

The Wonder of the Virgin Birth
Series: Rediscovering the Wonder of Christmas, Part 2
Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction: If you ask a typical kid below the age of seven or eight, what they would most like to know about Christmas, you might get answers like: “I wonder how Santa Claus carries enough toys in his sleigh for all the kids in the world.” “I wonder how Santa gets in my house since we don’t have a chimney.” “I wonder how reindeer can fly.” “I wonder why nobody’s ever seen Santa’s house at the North Pole.”

In other words, the sense of wonder children have about Christmas is all about Santa, not Jesus! But when the true meaning of Christmas is understood, here are some things I’ve heard children wonder about: **“Where did Jesus live before, He came to earth?” “How could God become a baby?” “Why was Jesus born in a stable with animals instead of in a hospital?”**

Those questions represent the sense of wonder that ought to resurface in our minds at this time of year. Today we continued our series:

Rediscovering the Wonder of Christmas. Let’s

PRAY

This morning I want to start with a reading from the theological mind of Dr. Seuss, from his book, “On Beyond Zebra.”

“Said Conrad Cornelius O'Donnell O'Dell, my very young friend who was learning to spell, ‘The A is for Ape, the B is for Bear, the C is for Camel, the H is for Hair, the M is for Mouse, the R is for Rat ... I know all twenty-six letters like that. Through to Z is for Zebra, I know them all well,’ said Conrad Cornelius O'Donnell O'Dell.

‘Now I know everything anyone knows from beginning to end, from the start to the close, because Z is as far as the alphabet goes.’

“Then he almost fell flat on his face on the floor when I picked up the

chalk and drew one letter more. A letter he had never dreamed of before. And I said, 'You can stop if you want with the Z, and most people stop with the Z, but not me.

In the places I go, there are things that I see that I never could spell if I stopped with a Z. "I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends, my alphabet starts where your alphabet ends. My alphabet starts with this letter called yezz, it's the letter I use to spell yezzametezz. You'll be sort of surprised what there is to be found once you go beyond Z and start poking around.

When Dr. Seuss says, "on beyond zebra", he means that you and I have certain mental categories that we've developed through the years into which we fit the experiences of life. For example, we all have a category in our minds for dogs? When we see a dog, memories and experiences fill that category in our minds. (Examples)

Sometimes, however, we have a category without any real encounters, like unicorns, Big Foot, the Loch Ness Monster. Mysterious things and fairy tales are places where we have concepts or images but no experiences. But what's really shocking is when we encounter an event or experience that doesn't fit any category. **That's on beyond zebra.**

On the first Christmas, God added a new letter to our alphabet in the Virgin Birth. So, as we look to rediscover wonder this Christmas, I invite you to join me on a journey this morning, of the **Wonder of the Virgin Birth.**

The birth of Jesus Christ started out as the classic boy meets girl. The young carpenter may have carved "Joe loves Mary" in the tree in the back yard. Then they were engaged. It was that delightful time when a young couple could hardly wait. At long last, they were finally to be united in marriage.

But then the unexpected and unthinkable happened. Mary gets pregnant. Suddenly, Joseph's love turns into a world of hurt and pain. Mary tried to explain what had happened, and Joseph wanted to believe her, but there was no way that even a heart full of love could dispel all those suspicions in his mind. What Mary was saying was just beyond belief.

Wanting to believe Mary but unable, unwilling to marry her and yet wanting to

spare her as much pain as possible, Joseph decides to divorce her quietly.

According to his range of experiences, there was only one way a woman gets pregnant, and he knew he could not be the father, so of course he felt hurt and betrayed. Yet as you look at verse 20, you see that the angel said to Joseph something that suggests the deepest feeling inside Joseph was not hurt and betrayal, **but fear**. He was afraid to believe Mary.

Here we come to an ageless human trait: we are afraid of the unknown, or fearful of what we don't know. Whenever we come up against the unfamiliar, something previously unseen and unheard of, we automatically believe it's probably bad or dangerous or horrible or false. Let me just say; that tendency keeps us from exploring new possibilities and hinders our ability to walk by faith in our relationship with God.

For example, in ancient days there were map makers, cartographers, who used the instruments and knowledge available to make maps of the world. Some of them did a good job, but all of them had one trait in common. Whenever they came to the limits of their knowledge of the world, in the margin of the map they would write these words: ***"Beyond here there be dragons."***

They could have written there, "Beyond this is the unknown." They could even have written, "Beyond this lies something full of wonder and beauty." But, they assumed that beyond what they knew was a place of danger...of dragons.

