

Series: Unwrapping THE GIFT of Christmas

Christmas BIOLOGY #2

Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction: Someone has said, "The ideal husband remembers every one of his wife's birthdays but forgets how many." But whether we observe our birthdays with excited anticipation or thinking, I'm getting older, the celebration normally only includes our family or circle of friends. Some birthdays attract national attention, **but there is only one birth that receives world-wide recognition, and that is the birth of Christ.**

The reason that we observe a famous person's birthday is not because there is anything outstanding about their birth, but rather because their achievements in life were noteworthy. Nothing significant occurred at the birth of Abraham Lincoln or George Washington, that I'm aware of. It was their achievements during their lifetime that makes us honor their birthdays.

More than two billion people in 160 countries will celebrate Christmas. If you were to ask someone why they celebrate Christmas Day their answer would be "We celebrate the birth of Jesus." If you really understand Christmas, that is not the primary reason we celebrate Christmas.

The real reason why we celebrate the birth of this baby is because of WHO Jesus was at his birth.

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" was written by Charles Wesley. One line in that carol shows the essence, not just of Christmas, but of Christianity.

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see! Hail th' incarnate Deity!

Every other baby born in history was a human being with sinful, human nature. The Bible says that the baby born in Bethlehem was fully man and fully God.

That's why Isaiah prophesied, ***"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*** (Isaiah 9:6, NIV)

When you say “**Jesus Christ was God in the flesh born of a virgin,**” Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhist, Hindus all check out. People say, “He was different, but he wasn’t divine.” “He was great, but he wasn’t God.” “He is to be welcomed, but He is not to be worshipped.”

The clear answer from scripture and what makes His birth so unique is He was conceived by the Holy Spirit through a virgin named Mary.

I have entitled this year’s Christmas Sermon Series, “**Unwrapping THE GIFT of Christmas.**” You could call it Christmas101. Last week we talked about Christmas B.C. (History) Today we’re going to talk about Christmas **biology**. Next week we are going to look at Christmas **theology**. And the last message will be about Christmas **doxology**.

The Christmas story is told in narrative form by the tax collector named Matthew and by the medical doctor named Luke.

So, let’s look at Matthew 1 and Luke 2 so you have these verses in mind.

Matthew 1:18-25: ***“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, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19Because 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.***

20But 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. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

22All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23“**The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel**” (which means “**God with us**”). 24When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And

he gave him the name Jesus. (NIV)

Luke 2:26-38: “In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

35The 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 God. 36Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37For no word from God will ever fail.”

38“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.” (NIV)

I want to make three points today:

1. The Problem of the Virgin Birth
2. The Person born of the Virgin Birth
3. The Promise we have because of the Virgin Birth

Here are Take-A-Ways I hope you will remember:

1. I want you to ***know***: **The Virgin Birth is Foundational to our faith.**
2. I want you to ***feel***: Inspired by the truth, ***‘nothing is impossible with God.’***
3. I want you to ***trust***: The plan God has for your life **to form Christ in you.**

LET’S PRAY

THE STORY: 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 as they were about to be married.

But then the unexpected and unthinkable happened. Mary gets pregnant. Joseph knows it's not his. Suddenly, his love turns into a world of hurt and pain. Mary tried to explain what had happened, and Joseph wanted to believe her, but what Mary was saying was just beyond belief.

Unwilling to marry her and yet wanting to spare her as much pain as possible, Joseph decides to divorce her quietly. But as you look at verse 20, you see that what the angel said to Joseph suggests the deepest feeling inside him was not hurt or pain, He was afraid to believe Mary.

I. The Problem of the Virgin Birth

It's a human trait that when we come up against the unfamiliar, something unheard of, our default setting is FEAR; belief it's probably bad or dangerous.

Illustration: In ancient days there were map makers, cartographers, who used the instruments and knowledge available to make maps of the world. They 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, “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 must be a place of danger...of dragons.

There are lots of people who come to the miracle of the Virgin Birth with the same kind of attitude. They say, “It's just suspicion; it's nonsense; it's a fairy tale made up by people who had a primitive knowledge of the world.”

