

Click Here to  
Buy it Now



Westminster  
Bookstore

# *The Incarnation in the Gospels*

REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

*A Series*

*Series Editors*

Richard D. Phillips  
Philip Graham Ryken

*Testament Editors*

Iain M. Duguid, Old Testament  
Daniel M. Doriani, New Testament

*The Incarnation  
in the Gospels*

DANIEL M. DORIANI  
PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN  
RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

  
P U B L I S H I N G  
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

© 2008 by Daniel M. Doriani, Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865–0817.

Scripture quotations in chapters 1–4 are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations in chapters 5–12 are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

*Page design by Lakeside Design Plus*

Printed in the United States of America

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Doriani, Daniel M., 1953–

The incarnation in the Gospels / Daniel M. Doriani, Philip Graham Ryken, Richard D. Phillips.

p. cm. — (Reformed expository commentary)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-59638-140-7 (cloth)

1. Advent sermons. 2. Incarnation—Sermons. 3. Bible. N.T. Gospels—Sermons. I. Ryken, Philip Graham, 1966– II. Phillips, Richard D. (Richard Davis), 1960– III. Title.

BV4254.5.D67 2008

252'.61—dc22

2008034189

# CONTENTS

Series Introduction vii

Preface ix

## **Part 1: The Incarnation in Matthew: The Hope of Israel**

DANIEL M. DORIANI

1. The Identity of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:1–17) 5
2. The Origin of Jesus, Our Immanuel (Matt. 1:18–25) 21
3. The Adoration of Jesus (Matt. 2:1–12) 37
4. The Protection of Jesus (Matt. 2:13–23) 51

## **Part 2: The Incarnation in Luke: Songs for the Savior**

PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN

5. Magnificat (Luke 1:39–55) 67
6. Benedictus (Luke 1:56–80) 85
7. Gloria in Excelsis Deo (Luke 2:1–20) 99
8. Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:21–38) 119

## **Part 3: The Incarnation in John: The Coming of the Light**

RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

9. The Divine Word (John 1:1–3) 137
10. The Light of Men (John 1:4–5) 149

*Contents*

11. Light for Everyone (John 1:6–13) 161  
12. The Word Became Flesh (John 1:14–18) 175

Appendix 1: Gospel-Centered Worship Connected  
to Christ's Nativity 189

MARK L. DALBEY

Appendix 2: A Christmas Eve Service of Lessons  
and Carols 200

RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

Appendix 3: Five Recent Advent Carols 210

PAUL S. JONES, JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE, ERIC J. ALEXANDER,  
DEREK W. H. THOMAS, PHILIP GRAHAM RYKEN

Appendix 4: Meditations on Christmas Customs 216

DANIEL M. DORIANI

Index of Scripture 223

## SERIES INTRODUCTION

The chapters in this book of Christmas messages originate in the Reformed Expository Commentary series, having been adapted from our volumes on the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John (all of which are yet to be published). Just as *The Incarnation in the Gospels* is an attempt to interpret the birth narratives of Jesus in a faithful, fresh way for our generation, the Reformed Expository Commentary seeks to set forth the whole counsel of God for our times from the exposition of God's Word.

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church, for the world. At the same time, the church must understand the comprehensive teaching of the whole Bible, which is the task of theology. The conviction underlying the Reformed Expository Commentary is that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine of the whole. We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and doctrinal reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. Our desire, then, is to inspire a renewed commitment to the Bible in the church, including the Bible's careful interpretation and fervent application for our times, and to serve as a resource for others who desire the same.

The Reformed Expository Commentary series has four fundamental commitments. First, our commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition of whole passages of Scripture. Each

## *Series Introduction*

commentary will thus present a sequential treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture. Each volume teaches, explains, and defends the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are taught in the biblical text. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are understood to point us to Christ and his gospel. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life, with appropriate illustrations.

If you benefit from this collection of Christmas studies from the Gospels, we hope this book will serve as an introduction to the Reformed Expository Commentary series. All our pastor-scholar authors labor diligently to be servants of the church through their exposition of God's holy Word. Our desire is to assist you in understanding and teaching God's Word to others, so that the message of God's glorious grace in Christ might be made plain to our times, and so that God might receive from us the glory that he so abundantly deserves.

