

The Virgin Birth

Matthew 1:18-25

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I want to preach today on the very important doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew is the first book of the New Testament, and chapter 1 is the gateway to the life of Christ.

Matthew 1:18-25 says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed..." or "espoused" "...to Joseph..." A betrothal was an engagement, and it was legally binding. It occurred one year before they consummated the marriage. So legally they were married, and that's why they are called husband and wife. But they didn't consummate the marriage until the wedding ceremony, which would happen one year after the betrothal. So to break the betrothal period would take a formal divorce.

Continuing with verse 18, "...before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid 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 name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.'"

"So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying..." quoting from Isaiah 7:14 "...'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.' Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus."

Of the more than 6,000 hymns from the pen of Charles Wesley, one of the greatest is Hark! The Herald Angels Sing. It was written in 1739 and is still sung today. The second stanza goes like this:

"Christ, the highest heav'n adored;

Christ, the everlasting Lord;

Late in time, behold Him come,

Offspring of the Virgin's womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;

Hail th' Incarnate Deity,

Pleased as Man with man to dwell;

Jesus, our Emanuel!"

A preacher could actually preach a sermon from that stanza of this beautiful hymn.

What I want to do is to ask some questions and answer them from the Bible. The first question is, "Was Jesus truly born of a virgin?" The answer is "Yes."

But sadly a lot of churches don't believe that anymore. One of the attacks of liberal theologians is the virgin birth, or more specifically the miraculous conception, of Christ in the womb of Mary. They deny that, so they deny His deity, deny His Incarnation, deny His substitutionary death and the physical Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I want you to understand that the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is not optional; it is essential. It's not a take-it-or-leave-it option of Christianity. Rather, it is essential Christianity; it is foundational. It is the vanguard to the supernatural nature and life of Jesus Christ.

You might be a Christian but ignorant of the doctrine of the virgin birth. You may even deny it. But you won't have orthodox, Christian doctrine or theology if you deny the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. It is linked together with the Incarnation, which is God becoming man, so that Jesus Christ is both man and God. That was necessary for Him to be the Redeemer and to reign on the throne of David.

All the other doctrines of Christ are built upon this supernatural, divine nature and human nature; it's called by theologians "the hypostatic union," meaning Christ is a fully, sinless man and fully, divine God in one Person, Jesus Christ. Or truly God and truly man in one Person, Jesus Christ. Anything less than that is not orthodox Christian belief. And if you don't have a virgin birth, you don't have a sinless Christ. And if you don't have a sinless Christ, you don't have a Savior.

So the answer to the first question, "Was Jesus truly born of a virgin?" The answer is "Yes, Jesus was born of a virgin." But many do not believe that.

But if you believe Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," why couldn't you believe Matthew 1 or Luke 1, that God can create in the womb of a virgin the seed of the Son of God and that He could actually be incarnate in that womb?

The virgin birth, the conception of Christ in the womb of the virgin Mary, established the time of the Incarnation. In the early church there was a false doctrine known as Gnosticism. It became popular years later when it was said that Jesus was just a man. The gnostics said when Jesus was baptized, that Christ came on the man Jesus, and when Jesus hung on the Cross and cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Christ then left the man Jesus. That's

not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches that God is triune; there is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Second Person of that Godhead. He is just as much divine as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He is eternal and preexistent before Bethlehem. He became incarnate in the womb of the virgin Mary. This is so important for us to understand what the Bible teaches.

So yes, this was a miracle; Jesus was born of a virgin. It is a miracle and it is a mystery. And I don't have any problem with it. I believe there is a God who can perform miracles. I believe God can speak the whole cosmos into existence and uphold it by "the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3), so the virgin birth is no difficulty for Him.

If you have a world view that believes we live in a closed system, that there is no God outside of our time-space domain or matter, then you have a problem with the virgin birth. But if you believe in an open universe, one in which God is outside, then He is not bound by natural laws. So I believe there is a God who exists outside of our time-space domain and material matter in the universe, and that He has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ, who entered our world through the womb of the virgin Mary. I also believe that the Bible teaches this.

I believe the Bible. My view is that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..." that means that Scripture is God breathed "...and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). So all Scripture is given by God. And what we read in the text is history. It is miraculous and God's intervention, but it is real, true history.

I want to give you some verses from the Bible to back up what I'm saying. Genesis 3:15 is the first Messianic prophecy given right after the Fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed," which is a reference to Christ. "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

So way back in the garden of Eden, right after Adam and Eve sinned, God prophesied that it would not be the seed of the man, but it specifically mentions the Seed of the woman that would bruise the serpent's head, even though Satan would bruise His heel, which is a reference to the Cross of Christ.

Isaiah 7:14, which is quoted in Matthew 1, says, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel," which means "God with us." So the virgin birth means that God is with us.

But how do we know that this God prophesied in Isaiah refers to Jesus? The answer is our text, from Matthew 1. I want to point out some verses. Verse 18 says, "Mary was betrothed to Joseph, [and] before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit." It's in the Bible and it's very clear. And verse 20 says, "But while he..." that is, "Joseph" "...thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of

David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” This is the second reference to the virgin birth.