A. There are enemies of the virgin birth who try to:

1. **Destroy it.** Just like King Herod hunted down and destroyed those little babies around the time of Jesus' birth, there are modern day Herods who would love nothing better than to destroy the doctrine of Jesus' miraculous, virgin birth.

2. **Deny it.** They say, "It's a fable. A fairy tale. A fantasy. It's just another one among many tales that were told back when the earth was young and people weren't as educated or intellectual as we are today. It's right up there with Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny. It's nice and cute and comforting, but it really didn't happen."
3. **Dismiss it.** They don't try to deny it or destroy it; even some Christians just don't think it matters. They say, "Well, I believe in the virgin birth - I just don't see what the big deal is."

In his best-selling book "*God Is Not Great*" the late atheist Christopher Hitchens argues that a Virgin Birth would violate science, and since science has more credibility than religion in the world's eyes, they dismiss it as fact.

Some scientists have hypothesized that perhaps this was an instance of what is known as 'parthenogenesis.' this is a natural form of asexual reproduction, in which the growth and the development of an embryo, can occur without fertilization. However, that has never occurred in a mammal of any kind.

Warren Booth, a leading expert in parthenogenesis at the university of Tulsa said, **"I've been asked about [the virgin birth] many times and I can come up with no feasible explanation as to how a female that had abstained from intercourse could give a birth to a child of either sex."**

Here are the absolute facts, *biblically speaking, biologically speaking, scientifically speaking, and supernaturally speaking.* The virgin birth of Jesus was impossible according to science, impossible according to biology, except for the fact that NOTHING is impossible with God.

Of the estimated 108 billion people that have been born upon this earth, we have over 6000 years of data proving the impossibility of a virgin having a baby without physical or biological means.

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.

You see, despite what some liberal theologians and secular writers would have you believe, the virgin birth isn't a peripheral issue, it's a primary issue. It's not extraneous, it is essential. It is a vital truth in the tower of our Christian faith.

If you've ever done any construction work or remodeling, you'll understand what a load bearing wall is. In other words, if you take the truth of the virgin birth out of the house of the Christian faith, the whole thing collapses. It is foundational. It is fundamental.

In what is perhaps the church's oldest statement of faith, The Apostle's Creed, we find these words: "**Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost and was born of the virgin Mary.**" It is central, essential to the Christian faith.

B. Two mistakes' people make concerning the Virgin Mary.

1. Some people DEIFY Mary.

They call her the "Queen of Heaven." They esteem her and say that she was sinless. That she never died, but rather ascended to the right hand of the throne of Jesus Christ. They pray to her.

They believe that she still shows back up on earth from time to time through visions and apparitions.

None of those things are supported or substantiated by one verse in the Bible. The Bible says that Mary was just an ordinary person through whom God did an extraordinary thing. **BUT she should not be worshipped or deified.**

2. Some people DEFAME Mary. To deny the virgin birth is to defame the purity of Jesus' mother, because she was a virgin all through her pregnancy.

When some people try to destroy the beautiful miracle of the virgin birth, they do so at the expense of Mary's reputation.

ILLUS: Heinrich Paulus, a skeptical scholar that lived in the 18th century argued that the story of the virgin birth is a fantasy contrived by a young girl in a crisis pregnancy. He believed that Gabriel wasn't an angel, but a fanatical man who impregnated Mary.

ILLUS: Neils Fair, "Jesus is the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier who fell in love with Mary." If Jesus wasn't virgin born, then Mary was an adulteress.

We should not deify Mary or defame her. The Bible tells us that there were times when she misunderstood Jesus. But she loved Him. She wept at the foot of His cross. She was numbered among the earliest members of the church after His resurrection. She was a woman of great faith.

II. The Person born of the Virgin Birth

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

"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...' (Matthew 1:20-23, NIV)

"But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus." (Matthew 1:25, NIV)

In Matthew 1:16, 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)

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.

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 God.'" (Luke 1:35, NIV)

So, there you have it. Mary is the mother of Jesus, but Jesus is the son of God.

We have different ways of identifying a person. At the simplest level we can identify a person by their face or the sound of their voice. If you want to get a little more sophisticated, you can check their fingerprints. But if you really want to be precise, you can check their DNA because your DNA is unique to you and to you alone.

