

## MATTHEW 1:18-23

### A PROMISE FORGOTTEN IN TIME

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel’

(which means, God with us).”<sup>1</sup>

I confess that I am of two minds concerning the Advent Season. Certainly, this is a joyous time of the year—filled with parties and good cheer as people seem to be on their best behaviour. However, it is also a time of intense pressures. Unrealistic expectations drive many people to excess. The incident of suicides is increased during this season, the incident of drunkenness with all its attendant problems increases throughout the Christmas season and marital strife resulting from excessive debt incurred during the season is exaggerated.

Nevertheless, Christmas presents a great opportunity to provide teaching about the doctrine of Christ the Saviour—teaching that is woefully neglected by far too many pulpits. The doctrines that are essential, though essentially ignored, are doctrines that address such necessary truths as prophetic fulfilment, the virginal conception, the humanity of the Master, the deity of the Saviour, and God’s salvation and the faithfulness of God. To be certain, addressing these doctrines from the pulpit provides opportunity to teach God’s people in great and wonderful truths. Considered in this light, I welcome the Advent Season.

On the other hand, because these wonderful doctrines are interwoven with the cultural phenomenon of Christmas, many people attend church out of duty during this season, failing to hear what is said. Others dismiss what is said, refusing to connect the dots, as it were. Worse yet are the vast numbers of professed Christians who imagine that they know all about the story of Christ’s advent, and tune out what is being taught.

We are not really so very different from the people who were living in Judea during the days when the Master was born. Many fell into one of those same categories: knowing all about God’s promise, but consumed with their own interests so that they ignored what they knew; dutifully listening to what was said during the days of worship required in the Temple, though tuning out the message that was delivered; or, deliberately dismissing what God had said. God had promised from the fall of our first parents that He would send a Deliverer. All peoples familiar with the promise of God should have been living in anticipation. That they were not eagerly waiting indicates that the promise of His Advent was a promise forgotten in time.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations 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.

**THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN CONTEXT** — Perhaps it is more accurate for us to speak of the virginal conception than it is to speak of the virgin birth. My reason for making such a statement is that the Bible tells us little about the actual birth of the Messiah; but the account of the Saviour's conception receives significant attention. Nevertheless, most people understand that whenever we speak of "The Virgin Birth," we are speaking of the fact that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived through the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to point out that Matthew takes care to stress that Mary and Joseph did not enjoy marital relationship until after the birth of the Master. Having been informed by the angel that Mary was not promiscuous, Joseph did assume responsibility as her husband, and, as the text states, he "knew her not until she had given birth to a son" [VERSE 25]. Before continuing our consideration of prophecies pointing to the virgin birth of the Messiah, there are several issues surrounding the account of Joseph's character that I want to address.

Joseph is the focus of Matthew's account of the conception of the Master. Whereas Luke's account focuses on Mary and her reaction to the divine announcement and activity, Matthew focuses on Joseph. To be certain, Mary's pregnancy underlies the discussion, but the issue central to Matthew's presentation is Joseph's dilemma presented by Mary's pregnancy.

In Jewish culture, betrothal was somewhat like engagement in our culture, but it imposed a more rigorous set of requirements on those who were betrothed. If an engagement is broken in our culture, there is no lasting shame attached to either party. However, betrothal in the Jewish system was tantamount to marriage. It conferred a legal status on the two individuals such that they were actually considered to be husband and wife. This is evident from the text when we note that Joseph is identified as Mary's husband [VERSE 19]. This is not the first time he is identified as the husband of Mary before the marriage ceremony proper [see MATTHEW 1:16].

Parents might pledge their children to marriage at quite a young age, even during infancy. Of course, the parents would be careful to raise their children to anticipate marriage in that case, preparing them for the responsibilities of marriage. At a point in time—somewhere between twelve and fourteen for a young woman, and between fourteen and nineteen for a young man—betrothal would occur. Betrothal lasted for a year, during which time the couple was considered to be legally married, though no sexual activity would be permitted during the betrothal. The bride's parents would present the dowry to the husband and the groom's parents would present the bride price to the parents of the young woman. During betrothal, the couple would not see one another, often not even being permitted a glimpse of each other.

