

Born of a Virgin

Matthew 1:18-25

In the Apostles' Creed, Christians confess that Jesus "was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary." Both gospels that give an account of Jesus' birth include this wonderful "detail." The virgin birth is not a random miracle, but an absolute necessity if Jesus was going to be our Savior.

A Pregnant Virgin

Mary and Joseph are betrothed when they find out she is pregnant (v18). Joseph, being a just man, plans to put her away quietly, and while he thinks about it, the angel of the Lord appears to him and tells him not to be afraid to marry her because the baby is of the Holy Spirit. The child will be called Jesus, "Yahweh saves", because He will save His people from their sins (vv20-21). Matthew tells us this was done to fulfill Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel" (vv22-23). In the eighth century before Christ, Isaiah gave this prophecy to Ahaz, king of Judah (Is. 7:3). Ahaz faced a coalition of Pekah, king of Israel and Rezin, king of Syria who wanted him to join the fight against Assyria, and were trying to depose him in order to make it happen (Is. 7:7). But they were not going to succeed, and God told Ahaz to ask for a sign, which he stubbornly refused to do. God gave him a sign anyway that an *almah* would conceive, her son would be named Emmanuel, and before he was on solid foods both kings would be gone (Is. 7:14-16). The word *almah* in Hebrew can mean either young woman or virgin. We don't know if the original young woman referred to by Isaiah was a virgin or not before she conceived with a man, but when Matthew cites Isaiah he uses the Greek word *parthenos* which means virgin exclusively. The first woman, the type, may not have been a virgin, but the fulfillment, the antitype, is one. This is often how types, shadows, and prophecies work. The translators of the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament from the second century B.C., also used *parthenos* in Isaiah 7:14, so Christians were not the first ones with the idea. But at the time everyone was surprised (Matt. 1:19-20; Lk. 1:34).

Conceived by the Holy Spirit

Leading up to this passage, Matthew lays out the genealogy of Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham (v1). Jesus is in the royal line, and He is the Messiah whom Israel has been waiting for. He is prophet Moses spoke of and the true King to come from David. But how was He begotten? Not from Joseph (Lk. 3:23). Since the fall, we are not born innocent with neutral desires, but inclined to sin and by nature objects of wrath (1 Cor. 2:14; Job 14:1, 4; Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:3). If Jesus had an earthly father, He would have been a sinner, and would have had to die for His own sins instead of ours (Heb. 7:27). If Jesus would start a new humanity, He couldn't be complicit in the old one (Rom. 5:12). We needed a spotless lamb; we needed Emmanuel (1 Pet. 1:19; Matt. 1:23; Lk. 1:35). This is why Jesus had to be conceived of the Holy Spirit, and Mary's virginity assures us that He was (vv20, 24-25). Roman Catholicism want to protect Jesus' purity by making Mary perfect (e.g. Immaculate Conception), but she needed God's mercy as much as anyone (Lk. 1:47, 50). Her other children came through Joseph and they were sinners like us (Jms. 5:16-17; Jn. 7:3-5). But Jesus was different.

A True Man

Once we consider the divinity and holiness of Jesus, it's hard for us to remember His humanity. The virgin *birth* should help. What we see at Christmas is the homebirth of God into a feeding trough (Lk. 1:7). We shouldn't scrub the story so the little Lord Jesus "no crying He makes", more like a little grownup than a baby. Jesus had to be born by the Holy Spirit in order to be sinless, but He had to be born in order to be a true person, to face the sins that real people face, to be our true representative (Heb. 2:17-18, 4:15). It's appropriate to focus on the cross as the place our sins were paid for, but we can't forget the life that Jesus lived. It is His righteousness, and without it His death on the cross would have meant nothing. Jesus had no sin, but when He was on the cross, our sin was reckoned, accounted, imputed to Him (2 Cor. 5:21). But His righteousness was also imputed to us, the righteousness He demonstrated on earth as a true human being, a faithful son (Phil. 3:9). This is God's Christmas present to you—all of Christ from beginning to end.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Luke 1:67-75

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." 22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

1. What was Joseph going to do when he found out Mary was pregnant, and how do you think he felt (verses 18-19)?
2. Joseph was relieved when he found out Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, but he also must have been completely overwhelmed. What great news does he hear (verses 21-23)?
3. We are sinners not just by choice (due to the things we do), but also by nature. Because Adam is our father (our first leader and representative), we inherit a sinful nature and sin comes naturally to us. But because Jesus doesn't have an earthly father, he's not a sinner by nature. He resists sin as a new Adam. He dies to pay the penalty of our sin, but He also gives us His righteousness—God sees us as He sees Jesus, the faithful Son. Can you think of three wonderful things Jesus did on earth?
4. Draw a picture of Mary holding the baby Jesus.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."—Matthew 1:23