Richard D. Phillips  
Philip G. Ryken  
*Series Editors*

Iain M. Duguid  
*Old Testament Editor*

Daniel M. Doriani  
*New Testament Editor*

## PREFACE

It is customary in most churches for pastors to prepare a series of two to five Christmas messages during the Advent season. Godly pastors seek both to meet the reasonable expectations of their people and to seize the opportunity the season affords to present biblical teaching, the vital doctrines of Christ and redemption, and the call to a proper response to the Lord's bold plan to redeem and restore mankind. Since preaching pastors may present twenty to fifty Christmas sermons in a decade, there is an annual search for sound resources and fresh approaches.

This book presents twelve biblically and theologically grounded Christmas messages. The authors explore the canonical teaching on the birth of Jesus Christ in the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John (Mark says nothing of Jesus' birth). Together these passages cover most major issues regarding the incarnation: The connections between Jesus' birth and the Old Testament promises, the birth itself, the joy and the opposition that the birth aroused, the genealogy of Jesus, and the titles of the Lord, to name a few.

The authors hope to provide rich homiletical resources for pastors who see the value of a Christmas series that follows one canonical presentation of the incarnation per year.

By following the canon, the book provides pastors and teachers a resource that follows the agenda of the Author of Scripture himself.

## *Preface*

Matthew, Luke, and John provide three distinct accounts of the core events surrounding the birth of Christ and their significance. While the Gospels overlap at many points, Matthew leads us to contemplate the connection between Jesus and the people of Israel through the genealogy, the many titles Jesus receives, and the way events fulfill Scripture. Luke, the longest account of the incarnation, is the gospel of joy in the work of God. Luke presents four rich speeches/songs in which Mary, Zechariah, the shepherds, and Simeon exult in the Lord's work. John sees the incarnation from the perspective of the Father in heaven while the plan of redemption comes to fruition as God's light enters the world through the birth of the Son.

We pray that our work will enable pastors and teachers to explore the unique riches of each account of the incarnation to the benefit of the church. We commend to you the canonical approach to expository preaching. We believe that a commitment to preach through the full testimony of one book leads us to teach helpfully on topics that are not necessarily our primary interests. The alternative, at the extreme, is need-oriented preaching that can narrow sermon topics to themes that meet felt needs. In that event the congregation hears not the whole counsel of God but a series of replies to the whole litany of human complaint. At worst, preachers abdicate pastoral leadership, neglect the canon, and simply answer questions. By following the canon, we can hope at least to come closer to preaching the whole counsel of God rather than the thinner list of current human interests.

We want to lead you toward an exploration of the unique riches of each book. We also confess that each book shares foundational beliefs about the incarnation. Orthodox churches have always affirmed these beliefs, and we wholeheartedly affirm them. These we confess and preach:

1. Jesus, Lord and Christ, is the unique Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. He is truly and eternally God, of one substance with the Father.
2. Like the Father and the Spirit, Jesus the Son is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, truth, love, and grace.
3. Jesus is truly God and truly man, yet one person, the Christ, the only mediator between God and man. Jesus is complete and perfect in his deity and his humanity, yet he is one person, for the two natures are joined inseparably and without confusion.
4. In the fullness of time, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, apart from the will or action of any man.
5. In the incarnation Jesus became a man and took a human nature, including a true human body, soul, mind, will, and emotions. In his humanity, Jesus had all the weaknesses of humanity, but not the sinful nature.
6. The birth of Jesus is no end in itself, but is part of the fulfillment of God's plan of redemption. Jesus exercised the offices of prophet, priest, and king in his role as mediator, and especially took on human flesh that he might suffer in that flesh, offering himself as a substitutionary sacrifice, to atone for the sins of his people.





*The Incarnation  
in the Gospels*

THE WORD BECAME FLESH



PART 1



*The Incarnation in Matthew:  
The Hope of Israel*

DANIEL M. DORIANI



# 1

## THE IDENTITY OF JESUS CHRIST

### *Matthew 1:1–17*

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son  
of David, the son of Abraham. (Matt. 1:1)*

**T**he biblical accounts of the birth of Christ answer all the questions people like to ask. How? By the direct, miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit, a virgin conceived. Why? To usher in the climactic stage of God's plan of redemption. When and where? In Bethlehem of Judea, during the reign of Herod the Great, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Yet there is no doubt that the Gospels, not least Matthew, take greatest interest in the question "Who?" Who is this who is born after such preparation, amid such great signs and portents?

We know intuitively that Matthew's interest in the identity of Jesus is right. We know that all hope of making sense of events rests on a knowledge of the characters. This is true of the birth of Jesus as it is true for any striking event.