After a year, the marriage would be finalised as the couple would have a formal ceremony. The husband would escort his wife to the marriage chamber where the marriage would be consummated. The bride's parents would eagerly await the morning to grab the sheets to demonstrate that their daughter was a virgin should a challenge ever arise to her purity.

We do not know at what point during the betrothal Mary was approached by Gabriel. We do have a truncated timeline informing us that her relative (perhaps her cousin) Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy with John, who would be called "The Baptist" [LUKE 1:26, 36]. Upon her return to her hometown, it was evident that Mary was pregnant. Her condition could not be hidden, and undoubtedly the gossip began. Eventually, word reached Joseph that his wife to whom he was betrothed, was pregnant. Perhaps during her absence from her parents she had a dalliance with someone and had been impregnated. In our day, affairs seem rather commonplace and we are no longer shocked at such a casual attitude toward sex. However, her condition and the possibility of immorality would have been shocking to Mary's neighbours.

Joseph's reaction to Mary's condition demonstrates the accuracy of Matthew's assessment that he was "a just man" [VERSE 19]. Technically, Mary was guilty of adultery. However, by the time of the account before us, stoning of adulterous women was unheard of. Any woman guilty of adultery would be publicly shamed—disowned by her family and disgraced before her peers, she would likely never marry. In that culture, it would be a very serious sentence as there would be little chance of her providing for herself. Should she have an illegitimate child to feed, her situation would be more desperate still.

Joseph had the option of openly distancing himself from her. He would keep the dowry that his family had received and Mary's parents would be compelled to return the bride price. Through such action, Joseph would publicly disclaim responsibility for impregnating Mary and be exonerated of violating social expectations and be absolved of all responsibility either for Mary or for the child she was carrying.

Alternatively, he could ask two or three elders to hear his statement of divorce, in which case he would be formally absolved of all responsibility, and Mary would be spared the trauma and humiliation of public denunciation. She would be free to grapple with the fallout from her pregnancy as she saw fit, and Joseph would be free of responsibility for her care.

This was Joseph's dilemma. He is called a "just man" because of his concern for Mary. Wishing to spare her public humiliation, he weighed a quiet divorce. In fact, the text indicates that he had settled on this latter action when we read that he "resolved to divorce her quietly" [VERSE 19]. This is an exceptionally mature attitude by such a young man who was disgraced by the betrayal of the woman betrothed to him. Despite trying to keep matters quiet, people would know that the marriage did not take place. They would know about Mary's condition. They would be able to put two and two together.

As Joseph was weighing this momentous decision, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. It is possible, perhaps even probable, that this was Gabriel, the same angel that had appeared to Mary to announce that she would bear God's Anointed One [LUKE 1:26], and who had also appeared to Zechariah to announce the birth of John [LUKE 1:19]. Since Gabriel had been the messenger dispatched to speak of these miraculous births, it is reasonable to suggest that he also appeared to Joseph. What is important to note is that the angel assuaged Joseph's fears, telling him that the child Mary was carrying was not an ordinary child, but one conceived by the Spirit of God. In fact, Joseph was to name the child "Jesus," a somewhat common name for Jewish children meaning "Yahweh Saves," or "Salvation of Yahweh." Whether the angel continued speaking, or whether Matthew added a commentary, is uncertain. In any case, God presents this as fulfilment of a prophecy that had been given through Isaiah concerning a child born of a virgin who would be called "Immanuel" [VERSES 22, 23].

There is a final issue that will assist in providing context for what we read. We are focused on the evidence of Joseph's maturity, which is striking. In particular, note three aspects of his obedience to the angelic message which reveal what can only be said to be exceptional maturity—maturity that outstrips that of many mature men within our own ken. Remember, Joseph was probably no older than sixteen to eighteen years of age, and Mary was possibly as young as twelve years of age and certainly no more than fourteen. Joseph was willing to accept the disgrace that would attend marrying this young woman; he was willing to exercise restraint, withholding himself from sexual intimacy with her until after the birth of the child she was carrying; and he was willing to assume responsibility to raise this exceptional child. Any of these three situations would cause strong men to quail, and would certainly give pause to most men, especially when the child was not the result of their own immorality!

