

## Born of a Virgin

ISAIAH 7:14; MATTHEW 1:23  
ABC 12/23/18

History has revealed some interesting, amazing, & miraculous births. Although our grandson was born this last Tuesday, his birth was normal. But there have been fraternal twins born with different fathers. Go figure. It's called heteropaternal superfecundation. Rajo Devi gave birth in 2008 at the age of 70. No thank you. In 1955 some unfortunate woman gave birth in Italy to a 22 lb 8 oz baby.<sup>1</sup> Anyone want to beat that? In the Bible we have the birth of Isaac, born to nearly 100-year-old barren parents who were laughing at the thought she could give birth at that age. We also have the births of Samson & Samuel. In the NT we have John the Baptist's birth to Zechariah & Elisabeth, which was another miracle of God. But the virgin birth of Jesus is by far the most amazing & awe inspiring of miraculous births.

It's been 10 years since I've devoted a sermon to the virgin birth & since it was foretold by a prophet, we're looking at it today as we continue our series, *Of Prophet Bards Foretold*. We've looked at Gen 3:15 where it's predicted that the seed of woman will crush Satan's head. Ex 12 portrays the coming Messiah to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Dt 18:15 tells us there's a greater prophet than Moses coming & Jesus is that prophet. All the Bible, Old & NTs, are about Jesus. Unfortunately, we live in a day of cafeteria Christianity where people go down the line & say, *I'll have some of this, but I don't want any of that. I don't like it or I can't believe it*. They pick & choose what suits them, as if they're free to take whatever they like from God's Word & ignore the rest. Along with this is the belief that doctrine is, at best, not important &, at worst, intolerant & divisive. According to this view, it really doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're loving & accepting toward others, no matter what they believe. That's not biblical Christianity. Of course, all Christians enjoy the story of the birth of Jesus. The familiar narrative of Joseph & Mary, their trek to Bethlehem, no vacancy at the inn, the birth of Jesus in a stable, & the adoration of the shepherds & the magi makes for a story we never grow tired of repeating. But there's one part of the story that many claiming to be Christians ignore or leave out. What is it? The virgin birth of our Savior, Jesus. While those of us

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<sup>1</sup> <http://listverse.com/2010/01/21/10-stories-of-bizarre-births>

who've grown up in church & believe the Bible is God's inerrant Word, have no trouble believing this, others do. Thomas Jefferson once said that *the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter.*<sup>2</sup> Robert Schuller once said, *I could not in print or in public deny the virgin birth of Christ, but when I have something I can't comprehend I just don't deal with it.*<sup>3</sup> That's not right either. Rather, as Donald Macleod writes,

*The virgin birth is posted on guard at the door of the mystery of Christmas; & none of us must think of hurrying past it. It stands on the threshold of the NT, blatantly supernatural, defying our rationalism, informing us that all that follows belongs to the same order as itself & that if we find it offensive there is no point in proceeding further.*<sup>4</sup>

The virgin birth is a doctrine overlooked or taken for granted by many of us. We don't hear much the virgin birth anymore. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century controversy over the virgin birth tore the church apart. It was one of the fundamentals of the faith. Liberals denied it & called it an unnecessary & irrational doctrine. On May 21, 1922 Harry Emerson Fosdick delivered a sermon entitled, *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?* In it he said,

*It is interesting to note where the Fundamentalists are driving in their stakes to mark out the deadline of doctrine around the church, across which no one is to pass except on terms of agreement. They insist that we must all believe in the historicity of certain special miracles, preeminently the virgin birth of our Lord...*

*We may well begin with the vexed & mooted question of the virgin birth of our Lord. I know people in the Christian churches, ministers, missionaries, laymen, devoted lovers of the Lord & servants of the Gospel, who, alike as they are in their personal devotion to the Master, hold quite different points of view about a matter like the virgin birth. Here, for example, is one point of view that the virgin birth is to be accepted as historical fact; it actually happened; there was no other way for a personality like the Master to come into this world except by a special biological miracle. That is one point of view, & many are the gracious & beautiful souls who hold it. But side by side with them in the evangelical churches is a group of equally loyal & reverent people who would say that the virgin birth is not to be accepted as an historic fact. . . . So far from thinking that they have given up anything vital in the NT's attitude toward Jesus, these Christians remember that the two men who contributed most to the Church's thought of the divine meaning of the Christ were Paul & John, who never even distantly allude to the virgin birth.*<sup>5</sup>

