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“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins,” Matthew 1:21.

Virgin-Born Son of God

Lesson Aim: To set forth the doctrine of the virgin birth as an indispensable cornerstone of the Christian faith.

L303. Date: September 1974. **Text:** Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:26, 30-35; Matthew 1:22-23. **Topic:** Christ: Birth of.

Two Christians were discussing their attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ in view of His redemptive work among men. One said, “I stand in wonder when I think of His going to the cross for sinners.”

The other replied, “I can scarce get past His cradle in my wondering to wonder at His cross.”

The incarnation of God in human flesh, in the person of Jesus, is one of the greatest marvels of grace ever manifested among men. Imagine! The Ancient of days became a babe at Bethlehem. He who thunders in the heavens was crying in a cradle. He who made all flesh was Himself made flesh. The mighty God became a helpless child. God and man became one in the person of Him whom we call Jesus, the Christ.

Human reason rejects the fact of the incarnation of God. It is so contrary to the natural order. Since the eternal God would come into the world to do a totally new thing—provide eternal atonement for sinners—why be surprised that He came by a new and different way. Whether men understand it or not, the virgin-conception of Mary and the birth of her unusual Son are divinely attested facts.

MEANING OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

What does “virgin birth” mean? First, note what it does not mean. (1) It does not mean immaculate conception in which Mary was conceived in her

mother's womb by a divine miracle. (2) It does not mean miraculous birth by which Mary, following the birth of Jesus, remained as if she had borne no child. The development and birth of Mary's Son was normal in every respect. (3) It does not mean perpetual virginity. After the birth of Jesus, Mary was a normal wife to Joseph. She bore at least six other children by normal conception (Mark 6:3),

Virgin birth means that, contrary to the course of nature, by a creative miracle of God, the physical body of Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, a chaste virgin in the strictest sense of the word. No coitus of any kind, natural or supernatural, occurred. The spoken Word of God brought conception. In the Child born to Mary, pre-existent deity and finite humanity were fused into one. He whom we call Jesus bore two natures, human and divine, as the God-Man.

The Bible bears witness of the unique miracle involved in the virgin birth. John 3:16 declares, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son . . .”** The Greek term Jesus used for “only begotten” is **“monogenes.”** It means “alone, I am born.” Jesus chose that word, in speaking of Himself, because He is the only one born by virgin conception. Of no other has God ever said, **“Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,”** Hebrews 1:5.

Jesus recognized that He was deity in human flesh. He declared, **“I came down from heaven . . . Ye are from beneath; I am from above . . . I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father,”** John 6:38; 8:23; 16:28. Such statements would be grossly untrue apart from the miracle of His virgin birth.

The writers of the Gospels recognized the unique nature of Jesus' conception and birth. Matthew took the first portion of his book to record the genealogy of Jesus. He went from generation to generation with the formula, “A begat B; and B begat C; and C begat D,” He changed the formula in verse 16, **“And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”** Matthew underscored the virgin conception of Mary in that the phrase “of whom” uses the feminine pronoun. It could be translated, “of her was born Jesus.” Mary was Jesus' mother, but Joseph was not His father.

The doctrine of the virgin birth was not manufactured to explain the parentage of Jesus. The belief rose out of the fact. Mary did not expect virgin conception; the angel of the Lord had to explain to her how it would happen (Luke 1:34-35). Joseph did not expect virgin conception; the angel of the Lord had to explain to him what had happened (Matthew 1:18-25). They did not realize the promise, **“Behold, a virgin shalt conceive, and**

bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” was to be fulfilled in the child to be born to Mary (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23). The doctrine of the virgin birth was not a concoction of man, but a revelation of God.

WITNESSES OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Prophetic witness—In the beginnings of human history, God promised that one day a son born to a woman would bruise the head of the serpent (who had caused man's fall into sin) and deliver men from the condemnation which sin brought (Genesis 3:15). **“But when the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman . . .”** Galatians 4:4. The prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke of a time when a virgin would conceive and bear a son. He would be so unusual in his nature that she would call him Immanuel, which means “God is with us.” The angel of the Lord explained the coming birth of Mary's child, saying, **“Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet . . .”** Matthew 1:22.

The prophets told that He would be descended from the Semetic branch of the human family, a descendant of Abraham, from the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, the house of David. They announced that He would be born in Bethlehem, betrayed by a friend, die by crucifixion, arise from the dead, ascend back to the Father, and return to institute God's kingdom upon earth. The prophetic witness is complete. Jesus is the Christ.

Angelic witness—Heaven testified to the fact of virgin conception by the message of the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26). He seems to have been a special messenger of God. He appeared to the prophet Daniel to explain certain visions (Daniel 8:16). He appeared to Zacharias to announce the coming birth of John the Baptist. Then he appeared to the virgin Mary to tell of her conception and the birth of her divine Son. It is possible that it was he who appeared to Joseph as “the angel of the Lord” to explain the nature of Mary's conception and the deity of her Son (Matthew 1:18-25). Heaven's best was chosen to be the messenger of God's incarnation.

Historic witness—History bears witness of the virgin conception of Mary and attendant birth of her Son. (1) It bears witness of its announcement: **“The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God,”** Luke 1:35. (2) It

bears witness of its fulfillment: **“And she brought forth her firstborn son . . .”** Luke 2:7. (3) It bears witness of its mystery: **“And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph . . .”** Luke 3:23. History testifies of the incarnation of the Son of God.

