

It Was The Birthday Of The Savior
(The Virgin Birth of Jesus)

Matthew 1:18-25

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Introduction

1. A number of years ago *CNN's* Larry King was asked who he would most like to have interviewed across history. One of those he named was Jesus Christ. When questioned as to what he would have asked Him, Larry King said, "I would like to ask Him if He was indeed virgin born, because the answer to that question would define history" (quote from Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?*, p. XVIII). Larry King is right. It would define history. It would also define eternity.
2. Predicted in Isaiah 7:14, and recorded in Matthew 1 and Luke 1-2, few teachings about our Lord have been more wonderfully adored or more fiercely attacked. A search on Google (12-05) brought up more than 7 million hits, with the first reading, "The Virgin Birth of Jesus: Fact or Fable?" Until the modern era with its antisupernatural bias, the Church with one voice affirmed the plain teaching of Scripture on this doctrine:

The Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary..."

The Nicene Creed, adopted at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ...[who] for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man..."

The Chalcedonian Creed, adopted at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451: "... we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ...begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin..."

The Small Catechism of Martin Luther of 1529: "I believe in...Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary..."

The Augsburg Confession, the first Protestant confession, written by Philip Melancthon, and presented to Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman empire at the *Diet of Augsburg* in 1530, Article III, "Of the Son of God", begins: "Also they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did assume the human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary..."

Baptists have likewise heralded the truth of the miraculous and supernatural conception of our Savior without dissent or debate. *The 2nd London Confession* of 1689 said, "The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him, who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowing her, and so was made of a woman, of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David, according to the scriptures..."

Our *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* also states, “Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin.”

3. Today, however, the picture is all together different, with more and more voices consigning the virgin birth to the dustbin of myth, fable, legend or outright lie. Thomas Jefferson said in 1823, “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.”

And John Shelby Spong, former Episcopal Bishop of Newark, NJ wrote in *Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus* (1992), “In time, the virgin birth account will join Adam and Eve and the story of the ascension as clearly recognized mythological elements in our faith tradition whose purpose was not to describe a literal event but to capture the transcendent dimensions of God in the earthbound words and concepts of first-century human beings” (p. 74-79).

Transition

The Bible does not present the virgin birth of Jesus as myth, fable or legend. Rather it presents it as historical fact, a supernatural act of God whereby He invades space and time and comes to live in the midst of His people. Problems with the virgin birth are almost always problems with the supernatural and the truth of the Scriptures. And problems with the supernatural are always a problem with the God of the Bible. If you can see your way to believing in the God of Holy Scripture, you will have no problem finding your way to the virgin birth of Jesus, a birth that is truly like no other, the birth of a King, the birth of the Savior. What should be learned from this marvelous event? What does God want us to take away from this sublime story?

I. God still does the supernatural. 1:18

- × Matthew begins his gospel with a genealogy that gives Jesus the legal right to the throne of David, Israel’s greatest king. Verse 1 affirms He is the:
 - Son of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), connecting His birth to the Davidic Covenant.
 - Son of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18), connecting His birth to the Abrahamic Covenant.
- × Now in verses 18ff he proceeds to tell us how Jesus’, Immanuel’s, coming took place. He gives us the main persons and events involved. In doing so, several wonderful lessons are presented.

1. God blesses purity. (cf. Luke 1:26-37)

- Birth – (*genesis*) – origins, beginning (takes us back to Matt. 1:1, but also Gen. 1:1!)
- Jesus – (*Iēsous*, Heb. “Joshua”), mentioned 3x in 1:18-25
- Christ – (*Christos*, Heb. “Messiah”), anointed one
- Mary betrothed – Families in the ancient Near Eastern culture usually arranged the marriage of their children. Young men and women were often pledged,

betrothed, between 12 & 13, with men often marrying around 18. A betrothal was an official, legal arrangement, less than a consummated marriage but much more than an engagement. In a formal ceremony before witnesses, a couple entered into a marital contract. It could only be broken by a legal divorce. Thus the couple was viewed as married (cf. v. 19, “Joseph, her husband”), though they had not come together to consummate their relationship. The betrothal usually lasted about a year and served as a time of testing with respect to the couple (and especially the woman’s) faithfulness. Sexual unfaithfulness during the betrothal was considered an act of adultery and the penalty could be death by stoning (cf. Deut. 22:23-24), although by New Testament times stoning was rare.