He later said, *Of course I do not believe in the virgin birth or in that old-fashioned substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, & I know of no intelligent person who does.*<sup>6</sup> More recently, the *Jesus Seminar* wackos decided the virgin birth is just a legend. They scoff & call the gospel accounts of

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<sup>2</sup> Letters to John Adams, April 11, 1823

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by John MacArthur, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2181/the-virgin-birth>

<sup>4</sup> *The Person of Christ (Contours of Christian Theology)*, p 37

<sup>5</sup> <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5070/>

Jesus' birth *theological fiction*.<sup>7</sup> They decided Mary must have had intercourse with Joseph or with some unknown person before she became pregnant with Jesus. While we may be tempted to laugh this off as the work of a few kooks, we need to take it seriously. 1<sup>st</sup> you attack the birth, then you attack the Baby; 1<sup>st</sup> the miracle, then the Man. Once you deny His miraculous entrance into this world, it's short work to deny His deity. Behind this kind of thinking stands a theology that attacks the central truth that God became a Man in the Person of Jesus Christ. From the beginning, true Christians have believed in the virgin birth. Remember the words of the Apostles' Creed? *I believe in Jesus Christ who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.* Those words point to the fundamental fact that in Jesus, God became one of us. The NT clearly declares the virgin birth as fact, it happened in time & space. Matthew & Luke both tell the story as sober historical reality. The Bible clearly teaches the virgin birth. You can say it isn't true if you want but you can't deny that the Bible teaches it & that it's a central part of the Christmas story. **Lk 1:26-38** PRAY

Mt 1:22–23 clearly identifies Jesus' virgin birth as a fulfillment of OT prophecy: **Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD & SHALL BEAR A SON, & THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,"** which translated means, **"GOD WITH US."** Matthew's quotation of Is 7:14 confirms that the prophet, 700 years earlier predicted the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Turn to **Isaiah 7:1-16**.

What's going on here & why is this familiar verse in the midst of it? Isaiah made this prophecy during the reign of Judah's wicked King Ahaz. He faced a major military threat from the Israelite king, Pekah, & the Syrian king, Rezin, both of whom wanted to overthrow Ahaz & replace him with someone of their choosing. Instead of seeking the Lord's help during that crisis, Ahaz turned instead to Tiglath-Pileser, the brutal ruler of the pagan Assyrians. Ahaz even attracted their assistance by offering them gold & silver stolen from the Temple. Ahaz refused to listen to Isaiah's report that God would deliver the people from Pekah & Rezin. Therefore, Isaiah spoke the remarkable prophecy of vs 14, which told Ahaz that no one would destroy the people of God or the royal line of David. & sure enough, although Tiglath-Pileser destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, deported its population, & overran Judah 4x,

6 Quoted at <http://looneyfundamentalist.blogspot.com/2006/08/remembering-harry-emerson-fosdick-1878.html>

7 W. Barnes Tatum, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1994/november14/4td092.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1994/november14/4td092.html)

God ultimately preserved His people just as He promised. Isaiah said that before this child, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:3) was very mature or aware of events, the territories of Rezin & Pekah would be abandoned (vss 15–16). Again, the prophet's divinely inspired words were completely accurate. Before this child, who was born to Isaiah's wife, was 3 years old, the 2 enemy kings were dead. Just as God fulfilled that ancient prophecy about Isaiah's son, so He was about to fulfill the one concerning the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Both were signs from the Lord that He would not abandon His people, but the greater of the 2 was obviously the 2<sup>nd</sup> one: that His Son would actually be born of a virgin, live among His people, & die for their sins. Isaiah used the Hebrew word *alma* for **virgin**. It occurs 7 other times in the OT (Gen 24:43; Ex 2:8; 1 Chron 15:20; Ps 68:25; Prov 30:19; Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8), & each time it means **virgin**. Until recent times, both Jewish & Christian scholars always translated the word that way. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah wrote with the clear conviction that the woman who would bear the Messiah would indeed be a young woman who never had sexual relations with a man. Matthew's use of Isaiah's prophecy confirms this. Matthew wasn't giving it a new meaning to make it fit the virgin birth. Instead, Matthew gave the term the same meaning as Isaiah intended. Did Isaiah know what he was writing about? Probably not, but Matthew did! The OT predicted Jesus' virgin birth & the NT says that's the way it happened. How do you respond to that? Some say it's impossible because miracles don't happen. Others, who profess to be followers of Jesus & acknowledge that miracles do happen, believe this miracle never took place because it's too far-fetched. There's a 3<sup>rd</sup> group that believes the virgin birth simply because it's in the Bible. They say, *If it's in the Bible, I believe it*. But they'd be hard pressed to explain why the Virgin Birth is important. I don't want to dismiss this kind of faith, but there's more reason to believe the virgin birth than this. The final group is made up of those who not only believe the virgin birth, but also understand how absolutely critical it is to the gospel. What must we know?