## *The Identity of Jesus Christ*

One Saturday I headed off for a doubles tennis match against the best team in the league. I arrived hoping for an upset, and those hopes surged as I began to warm up with one of our opponents. He was a big, hard-hitting lefty, but he looked erratic and slow-footed. Much hinged on his partner, who had not arrived. The minutes ticked away and the time for a forfeit approached when Lefty asked a club pro to find someone to fill in. The pro returned with a slender man named Altof, who moved like a leopard and held his racket in a faintly menacing way. I began to hit with Altof. In league play, men warm up watchfully, trying to judge their opponents' skills and deficiencies. As I watched Altof, I saw all skill and no deficiencies. His strokes were effortless, his footwork flawless. Every ball he struck came in deep and hard. I leaned over and told my partner, "We need to hit to your man; mine looks *very* solid."

We tried to hit everything to Lefty, and it worked well enough that the score was tied 4–4 after eight games. Then, suddenly Altof was everywhere, crushing the ball for winner after winner; we lost the first set, 6–4. Before the second set began, I heard Altof whisper to Lefty, "I need to finish soon." I told my partner, "If we lose the second set in fifteen minutes, we'll know something is up." Indeed, we lost 6–1 in 14 minutes, with Altof covering the entire court, punishing us in point after point. As we shook hands at the net, I said, "That was impressive. Now tell me who you are."

"Well," he confessed, "I'm a pro here, just filling in so you could have a match."

"Oh, I figured that out a while ago," I smiled. "I want to know: who are you?!"

"OK," he said, "I'll tell you. I was a touring pro till a year ago; I played for India's Davis Cup team." He had been one of the top

200 players in the world. Now that I knew who he was, I could make sense of our match.

The gospel of Matthew operates on this very principle. Events make sense if and only if we know who the characters are. Matthew 1 certainly describes some very unusual events. There is a virgin who is pregnant by the agency of the Holy Spirit. An angel appears to prevent a young man from setting aside an unwed mother. Later, an angel picks the name of that child and declares that he will be the Savior.

It's an incomprehensible story, unless you know the characters. So, then, who is this child? It's a good question; people ask it over and over in the Gospels:

- A storm threatens to swamp a boat and drown everyone on board. Jesus stands up and rebukes the wind and the waves, and they stop at once. His disciples see this and ask, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41; cf. Matt. 8:27).
- He forgives sins and they ask, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:49).
- He enters Jerusalem attended by a crowd that lays cloaks and palm branches on the road before him. They call out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and the city asks, "Who is this?" (Matt. 21:9–10).
- At his trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest of the Jews says, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." The Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, asks, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Matt. 26:63; 27:11).

The whole gospel of Matthew *asks* and the whole gospel of Matthew *tells* who this is. The reader starts to learn who Jesus

## *The Identity of Jesus Christ*

is in the first chapter. The child's name is Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (1:1, 21). He is the Christ, anointed by God for a given task (1:1, 18). He is the son of David—born king of the Jews (1:1; 2:2). He is the son of Abraham, for he will bring God's blessing to the nations (1:1, 18). He is born of the Holy Spirit (1:18). He is Immanuel, for he is "God with us" (1:23).

Jesus received names such as Jesus and Immanuel not because they were fashionable, not because they were manly, not because of family heritage, but because they were fraught with significance. Each name reveals part of Jesus' identity. The question "Who is this?" leads next to the vital question, "Why is he important?" The answer is traced through the hopes and fears of 2,000 years of Israel's history. So Matthew 1 introduces us to our hero by stating his name and his origin.

### JESUS THE SAVIOR

As Matthew introduces Jesus, he quickly reveals several names and titles. Jesus is son of Abraham, therefore he is the hope of both Gentiles and Jews. He is son of David (1:1), therefore the great king of the Jews (2:2, 6). He is the Christ (1:1; 2:4), therefore anointed by God for some crucial task. But first and best, he is Jesus, the Savior (1:1, 21–23).

Jesus is a Hebrew name. In Hebrew it is Joshua; in Greek that becomes Jesus. Joshua means "the Lord [Yahweh] saves" or "The Lord is salvation." The name Joshua reminds us of the Joshua who succeeded Moses and led Israel into the Promised Land. In that day, the Lord saved his people physically and materially by giving them their land and ending their years of wilderness wandering.