- The Scriptures are clear as to Mary’s purity – this was before they came together. Luke 1:26-37 is even more adamant on this [read Luke 1:26-37].

2. God blesses humility. (cf. Luke 1:38, 46-49)

- She was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Upon this woman and no other, the Holy Spirit of God found someone whose purity and humility of life invited His utterly and completely unique blessing. Hear the words of Mary herself in Luke 1:38, 46-49 [read].
- The language of both the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Luke is chaste and restrained. There is no hint of divine rape such as that of the god Apollo, who in the form of a snake impregnated the mother of the emperor Octavius.

There is nothing of the lust of a pagan god like Zeus, who descended upon the woman Diana in a rain of gold and caused her to conceive and bear a son named Perseus.

This is not like the myth surrounding the birth of Alexander the Great, whose mother Olympius was awakened by a clap of thunder, struck by a lightning bolt in her womb causing a fire which, after extinguished, led to the birth of her son.

No, this birth is not like that of Gautama Buddha, whose mother had a white elephant enter into her body at the time she conceived; and the list could go on.

Nor was Jesus the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier named Pandira, as the Jewish Talmud in the 2nd century would propagate. And he most certainly was not the biological son of righteous Joseph. No, the virgin birth is not as the infamous Jesus Seminar says, “theological fiction.” No, this birth was different. It was a birth like no other. It was the birth of the Savior. It was once more a demonstration of the fact that our God still does the supernatural, and that He blesses purity and humility. Never let those truths escape your heart.

II. God still speaks to His children. 1:19-21

- Luke tells the birth story primarily from Mary’s perspective. Matthew tells the birth story primarily from Joseph’s perspective. Joseph was a good man, a godly man. Profiled in TIME (Dec. 19, 2005), he is never quoted directly even once in Scripture. *The Koran* dedicates a chapter to Mary, but omits Joseph all together. And yet, as

Howard Edington says in *The Forgotten Man of Christmas*, “Do not forget that God had all the men in this world from whom to pick when He selected a father for Jesus” (p.74). God speaks to Joseph and does so repeatedly, primarily through dreams (1:20; 2:12 [wise men], 2:13, 19, 22). As God honored Mary to be the mother of our Savior, God also honored Joseph to be the father of our Savior. Why did God honor this man? What kind of life is it that God will bless?

1. Live in a way that pleases God. 1:19

- Joseph, her husband – they are legally bound
- Being a just man – one who honored and obeyed the Law; here also one who was merciful and compassionate. Therefore (1) he must and would divorce her, but (2) he would do it privately and quietly.
- Joseph loved God and Joseph cared about Mary. Clearly he did not know yet what was going on. Confused and no doubt heartbroken, he will act justly and also graciously. Here is a man who lived to please God and bless others. His pain would not prevent him from providing for another. His burden would not keep him from blessing another. No wonder God picked him, as well as Mary, to entrust the care of His Son Jesus.

2. Listen in a way that pleases the Father. 1:20-21

- He thought about these things – what all must have gone through his mind! I thought I knew her! Why did God allow this? Did I do something wrong?
- Angel of the Lord (God’s messenger) ... in a dream – dreams will become Joseph’s nightmares(!), but also his salvation.
- Joseph, son of David (cf. 1:1) – 10x in Matthew, only here of Joseph and not of Jesus.
- Do not be afraid (imperative force). And why should he not be afraid to take Mary as His wife?
 - 1) Her pregnancy is of the Holy Spirit.
 - 2) She will have a Son.
 - 3) You (Joseph) will call him Jesus.
 - 4) He will save His people from their sins (man’s greatest need (salvation) and enemy (sin)).
- Jesus – “Yahweh is salvation” or “Yahweh saves” Psalm 130:7-8 is in the background here; it says, “O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

There was great Jewish expectation that a Messiah would come and redeem Israel from the tyranny of Rome. There was little or no expectation that the Davidic Messiah would also be the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, and give his own life a ransom to save his people from their sins. Yet Matthew 20:28 says “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

III. God still keeps His promises. 1:22-23

- Verses 22-23 are either the words of the angel or Matthew's theological explanation of what all of this is about. A clear connection is made between the virgin conception of Jesus and the Old Testament Scriptures. What we discover should not surprise us: God keeps His promises.