**1. THE VIRGIN BIRTH WAS THE BIRTH OF GOD HIMSELF.** Jn 1 opens by saying, **In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, & the Word was God (1:1).** The **Word** refers to Jesus. John didn't write, *In the beginning, Jesus was created*. Jesus was already there. In Jn 17, Jesus talks about the glory He enjoyed with the Father before the foundations of the world. In Phil 2 Paul talks about the fact that Jesus was God Himself in heaven & enjoyed the glory of God. But Jesus set all that aside, He humbled Himself to

become a man, to go to His death on a cross in our place. When we talk about the virgin birth, we're not talking about a birth like yours or mine. Our souls didn't exist in a spiritual state on some shelf in heaven, waiting for God to pull us down & give us a body & send us to earth. No, our lives begin at conception. But Jesus has always been. He's eternal. This is foundational. The virgin birth was the birth of none other than God Himself. God taking on human flesh, God incarnate. God with us. Immanuel.

**2. THE VIRGIN BIRTH WAS THE FULFILLMENT OF OT PROPHECY.** When we talk about the virgin birth it's important to realize that the story doesn't begin with the angel's announcement. Writing some 700 years prior, Isaiah says, **Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child & bear a son, & she will call His name Immanuel (7:14).** Speaking on behalf of God, the prophet Isaiah says, *I'm going to give you a sign, & this is how you'll know for sure that God has sent His Messiah, He'll be born of a virgin.* What is the sign? That the Messiah will be born of a young woman? No! That wouldn't be much of a sign, it doesn't narrow things down at all! The sign is that He'll be born to a virgin. Furthermore, Matthew quotes this claiming that all these things took place so that the prophecy would be fulfilled (1:23). When Matthew translates the verse from Hebrew into Greek, the word he uses can only be referring to a virgin. Are there other references to the virgin birth in the OT? Gen 3:15 says that the Messiah will be born of the **seed of the woman**. That phrase has long been understood by Christian theologians as a reference to the virgin birth. Much more could be said, but even if the virgin birth was taught in only one biblical passage, that would be enough to obligate us to believe it. We have no right to measure the relative truthfulness of biblical teachings by their repetition in Scripture. We can't claim to believe that the Bible is the Word of God & then turn around & cast suspicion on its teaching.

**3. THE NT BEARS WITNESS TO THE VIRGIN BIRTH.** In Luke the angel says to Mary, *You've found favor with God. You are going to give birth to the Messiah (30-31).* Mary responds, **How can this be, since I am a virgin?** (34). Matthew develops his birth account around the character of Joseph. The angel expects Joseph to believe Mary when she says she has no idea how she got pregnant. *It was God's doing,* she says. *The Holy Spirit came upon me, & I'm pregnant.* What a shock for Joseph! Engagement in that culture was binding. In essence, the couple was married. If your fiancé died during the engagement, you were considered a widow. This was a serious relationship. When Mary comes back from visiting her

Aunt Elizabeth, she's pregnant. Joseph knows he's not the father, so he begins making plans to quietly divorce her. Gabriel is sent to Nazareth to stop Joseph from ending the relationship: *You're to marry this woman, he tells Joseph. What is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit* (Mt 1:20). Jn 1:14 says that **the Word became flesh**, which refers to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God in human flesh. While it doesn't demand a virgin birth, it certainly implies a supernatural entrance into the world. 1 Tim 3:16 summarizes Jesus' birth by saying He **appeared in a body**, which sounds like Jesus didn't come into the world the usual way. Gal 4:4 states that Jesus was **born of a woman**. Indeed He was, but why use such a strange expression unless there was something unusual about His birth? The Christmas story doesn't begin, *Once upon a time in a land faraway a young virgin gave birth*. This isn't a fairy story or a bedtime story. This is the truth! It really happened exactly as the Bible says. It doesn't make it more true if it's mentioned once or 1,000 times. God's truth is God's truth.