Apostolic witness—The Apostle Paul, above all other New Testament writers, emphasized the unique nature of Jesus. He and Luke, a physician, were companions during several years of missionary ministry. They must have often discussed the miracle of Mary's virgin conception and the nature of Jesus. Out of that background, and by divine inspiration, Paul wrote of God's “sending forth His Son” (Galatians 4:4), of Jesus' “partaking” of flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14), and of Him who “knew no sin” becoming sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21).

The classic apostolic statement is Philippians 2:5-8. It declares that Jesus existed in the very nature of God and on equality with God before His incarnation. He laid it all aside, however, when He came in human flesh. He took the nature of a slave, in becoming man, and became our sin offering upon the cross. Amazing grace!

Consider Galatians 4. Four times Paul wrote of the beginning of human life, using a word which means “born.” When he wrote of the coming of God's Son into the world, he did not use the term for “born” but one which means “become.” He evidently intended to say that Jesus was not born as other men are. He is the unique, incarnate Son of God. Ample witnesses testify to that fact.

IMPORTANCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The virgin birth was truly necessary for Jesus to be God. He “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,” the pre-existent One, could not come into human flesh as mortal man does (Micah 5:2). No ordinary man, born of natural human generation, can be called by such names as “Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace,” Isaiah 9:6. Since God came into the world by a new and different way, it may truly be said of Him, **“And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord . . . with righteousness shall he judge . . . and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked,”** Isaiah 11:2, 4. His virgin birth showed Jesus to be the born

Son of God.

The virgin birth was necessary for Jesus' teachings to be justified. He clearly referred to Himself as “the only begotten Son of God,” John 3:16. Is His statement true or is He a deceiver? He boldly declared, **“Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world . . . for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me,”** John 8:23, 42. If Jesus were not what He declared Himself to be, the only-begotten Son of the Heavenly Father, He was either mentally deranged or a wicked deceiver. He declared equality with God. He claimed a different birth. He said. He was the only one born in the manner in which He was born. The virgin birth must be true to justify His teachings concerning Himself.

The virgin birth was necessary for Jesus to be heir to the throne of David. The angel Gabriel announced, **“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end,”** Luke 1:32-33. If Jesus is the natural son of Joseph, He is excluded from the throne of David. Joseph was descended from King David, true, but he was descended through wicked King Coniah (Jehoiachin) of whom God said none of his descendants would ever sit upon the throne (Jeremiah 22:30). Jesus was descended from David through Mary, who was not descended from Coniah. He may claim the throne through His mother.

The virgin birth is necessary to demonstrate the reliability of Scripture. God had plainly predicted that the Messiah would be born through a virgin conception (Isaiah 7:14). Would it happen or would the Word of God be proved untrue? It happened! It not only happened, but the Holy Spirit saw fit to record its happening as direct fulfillment of what God had promised seven centuries before (Matthew 1:22-23).

The virgin birth is necessary to explain the virgin life of Jesus. How can you explain the fact that Jesus did not sin? How can you explain the fact that the statement, “all have sinned,” does not apply to Him? The only explanation of His virgin (pure) life is His virgin birth. He is different because He is the Son of God.

The virgin birth was necessary in order for Jesus to die for our sins. God's verdict is that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, **“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,”** Romans 3:23. Concerning every human is written the verdict that he is “by nature” a child of wrath (Ephesians 2: 3). So universally is that true that if one says he has not sinned he makes God a liar (I John 1:10). One of the principles governing

redemption is that one sinner cannot redeem another sinner, just as one slave cannot redeem another slave. The savior must be one who himself is not a sinner.

By virtue of His sinless nature, which is related to His virgin conception as God's own Son, Jesus is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens,” Hebrews 7:26. He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,” Hebrews 4:15. When He suffered for sins, it was the Just One for the unjust ones (I Peter 3:18). God made Him who knew no sin to be the sin offering for us that we might receive the righteousness of God in Him (II Corinthians 5: 21). He could suffer for our sins because He had no sin of His own for which to atone.

“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him . . .” Hebrews 7:25. Why? He is able because of “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood . . .” Romans 3:24-25.

Someone has observed that Jesus saves sinners “from the uttermost to the uttermost.” He can do so because, as the Son of God, His blood cleanses us from all sin, I John 1:7.

Do you find yourself somewhat unmoved at the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus? If so, do not worry. It is not the doctrine which is important. Consider, instead, what the virgin birth means in the person of Jesus Christ. It means He is God. It means His teachings are true. It means He is the Messiah, heir to the throne of David. It means the testimony of Scripture is reliable. It means He was truly able to live a sinless life. It means He could die for our sins and be our Savior because of who He is. It is not merely a doctrine to accept though the virgin birth of Jesus lies at the heart of our religion and at the basis of our hope.

Consider the miracle of it all. God came in the appearance and bearing the very nature of His creatures. He came because of love. He came in order to lift. He came to His own things, but His own people received Him not (John 1:11). He came just the same and perfected the way of salvation. Oh, what a Savior!

Questions

1. Why is the incarnation a cause for wonder?
2. What is meant by “virgin birth”?
3. What did Jesus teach about His birth?

4. What prophecy foretold His unusual birth?
5. How were Mary and Joseph informed?
6. What does Philippians 2:5-8 mean to you?
7. How is the virgin birth related to the deity of Jesus?
8. How does the virgin birth show that the Bible is reliable?