

Chapter 7 - The Virgin Birth

Introduction

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18)

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He 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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How shall this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon 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. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered, "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:26-38)

It is not surprising to us who believe that when God became a man it was in such unusual circumstances. So it ought to be. But for the unbeliever the story of Mary, a virgin, being found with child before marriage can mean only one thing. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ, however difficult for some to believe, is a fact of biblical record in both the Old and New Testaments. The doctrine of the virgin birth is not an optional belief. If you reject the virgin birth of Christ you reject the testimony of God, the sinlessness of Christ and therefore the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Am I saying then that you cannot be saved without believing in the virgin birth? Yes, I am. For if you reject the virgin birth of Christ you reject Christ. Your Jesus would then not be the Christ of the Bible and he could not be called the Son of God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) You see the problem of those who question or oppose the virgin birth is not lack of biblical evidence, but a lack of faith in the supernatural. (Berkoff p333) Liberal theologians who reject this doctrine reject the Christ of the Bible in favor of their own human prophet/savior. If one cannot believe in the miraculous then one cannot believe "to the saving of the soul," (Hebrews 10:39) for that in itself is miraculous.

In this part of our lesson on the miraculous birth we will provide ample evidence and argument for the virgin birth so that the true student of the Word can "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." (Jude 3)

The Gospel Record

Both Matthew and Luke record the testimony that Mary was a virgin and became pregnant by an act of God alone without the instrumentation of man. Those who oppose it search in vain for some thread of support for their perilous position. One of the arguments assumes that since the other gospel writers, Mark and John, do not directly mention the virgin birth then they must have known nothing of it. This is preposterous!

Mark does not record the story of Jesus' childhood and neither does John. Does that mean they did not believe he was ever a child? Certainly not! Mark does in fact allude to the virgin birth in Mark 6:3 when referring to the Jews questioning Jesus' wisdom.

"Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him."

In the Jewish world of Jesus' time there were rules governing the giving of names to sons. A man was named after his father even if his father died before his birth. A child was named after his mother only when the father was unknown. Jesus would have been referred to in this passage as the "Son of Joseph, the carpenter," but he is not. The evidence points to community knowledge that Jesus was the son of Mary, not Joseph. (McDowell, Evidence p117)

John similarly does not tell the story of Jesus' birth but he certainly alludes to it as well in his often repeated appellation of Jesus as the Son of God. In the same way he refers to Jesus as the "only begotten of God." No one else can be given such a title who is not born of God. The word "begat," from which we get "begotten," is a term which is always employed to designate the male part of procreation. The Greek word for begotten, "monogenes," is used six times in the New Testament as applied to Jesus as the only begotten of God. Jesus twice used it of himself. No one else was ever begotten or conceived by the Holy Ghost. No one else was ever born of a virgin. (McDowell, Evidence, p114)

These liberal naysayers also say that the other New Testament writers completely ignore any virgin birth therefore they must not have believed it. This is a very poor argument from silence as we have seen before. In fact, the apostle Paul, who was a close friend of Luke, writes his whole premise of justification by faith in Romans based on the sinlessness of Christ as the new Adam. Jesus was untainted by the sin of Adam that he might redeem us from the curse of the law. His whole argument is premised on the virgin birth, therefore the sinless birth of Christ. (Romans 5:12)

The Prophetic Witness

The virgin birth is attested to in the Old Testament as well. In Genesis 3:15 God promises to Adam that the "seed of the woman" will crush the head of Satan. Notice it is not the seed of the man that will crush Satan's rule of sin, but the seed of the woman – that is, the offspring of a woman will be used of God to reverse the curse.

Isaiah 7:14 which Matthew quotes stands as a monument to the virgin birth.

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

We need to point out several things about this passage.

1. A Virgin: The word virgin in Hebrew is represented by two words. The first and most commonly used is "bethulah" which means a virgin maiden. The second "almah (veiled)" means a young woman of marriageable age. (McDowell, Evidence, p145) This is the word used by Isaiah to distinguish clearly that the woman in the prophecy is not married and is a virgin. It would be as if Isaiah had said "A young virgin, who continued a virgin, will have a child." There is no miracle when a virgin ceases to be a virgin and has a child but when that virgin has the child and still is a virgin that is a miracle.