1. **God gave His word in the Scripture. 1:22**

- Note: 1) all of this was done...fulfilled, and 2) spoken by the Lord through the prophet. Here, in a single, simple verse the doctrine of biblical inspiration is made clear. It is the Lord speaking... through his prophet. "The Bible is the Word of God written in the words of men." It is 100% divine and 100% human. As Paul says in 2 Tim. 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." As Peter says in 2 Peter 1:20-21, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." God gave His Word and God keeps His Word.

2. **God kept His word by a Savior. 1:23**

- This is a quote from Isaiah 7:14. In verse 22 we are introduced to the first of 10 Old Testament quotations introduced by the author of the first gospel with the impressive formula, "This is come to pass that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet." The principal point the evangelist wishes to make here is that the birth of Jesus was the subject of Isaiah's great Immanuel prophecy. The child born of the virgin, to be called Immanuel, would come in the midst of the depravity and rebellion of His people Israel (cf. Isa. 7:10-16). But ultimately He would overcome all His enemies (9:6-7). The point here is crucial. The sweep of Isaiah's argument demands that the "child" of Isaiah 7:14 be the "Son who is given" of Isaiah 9:6. Although born of a lowly virgin in Israel (cf. 9:6, "unto us"), He would be Immanuel, "the Mighty God," and the government would be upon His shoulder. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Matthew links the prophecy with the history of the birth of Mary's son. Of all the elements, however, the greatest stress lies upon His deity, or upon Immanuel. He is with us by virtue of the virgin birth, but let one never forget that He is God with us.
- I believe we should acknowledge that the original context of Isaiah's prophecy may not be exclusively about the virginal conception of Jesus. The year is 734 B.C. and King Ahaz of Judah (in the south) is terrified to learn that Aram and Israel (the northern kingdom) have formed an alliance against him. Isaiah is sent to reassure Ahaz that God is in control and that the aims of the alliance will not succeed. Ahaz is told to request a sign from the Lord, a means of confirming the truth of Isaiah's message. But he refuses! Annoyed at the king's stubbornness, Isaiah declares that the Lord will give a sign anyway: an *almah* (a maiden of marriageable age) will conceive a son and call his name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey, the food of judgment and want, upon reaching an age of moral discernment. But before this happens, the land of the two dreaded kings will be forsaken. Now, should this prophecy be understood to refer exclusively to Jesus'

virginal conception? If so, how does it relate to the promise that the Aram-Israel alliance would soon be broken and their lands forsaken (a promise fulfilled within twelve years time)?

It's quite possible that Isaiah's prophecy *had a dual or typological fulfillment: initially, in Isaiah's day; and ultimately, at the birth of Jesus*. In other words God establishes a pattern that reveals that He is present among His people, a pattern that reaches its apex in the virgin birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. In this view the *almah*, or *young maiden of Isaiah's prophecy*, is a type of the virgin Mary, who later conceived Jesus through the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit. So although a young woman in Isaiah's day bore a child who gave proof that God was still with His people, Jesus is later recognized by Matthew to be the true Immanuel, "God with us" in a new, genuine and unprecedented way.