Marrying the young mother, Joseph would be identified as the father of the child she was carrying. He would be subject to innuendo and gossip—the butt of jokes for the rest of his life. Knowing this, he nevertheless accepted the burden of marrying the young girl. Few men would willingly accept the responsibility of marrying a woman whom they did not sleep with. Of those willing to do such a thing, it would be difficult not to throw the situation in her face each time there was a family blow-up, which comes to all families occasionally.

Having married her, formally accepting before witnesses the responsibility of a husband and of a father, he had no intimate relations with her. He had not been sexually active for the period preceding this event, and now we know that he had no marital relations with her until after the birth of the child. This is exceptional in light of the lax morality that characterises this present day. It used to be that girls agonised over whether to kiss on the first date; today, they obsess over when they should sleep with the guy on the first date. And men appear to anticipate that a date will conclude with a romp in bed. Joseph must be commended for exceptional maturity in this instance.

Knowing that Mary was carrying the Anointed One, Joseph willingly accepted responsibility to raise the child. He would be responsible not only to provide for the child, but to protect Him and his mother, training Him in righteousness and instructing Him in the ways of God. He assumed an awesome responsibility, made all the more daunting by the knowledge that this child was destined to “save His people from their sins,” being identified as “God with us.”

**THE VIRGIN BIRTH PROPHESED** — That Joseph accepted the weight of responsibility is due in no small measure to the angel’s assurance him that the child was conceived of the Spirit of God. Moreover, Joseph was assured that this child which Mary carried was the promised Messiah, who had been prophesied by Isaiah.

Joseph was a son of his culture—taught in the Scriptures from childhood, instructed in righteousness, and anticipating God’s mercies through the presentation of the Anointed One. When the angel appeared, he pointed Joseph to the promise of the Word of God. Specifically, the angel allayed Joseph’s concern about taking Mary to be his wife, informing him that Mary was chaste and pure. Then, pointing to a promise that Joseph would have known from reading the Isaiah scroll, the angel said, “The child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you will name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins” [VERSES 20, 21].<sup>2</sup>

As already indicated, whether the explanatory verses were actually spoken by the angel, or whether Matthew appended them under the guidance of the Spirit, we are given an explanation of the momentous event that was taking place through reference to a prophecy delivered over seven centuries before the time of Joseph’s dream. Let’s turn back to that prophecy, which, incidentally, was not the first prophecy pointing forward to the birth of God’s Anointed One.

The prophecy cited in Matthew’s Gospel is quoted from **ISAIAH 7:14**. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was threatened by an unholy alliance between Samaria and Syria. The people were terrified at the prospect of being conquered by these ruthless enemies. God noted their distress and sent Isaiah, to tell the king, “Listen, calm down. Don’t be afraid. And don’t panic over these two burnt-out cases, Rezin of Aram and the son of Remaliah. They talk big but there’s nothing to them” [ISAIAH 7:4].<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **The NET Bible** (Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2006)

<sup>3</sup> **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

God promised deliverance for Judah, but then, speaking through Isaiah, God said to the king, “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven” [ISAIAH 7:11]. Listen to the king’s fraudulent, pious answer. “I will not put the LORD to the test” [ISAIAH 7:12]. This was nothing but trash talk. This king was ungodly and focused on his own interest. He did not have the things of God in mind at any point during his reign. He wouldn’t put the Lord to the test because he couldn’t think of anything to ask as demonstration of God’s purpose and power. He was so out of touch with the Living God that he was unable to respond appropriately.

However, Isaiah spoke for the LORD. “The Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His Name Immanuel” [ISAIAH 7:14]. Liberal scholars have made much of the fact that Isaiah chose a word that could refer to a young woman. Isaiah used the Hebrew word *’almah*, which can indeed speak of “a young woman,” a “damsel” or a “maiden,” though it is frequently translated “virgin” in contemporary translations that benefit from recent scholastic studies.<sup>4</sup> Isaiah could have used the word *b<sup>e</sup>thulah* which is usually translated “virgin.”<sup>5</sup> Liberal students in particular ridiculed Matthew’s reference to Isaiah’s prophecy as pointing to a virgin birth. “What is miraculous about a young woman conceiving?” they chortled. A young woman becoming pregnant is neither startling nor miraculous. Isaiah was not simply saying that a young woman would become pregnant—a prophecy rising to the level of tabloid prophecy; the element of the miraculous was inherent in his prophecy, as understood by those who translated the Hebrew into the Greek tongue. The Septuagint translates the word *’almah* as *parthénos*, which specifically means “a virgin.”