There are lots of people who come to the mysteries of the Bible and the miracle of the Virgin Birth with the same kind of attitude. They say, "It's just suspicion; it's hogwash; it's foolishness; it's a fairy tale made up by people who had a primitive knowledge of the world and no idea of natural law."

There's an old story that goes like this: A little six-year-old girl asks her mom: Where did I come from? Her mom is a little embarrassed, and she goes into a long explanation about birds and bees and men and women and eggs and seeds. Then she asks her daughter: Now do you understand? Her daughter says: No. Jenny says she comes from Atlanta. Where did I come from?

ILLUS: Walter Lauster, a Church of God missionary, said, "I was sitting in my

office on the first Saturday of December. Outside in the courtyard, the men of the church were in the process of building the stage for a live nativity scene. Since my door was open, I heard two kids talking about what was going on. One kid asked the other kid, "What are they doing?" The other one said, "O, they're building a live fertility scene."

In ancient religions, there were stories of heroes like Hercules, who was the result of one of the Greek or Roman gods getting together with a human mother. People have sometimes thought that the story of Jesus' birth was borrowed from one of those stories to give it a little more credibility in the ancient world. But the reality is that the presentation of the story of Jesus' origins was nothing like any story that had ever come before.

We read the story of the Virgin Birth both in the Gospel of Luke and in the Gospel of Matthew.

Luke writes explicitly, as an historian. He writes within a generation of Jesus' actual life. He writes while there are many eyewitnesses still around—eyewitnesses who could challenge any inaccuracies. He includes in his story the historical details of Jesus' birth: its geographical setting in Bethlehem of Judea, its chronological setting: In the days of Caesar Augustus when Quirinius was the Governor of Syria ... (Luke 2:1)

The claim that Christ entered the world by Virgin birth elicits a variety of responses. There are some who argue the Virgin Birth is absolutely impossible, because miracles don't happen.

There's a second group who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ and acknowledge that miracles do happen, but—for whatever reason—they argue that the term virgin was applied to Mary because she was so young.

There's a third group that affirms the Virgin Birth simply because it's in the Bible. They've reached the point in their spiritual journey where they say, "If it's in the Bible, I believe it." But they would be hard pressed to explain why the Virgin Birth is so important.

Anytime someone rejects the virgin birth, they basically have two problems.

They have a problem with the Word of God, and they have a problem with the God of the Word.

If God can do anything, and if the Bible is the Word of God, then you shouldn't have any problem with the virgin birth.

But there is a fourth group, made up of those who not only affirm the Virgin Birth, but also understand how critical it is to God's plan of redemption.

There are some reasons why people Doubt the Virgin Birth

1. It's a miracle. Miracles are beyond human explanation. No one can explain it or duplicate it. The Virgin Birth of Christ stands absolutely alone. Nothing can be compared to it because no other birth has been—or ever could be—like it.

2. It's not mentioned outside of the books of Matthew and Luke

The virgin birth is never explicitly mentioned in Acts or the letters of Paul, Peter, or John.

3. There are some who say that the word translated "virgin" from the Hebrew should be translated as "young woman." This is partially true, but it is also misleading. The word occurs nine times in the Old Testament. Of the other eight occurrences, seven clearly refer to a virgin and not simply a young woman. That's absolutely the case in Isaiah 7:14.

"I'm going to give you a sign, and this is how you will know for sure that God has sent his Messiah. The Messiah will be born of a **young woman**? No! That doesn't exactly narrow things down! The sign is that he will be born to a virgin.

If Jesus was born that way, what does it prove?" It proves nothing. You and I need to realize that. A person could believe in the Virgin Birth and still not be a Christian. The Virgin Birth is nothing more than a signpost pointing the way toward becoming a Christian. You've got to go beyond simply believing in the Virgin Birth to believing in the message the angel gave to Joseph when he said, **"Not only was this baby miraculously conceived, but the baby growing inside**

Mary is none other than God in human flesh.” That is the miracle of miracles.

Every Christmas people around the world come together and celebrate the birth of Jesus, not just because he was born, but how he was born.

The virgin birth remains the second most controversial miracle in all of history, second behind the resurrection of Jesus.

The gospel of Matthew is going to tell us 3 things that are true about this baby.

I. Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God

As Matthew describes the birth of Jesus, he does it in a very unusual way.

"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: his mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together [had sexual relations], she was found to be pregnant through the holy spirit." (Matthew 1:18, NIV)

What is unusual is Matthew takes seventeen verses to talk about Jesus' ancestry and genealogy and then introduces the birth of Jesus in one verse. He states Jesus was not conceived by an earthly father, but by the holy spirit.