Jesus does not save us this way. He did not save Israel from military enemies. Jesus did save some people from physical ill-

ness and danger (8:25; 9:21–22), but physical deliverance is not the essence of his work. Rather, such deliverance pointed beyond itself to God’s eternal restoration of all things. Psalm 130:7–8 says, “O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their *sins*.” In the long run, God cares about salvation from enemies, disease, and death, but that part of his program lies in the future, when Jesus returns.

By his incarnation, Jesus began to address the problem that lies at the root of all pains and sorrows. He came to save his people from their sins. We see this already in the genealogy of Jesus.

The genealogy shows that Jesus descended from the line of Jewish kings. Matthew names fifteen of them, from David to Jeconiah, also known as Jehoiachin. So Jesus came from a noble line. But if we look hard, we see that this regal group was not especially righteous. About half of the kings were men of faith. Several, including David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, were great men. Still, even among the believers, some committed striking sins. Jehoshaphat entered into alliances with wicked men (2 Chron. 20:35–37). In foolish pride, Hezekiah showed the treasures of Israel to her powerful enemies, who later plundered them (2 Kings 20:12–18). After years of successful rule, Uzziah became proud and dared to usurp the role of a priest and entered the Lord’s temple to burn incense on the altar (2 Chron. 26:1–22).

About half the kings in the genealogy were truly wicked. Ahaz worshiped the pagan gods of Assyria. He practiced human sacrifice. He killed one of his own sons. He stripped the gold and silver from the temple and gave it to other kings. He defiled the Lord’s altar and installed pagan altars instead (2 Kings 16). Nor was Ahaz alone. Rehoboam and Jeconiah were almost as bad and Manasseh

## *The Identity of Jesus Christ*

was worse. Indeed, Manasseh “did more evil than the nations” that the Lord drove out of Canaan. He promoted the worship of idols and murdered innocent people (2 Kings 21:9–18).

So Jesus’ genealogy includes great kings and sordid sinners. Regal as his lineage was, Jesus did not come to praise his forebears, but to save them. If you doubt this, consider the four women in the genealogy. People often wonder why we find women inserted, apparently at random, in the genealogy. The answer is clear if we notice that common threads appear in the foursome that is interwoven with the kings: “Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife” (Matt. 1:5–6). Three women are listed here; the fourth, Tamar, gets a mere mention in 1:3. The four are:

- Tamar the daughter-in-law of Judah, who was the son of Jacob; she played the role of a prostitute (Gen. 38).
- Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho, who helped Israel’s spies (Josh. 2, 6).
- Ruth, the Moabitess who was adopted into the family of Boaz (Ruth 1–4).
- Bathsheba, the paramour of David and the wife of a Hittite (2 Sam. 11–12).

Within this quartet, all but Tamar came from foreign lands or families. They were outside the family of God. Moreover, of the four, three were either prostitutes or adulteresses. The point is clear: Jesus comes from the *human* line, pimples and all. His own people, his own family, needed him to save them from their *sins*.

The last part of Jesus' genealogy shows that Israel was suffering the consequences of its sin (1:11–16). The borders of Israel had failed to hold. Assyria dethroned Israel's king and Babylon conquered Judah, deported its leaders, and declared the pitiful remnant to be their vassals.

Jesus' ancestors lost their rank as kings, lost their wealth and land, and nearly lost their identity. We could compare the family of Jesus to the last derelict scion of a once-great family. They were Roosevelts, Lincolns, or Jeffersons, but had fallen far over the years. In any shattered clan, some are drunks, gamblers, or wastrels; others are decent folk, perhaps, but lack any great skill or asset. Those are the people Jesus came to save, then and now. We too have lowlifes in our family, and we have done things that fit a lowlife-laden family.

### CHRIST, THE ANOINTED ONE

Jesus is a given name. "Christ" eventually became Jesus' second name in Christian usage, but originally it was a title for the Messiah. As a title, it simply means "anointed one." To be anointed is to be set apart and empowered by God for a task he appoints. In Israel, priests were always anointed (Ex. 28–30), kings were always anointed (1 Sam. 9, 16), and prophets were sometimes anointed (1 Kings 19:16).

In Jesus' day, "Christ" came to signify a specific king, one anointed with God's strength to deliver the people. The people thought of the Christ as a king because they hoped for a military victory and release from Rome. One book from the time said it this way:

See Lord, and raise up for them their king,  
The son of David, to rule over your servant Israel  
In the time known to you, O God.