

The Mystery of the Virgin Conception

Luke 1:34-45 (11/25/18)

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“Of course I do not believe in the virgin birth. I do not know of any intelligent minister who does.” That’s what Harry Emerson Fosdick assured his hearers. In May 1922, this very popular pastor in New York City gave a sermon entitled “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” In the sermon he declared it was not necessary to believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, the inerrancy of the Bible, and the second coming of Christ. Oil Baron John D. Rockefeller liked the sermon so much he had 130,000 copies printed and distributed to every Protestant pastor in America.

The battle over the virgin conception of Christ continues to our day. Mainline liberal churches, scholars, professors, and seminaries everywhere reject it as irrational, unnatural, unscientific, lacking evidence, and only reported by two New Testament books, Matthew and Luke, which they conveniently reject as carrying no authority. For example, Bart Ehrman is a highly esteemed New Testament professor at the University of North Carolina who has nothing but ridicule and contempt for the teaching of the virgin birth, as well as many of the other doctrines God’s people hold dear.

How important is the virgin birth of Jesus Christ? Let’s just say this: the entire Bible rests on this miracle. If it is true, then you can believe all the other miracles in the Bible, from God creating the universe out of nothing to the second coming. If it is not true, then we may as well pitch all of Christianity. If Mary’s child was not both God and man, deity and humanity in one Person, then Christ’s death on the cross couldn’t save anyone. As the sinless man who is also God, He died bearing the sins of all whom God would save.

Last week we introduced this incredible truth of the incarnation or virgin conception of Jesus Christ. God sent His special angelic agent Gabriel to inform Mary she would conceive and bear this child whose name would be Jesus. This Jesus would be uniquely great, the Son of the Most High, and would sit on David’s throne to rule the house of Jacob forever. Now we’re going to look more closely at the miracle itself.

The great mystery revealed to Mary and all mankind

Luke 1:34-35, *Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.*

Gabriel may have lost Mary in verse 31 when he said, “You will conceive...” As any woman would, she immediately began wondering about one huge problem. “How can this be, since I’m a virgin.” She isn’t doubting what Gabriel is saying, but like any female she’s pondering hard and heavy, “Wait, what? How could I have this baby if I’ve never known a man?”

Mary knows her basic biology. She didn’t need a modern how-to course in sex-education. For some reason the human race made it for centuries without heavy doses of amoral gender education classes. Somehow we figure it out. So she’s wondering, “How can this be?” She didn’t say, “That’s impossible and ridiculous. Everyone knows you need a male and female to produce a child, and I’ve never known a man intimately.” No, she’s wondering how it can happen. Let’s learn from Mary right here. When you don’t understand something God has said, don’t deny it. Talk to God and ask Him to help you understand. Sometimes people come to our church and hear about the doctrine of election or human depravity or recent creationism or God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility and they don’t understand. “How can this be?” Keep asking the questions, but go to the right source. Ask people who are 100% committed to God’s Word.

What about all these stories of people visiting heaven and coming back and writing books about it and making tons of money from people who don’t know their Bibles and waste their money. They should ask questions of the Bible. We know that the really important thing is not visiting heaven. What’s really

important is when heaven visits earth. That's when you need to pay attention. And that's what's happening here. Heaven is coming to earth in the form of a child. And Mary asks, "How can this be?"

Here we have the Miracle of all Miracles – the virgin conception of Jesus Christ. How can Mary have a child unless she conceives in her womb in the normal way? It's a mystery – 1 Timothy 3:16, "Great is the mystery of godliness, He [Christ] was manifest in the flesh." This is the great mystery of Christianity and stands apart from all the other pagan mythological accounts of gods bearing sons. They are bizarre to say the least, such as Zeus having a headache and bearing a child through his skull fully dressed in armor.

But this mystery of Mary's virgin birth is unique. It involves the three persons of the trinity. In verse 35 you have the Holy Spirit, the Father (the Most High), and the Son, who will unite with Mary's humanity to be conceived as the God-Man. This is truly an incredible statement:

vs. 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.

The Holy Spirit was involved at the creation of the universe. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us new hearts. And here the Holy Spirit is the one who comes upon Mary, plus she will be overshadowed by the amazing power of the Father, the Most High, and she conceives a holy Child in her womb. Ladies, you'll never have a holy child. You may wish they'd come perfectly sanctified. They seem angelic at first with those pudgy little cheeks that just beg squeezing. But wait a while and you'll want Dr. Tripp to come back and go over all those great parenting truths again.

But this child was absolutely holy, without original or actual sin. Plus He is God – the theanthropic Person. That's all we know. We believe in the virgin birth of Christ. It's a mystery revealed here in the Scriptures. If you've never heard of it before, now you have. You've seen it right here in these words given by God. Now you are responsible to believe it. If you don't believe it, you can't claim to be a Christian. This is that one miracle liberals simply cannot believe because it can't be explained scientifically among humans. It's impossible. And they are right. Remove God and it is impossible.

I don't want to overlook one of the greatest descriptions Christ's deity and humanity in Philippians 2. This is truly amazing. Philippians 2:6-11 [speaking of Christ], *who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself [of his exalted status], taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Love this – "every tongue." Every human being who ever lived will sooner or later confess that Christ is Lord. Those who confess Him as Lord in this life will be saved (Romans 10:9). If you refuse, you will confess Him as Lord at the Great White Throne Judgment as you are separated from Him forever in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

But, you ask, how could God produce this child without a man?

God can do the impossible

Luke 1:36-37, And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.