2. A Sign: Next it is important to note that this birth of a child to a virgin would be a "sign." It would be no sign if what was meant was that a young married woman, a virgin 'til marriage, would conceive and bring forth a son. There is no miracle to that, therefore it is not sign.

3. Immanuel: Finally the name given to the child of this virgin birth is the clincher. She will call him Immanuel, meaning God with us. No one in Israel would dare take on the name of Jehovah or claim to be God with us.

The Theological Necessity

We have already mentioned the argument of the apostle Paul for the theological necessity of Jesus Christ being the spotless lamb of God. Jesus did not become the Son of God gradually as he matured to adulthood. He was the Son of God from the moment of his conception. If Jesus was the fruit of a human sexual relationship (the sperm of man) he would carry the inheritance of Adam's race which is the sin nature which came on every man since Adam's fall. Thus he would have had to atone for his own sin nature before he could atone for mankind. If he had a sin nature he would not be the spotless lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. The importance of Jesus' sinless nature cannot be overemphasized. Jesus alone was without sin. No other man could come close since Adam's sin taints every man. We call this "original sin." The only way Jesus could avoid the contamination of Adam's sin was to avoid Adam's seed altogether and be conceived by the Holy Spirit, thus without sin.

If Jesus had been from Joseph's flesh he would have carried the sin of Adam in him. Also, had Joseph been his physical father Jesus would not be qualified to sit on the throne of David. A little known prophecy of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 22:28-30) declares that there was a curse on the descendants of King Jeconiah. Matthew 1:12 exposes Joseph as a direct descendant of Jeconiah. Jesus therefore would have been under that curse and could not be the heir to David's throne. Mary on the other hand did not come from Jeconiah's line. (McDowell, Evidence, p113)

Oppositions to the Virgin Birth

From the earliest days of the church the virgin birth has been an article of faith without question. The only ones to dispute the issue were the infamous Ebonites and Gnostics who for their own doctrinal reasons refused to believe the testimony of the nature of Jesus Christ. The Ebonites argued that the Isaiah 7:14 passage should be translated "a young woman," not a "virgin."

Biological Impossibility

Many have opposed the doctrine of the virgin birth purely on a human level supposing that since it is not scientific it is not possible. They allege that the people of the early church were ignorant and superstitious, easily falling prey to such fables. On that kind of argument we would have to debunk all the miracles of the Bible, the atoning death of Christ and his resurrection. They all were non-scientific and required extraordinary miracles from the hand of God. C.S. Lewis spoke of this fallacy of reasoning in his defense of the virgin birth.

"Thus you will hear people say, 'The early Christians believed that Christ was the son of a virgin, but we know that this is a scientific impossibility.' Such people seem to have the idea that belief in miracles arose at the period when men were so ignorant of the course of nature that they did not perceive a miracle to be contrary to it.

A moment's thought shows this to be foolish, with the story of the virgin birth as a particularly striking example. When Joseph discovered that his fiancée was going to have a baby, he naturally decided to repudiate her. Why? Because he knew just as well as any modern gynecologist that in the ordinary course of nature women do not have babies unless they have lain with men.

No doubt the modern gynecologist knows several things about birth and begetting that Joseph did not know. But those things do not concern the main point – that a virgin birth is contrary to the course of nature. And Joseph obviously knew that." (McDowell, Defense, p189)

Early Jewish Records

Even in the time of Jesus there was controversy concerning his origin, as we have already seen in Mark 6:3. Among the Jews there was the rumor and belief that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary. It has been recorded that in an early genealogical table which dates from before A.D.70, Jesus was listed as "the bastard son of a wedded wife." Another scroll refers to him as "so and so, bastard son of an adulteress." The rabbis crudely called Jesus "the son of an adulteress." Some went so far as to say they knew the name of the illegitimate father of Jesus, a man, a soldier by the name of "Panthera.." Other rabbinical texts find references to Jesus ben Panthera ("ben" is the Hebrew word for "the son of.")