- In this prophecy the remarkable truth that Jesus is both God and man is affirmed. Here the mystery of the incarnation is succinctly yet sufficiently articulated.

a. Our Savior is fully human

- × She will bring forth a Son (v. 2).
- × The virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son (v. 23).
- × She brought forth her firstborn Son (v. 25).

b. Our Savior is fully divine

- × Call His name Immanuel, "God with us" (a title or description of His person). Because He is God with us in the cradle, He can be God for us on the cross.
- × Chuck Swindoll has well said, "The most significant event of the centuries took place in a stable...in a manger. Yes, Mary had a little Lamb. And her little Lamb was destined for sacrifice. There was a tiny Lamb in Bethlehem who was destined for Golgotha's altar." (Quoted in *Discovering the Biblical Jesus*, p. 29). Yes, the King in the cradle would become the King on the cross.
- Jesus Christ is the most remarkable person in all of creation. Think about it:
 - He had no human Father, but an earthly mother.
 - He had no heavenly mother, but a heavenly Father.
 - He was older than His mother and as old as His Father.
 - All of this, and more, is made possible by His virgin conception.
- It is fascinating to think how God has brought various persons into the world. The virgin birth completes the circle.
 - Adam → no man/no woman
 - Eve → a man/no woman
 - Us → a man/a woman
 - Jesus → no man/a woman!
- Yes, as John Stott says, "The incarnation was a historical and unrepeatable event with permanent consequences (*C.T.*, 12-9-02, p. 53).

- * What is at stake with respect to the virgin birth?
 - 1) The trustworthiness of Scripture.
 - 2) The legitimacy or illegitimacy of Jesus' birth.
 - 3) The sinlessness of the Son of God.
 - 4) The wedding of deity and humanity.
 - 5) The salvation of sinners (He must be both God and man).
 - 6) The curse of Jeconiah (1:11; cf. Jer. 22:30). (Jesus is legally in this line, it is Joseph's, but not naturally in it. The virgin birth makes this possible!)

IV. **God still honors obedience. 1:24-25**

- The speed, suddenness and surprise of these events must have left Joseph breathless, stunned, paralyzed. We easily understand if this had been his response. But no, whereas in v. 20 he thought about these things, now in verse 24 he leaps into action at the word he has received from the Lord. What an incredible example he sets for us.

1. **We should obey immediately. 1:24**

- He awoke from his sleep (not his dream).
- He obeyed the word of the angel of the Lord.
- He took Mary without hesitation to be his wife. Here is a marvelous example of a personal crisis pregnancy center! Here is the original Promise Keeper!
- There is no delay, debate or discussion, only action.
- Did he understand fully all that was happening? I doubt it, but then, he did not have too.

- * When God speaks, we obey, whether we understand everything or not!

2. **We should obey completely. 1:25**

- He honored Mary and the child in her until Jesus' birth (he went beyond the command of the angel).
- He named his son as told. He named Him Jesus. The name Immanuel (God with us) tells us who He is. The name Jesus (God saves) tells us what He does.
- How amazing that Joseph's and Mary's nothingness should attract God's all. How amazing that thru our obedience God accomplishes so much! You see when we are to others what Christ has become for us, there is no telling what all God might do.

Conclusion

The simplicity of our Savior's birth and His name is a remarkable thing. We have examined His birth, but consider His name. Men make much of names, especially their leaders and rulers. Think of the extravagant claims made for Alexander the Great, Caesar Augustus (the divine one), Charles the Bold, Richard the Lion-Hearted.

What a contrast, oh how different, is that simple name of Jesus.

“That Beautiful Name”

I know of a name. A beautiful name that angels brought down to earth.

They whispered it low, one night long ago, to a maiden of lowly birth.

I know of a name. A beautiful name that unto a Babe was given.
The stars glittered bright throughout that glad night, and angels praised God in heaven.

The One of that name, my Savior became, my Savior of Calvary.
My sins nailed Him there, my burdens to bear. He suffered all this for me.

I love that blest name, that wonderful name, made higher than all in heaven.
'Twas whispered I know, in my heart long ago. To Jesus my life I've given.

Refrain: That beautiful name, that beautiful name, from sin has power to free us!
That beautiful name, that wonderful name, that matchless name is Jesus!

“O holy Child of Bethlehem descend to us, we pray.
Cast out our sin, and enter in -- be born in us today!

We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell --
Oh, come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!”