And verses 22-23 say, “So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’” This is the third, clear reference to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

And then verse 25 says that Joseph “did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus,” or Yeshua, which is the Old Testament Joshua, which means “Jehovah saves” or “God saves.” Where it says, “did not know her,” it means that they did not have physical intimacy; they had not yet consummated the marriage relationship. It is mentioned in verses 18, 20, 23 and 25. So the Bible is clear that Jesus was born of a virgin.

And Luke 1 clearly teaches the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Starting with verse 26, it says, “Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth...” At this time, Gabriel was very busy. You think you are busy at Christmas? “...to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.” Twice in verse 27 it says “virgin.”

“And having come in, the angel said to her, ‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!’ But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus,’” or “Jehovah saves.” Now notice the angel's description of the Son. “‘He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.’”

“Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’” She was asking how this could happen since she hadn't had an intimate relationship with a man. “And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.’ Then Mary said, ‘Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.”

Again, verse 27 says, “to a virgin....The virgin's name was Mary.” And verse 34 says, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” So the implication is that she had not been with a man; she was a virgin. She was asking, “How would I have a child?” So Mary's question was not, “Will it happen?” it was “How will it happen?”

On the other hand, when Zacharias was told his wife would have a child in his old age, he didn't

believe it would happen, so he was struck dumb and he couldn't speak. But Mary's question was not doubt; it was just how it would happen. She responded with a heart of belief. And I like the angel's answer: "the Holy Spirit."

Remember that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or the Bible teaches that there is one God; the Bible is monotheistic. But the one God is in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They are one in essence and three in Persons. And it is just as heretical to deny the three Persons of the Godhead as it is to deny that Jesus is the Son of God. So we need to understand the Trinity. To understand Jesus, to understand the virgin birth, to understand the Incarnation, we need to understand that God the Father sent God the Son and that in Mary's womb, she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. This was all a divine, miraculous work of God.

I want you to note that the Holy Spirit was mentioned in Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you." And it says, "the Son of God." And verse 37 says, "With God nothing will be impossible." That is a reference to God the Father. So all three Persons of the Trinity were involved in Christmas: God the Father sent God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit conceived God the Son in the womb of Mary. Jesus would be God incarnate. What happened was that God was fusing together deity with humanity for all eternity. After the Resurrection of Christ, His human body was glorified. And that human, glorified body ascended back into heaven.

I believe that Jesus still has His body in heaven, but it is a glorified body, which is a forerunner or prototype of our body that we'll have in heaven. Jesus is now the glorified, God-man in heaven and will be throughout all of eternity.

Let me give you some verses on these points. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "Word" is a reference to Jesus Christ or "the Logos." Jesus Christ is eternal; He is preexistent and divine. The phrase "with God" literally means "face to face"; God the Father with God the Son face to face. Jesus is the perfect Word. And John 1:1 tells us He is the divine Word: "And the Word was God." And that eternal Word, that divine Word, that personal Word "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The words "became flesh" literally means He "pitched His tent among us."

The Bible likens our bodies to tents. My tent is leaning right now, flapping in the wind, ready to pull up stakes and take off. A tent is not a very permanent dwelling. But the Bible says, "To be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). We will have a house..." or "body" "...not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). What a blessing that will be!

And this is only possible because God left heaven in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, came down to earth and took on Himself a sinless, human body. He gave Himself as a substitute on the Cross for our sin. It's called "the Incarnation" or God becoming flesh. From the moment of conception in the womb of the virgin Mary, humanity was fused together with deity for all

eternity. That implies that Jesus is preincarnate, that He is God and that He is also man. Isaiah 9:6 says, "For unto us a Child is born..." that's His humanity "...unto us a Son is given," that's His deity.

The next series of questions I want to ask is, "Why the virgin birth? Why the Incarnation? Why did God become a man?" I will give you three, profound reasons. I call them the three "R's." The first reason why God became a man on Christmas was to reveal God to man.

John 1:1-18 is John's prologue to his Gospel on the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And in verse 18, it says, "No one has seen God at any time." This might have been why the angels were blown away when God became a man: mankind could finally see God at the Incarnation. That should blow us away.

And verse 18 continues, "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." From the word "declared," we get our word "exegesis" or explain. When we do expositional preaching, it means we read the text, explain the text and apply the text. We pull out the meaning of the text from its grammatical, historical and theological content. Then we explain the author's intent or meaning of the text as the author intended it to be when he wrote it.

So Jesus explains God the Father to us. In John 14, when Jesus talked about going to the Father's house, Philip said—which I so appreciate—"Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Thanks for saying that, Philip. Jesus said, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:8-9).

