'.

I close by quoting a not-so-well-known verse of a Christmas carol. Mr William Dix⁴⁷ wrote over 40 hymns, including the carol, 'What child is this?'

The not-so-well-known verse of that carol reads:

Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.⁴⁸

This Christmas time, let us not lose sight of the purpose⁴⁹ which 'the Word' (our Lord Jesus) had in view when He was 'made flesh',⁵⁰ and let us ponder those emotive words of William Dix,

'The cross ... borne for me, for you'.



Notes

¹ In all, 62 times; from Gen. 17. 1 to Rev. 1. 17.

² Matt. 1. 20; Luke 1. 30 and Luke 2. 10. It was also spoken by an angel in connection with the birth of John the Baptist, Luke 1. 13.

³ It is notable that, whereas Matthew speaks of Mary as our Lord's 'mother', he is careful to avoid giving the impression that Joseph was, in any sense, our Lord's 'father', Matt. 1. 16.

⁴ 'The Holy Spirit is mentioned here for the first time in Matthew. The Spirit is involved in Jesus' conception (cf. Matt. 1. 20), empowerment (Matt. 3. 16; 12. 18, 28), and leading (4. 1). In Jesus' view, the Scriptures come from the Spirit (22. 43). John spoke of the day when Jesus would baptize in the Spirit (3. 11), and Jesus promised His disciples that the Spirit would supply their testimony during persecution (10. 20). The world mission of the disciples would include baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28. 19)', David L. Turner, 'Matthew (Baker Exegetical Commentary)', on Matt. 1. 18.

⁵ 'The particle ἰδοὺ ('Behold') occurs here for the first of 62 times in Matthew. It frequently introduces divine intervention or something else that is surprising or remarkable', David L. Turner, *ibid.*, footnote 4 on Matt. 1. 20.

⁶ The expression 'son of David' links this narrative to the preceding genealogy, especially Matt. 1. 1.

⁷ 'The angelic annunciation has a form that is common to other biblical birth announcements (Gen. 16. 11; 17. 19; Luke 1. 13, 31)', David L. Turner, *ibid.*, on Matt. 1. 21.

⁸ In Luke's account, Mary is told to give the name, Luke 1. 13, but presumably the formal naming would be by Joseph.

⁹ 'The angel may have meant simply the people of Israel, i.e., the truly pious among them, not intending to exclude the Gentiles from being saved by Jesus, but confining the view at present to the salvation of the Jews. So the angel announces to the shepherds "great joy, which shall be to all the people" (Luke 2. 10, Revised Version)', John Broadus, '*Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*', page 10. The word translated 'people' occurs 25 times in the Gospel according to Matthew, and on every other occasion it refers to the people of Israel.

¹⁰ 'This is the first of several fulfilment citations (Matt. 2. 15, 17-18, 23; 4. 15-16; 8. 17; 12. 17-21; 13. 35; 21. 4-5; 27. 9-10) which interpret and illuminate almost every aspect of Jesus' life and ministry in terms of the fulfilment of God's promises to His people', Larry Chouinard, '*Matthew (The College Press NIV Commentary)*', on Matt. 1. 22.

¹¹ 'Melchisedec was a type of Christ, who is said to be "without father and without mother". Christ being born of a virgin, answered the type; He was without father and without mother; without mother as He was God, without father as He was man', Thomas Watson, '*A Body of Divinity*', page 193 ('Christ's Humiliation In His Incarnation');

¹² Matt. 1. 18-23 (New King James Version).

¹³ Luke 1. 35.

¹⁴ 'Scripture already noted miraculous births, such as those of Samson, Samuel, and especially Isaac, but no one else narrated a virgin birth', Craig Keener, '*Matthew Bible Study*', at www.craigkeener.com.

'On the Virginal conception in particular, it is often said that such a belief stems from prescientific superstition. But even the relatively primitive stage of first-century science was sufficiently advanced for people to know that in every other known instance it required a biological father as well as a biological mother to produce a human child. The Christian notion of a Virginal conception was no more plausible in first-century Judaism than it is in the twentieth-century Western world', Craig Blomberg, '*Matthew (The New American Commentary)*', page 58.

¹⁵ 'How clearly fitting it is that, as man's sin and the cause of our condemnation sprung from a woman, so the cure of sin and the source of our salvation should also be born of a woman ... *If it was a virgin [Gen. 4. 1] who has been the cause of all the evil besetting the human race, it is all the more appropriate that that a virgin should be the occasion of all good*'. Anselm of Canterbury, '*Cur Deus Homo*', Book II, Chapter VIII.

¹⁶ Luke 1. 36.

¹⁷ Luke 1. 39-56.

¹⁸ The expression 'before they came together' 'probably refers to both domestic and marital relations: "come together under the same roof as man and wife"', W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., '*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*', volume 1, page 154.

¹⁹ Cf. Lev. 20. 10.

²⁰ 'One of two options confronted Joseph. Either he could accuse his betrothed before the public authority and ask for a trial to determine whether she had been forcibly seized against her will or seduced with consent (cf. Deut. 22. 23-7; 11QTemple 66:1-8; b. Sanh. 57b), or ... he could without further ado draw up a bill of divorce himself (Deut. 24. 1; m. Giṭ 2:5), without a trial (m. Soṭa 1:5?), and call upon two or three witnesses to sign the document (m. Giṭ 9:4, 8)', W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *ibid.*, page 157.

And see Alfred Edersheim, '*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*', Book 2, chapter 4.