If you ever have a hard time believing God, here are two helps in verses 36-37. First, see how God has worked mightily in others. Mary had a relative Elizabeth, who was probably her aunt on her mother's side. Elizabeth is really old and had been barren all her life. And now Mary is told she too is with child. This is not an everyday occurrence. Elizabeth joins Sarah, Rebekah, Samson's mom, and Hannah as women who conceived when barren or sterile.

The second help to believe God is this great promise in vs. 37, "For nothing will be impossible with God." That's a double negative, emphasizing the positive. There isn't anything that God has promised to do that is impossible! Believe Him. When God says He's going to do something, He is omnipotent and able to do in your life whatever He calls you to, regardless of the situation. We had a pastor who taught us this good chorus back in the 70s, "Nothing is impossible with God when you put your trust in God. Nothing is impossible when you're trusting in His Word." Mary is told, "Nothing will be impossible with God." And that is a truth for all of us.

Isn't it interesting that Gabriel inserts this grand and glorious promise. It's the same thing God told Abraham when Sarah laughed about bearing a child in her old age in Genesis 18:14 and what God told Jeremiah about the future return from captivity in Jeremiah 32. "Is anything too hard for God?" The omnipotent God can create a vast universe out of absolutely nothing. He spoke, BOOM, there it is. He can flood an entire globe with enough water to cover the highest mountains and drown everyone except those eight souls in the ark. He can open a large sea long enough for His people to go through and then bring the waters back again to drown the enemies. He can make walls tumble, fire not burn, and hungry lions not attack.

"Nothing will be impossible with God." All the liberal virgin birth deniers and all the false teachers like Bart Ehrman need to sit down and face this astounding promise before ridiculing the virgin birth. You should sit down and list all the things that are not impossible with God in your life – Can He give you a new heart? Can He enable you to overcome a sin habit? Can He deliver you from your depression and fear and anxiety? Can He give you courage to face that severe trial in your future? NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD.

And now we see today that He can miraculously and mysteriously unite with a human female's ovum, go through gestation, and be born as a Jewish child, fully God and fully man. What is Mary's response?

Check out this young lady's sweet submission

Luke 1:38, *And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

J. C. Ryle writes, "Faith never rests as calmly and peacefully as when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence." Resting her heart on God's promise, Mary fully yields herself to her God whom she loves and trusts. God is her Loving Master; she is His slave. Aren't these words sweet – do with me whatever you have decided. I'm yours to command and use for your glory! May this be the humble, submissive spirit of every one of us before our great and powerful and loving God. Is this your heart attitude? Has God's powerful grace humbled you to do whatever He calls you to do? Isn't your heart blessed to hear and see so many of our young people with Mary's yielded heart – willing to serve God in any way He desires. This is something we give thanks for over and over.

Then suddenly, Gabriel's gone. Back to glory, back to God, mission accomplished! And there's Mary, all alone with her thoughts. Thank God Planned Parenthood wasn't lurking around the corner ready to assure this young girl that she had every right to her own body, and that no one could tell her what to do. She has reproductive rights, and if she decides after conception that this bit of flesh will make her life too hard, too crazy, come right over and we'll help you take care of it. No, Mary took Gabriel's hint about her Aunt Elizabeth and sets out on a four day journey to spend time with her, perhaps to Hebron, a Levitical city.

The joy of encouraging fellowship in the faith

Luke 1:39-45, *Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 "And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. 45 "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."*

When exactly did Mary conceive? We don't know and God didn't tell us. We don't need to know all the details. So there she goes, on foot or on a donkey. No car, no scooter. In nine months she and Joseph would be taking this same journey to Bethlehem. She may have told Joseph where she's going, since she's going for three months. But Joseph doesn't yet know about the great miracle.

Here comes sweet Mary into Elizabeth's house and for the rest of Elizabeth's pregnancy she'd have Mary there with her for encouraging fellowship. Matthew Henry notes how the two of them alone of all women could freely talk about their conditions. Elizabeth is the only person in the world right now who knows Mary's condition. God must have revealed to Elizabeth what happened to her niece. As soon as Mary greets Elizabeth, John does a spiritual flip in his mother's womb while the Spirit takes control of Elizabeth. Do six-month-olds jump for joy in their mother's womb? I have it from a good source that six-month-olds can do quite a bit. They know more than we may think. But in this situation, somehow this little unborn six-month-old is experiencing joy and filled with the Holy Spirit. He is the youngest and smallest prophet of the Lord ever, and apparently is excited about being in the presence of his Lord. Gabriel told his father Zechariah that he would be filled with the Spirit while yet in his mother's womb (Luke 1:5). Are fetuses filled with the Spirit in the womb today? No, this is unique and an exception.

Here are two women who knew their pregnancies were from God. The reality that God had chosen both of them in His great redemptive plan, fulfilling the Old Testament and bringing forth both the forerunner and the actual Messiah into this world, must have brought them both great joy. Elizabeth cried out with strong faith what we should all cry out, "How is it that my Lord should come into my life!" Stop and think about her confession. What a statement full of faith in God's truth when she exclaimed, "the mother of my Lord." She already realizes that Mary's child is not just a boy, but also her Lord, deity. She here confesses to the great mystery of the incarnation of God in human flesh, the God-Man. There is not a shred of pride or envy in Elizabeth that God had chosen her much younger relative to bring in the Messiah. She is just blessed beyond words to know it's true.

Verse 45 ends with the secret of real happiness and joy – believing the promises in God's Word. You and I need to learn from Elizabeth's counsel right here – believe what God says! Nothing is impossible with God. When God says He is going to do something, believe it. Don't doubt. Live by faith...faith in the omnipotent God who is always, always, always faithful to His promises. Thank God for the miracle of the virgin conception of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. We can't imagine a world without this great Miracle.