Around A.D.160 a Platonist writer named Celsus chronicled the supposed escapades of Mary and Panthera. The document was known to the early church as well. Origen, one of the early church fathers, wrote a dissertation against the claims of Celsus in a work called, *Contra Celsus*. In it he argues convincingly that the spurious accusations against Mary were deliberate slander, obviously concocted to impugn the story of the virgin birth. As Christians we should not be surprised at this. These things were written when Christianity was being accused of cannibalism and blood sacrifices which contributed to the widespread persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. The Jews from the beginning made up stories in attempts to persuade the multitudes that Jesus was an imposter. (see Matthew 28:11- 15)

The full text of *Contra Celsus* is available on the Web at:

<http://www.yahshua.webhost.com.au/relig/books/lbks/gnostic/contc1.txt>

Greek and Babylonian Mythology

Others have attempted to explain away the virgin birth saying that it was just an attempt to imitate the myths of the Greeks and Babylonians. In posting this argument they try to liken the virgin birth story to the Greek and Babylonian mythologies in which their gods were born in unusual circumstances. These pagan stories however usually resemble the fictitious stories of gods and goddesses having sexual relations with human beings. We need to be very careful in this regard. The virgin birth story never intimates that Mary had sex with a god. In fact, the miracle is that no sexual union was had at all. Such gods having sex are common in false cults such as the Mormons, but do not appear in the sacred scriptures. For this reason Paul and Peter warn the church to flee from such "cleverly devised fables and doctrines of devils." (I Tim. 1:4; 4:7; II Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14 and 2 Peter 1:16) The Greek word used for fables is "muthos" or myths. Sexual relations of humans with spirits is technically called "incubus" and is heathen and devilish in its entirety and a part of witchcraft, not the faith once delivered to the saints.

The virgin birth is not a myth or fable. It is the witness of the Old and New Testaments, of Jesus himself, the gospel writers, the writers of the epistles and the witness of the early church, fought against the Ebonite and Gnostic philosophies which denied it.

Roman Catholic Teachings

The So-called Immaculate Conception of Mary

It is fitting at this time to take up the subject associated with Christ's birth that has caused confusion and concern through the centuries; that is the so-called "immaculate conception of Mary." The Roman Catholic church has held to this doctrine as part of its veneration of Mary as co-mediator and co-redeemer with Jesus Christ.

Paul makes it very clear in I Timothy 2:5 that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man and he needs no assistance.

"For there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (I Tim. 2:5)

We must ask everyone who believes in the mediation of saints and/or Mary, 'Which part of "ONE" don't you understand?' Jesus himself made it abundantly clear when speaking to his disciples just before his death when he said,

"I am the way the truth and the life, no man comes unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6)

The Roman Catholic church did not always hold to this position. The idea of the mediation of Mary came about during later centuries when so many other church doctrines became as polluted as the papacy and priesthood. It was these extra-biblical doctrines, added to the scriptures by the Church, that led men like Martin Luther to call the church back to the Bible in what we now call the Reformation.

Did the Early Church Know of an Immaculate Conception?

The answer is yes. At least it was known to the church around the second century. The book was not mentioned in other literature until the middle of the second century. It was rejected by the church as spurious (unauthentic) since its own authorship claimed to be by the hand of James who died before Matthew and Luke were written. Yet the author claims to know of those books. In addition, he claims to have written it "at the time of an uproar in Jerusalem at the death of Herod." Herod died in 4 or 5 B.C. Even the books own proponents say this is impossible and that James, the brother of our Lord, was not the author.

The story of the immaculate conception is contained only in the apocryphal book of the Infancy Gospel of James, which was excluded from the canon for reasons we discussed in the first lesson of this series. Yet we find the Roman Catholic Church in later centuries deriving doctrine from the very books it considered non-canonical and of questionable origin at best. Remember it was not the Protestant Church that approved the canon (the Protestant movement didn't begin until the 1500's), it was the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church has built around this story a doctrine which has greatly influenced the lives and faith of its adherents. It is a dangerous doctrine of another salvation which is not taught in any of the canonical books of the New Testament. Paul warned the church with the severest language concerning those who would teach another gospel than what he preached.