In a very similar way, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is integral to His identity.

The Bible says there at the beginning of that verse that "the angel answered and said to her, ***"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you. . ."*** There is the declaration that Jesus would be born miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit apart from a human father.

And then the rest of the verse states the result. ***". . .therefore, (because the Holy Spirit will come upon you; because the power of the Highest will overshadow you) therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."***

If we were to boil down the essence of what the Bible teaches us about Jesus we could summarize it like this:

Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus was fully human. Jesus was fully God. Jesus was completely sinless. Jesus died for sinners on the cross. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Jesus will come again.

Think about this.

Jesus had to be totally man to die in your place on the cross and He became a man through the virgin birth.

Jesus had to be sinless, in other words He had to be born in a way that would not relate Him to the sinful blood of Adam's race. That was accomplished through the virgin birth.

Jesus had to shed blood from a human body to pay the price for your sins. That was accomplished through the virgin birth.

Jesus had to be raised from the dead in a physical body. That was made possible through the virgin birth.

In the virgin birth we see the Person of Jesus. He's the Holy One, the Son of God who came in human flesh, lived without sin, died and rose again.

Transition: Think about it. God sent an angelic messenger all the way from Heaven. Mary is in the presence of an angelic visitor. And right in the middle of all this Mary tries to teach Gabriel a human biology lesson. She says, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Isn't that like us?)

Here's a human trying to school God on the workings of His own creation.

Notice what Gabriel doesn't say. He doesn't explain to Mary the inner workings of HOW the virgin birth will take place. He doesn't explain to Mary the details of WHY the virgin birth would take place.

Even though He doesn't tell her HOW or WHY, he tells her WHO in verse 37, "For with God nothing will be impossible." Final Point...

III. The Promise we have because of the Virgin Birth

The virgin birth shows us that nothing is impossible for God.

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

The biggest problem with the virgin birth is that it's impossible - BUT here's the good news, **nothing is impossible for God.**

If Jesus' virgin birth were possible, it wouldn't be a miracle.

If we could explain it, it wouldn't be a mystery.

The virgin birth is impossible and inexplicable - but it's no more of a miracle, no than the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross for your sins!

The virgin birth is no more miraculous, no more mysterious than the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the third day.

The virgin birth is no more miraculous, no more mysterious than the regeneration and salvation of your soul when you turned to Jesus Christ and invited Him into your heart and life.

If you throw out the virgin birth of Jesus because you think it's impossible, then you must throw out everything else about Jesus too.

There are 89 chapters in the four gospels - if you eliminate the miraculous from those accounts, you'd have to tear out 52 of those 89 chapters from your Bible.

With the virgin birth, just like so many of the mysteries and miracles that surround our Great God, we many never know WHY, or HOW, or WHEN, but we can always trust WHO - **"With God nothing is impossible."**

The apostle Paul said, ***"I may not know WHY, HOW, IF or WHEN, BUT I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."***

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ reveals to us supremely that our God is able!

He is able to invade humanity through the womb of a virgin.

He is able to lay the sins of this world on His Son who died of the cross.

He is able raise His Son from the grave.

He is able to give eternal life and forgiveness of sins to all who believe on His Son and call on His name for salvation.

He is able!

And because He is able to all of that, no matter what you may be facing in your life today, He is able!

When you face a storm of fear -He's able!

When your body needs healing - He's able!

When you're out of hope and at the end of your rope - He's able!

When you stand on the shoreline of solitude, and you wonder if you have a friend - He's able!

When you don't know what the future holds - He's able!

When the only hope to the answer of your prayer is something that's beyond human experience and scientific understanding and the abilities of man and you need a miracle - He is able!

Ephesians 3:20 says that my God ***"is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."***

Conclusion: The point is, in the very first chapter of Luke's account of the life of Jesus, we are challenged to believe in the supernatural.

For some folks, that's the end of the story. They have an "a priori" bias against the supernatural. "A priori" is Latin for "What comes before" and in philosophy it refers to an assumption that is made independent of investigation. "Virgin birth? I don't believe that." Why not? "Because it can't happen." Why can't it happen? "Because it never has happened before." That's called circular reasoning. That's being closed-minded.

