

## B. The Virgin Birth of Christ: The Glory of His Miraculous Conception

**“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife;  
for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit”**

(Matt. 1:20)

*“It is perfectly clear that the New Testament teaches the virgin birth of Christ; about that there can be no matter of doubt. There is no serious question as to the interpretation of the Bible at this point”* (J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*).

*“The manner of Christ’s conception was peculiar. Without a human father, He was conceived in the womb of His virgin mother, by the power of the Holy [Spirit] . . . The divine power which formed a man out of the dust of the ground could also form a man in the womb of a virgin . . .”* (John Dagg).

**Definition:** This is that miraculous act whereby Jesus Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary with the result that the Second Person of the Triune God was joined eternally to a real human body and nature.

**Remember:** This was the “door” of His entrance into the world. It was not His beginning or origin. It was, however, the *method* of His new manner of existence by which the Second Person entered into our humanity and became the God-man. It was the *means* by which God became man (Reymond, 552). The virgin birth was the initiation of the Incarnation.

**NOTE:** Do not confuse the miraculous conception with the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception which falsely teaches that *Mary’s* conception was holy and free from sin! (Pope Pius IX, 1854)

### Anticipated in the Old Testament.

Genesis 3:15.

Isaiah 7:14. The Hebrew term for “the virgin” (*ha-almah*) was the most appropriate available to Isaiah if Mary was the mother referred to. It means not strictly a virgin, but a young, unmarried woman (who was expected to be a virgin). The LXX translation is *parthenos*, which means “virgin.” Everything in the verse points to a miraculous birth. The sign to the house of David must be a miracle of cosmic proportions (7:11). Of course, there is no disputing how Matthew understood it (Matt. 1:22-23).

### Affirmed in the New Testament.

Matt. 1:18-2:1.

Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-11, 21.

**Epitomizing Text: Luke 1:26-38.** There is, as some have noted, a certain delicacy, an “exquisite tenderness” in the divine record.

1. **The NATURE of His Conception--Miraculous and Mysterious.** “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34). Following John Murray’s outline we may observe of this conception and birth:

- **Supernatural Begetting.** “**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you . . .**” (Lk. 1:35). Mary became pregnant without sexual intercourse (human or divine). It was a begetting by the creative power of the Holy Spirit over the womb of Mary. The Spirit begat. Mary conceived. Christ’s human nature was not begotten from the essence of God, but created from the substance of the Virgin (created not *ex nihilo*, but *ex Maria*, out of Mary). He was really, “**the fruit of [her] womb**” (Luke 1:42).
- **Supernatural Person.** He “**shall be called the Son of God**” (Lk. 1:35). It was not a mere baby that was supernaturally begotten. It was the eternal Son of God in respect of His human nature. He was begotten of the Spirit and conceived by the virgin in human nature. It was the conception of One who is truly and fully human, yet who was also truly and fully God. “*According to the doctrine of the virgin conception . . . the human nature of Christ does not exist for a single moment except as the humanity of God. It never becomes God’s human nature. It comes into existence united to God*” (Macleod, 38). The incarnation was supernatural through and through, because at no point was the supernatural identity of His person suspended.
- **Supernatural Preservation.** He is a “**holy offspring**” (Lk. 1:35). He was preserved from defilement from the womb. The virgin birth, in itself, does not account for Jesus’ sinlessness, for Mary also shared in the sinfulness of the human race (cf. Luke 1:47; Ps. 51:5). Except for a special divine work of preservation beyond the conception itself, Mary would have transmitted the human bent to sin (i.e., depravity) to her firstborn. Christ was free of the stain of sin not just because Mary did not have sexual relations with a man, but because He was sanctified by the Spirit that His begetting might be pure and undefiled (so John Calvin, John Murray). “*We need say no more than that the humanity of Christ was created by the Holy Spirit, rather than procreated by sexual intercourse, and that as such it partook of the essential character of all that God creates: it was very good*” (Macleod, 40-41). Although He was genuinely human, He was not “in Adam” in terms of depravity and guilt (see Macleod’s excellent remarks, 41).

His miraculous conception was followed by a normal embryonic development in the womb and a normal passage from the womb (birth) into this world as an infant. He was birthed like any other, i.e., wrinkled, smelly, bloody, slippery, and dependent.

**“For nothing will be impossible with God”** (Lk. 1:37).

The virgin birth gives the only reasonable explanation of the incarnation of God’s Son in human flesh. The natural result of the ordinary procreative process is the beginning of a new personality. But Jesus was a person before He was born. Therefore, a divine act is needed to prevent the production of a wholly new personality of the Son of God. By a special divine act the pre-existing personality of the Son of God was clothed with human nature and form in the womb of the virgin Mary (Zemek; Reymond, 552).

*The eternal Son of God became the earthly son of Mary. Where Adam had a beginning, but no birth; the Second Adam had a birth, but no beginning.*

**Note: No Human Father.** Both accounts carefully guard against the suggestion of any human father (Matt. 1:16; Lk. 3:23). (Further note: Along these lines we should not be surprised to find Joseph referred to as Jesus’ “father” in the Scriptures (Matt. 13:55; Luke

4:22; John 6:42; Luke 2:27, 33, 48; John 1:45). Joseph was Jesus' legal father.)

**Note: No Curse.** Two separate genealogies are required to solve the problem of Jeremiah's curse upon Jehoiachin (Coniah, Jeconiah, Jer. 22:30).