I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ, but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:6-9 (The NIV says, Let him be eternally condemned." Which is a kind way of saying "Let him be eternally damned.")

We ought to give earnest heed to these words and warn our brothers and sisters who are of the Roman Catholic Church lest in their ignorance they be eternally damned. It is not a mild doctrinal difference to say that any human being is co-equal with Jesus Christ as mediator and co-redeemer. It is blasphemy! The Roman Catholic Church did not always believe this way. It was in 1854 that the doctrine became a dogma of the church by the encyclical of Pope Pius IX:

"And since she has been appointed by God to be the Queen of heaven and earth, and is exalted above all the choirs of angels and saints, and even stands at the right hand of her only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, she presents our petitions in a most efficacious manner. What she asks, she obtains. Her pleas can never be unheard."

Given at St. Peter's in Rome, the eighth day of December, 1854, in the eighth year of our pontificate."

Read the entire document at: <http://www.rc.net/rcchurch/popes/pius9/ineffab.asc>

The Roman Catholic Church has made serious errors regarding the nature of Mary and her position in the eternal state of things.

1. It calls her Queen of Heaven
2. It declares that she is the mediatrix between man and Jesus Christ.
3. It instructs that prayers should be addressed to her for her intercession to Jesus Christ, as well as prayers to other deceased saints.
4. It teaches that she is the co-redemptrix with her son Jesus Christ.
5. She ascended to heaven without dying. None of these are biblical doctrines. They are theological extensions of apocryphal writings which contradict the inspired Word of God.

(For further reading on this see:

<http://www.worldlynx.net/enbc/mariology.html>

An article about coredemptrix

<http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/coredeem.htm>

See also the Roman Catholic documents page <http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/>

Finally see a document chronicling the doctrinal changes with the history of the R.C. Church during the last 2,000 years.

http://cnview.com/on_line_resources/the_truth_about_roman_catholics_final.htm

Where is the Word of God?

Is it any wonder that the Roman Catholic Church discourages the reading and study of the Word of God by laymen? In every case where laymen are allowed to read and study the scriptures their eyes are opened to who Jesus really is and to the full knowledge of salvation by faith alone and by grace alone.

Someone will surely say, "Pastor, you are being too hard on the Catholic Church." Am I? It is the gospel that is hard on the Catholic church or any other church that teaches contrary to the scriptures. Jesus challenged the Jews to "search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39) And he promised that, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." (John 8:32) And again, "If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:17)

Jesus had no fear that the lowliest of men would misunderstand the Word of God and be led astray. Why should we? The Word of God is a "lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path." (Ps 119:105) Its power to instruct and transform is without precedent, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: The testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple...Moreover by them is your servant warned and in keeping of them is great reward." (Ps 19:7,11) It would be well for the membership of the Roman Catholic Church who truly love Jesus Christ to echo Isaiah's words to their wayward leadership and cry, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this world it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20)

The Roman Catholic Church is not an evil church for from it we all have received the canon of scripture and solid doctrines from the early church fathers. But over the centuries its leadership has become sick, errant and self-serving by exalting itself above the Word of God. Let it be known to every church be it Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, or Christian and Missionary Alliance, that the WORD OF GOD MUST BE CENTRAL to all the teaching of the church or it will become "anathema".

Links for further reading:

Contra Celsus: <http://www.yahshua.webhost.com.au/relig/books/lbks/gnostic/contc1.txt>

Read the entire document at: <http://www.rc.net/rcchurch/popes/pius9/ineffab.asc>

For further reading on Catholicism see: <http://www.worldlynx.net/enbc/mariology.html>

An article about coredemptrix <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/coredeem.htm>

See Roman Catholic documents page <http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/>

The history of the doctrinal changes within the of the R.C. Church during the last 2,000 years. http://cnview.com/on_line_resources/the_truth_about_roman_catholics_final.htm

Sources and Recommended Reading: (It is not necessary to buy these books.)

Hurbert Lockyer, All the Doctrines of the Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1964

L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, 1939

Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979

Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense, Compiled by Bill Wilson, Thomas Nelson Pub, 1993

Keathley, J. Hampton III, Angels, God's Ministering Spirits Internet Article on Angels, <
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