Recent scholars have documented that the word *’almah* is never used of a married woman, either in the Bible or elsewhere. Citing evidence from recent studies, one commentary notes that *’almah*, wherever it occurs in the Old Testament, points to young women who had not entered into sexual relationship.<sup>6</sup> The study continues by showing that *b<sup>e</sup>thulah* fails the test of “always” speaking of a virgin, pointing to the words of JOEL 1:8: “Grieve like a young woman dressed in sackcloth, [mourning] for the husband of her youth.”<sup>7</sup> The conclusion of the study is that Isaiah used the strongest possible word to stress the miraculous element of the prophecy—a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son who would be identified as “God with us.” In citing this prophecy, Matthew is employing what would have been understood to be sound Jewish understanding of the Hebrew tongue in that day. He was not giving the prophecy of Isaiah a “Christian twist.”

What Isaiah wrote was but an echo of the earlier promise that God had made following the awful rebellion in the Garden of Eden. The words are not as clear as some might wish them to be, but God did imply something marvellous as He cursed the serpent. Listen to the Word: “The LORD God said to the serpent,

‘Because you have done this,  
    cursed are you above all livestock  
    and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
    and dust you shall eat

<sup>4</sup> See GENESIS 24:43; EXODUS 2:8; PSALM 68:25; PROVERBS 30:19; CANTICLES 1:3; 6:8

<sup>5</sup> See GENESIS 24:16; LEVITICUS 21:3; JUDGES 2:12

<sup>6</sup> W. Hendriksen and S. J. Kistemaker, **New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew**, Vol. 9 (Baker, Grand Rapids MI 1973) 137-8

<sup>7</sup> **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2002, 2003)

all the days of your life.  
I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.”

[GENESIS 3:14, 15].

Hebrew lineage was not figured from the mother, but from the father. Women do not provide “seed” [*zer*<sup>a</sup>]; men provide the “seed.” Offspring is counted to husbands, not to wives. Yet, the Lord God promised that the offspring (literally *seed*) of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. For this reason, theologians speak of this as the Protoevangelium—the first preaching of the Good News. This is the first indication that God would send a Messiah.

In Jeremiah’s prophecy there is an enigmatic prophecy that likely points forward to the birth of the Messiah. In JEREMIAH 31:22, we read:

“How long will you waver,  
O faithless daughter?  
For the LORD has created a new thing on the earth:  
a woman encircles a man.”

Admittedly, the prophecy is obscure and liable to multiple understandings. From earliest days of the church fathers, biblical scholars have taken this verse to be a reference to the virgin birth. While the immediate context speaks of the restoration of Israel, there have always been those who advocated that the church fathers were correct in seeing this as a reference to the Virgin Birth. In later years even such revered commentators as Matthew Henry have understood this to be a reference to God presenting Messiah through the virginal conception.<sup>8</sup>

What is vital for our understanding is that Matthew (or possibly the angelic messenger) understood that what had occurred to Mary was fulfilment of the promise God had given through Isaiah. Matthew wrote these words in the confidence that those reading the Gospel—primarily Jewish Christians—would understand that Jesus was the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy, and that His birth was indeed a miraculous fulfilment of that which God had promised. He wrote with confidence that he was in the mainstream of Jewish thought.