There is an even deeper problem biologically speaking. It is certainly not unusual for a woman to conceive and give birth, but Matthew and Luke spare no detail in making sure we understand that Mary was a virgin.

Back up in verse 16, in recording the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew states, "...Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah." (Matthew 1:16, NIV)

You will notice every single person listed in that genealogy has a father listed, ***except Jesus***. Jacob was the father of Joseph, but it does not say that Joseph was the father of Jesus. In Jewish tradition, genealogy is always passed through the father, not the mother. Matthew wants to be clear. Jesus did not have a human father, but He was conceived by the holy spirit and virgin Mary.

Doctor Luke, records Mary's response when she finds out through an angel that she is pregnant with child. Mary asks this question, ***"How will this be,"***

Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'the holy spirit will come on you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you...'" (Luke 1:34-35, NIV)

There was something Mary knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, she had not had sex with anyone, so, there was no human father.

Joseph didn't know what Mary knew, but he did know one thing - he wasn't the father. ***"Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." (Matthew 1:19, NIV)***

Mary and Joseph were engaged, but they were not married, and they had not had sexual relations. From the moment that Joseph saw that baby-bump, there was one question burning in his mind, "who's the father?" He knew that the penalty for adultery was being stoned to death and he didn't want that to happen to Mary, so he was going to privately end the relationship.

There is one assumption that he made and that is if she is pregnant "she can't be a virgin." **But she was both.**

The question is not how Jesus was born. He was born the same way all babies were born. The question is how was he conceived and who conceived him? The clear answer from scripture and the reason why we celebrate Christmas and what makes his birth so unique is he was conceived by the Holy Spirit through a virgin named Mary.

I understand that even to this day, this seems unbelievable. But if you have difficulty believing in the virgin birth you really have difficulty believing in God.

When Mary raised her objection to the angel, Gabriel simply replied, ***"For nothing will be impossible with God." (Luke 1:37, NIV)***

If God can create a world out of nothing and create man from the dust of the earth and create a woman from a man's rib, you should have no difficulty believing that God can cause a woman to conceive in her womb while still a virgin and He can be the father.

So, Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God...

II. Jesus came as the Son of God

So far, the facts are these:

- a) Joseph is engaged to a woman named Mary, with whom he has had no sexual relations.
- b) Mary has had no sexual relations with any other man.
- c) Mary was a virgin and so was Joseph and yet a baby is on the way!
- d) Both Mary and Joseph know that the baby is going to be a boy. He is going to be a son! That fact is greatly emphasized. If they were to give Joseph a paternity test, that would find out that he **was not** the father.

Matthew 1:20-23,25 says, "But after he had considered this, an angel of the lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the holy spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus...' All this took place to fulfill what the lord had said through the prophet: 'the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son...' Verse 25 says, "But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." (NIV)

- e) So, Mary and Joseph both know they are about to become the parents of a son, but the question remains again, "whose son, is he?"

To leave no doubt, Doctor Luke records how the angel made it crystal clear.

"The angel answered, 'the holy spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of (who), Son of God.'" (Luke 1:35, NIV)

Jesus was the only man in history who at the moment of His birth was as old as His father and older than His mother.

So, there you have it. Mary is the mother of Jesus, but Jesus is not the son of Joseph, He is the son of God.

Jesus is not the Son of God, because he was a descendant of David (though he was). He was not the Son of God, because he died for our sins (though he did). He was not the Son of God because he was morally, sinlessly, and pure like God. All those things are true about Jesus because he was the Son of God.

Adrian Rogers said to Muhammad Ali one time, "champ, you need to understand something. Jesus was not the son of God, because he was born of a virgin. He was born of a virgin because he was the son of God." **One of the wonders of Christmas is that Jesus was the son of a human mother and the Son of a heavenly Father.**

Let me put it this way. Suppose the parents of Jesus had both been divine? God + God. Then, he would have just been God. Fully God but no humanity. If he is not human, He can't die for my sins, because God can't die.

On the other hand, suppose his parents had been human (a human mother and a human father) then he would have been fully human, but if that had been the case, he would have been just like us (born with a sinful nature like Adam). That's not good, because the bible says in Adam, everybody dies. **He would have been a sinner and couldn't have been the savior.**

The virgin birth is just as important to the story of Jesus as His sinless life, His miracles, His death on the cross, and His resurrection. Jesus came as He did from a virgin to be sinless, to do what He did - die for our sins. He did what He did as the son of God, so we could become children of God. He was born of a virgin, the son of God, that we might be **born again** as children of God.

So, Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God...Jesus came as the Son of God...