Find out who the baby is ... and you will understand his birth. The Virgin Birth doesn't explain who He is. Who He is explains the Virgin Birth.

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth is critical for our salvation that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. He is the Savior of the world, uniquely positioned to stand between God and man—which is what we needed in order to be reconciled with a holy God.

In the second century people had no problem affirming that Jesus was God, but they often waffled as to whether they believed that he was man. In the 21st century, however, it's the divine side of the equation that we must protect. We must protect the Virgin Birth, because it is only through the Virgin Birth—it is only

when God bypasses the sin of Adam—that God is able to provide a Savior who is unstained by original sin.

For us to have a perfect sacrifice, Adam's work had to be bypassed. The Second Adam—the perfect man and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ—was sent to us through a virgin's womb and the agency of the Holy Spirit, to perform a union of God and man without sin. The Virgin Birth isn't just some casual notion or quaint doctrine. It is critical to our salvation, because what we need is a Savior.

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.

Did anyone ever say it any better than Charles Wesley? **"Christ, by highest heavens adored; Christ the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold him come, offspring of the virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity, pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel."**

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 ate with Zaccheus ... then healed blind Bartimaeus.

He died on Friday ... then rose on Sunday.

Little children love him ... but He baffles the greatest minds.

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.

He is our friend ... He is our Savior.

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."***

A denial of the virgin birth is a denial of Jesus as the Christ. The virgin birth does not stand alone as a biblical doctrine; it is an vital part of the revelation of the person and work of Jesus.

Here's where you and I enter this story:

In some fashion we have to say what Mary said when we surrender our life to Christ; ***"I do not know all that you are going to ask of me, Lord. But I'll do whatever you say in your Word, whether I like it or not, and I'll accept patiently whatever you send into my life, whether I understand it or not."***

In other words, we cannot know ahead of time the things God will ask us to do. If we really want Jesus in the middle of our lives, we obey him unconditionally. We give up control of our lives. We give up the right to say, "I will obey you IF..." Jesus is not our consultant; He's, our LORD.

Mary surrendered completely to God's will. After she hears ***"Nothing is impossible with God"*** she takes a step of faith. ***"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."***

A miracle was taking place in Mary's life. It was a miracle that brought her great JOY and great SORROW. It was a blessing AND a trial. But Gabriel said, ***"God is with you."*** God gave Mary the strength and courage to do her part.

Gabriel's announcement to Mary was not a dictate, it was an invitation. Mary's answer, ***"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said"*** illustrates that God never violates our free will.

She agreed to God's heavenly assignment. And when Gabriel said, "Nothing is impossible with God," that statement applied not only to the miraculous

conception, but also to God's empowerment of Mary to successfully persevere in her trials and troubles as the mother of the Lord.

You and I have a role to play in God's plan of redemption. **"God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ in YOU, the hope of glory"** Colossians 1:27.

God's purpose for every believer is to be transformed into the image and character of Jesus Christ: **"For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters"** (Romans 8:29, NLT; see also Ephesians 1:4–11).

At salvation, the life of Christ indwells believers. Jesus said, **"I am in them"** (John 17:23, NLT), and Paul affirmed, **"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me"** (Galatians 2:20). But the transformation **"until Christ is formed in you"** is a life-long process (1 John 3:2; Philippians 3:21; 2 Peter 1:4).

We don't become righteous through their own efforts, observing rules and regulations, but by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit: **"And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image"** (2 Corinthians 3:18, NLT; see also Ephesians 4:23; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; Titus 3:4–7).

Christ is formed in you when there is nothing left to see but Him living in you (Romans 8:9–11; Galatians 3:27).

Christ is formed in you when He is your everything and all you need (Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 4:15; Philippians 4:19; 2 Peter 1:3).

Bow Your Heads and Close Your Eyes: Like Mary and Joseph, our assignment in God's plan of redemption is a joyful privilege. It is also a mystery and a great test. Today, you might be in one of the mysterious/testing phases of your assignment. **"God, how can this be? I don't understand. This doesn't make sense."** Whatever God has allowed into your life, trust God and respond like Mary: **"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."**

God is with you, and nothing is impossible with God.