**4. THE VIRGIN BIRTH IS CRITICAL TO GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION.** The virgin birth is a critical piece of God's plan for salvation. It's included in most of the ancient creeds, like the Apostles' Creed. The Nicene Creed doesn't speak directly of the virgin birth, but it goes to great lengths to make the point that Jesus' birth was different from all other births.

*We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible & invisible, & in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.*

The word *begotten* means he was fathered by God. As CS Lewis says, *When you beget something, you beget it after your own kind.*<sup>8</sup> Because Jesus was begotten of God, Jesus is God. There's much left unsaid that we'd like to know. The Bible tells us just enough to anchor our faith, but not enough to satisfy our curiosity. Everyone always asks how did this happen? No one knows! Gabriel uses discreet, non-specific language to describe the actual conception. In Lk 1:35 the angel tells Mary, **The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.** The verb *overshadow* speaks of the direct, personal presence of God. The same verb is used in all 3 accounts of the Transfiguration to describe the cloud that enveloped Jesus, Moses, & Elijah on the mountain. From that cloud came a voice saying, **This is my beloved Son** (Mt 17:5), even as Gabriel told Mary, **The holy Child shall be called the Son of God** (Lk

1:35). No one can explain the virgin birth or duplicate it. It stands absolutely alone. Nothing can be compared to it because no other birth has been, or ever could be, like it. The miraculous conception of Jesus lets us know that this isn't some ordinary Baby like every other baby.

Why is the virgin birth important? Why is it important that we believe this truth? What does it teach about the true nature of Jesus? & what are the implications of denying this truth? We believe the virgin birth because the Bible clearly teaches it & because it's absolutely critical for our salvation that Jesus is both fully God & fully man. He's the Savior of the world, uniquely positioned as Mediator between holy God & sinful man, which is exactly what we need in order to be reconciled to a holy God. We defend the virgin birth, because it's only through the virgin birth that God provides a Savior who is unstained by original sin. Sin entered the world through one man & death through sin (Rom 5:12). The infection of sin has infected all of us (Rom 3:23). We're not called sinners because we sin; we sin because that's our nature. We've inherited it as people. In order for us to have a perfect sacrifice, Adam's work had to be bypassed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam, the perfect Man & Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, was sent to us through a virgin's womb & the agency of the Holy Spirit, in order to perform a union of God & man without sin. Because He's born of Mary, He's fully human. Because He's conceived by the Holy Spirit, He's fully God. Because He's born holy (sinless in thought, word, & deed), He is fully qualified to be our Savior. He's fully able to stand in our place, taking our guilt, our shame, our punishment. He could pay for our sins precisely because He had no sin & no guilt of His own. **He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might receive the righteousness of God through Him** (2 Cor 5:21). The virgin birth teaches us that our salvation is entirely supernatural. When God wanted to save the world, He took the initiative & sent His Son. The virgin birth teaches us that salvation is entirely by God's grace. The virgin birth isn't just some casual notion, quaint doctrine, or archaic myth. It's absolutely critical to our salvation, because what we need is a Savior. The Bible presents Jesus as being fully human. He was born like us, lived like us, & died like us. Whatever it means to be truly human, that was true of Jesus. He was as much a Man as any man who ever lived. He wasn't an alien or an angel or a half-man, half-God creature. He was also fully divine, fully God. That's why miracles marked His entrance & exit from this world. He lived on the boundary between 2 worlds.

He was hungry & thirsty ... yet He fed the 5000.  
He slept in the boat ... yet He walked on water.  
He wept at the tomb ... then raised Lazarus from the dead.  
He died on Friday ... then rose on Sunday.