III. Jesus covered our Sins with God

You might tend to feel sorry for Joseph and Mary in a way. Mary was going to have a baby even though she is a virgin. Joseph is going to have a son he didn't conceive and neither one of them even get to name the baby.

"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21, NIV)

I read about a mother in New Jersey who had twins (a boy and a girl). She was

from Yugoslavia and in that country the mother is not supposed to leave the hospital until a relative names the baby. Her husband was away on a business trip, and he couldn't get home in time. She wanted to go home so she asked her husband's brother if he would name the twins.

When the husband finally got back, he was surprised to find his wife home. He said, "who named the babies?" she said, "your brother." he said, "what did he name them?" she said, "well, he named the little girl, 'Denise.'" he said, "that is nice. What did he name the boy?" she said, "he named him 'Duhnephew.'"

(By the way a former member of our church named Marie Jackson, told me that joke when I had visited her at Covenant Homes. She passed away a few months later on Sunday, December 4, 2018, at the age 80, as she was hit by a drunk driver on her way here to church that morning.)

The human name for this boy would be "Jesus." it was a common, ordinary name. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew, "Yeshua," which is the Hebrew form of the English name "Joshua." it literally means "God saves."

That one name tells us two things about Jesus that the virgin-birth confirms. He is a human being with a human name, that came to live among us, but He is also God who came to save us. That is why he alone qualifies to be the one that this world needs more than anything else.

Let me ask you a question. Whose blood was in that baby? It wasn't Mary's blood. How does a man prove that he is or isn't the father of a baby. By a blood test. You see, the bloodline doesn't come through the mother, it comes through the father. God's blood was in that baby?

Acts 20:28, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood." (NIV)

The blood of God, circulating in that little baby in its mother's womb, sinless blood, innocent blood was the blood of God. That's why I'm saying that if you take away the virgin birth, you take away our hope of salvation.

If someone is going to save us from our sins, this person must be a human

being who is sinless, so he can die for my sins and not his own sins. That is why Jesus was born like all babies are born, but he was not conceived like all babies are conceived. He was not just any old couple's son; he was God's son. He was not just human; he was sinless.

He was in no way a **sinner**, but he was in every way a **savior**.

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel.’

That's the punch line God with us, the incarnation of God in human flesh. Who is this baby? Paul tells us in Colossians 1:15, ***“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.”***

That is the miracle of miracles. That's also further than many people are willing to go, so instead, when they come to Jesus Christ, people say, “Jesus is the greatest teacher this world has ever known.” They say, “Jesus is the greatest moral exemplar the world has ever known.” But at no point does Jesus ever escape the human category and become a class by himself, the unique God-man. We have no category for that. When Jesus makes people feel uncomfortable, they just put out the NO ROOM in the Inn sign.

Jesus lived on the boundary between two worlds—the one we can see ... and the one we can't see.

He was hungry and 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.

He was just like us ... He was nothing like us.

He walked among us ... He came from God above.

He was the Son of Mary ... He was the only-begotten Son of God.
Little children love him ... He baffles the greatest minds.
He was like us in his birth ... He was unlike us in his birth ... the Virgin Birth.

Everywhere he went, he moved in an atmosphere of wonder and astonishment. We're told people were astonished at his doctrine. They said to one another, "What manner of man is this?" Even the disciples were utterly astounded at His words and His miracles.

Conclusion

So many people think of the Incarnation as being like the phone booth in a Superman movie, and Jesus is like Clark Kent, who is dressed like a normal man but then goes into a phone booth and emerges as Superman. Jesus was not a Superman. Jesus did not clothe himself in his humanity to hide his deity.

Jesus was fully human. Bullets didn't bounce off Jesus Christ. He cried real tears. He felt real pain. Why? Because only as a real man could he save us as.

One final word. Can a person reject the Virgin Birth and still be a Christian? I don't think so. The Virgin Birth was never meant to stand alone. The story of Jesus is a seamless garment woven by the Holy Spirit. Take out his miraculous birth and you have ripped the garment to shreds. History teaches us that when men begin to doubt the Virgin Birth, they do not stop there. One doubt leads to another until the Jesus they believe in is not the Jesus of the Bible.

I hope you see in the virgin birth and the Holy Spirit conception of Jesus, why His birth is a miracle and part of the wonder of Christmas. No one was conceived like Jesus. No one lived like Jesus lived. No one died like Jesus died. No one rose from the dead like Jesus did. Only Jesus qualifies to be our savior.

So, add a new letter for your alphabet this morning. For without the Virgin Birth, you cannot spell Immanuel, and without Immanuel you cannot have Christmas.