- The Messiah must inherit the throne of David through Solomon (2 Sam. 7:12-16). But the Messiah could not be a physical descendent of Solomon through the last legitimate king, Jehoiachin, because of the curse.
- The only solution is for Messiah to be born of a virgin who is a physical descendent of David (through Nathan, a brother of Solomon), and who marries a man of the royal line of Solomon. By adopting a boy who had no human father, but was of David's family through his mother, Joseph could pass on to Jesus his title to the throne without the curse that would have accompanied it through ordinary birth.
- Thus, Matthew traces the genealogy of Joseph, establishing Jesus' *legal* claim to the Messianic throne; while Luke traces the genealogy of Mary, establishing Jesus' *physical* claim to the throne.

**Note: No Perpetual Virginity of Mary.** No Biblical teaching that Mary perpetually remained a virgin (Matt. 1:25; Mark 3:32; 6:3).

## 2. **The SUPPORT of His Conception.**

- There are **frequent objections** to it: (cf. Macleod, 28-36)
  - *The Narratives Themselves.* Alleged inconsistencies within the narratives.
  - *Silence of rest of the New Testament.* There is generally an objection made to the virgin birth on the ground of the lack of reference to it in the other gospels and in the NT letters. However, reasonable to assume that this is a matter that would not be given much publicity. It was a delicate subject. Different purposes of the other gospel writers. John does not contradict. Paul, who knew Luke, was familiar [cf. his language in Galatians 4:4; Rom. 1:3; Phil. 2:7 "*There is hardly an allusion to Christ's entrance into humanity in the Epistles which is not marked by some significant peculiarity of expression*" (James Orr)]. The fact that Paul does not directly mention the virgin birth does not mean that he did not know of it or believe it. He was a companion of Luke, who wrote of the birth. Nowhere does he question the Virgin Birth or challenge it.
  - *Theologically Motivated.* The argument is that the birth narratives do not reflect the truth but a desire to give a rationale for calling Jesus the Son of God.
  - *Theologically Untenable.* Generally there are two lines of argument. The first is that the virgin birth is inconsistent with the pre-existence of Christ (His birth is seen as His "beginning"). The second line of argument is that the virgin birth is inconsistent with the genuine humanity of Christ (His birth is seen as defective without a human father). It is interesting to note the mutual contradiction between the objections, i.e., one sees the doctrine as inconsistent with deity and the other as inconsistent with humanity! Certainly those who are committed to a materialistic and rationalistic worldview will be opposed to anything "supernatural" or "miraculous."

*"Truth is, man will always find God's ways offensive" (Macleod).*

- Yet, there are **excellent reasons** to believe it:
  - The *biblical* teaching.

- The church’s *historical* testimony. It has been consistently affirmed by the early church fathers and by the great church creeds to the present.
- The Christian *theistic* reason that the virginal conception is simply one aspect of the total supernaturalism of the Scriptures.
  - The *psychological* reason that only the virginal conception can explain Mary’s willingness to be included in the company of those who worshipped Jesus (Acts 1:14).
  - The *theological* reasons that the virginal conception is the Bible’s explanation of the incarnation and gives some support to Jesus’ sinlessness which would not have been the case if he had been the offspring of a human father and mother.
- The *apologetic* reasons that if this is not true, then the Scriptures are in error and not trustworthy; that if not true, then it is difficult to understand the person and work of Christ; and that if Jesus was conceived like other men, then He, too, stands under the curse of Adam and could not have been a Savior of men before God.

3. **The SIGNIFICANCE of His Conception.** The virgin birth is the means whereby God became flesh. It is the Bible’s answer to “how did it happen?”

- a. ***It shows that salvation ultimately must come from the Lord.*** Salvation is impossible to men, but not to God. It highlights the “essentially supernatural character of Jesus and the gospel” (Macleod). It is blatantly supernatural, defying our rationalism. It stands at the door . . . (Macleod, citing Barth, 37).
- b. ***It is a sign of God’s judgment on human nature.*** It manifests that our race, which needs a Redeemer, could not and cannot produce one. Our help must come from outside of ourselves (Macleod, 37).
- c. ***It is a sign that Jesus Christ is a new beginning.*** He is a “divine intrusion” (a most blessed one!) into the plight of man (Macleod, 37, 41).
- d. ***The virgin birth made possible the uniting of full deity and full humanity in one person.*** It explains (though with mystery) “how” God became flesh and dwelt among us. The whole account points to Jesus’ true and full humanity (cf. Luke 1:31).
- e. ***The virgin birth makes possible Christ’s true humanity without inherited sin.*** Jesus did not descend from Adam in exactly the same way in which every other human being has descended from Adam (Grudem, cf. Macleod, 41). Therefore, He did not inherit the legal guilt or possess the moral corruption (depravity) of the rest of the race (but cf. Reymond, 550-551; Macleod, 39, “*The New Testament never sets forth the miraculous conception as an explanation for His sinlessness . . . Yet, the virgin birth does shed significant light on the sinlessness of Christ.*”)

**Applications of this Glory.** Consider the announcements which follow this birth in Matthew 1:21 and Luke 2:9-11.

*“The miraculous birth is therefore a guarantee to us that there must be some high and holy purpose in the advent of such a One. A naturalistic Christ does not require a supernatural origin . . . [Consistent] with the essential heart and meaning of Christianity is the supernatural birth of One who is at once man’s Savior and God’s Son”* (H. D. McDonald).

What response do we find in the inspired record to this birth?

From Matthew 2:1-12 we find two good responses:

- Seek this One so supernaturally born, v. 2.
- Worship this One so supernaturally born, vv. 2, 11.

From Luke 2:15-20 we may discern at least three good responses:

- Seek this One so supernaturally born, vv. 15-16.
- Speak of this One so supernaturally born, v. 17.
- Sing to God on account of this One so supernaturally born, v. 20.