

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST<sup>i</sup>

### Conceived by God and Born of A Woman... **Message 1 of 3**

According to the Gospel of Luke, in Nazareth of Galilee, a young woman found herself in the presence of Gabriel, the angelic messenger of the Lord, whose name was known to the Jews of the day as Almighty God. He had promised a Savior—the Messiah who would save them from their sin. And so each year more than a billion Christians commemorate our Lord's Nativity. Amid candlelight, carols and commingled smells of cedar and incense, the old tale unfolds: Gabriel's visitation, the journey to Bethlehem, the arrival of the baby in a manger, the glorious announcement to the shepherds in the night, the star in the East, the mission of the Magi.

Through the virgin birth of Jesus of Nazareth, God became human. This is the sensational and mysterious truth of the events of the Christmas Story. The Creator chose to become man in order to deliver humanity from the meaninglessness and depravity that were the result of man's own sin and sinful rebellion. 2004 years ago God determined that it was time for the Savior to come to earth. Everyone needed him very much, for no one was pleasing God. All the people in the world were sinners, just as Adam and Eve had been. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God promised them that a Savior would come someday to take away their sins. (See Genesis 3:15)

The prophets, as recorded in the Old Testament, had often told God's people that this wonderful Savior was going to come. In Isaiah 9:6 the prophet states, *"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."*

You and I struggling in the midst of life's pressures, illness, difficult relationships... perhaps looking for meaning or purpose; discover in the reality of "Jesus' incarnation" the understanding that God is greater than life's problems. We discover God's perfect Christmas Gift! God is faithful... a loving, caring Creator able to accomplish his purposes for his creation. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus brings comfort and hope to all who believe—to those who receive him!

John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing ye might have life through his name.

In this 3-part series we will consider the Bible's teaching of the Virgin Birth as a foundational way to address human difficulties. It is a way in which the Holy Spirit can effectively lead us to a deeper faith and trust in Jesus. To lead us to declare... **"There is no reality more breathtaking than the virgin birth of Jesus Christ."**

#### **A historical perspective**

There was a time when most folks believed that God had provided for humanity's basic needs through natural laws implemented at creation. The familiar rhythms of sunrise and sunset, seedtime and harvest, were viewed as evidence of a loving creator who continued to provide for the lives of his creation. God was seen as sovereign, all-powerful, all-knowing; actively, intimately involved in life's ebb and flow. Folks who new and worshipped God were inspired by God's Word and trusted in Providence.

Proverbs 3:5-6 *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thy own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."*

However, when the modern era arrived the role of provider and sustainer of humanity shifted from the Sovereign God to man himself and to science. Many people came to believe that the universe was a closed system, governed by the natural laws of "cause and effect" and in which an all-powerful God had no place. Folks increasingly expected science rather than God to provide answers to humanity's most profound questions and placed their faith and hope in technological progress through man's own achievements.

On the surface such confidence might seem to have been warranted. Advances in medicine, food production, transportation, communication and even household appliances allowed many to enjoy an unequaled level of ease and prosperity and a sense of well-being. Yet despite this progress people continue to face the same

problems that have plagued humanity's existence from the very beginning. The complexities of life, bound up in birth and death, planting and harvest, age and sickness, warfare and injustice continue to be part of our collective human experience.

Science and technology have not reduced our dependence upon the earth's food-producing capacity. Nor have man's greatest achievements been able to eliminate our dependence upon favorable climate conditions for such production. Science and technology have not been able to guarantee our collective welfare or provide us with the key to harmonious existence. They have failed to deliver mankind from its continuing struggle for survival. Ironically, the twenty-first century city dweller is as tied to the earth and the harsh realities of life as were the agrarian and nomadic peoples of the ancient world.

When modernism eliminated God from its worldview, it created a moral vacuum that science and technology could not fill. The failure of science and humanism to produce the utopia folks had expected has left many with a hopelessness that God's Word tells us can only be countered by the dynamic message of the person, Word, and work of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 4:19 But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Jesus Christ.

### **The doctrine of the Virgin Birth in church history**

The Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, foretold Jesus of Nazareth's virgin birth more than 700 years beforehand...