What are the ramifications if you deny the virgin birth? You really only have 2 choices. 1<sup>st</sup>, you can say that Joseph was the real father of Jesus & that the virgin birth was invented to make Jesus seem divine. Or you can argue that Mary had an adulterous relationship with someone else. But both Matthew & Luke clearly say that the conception of Jesus Christ took place while Mary was a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. This isn't open to question or debate. Those who give some other explanation must do so at the expense of the plain meaning of the text. It's impossible to make the terminology of the virgin birth refer to something other than the virgin birth. The virgin birth is a miracle which we may believe or deny. There's enough to believe for those who wish to believe. There's enough reason to doubt for those who care to doubt. Miracles are like that. They don't force us to believe. They invite us to make our own decision. If you say, *Miracles can't happen*, then you'll find some way to explain away the virgin birth. & you won't be the 1<sup>st</sup> to do so. If you doubt the virgin birth, I'm not going to ask you to study the facts & make up your mind. Rather, I want you to pray that God would reveal His truth to you & then to go back & read the gospel story from beginning to end. Take Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John & read it straight through. After that, you'll either believe or you won't. The virgin birth doesn't explain who He is. Who He is explains the virgin birth. How do you account for Jesus? Who is He? Answer that question & you'll also have your answer about the virgin birth.

Can a person reject the virgin birth & still be a Christian? The answer is no. Those who deny the virgin birth reject the authority of Scripture, deny the supernatural birth of the Savior, undermine the very foundations of the gospel, & have no way of explaining the deity of Christ.

For Jesus to be God, He must be born of God. Joseph, a man, & Mary, a woman, cannot produce God. God cannot be born into this world by natural human & biological processes. There's no way He could be God apart from being conceived by God. & that's exactly what happened. This Advent, this Christmas, we have the opportunity to celebrate every aspect of Jesus' life. His humble incarnation, His sinless life & ministry, His righteous example, & ultimately, His sacrificial death & victorious resurrection. But none of that matters if you don't believe God's Word is accurate & truthful regarding



His virgin birth. To deny this doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus is to open the door to denying anything plainly affirmed in the Bible. Mark Driscoll is right to claim,

*If the virgin birth of Jesus is untrue, then the story of Jesus changes greatly; we would have a sexually promiscuous young woman lying about God's miraculous hand in the birth of her son, raising that son to declare he was God, & then joining his religion. But if Mary is nothing more than a sinful con artist then neither she nor her son Jesus should be trusted. Because both the clear teachings of Scripture about the beginning of Jesus' earthly life & the character of his mother are at stake, we must contend for the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>*

Anyone who claims that the virgin birth can be discarded even as the deity of Christ is affirmed is either intellectually dishonest or a theological incompetent. The virgin birth was never meant to stand alone. It's not a random truth plucked from thin air. God never says, *Pick & choose what you want to believe*. It's not a buffet line. History teaches us that when men begin to doubt the virgin birth, they don't stop there. One doubt leads to another until the Jesus they believe in isn't the Jesus of the Bible. In truth, the virgin birth is no more miraculous than the resurrection. They stand or fall together. Do I understand it? No. Do I believe it? Yes. Why? Because the Bible teaches it & because it makes perfect sense. The Baby whose birth we celebrate is Immanuel, God with us. The virgin birth is a sign from God that He's entered the human race. God stooped low to be born in a manger. On the human side, His mother is Mary ... God with us. On the divine side, His Father is God ... God with us. Immanuel, infinitely rich, became poor. He took on our humanness & entered our sin polluted world without ever being tainted by it. He took our guilt, bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, died for our sins, went to heaven to prepare a place for us, sent His Spirit to dwell within us, makes intercession for us now, & will someday come to take us to be with Him. Don't take the virgin birth for granted. Instead, thank God for it & worship Him in awe because of it & what it means to each one of us. May the Lord help us this Christmas to fix our eyes upon Immanuel, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God with us, that we might find hope, peace, joy, & salvation to the praise of the glory of His glorious name.

So what's the message for us? The message for us, just like the message for Ahaz, is to trust God in His promises. What does Matthew say that this Son is brought in the world to do? He's brought into the world to forgive His peoples' sins. & so instead of us, through our own efforts, attempting to get right

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<sup>9</sup> *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, p 136

with God; instead of trying through our own good works trying to deal with our sins, instead we trust God. We trust Jesus & put our hope in this One who is God with us, who is the Son of God. We must put our hope & our faith in Him as He is offered in the gospel. We must turn our backs on our own good works. It's not about our deserving anything. It's about the fact that He is the Son of God in human flesh who came to forgive our sins, & we must trust Him. When we do so, we find that in trusting this One, the Son of David, the Messiah, God in the flesh, that all the promises of Abraham come true to us. That's exactly Matthew's message. *Put your trust in this little Babe, the One born of a virgin, & God will save you.* May God grant us the grace to trust Him.