Don't misunderstand that statement. Jesus is not the Father; He is the Son. What Jesus meant was that He reveals the Father, He explains the Father, He declares the Father to us. So if you've seen Jesus, you've seen God the Father. What that tells us is that God is gracious, merciful, kind, loving, compassionate and ready to forgive. You can't be wrong about Jesus and right about God. If you're wrong about who Jesus is, then you're wrong about God. That's because God is revealed in Jesus Christ.

I was listening to a sermon by Adrian Rogers about the virgin birth, and he said that Jesus was an earthly child with a heavenly father, and He was a heavenly child with an earthly mother. And He was as ageless as His father and older than His mother. What a thought! Jesus Christ, the Son of God! So He came to reveal God to us.

One of my favorite pictures of Jesus in the Bible is John 11:35, when He was at the grave of Lazarus. It says, "Jesus wept." What a statement! That's His humanity. Do you ever think that Jesus doesn't care? God doesn't know? God doesn't feel? The word "wept" doesn't mean that He wailed, screamed cried or lamented. The word means that His eyes moistened, and a tear trickled down His face. The Son of God in tears. So when I do a graveside service for someone who has died, and I look at the tears—"Every pain that rends the heart, the Man of Sorrows has a part."

It's Christmas and time to be joyful, jolly and happy, but some people are sad because of sorrow. Maybe they've lost a loved one. Maybe it's the first Christmas without someone you love. Maybe there's cancer or sickness or some other issue. Maybe it's finances or some relational situation. Jesus cares. Jesus sympathizes. He's that compassionate High Priest. He is moved by the feelings of our weaknesses. He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). So the truth of His compassion reveals to us a God of grace and a God of mercy.

The first "R" of Christmas is reveal. The second "R" is redeem. He came to reveal God to man, but He also came to redeem man back to God. In the book of Ruth in the Old Testament, we have a story of redemption. Ruth, the Moabite, was widowed and left her homeland to live with her mother-in-law back in Bethlehem, who was also widowed. It just so happened—God was in control—that Ruth went to glean in the fields owned by Boaz, and a love relationship kindled. Boaz found out he was the nearest kin, which is called "the kinsman redeemer." He had to be a blood relative, had to be able to buy the property and take back the land and take the bride for himself.

You see this beautiful story of redemption with Ruth, Naomi and Boaz. Through the lineage of Ruth and Boaz came David, the King of Israel. And from David came Jesus the Messiah, the Savior of the world. It is a picture of how God came down and took on flesh, because the kinsman redeemer had to be a blood relative.

And Jesus paid the price of our redemption on the Cross. The goel, the kinsman redeemer, had to buy back with a price, had to be able to buy the property and take the bride. So Jesus is our goel, our kinsman redeemer.

In 1 Peter 1:18-20, Peter says, "...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." In Galatians 4:4-5 it says, "When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman..." again you have the deity and humanity and virgin birth "...born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

So Jesus came to redeem us. He was created and fashioned in the womb of Mary to go to the Cross and be able to die for the sins of the world. And if you deny the virgin birth, you don't have God in the flesh. If you don't have God in the flesh, you have no sin substitute on the Cross.

Jesus came to reveal God, to redeem man, and the third "R" of Christmas is reign. He came to reign on the throne of David. In Luke 1:32-33, it says, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." This promise is to be fulfilled in the future; it has not taken place yet.

King David was given a promise; it's called the Davidic Covenant; that through his lineage, through his seed, the Messiah would come. David was told that he couldn't build God a house, but God would build him a house. When David heard that, he was speechless. This man, who could write these beautiful psalms, sat down in awe and wonder that God would make a promise like that. David's ancestor would be that specific Seed.

God promised Abraham, as well, that through his seed, all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). And to David it was promised that his seed would sit on his throne forever, "and of His kingdom, there would be no end." So Jesus became a man so He would one day sit on the throne of David. And God always keeps His promises.

This will happen at the Second Coming of Jesus. We sing Joy to the World at Christmas.

"Joy to the world;

The Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King."

That's the Second Coming; Christ is returning.

When I think of Christmas, I don't just think of a baby in a manger. I think of Him coming back in power, majesty and glory as King of kings and Lord of lords, sitting on David's throne and reigning forevermore. Isaiah 9:6-7 says, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder." This is what David's prophecy was about. "And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

So we have Jesus revealing God the Father—Incarnation; redeeming man back to God—Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension; and reigning on the throne of David—manifestation. What a marvelous truth that is!

We could throw one more "R" onto this list. When Jesus comes back to reign, He will reverse the curse. What does that mean? No more sickness, no more sin, no more sorrow, no more death. The former things will have passed away. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. He'll wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). How wonderful is that?!

Christmas takes us all the way out to eternity future. When Jesus Christ comes back and establishes His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years, that will flow into the new heaven and the new earth, in the eternal state. Satan will be bound for all eternity, Jesus Christ will reign on earth and we will be in heaven forever with Him.

This is why Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you,

I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

So we go from the cradle, the manger in Bethlehem, to the throne and to eternity. He has revealed God to man, He has redeemed man to God, He will reign on the throne of David, He will reverse the curse and He will bring about a whole new heaven and earth.