**THE VIRGIN BIRTH ACCOMPLISHED** — One thing is certain if we accept the accuracy of Matthew’s account: Joseph was not the father of the child born to Mary. Certainly, the church fathers were convinced of the accuracy of the accounts provided by Matthew and Luke, for they testified that Christ was “born of a virgin.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, conservative Christians are united in testifying to their confidence that Matthew accurately recorded the events that are now before us.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume** (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA 1991, 1994)

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Justin Martyr in A. Roberts, J. Donaldson and A. C. Coxe, **The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325**, Vol. I (Logos Research Systems, Oak Harbor, WA 1997) 231; Tertullian in A. Roberts, J. Donaldson and A. C. Coxe, **The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325**, Vol. IV (Logos Research Systems, Oak Harbor, WA 1997) 31; Cyprian, in A. Roberts, J. Donaldson and A. C. Coxe, **The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325**, Vol. V (Logos Research Systems, Oak Harbor, WA 1997) 515; see also St. John Chrysostom, “Homily III,” P. Schaff, **The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers**, Vol. X (Logos Research Systems, Oak Harbor, WA 1997) 14-5

In order to emphasise that Joseph was not the biological father of Mary's firstborn son, Matthew writes, Joseph "did not have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son" [MATTHEW 1:25].<sup>10</sup> It was during the latter stage of her pregnancy that a decree issued by Caesar Augustus compelled Joseph, together with the pregnant Mary, to whom he was now formally married, to trek to Bethlehem in order to be registered for taxation purposes [LUKE 2:1-7]. While there, Mary delivered her firstborn, fulfilling yet another prophecy that stated Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.<sup>11</sup>

The writers of the New Testament assume the virgin birth. We often imagine that the sole Christmas texts are those which have been provided by Matthew and by Luke. However, there are other passages that point to the Advent of the Master and His miraculous arrival. One such account is that found in one of Paul's earliest writings to be included in the canon of Scripture. Writing to the recalcitrant churches in Galatia, the Apostle wrote: "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" [GALATIANS 4:4, 5].

Remember that Paul and Luke were co-workers. It is impossible to believe that Paul wrote these words without interacting with Luke—each influencing the other. The Apostle's choice of words makes a strong case for the virgin birth in that he says, literally, the Son of God was "born *out of* a woman."<sup>12</sup> The wording hearkens back to the words recorded in the Protoevangelium, and comport to the revelation given by both Luke and Matthew. Steeped as he was in the Jewish Faith, we should not be surprised that the Apostle reflected that understanding. The ancient Jewish Faith was not errant; it is the later imposition of others who imagined they needed to rescue God through adding to His Word that is rejected. It is obvious that the Apostle was careful to state that Christ was formed from a woman's womb—literally born out of her. Though I do not wish to take away anything from the Apostle's intellect, we accept that he was guided by the Spirit of God to write precisely what God intended to be written for our benefit.

What must not be missed is that the Son of God was born for a specific purpose. In the midst of the gaiety and glitter of the season, it is easy to forget why we celebrate the birth of this One. The Son of God was born "to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be adopted as sons with full rights."<sup>13</sup> The Messiah was born to make it possible that we may be adopted as sons with full rights. Don't get hung up on gender; it is vital that we be adopted as sons, since daughters under the law and also under Roman law, had no inheritance rights. However, the adoption offered in the Son of God ensures that we receive full rights regardless of our gender in this life. What is important is our relationship to the Son of God, and not whether we are male or female. In Him, we have the adoption with full rights accorded to heirs.

Undoubtedly, John had in mind the unique birth of the Master when he penned these words: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" [JOHN 1:14]. In his first letter, John wrote in a similar vein, stating in his opening verses: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us" [1 JOHN 1:1, 2].

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<sup>10</sup> NET Bible, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> See MATTHEW 2:5, 6

<sup>12</sup> *genómenon ek gynaikós*

<sup>13</sup> NET Bible, op. cit.

Listen to that exciting truth from a couple of other translations. Charles B. Williams especially captures the force and the dynamic of the Greek verb tenses. His translation reads: “It is what existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have beheld, what our own hands have touched, about the very message of life—and that life has been unveiled to us, and we have seen it and now testify to it and we now announce it to you, yea, the eternal life that was with the Father and has been unveiled to us.”<sup>14</sup>

J. B. Phillips’ insightful paraphrase of the New Testament provides a delightful excursion into the excitement of the New Testament writings. He opens John’s words in this way. “We are writing to you about something which has always existed yet which we ourselves actually saw and heard: something which we had opportunity to observe closely and even to hold in our hands, and yet, as we know now, was something of the very Word of life himself! For it was life which appeared before us: we saw it, we are eyewitnesses of it, and are now writing to you about it. It was the very life of all ages, the life that has always existed with the Father, which became visible in person to us mortal men. We repeat, we actually saw and heard what we are now writing to you about.”<sup>15</sup>