'In cases of adultery, divorce was mandatory under Jewish law; Roman law agreed. Joseph has grounds to believe that Mary was unfaithful; the question for him is thus not whether he should divorce Mary, but how he should do so. By charging her before a judge, Joseph could publicly repudiate her pregnancy; he could reduce his dishonour by shaming her. He could also be certain to recoup any money that he had paid toward the marriage, though her shamed family might have returned that to him anyway. Once a father had given his daughter a dowry, her husband could keep the dowry if she were found unfaithful. *Joseph has various possible incentives for divorcing her publicly*', Craig Keener, *ibid.*.

²¹ 'The pledge to be married was legally binding. Only a divorce writ could break it, and infidelity at that stage was considered adultery (cf. Deut. 22. 23-24)', D. A. Carson, '*Matthew (The Expositor's Bible Commentary)*', on Matt. 1. 18.

²² 'The marriage itself took place when the groom (already called "husband," Matt. 1. 19) ceremoniously took the bride home (see Matt. 25. 1-13)', D. A. Carson, *ibid.*.

²³ A 'betrothal' relationship typically lasted between 10 and 12 months. 'About a year typically passed before the woman moved from her parents' house to her husband's house (m. Ketub. 5:2; m. Ned. 10:5; b. Ketub. 57b) ... During that time, although the marriage was not yet consummated, the woman was 'wife' (Deut. 20. 7; 28. 30; Judg. 14. 15; 15. 1; 2 Sam. 3. 14) and she could become a widow (m. Yeb. 4:10; 6:4; m. Ketub. 1:2) or be punished for adultery (Deut. 22. 23-4; 11QTemple 61). Thus betrothal was the legal equivalent of marriage, and its cancellation divorce (m. Ketub. 1:2; 4:2; m. Yeb. 2:6; m. Giṭ 6:2)', W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *op. cit.*, page 154.

²⁴ Cf. 'his espoused wife', Luke 2. 5.

²⁵ I note that in early biblical times, either a mother (Gen. 4. 25) or a father (Gen. 4. 26; 5. 3) could name a child.

²⁶ Matt. 1. 21. Cf. 'the Lord ... shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities', Psa. 130. 8.

²⁷ David L. Turner, *ibid.*, on Matt. 1. 21.

²⁸ Num. 13. 16.

²⁹ Zech. 3. 1.

³⁰ Luke 3. 29 (literal translation). The name is rendered 'Jose' (wrongly) or 'Joshua' in some translations.

³¹ 'We have a data base of about 3000 named persons (2625 men, 328 women, excluding fictional characters). Of the 2625 men, the name Joseph (including Yose, the abbreviated form) was borne by 218 or 8.3%. (It is the second most popular Jewish male name, after Simon/Simeon.) The name Judah was borne by 164 or 6.2%. *The name Jesus was borne by 99 or 3.4%*', Ben Witherington III; accessed at ...

http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/03/smoking-gun-tenth-talpiot-ossuary_9874.html.

'Kloner goes on to discuss the name Yeshua, or Jesus. He states that this name is "a derivative of Yehoshua (Joshua)...Yehoshua/Yeshua is the sixth most common name used during the Hellenistic and Roman periods in Eretz Israel, borne by 71 of the individuals studied by Ilan" (1996: 18a). *Ilan later came up with a total of 104 names* (2002: 126-133, 449)', Gordon Franz, accessed at <http://www.plymouthbrethren.org/article/4154>

³² Isa. 9. 6.

³³ Luke 1. 35.

³⁴ 1 Tim. 3. 16; cf. John 1. 14.

³⁵ Press release from Somerfield, 3 April 2007: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article1610495.ece>.

³⁶ The Co-operative Group took over the Somerfield grocery chain two years later, in March 2009.

³⁷ Luke 2. 21.

³⁸ Matt. 26. 28.

³⁹ John Owen, '*On the Holy Spirit*', pages 162-163 (Book II, Chapter III).

⁴⁰ Gen. 3. 5.

⁴¹ Gal. 4. 4-5.

⁴² Eph. 1. 7; where the word translated 'redemption' (απολυτρωσις) differs from that rendered 'redeem' (εξαγοραση) in Gal. 4. 5.

⁴³ President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed 7 December, 'a date which will live in infamy'.

⁴⁴ On 7th December 1941.

⁴⁵ The attack led to the United States' formal entry into World War II the next day.

⁴⁶ To my knowledge, the best biography of Mitsuo Fuchida is 'God's Samurai: Lead Pilot at Pearl Harbor', by Gordon W. Prange; published by Potomac Books. I highly recommend this book; many of the facts set out in my main text are drawn from this book.

Mr Fuchida himself wrote a short autobiography entitled 'Pearl Harbor to Golgotha' in 1953.

Online resources which I have consulted include:

<https://christiantreasury.org/content/mitsuo-fuchida-forgotten-story-faith>

<http://www.e-n.org.uk/1516-Pearl-Harbor-Bomber.htm>

<http://www.biblebelievers.com/fuchida1.html> no more

<http://personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~etmcmull/FUCHIDA.htm>

<http://personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~etmcmull/DESHAZER.htm>

<http://www.potsdam-naz.org/sermons/fuchida.htm>

Good documentaries about the Pearl Harbor attack (including numerous quotations from Mitsuo Fuchida) can be viewed here:

[\https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Joh2BXPsrXs&t=1337s

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tm39s7ry6rk\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tm39s7ry6rk)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZVG6pFpEbE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnfhRhuhqmw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdPAbvI-UZg>

⁴⁷ See ... http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/d/i/x/dix_wc.htm.

⁴⁸ See ... <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/w/h/a/whatcist.htm>

⁴⁹ Consider not only *who* it was, nor only *how* it was, but *why* it was, that the Son of God entered the womb of Mary.

⁵⁰ John 1. 14.