*"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel..."* "...which being interpreted is, 'God with us'" Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23b

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth is not a new teaching. The apostles and the first generations of church fathers realized that they were earthly stewards of a message that had to be written down, explained and defended. The construction of Christianity, the early believers gradually discovered, required preserving the stories and sayings of Jesus, his life and ministry, shaping the gospel and spreading it to fellow Jews and to Gentiles. There is continuity between what today's evangelical church affirms that the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ and what was held to be true about him by the very first Christians. It is comforting and encouraging for believers to know that from the earliest followers of Jesus, to our own day; the church has universally affirmed the supernatural origin of Jesus of Nazareth—whose birth we celebrate each Christmas.

Jesus birth was unique, the result of a "divine-human cooperative" between God the Holy Spirit and his willing servant Mary. Jesus birth was not the result of normal human biology; it was a direct creative act of God... whereby he formed in the womb of Mary the humanity of the Lord Jesus. The "spiritual" (without body) became the natural. The Creator became a helpless babe in Mary's womb.

Where did the details—of miraculous conception, of birth in Bethlehem, of stars in the sky, shepherds in the night and wise men on a journey—come from? In the gospels of Matthew and Luke the story of the birth of Jesus is told: Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38. From the gospel of Luke we read:

*To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus." Then said Mary unto the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" And the angel answered and said unto her, "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. For with God nothing shall be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." And the angel departed from her. Luke 1:27-28, 31, 34-35, 37-38*

The central events in the gospel Nativity accounts are Mary's virginal conception, which renders her child a truly unique figure, and Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, which makes him the long-expected Davidic Messiah. The early church insisted on the virginal conception as the logical beginning to a story that climaxed with the death, burial and physical resurrection of this divine-human being. The two separate miracles form a theologically

perfect whole. Through divine intervention, in fulfillment of the Messianic Prophecies, Jesus was seen to be both divine and human.

Throughout early Christian church history are found the writings of church patriarchs and various statements of faith such as the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed in answer to the many false teachings and objections to the Virgin Birth and to Jesus identity as Messiah. These early references in the Creeds and in the Patriarchs writings are significant because they they demonstrate that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth was a foundational truth of the earliest Christian church.

### **The Protestant reformation**

The earliest church, the church of the Middle Ages, and the Protestant Reformers continued to define what doctrines should be considered the irreducible core of evangelical Christian faith. Three doctrines were considered foundational: the virgin birth, the deity of Christ (Christ is God), and the authority of Scripture.

Martin Luther, hailed as the first of the Reformers, was committed to these fundamental doctrines of an orthodox evangelical Christian faith. In 1517 he nailed his “Ninety-five Theses” to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany. The first Lutheran confession in 1530 reflected Luther’s commitment to the core doctrines of evangelical faith.

- It taught that God the Son became man, born of the Virgin Mary, and that two natures—divine and human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ, true God and true man, who was truly born, suffered, was crucified, died and was buried in order to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all others sins, and to propitiate (satisfy) God’s wrath.

Like the Lutherans, John Calvin and those who followed him in the Reformed tradition tied their faith to these historic creeds. Calvin further argued that the authority (and truth) of Scripture must be determined, by each believer, through the “inner witness” of the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 8:16, 1 John 4:13)

1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

### **The historical record of the Christian church is clear:**

- The church has steadfastly maintained that Jesus Christ is the God-man.
- He was born of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit in a miraculous, divine creative act.

The notion of Jesus having been born as one person with both divine and human natures surely entails “mystery”, yet this is the foundation of the Church’s understanding of his uniqueness as the God-man. No human parents, sinful or otherwise, could produce a divine offspring. No human parents could give birth to God, who alone could remedy humanity’s sinful condition.

In this series we will continue to unwrap God’s perfect Christmas gift—the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. What do the Scriptures say about the nature of Christ’s birth? Moreover, what significance does this truth have for our lives and ministries? We will draw out some practical meaningful applications of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth so that we will be, “...*the kind of worshippers that the Father seeks.*” (John 4:23-23)

The name Jesus means... “God saves!”

Matthew 1:20-21 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

<sup>i</sup> Based on Chapter 3 from “Foundational Faith” by Robert K. Rapa, Moody Bible Institute