There is yet one final passage that points to this virgin birth. The writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians quotes a Psalm as though Christ the Lord Himself were speaking. “When Christ came into the world, he said,

‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;  
in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.  
Then I said, “Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book”’”

[HEBREWS 10:5-7]

Again, underscore in your mind that the purpose of His coming was to fulfil the will of the Father, to redeem fallen man. He would present Himself as a sacrifice because of the sin of mankind. His birth was unique, and His death would likewise be unique. Though in historical accounts others may have given their lives as a sacrifice, He gave His to redeem sinful man. Through His death, He would provide atonement for sinful man.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH** — Why does it matter whether Jesus was born of a virgin? Isn’t the fact He was born the only thing of vital importance? Perhaps we could imagine that to be the case if the Bible did not present this truth as fulfilment of prophecy. Obviously, because God presented this truth from the fall of our first parents, it is important that His Son should be conceived in a manner that distinguishes Him from the rest of humanity. Think with me of several reasons why the virgin birth, and the virginal conception, is so vital to our Faith.

If Jesus was not born of a virgin, then the Bible is in error. If God lied concerning this central truth in the birth of His Son, then how can we know that He has not lied concerning our salvation? The Word of God must be true, or we have no sure foundation on which to base our faith. If the Faith we have received is the best thought of good men, then we have built on shifting sand, and tomorrow there will be no faith at all.

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<sup>14</sup> Charles B. Williams, **New Testament in the Language of the People** (Moody, Chicago, IL 1937)

<sup>15</sup> J. B. Phillips, **The New Testament in Modern English** (Macmillan, San Francisco, CA 1965)



There is perhaps another reason why the virgin birth is vital to our Faith. The virgin birth was necessary to avoid the contamination of sin in the Messiah. David, in his penitential psalm, expresses a startling truth when he writes: “In sin did my mother conceive me” [PSALM 51:5]. He does not mean that the act of love between his mother and father was sinful, for God has declared the marriage bed to be undefiled [see HEBREWS 13:4]. However, he does mean that even from the point life begins—conception, for those who wonder—we are subject to the effects of sin. Infants do not die because they are ungodly sinners, but they are born under sin and thus subject to the effects of sin [e.g. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:22]. The unborn child is very much a human, but they are subject to death. Thus, to abort the unborn is to take human life. Christ, by circumventing the union of sinful seed with sinful egg avoided the taint of sin. Therefore, in Christ, we have a High Priest “who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” [HEBREWS 4:15].

I do wish to present one other reason why the virgin birth of our Saviour is important. God was presenting His Son to be a sacrifice for this fallen world. In fact, we read of the Father, “God so loved the world that He gave His Only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” [JOHN 3:16]. The Son of God would be born for this unique purpose of providing atonement for all mankind. His would be a unique death, and therefore, His must be a unique birth. Unlike the weird myths of the Greeks and Romans, or of the Norse and others, God did not need to have sex with a mere mortal to present His Son to the world. Rather, He sent His Spirit to create a new thing in the earth—a child born without a mortal father.

And that brings the question to you. Do you know the virgin-born Son of God? Have you received the gift of life which He freely offers to all who come to Him in faith? Christ Jesus the Lord was born so that He might die because of your sin. The wonderful truth is that He did not remain dead. Indeed, He tasted death for every person, and that includes you. He was buried, attesting that He had experienced the bitter pangs of sin that gushed out onto Him—sin that poured forth from every fallen being that should ever be born into this fallen world. Yet, He conquered death and rose from the grave.

Therefore, the Word of God is very clear in stating, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” That passage continues with the simple promise that, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

The sincere prayer of each member of this congregation is that you know the Christ of Christmas. We pray with pure motives that you have indeed believed this glorious truth, and that you know what it means to be born from above. If not, let this Holy Season be the time you come to life in God’s Beloved Son. In fact, let this be the day you believe and come to faith. Amen.