

The Virgin Birth – Myth or Miracle?

by Harold Rawlings

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The virgin birth of Christ is a battleground upon which many believers receive their first wounds at the hands of unbelievers in the church. A recent survey reported by the University of California at Berkeley indicates that 43 percent of all Protestants do not believe that Christ was born of a virgin.

During the first seventeen centuries after the birth of Christ, the vast majority of those professing Christianity accepted the virgin birth of Christ without question. From palace to hovel, from divinity college to humble meeting house, the virgin birth was considered an essential doctrine of the Christian faith.

Justin Martyr, who was born shortly after the last New Testament apostle was martyred, wrote in A.D. 140, “The virgin birth is an universal belief to be accepted by everyone calling himself a Christian.” Irenaeus in A.D. 190 said, “The Christian church, scattered over the whole world, received from the Apostles the faith in the virgin birth.” But the last 150 years have seen a gradual undermining of this important biblical concept. It is not at all uncommon these days to read of some church leader or denominational official publicly denying the virgin birth, convincing millions of their followers that, in the words of H. R. Niebuhr (who classifies himself as an “unbelieving believer”) – “The virgin birth has nothing to do with the meaning of Christ.”

Some years ago a man by the name of Nels Ferre wrote a book entitled ***The Sun and the Umbrella***. In this book, Mr. Ferre, a pseudotheologian, proposed the theory that Jesus could have been the illegitimate son of a blond German soldier, since Mary was living near a German military camp. For many years, modernists, liberals, and unbelievers, who were unable to accept the supernatural element of the Bible, taught that Joseph was the father of Jesus, but Mr. Ferre blatantly suggests an even more ridiculous and blasphemous theory.

Matthew writes, “**Now the birth of Jesus Christ is on this wise.**” But along comes Mr. Ferre and says, “The birth of Jesus Christ is on THIS wise.” He proceeds to imply that it was an illegitimate birth. Many a church member says, “The virgin birth of Christ is a biological impossibility and therefore I reject it.” Anything he cannot see or touch or experience with his senses, he rejects. The virgin birth is rejected by men who refuse to accept the Word of God by faith.

If we are willing to accept the Bible as the Word of God (which it claims to be), there should be no doubt whatever as to the reality of the virgin birth. It is not only substantiated in the Old and New Testaments, it is absolutely essential to man’s redemption.

1. SPIRITUAL EVIDENCE FOR THE VIRGIN BIRTH

A wealth of prophetic and historic evidence for the virgin birth is readily discovered in the Word of God. The very first book in the Old Testament, the book of Genesis, contains the earliest prediction of the birth of Christ. **Genesis 3:15** says, “**And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed ... It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.**” This is God speaking to the serpent after he had beguiled Eve and caused her to eat of the forbidden fruit. It was through the woman that sin entered the race. By the seed of the woman also, salvation would come.

In **Isaiah 7:14** the Prophet says, “**Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.**” Centuries before Christ was born in Bethlehem of the virgin Mary, this prophecy was written. The Hebrew word for “virgin” properly means “a young, unmarried woman, who is of marriageable age and who has preserved the chastity of her body.” The term “young woman” which the Revised Standard Version translators inserted in **Isaiah 7:14** does not do justice to the Hebrew word “almah.” It seems like a deliberate attempt on the part of the translators to assail the messianic nature of this Old Testament prophecy. The fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies is found in **Galatians 4:4-5**. There are those who imply that Paul has nothing to say about the miraculous nature of Christ’s birth in Bethlehem. It is argued that since Paul never refers to the virgin birth, he therefore did not know of it or did not believe it. It might as well be said that he did not believe in the existence of Mary, because he never mentions her either.

How can anyone read **Galatians 4:4** and receive any other impression than that the birth of Christ was unique, even miraculous? In this verse, Paul states, “**When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under**

the law.” God sent forth His Son, made of a woman – no mention is made of Joseph. Paul’s description takes us back to **Genesis 3:15** which speaks of the seed of the woman. The first chapter of Matthew should convince us that the virgin birth is a truth we cannot escape. Beginning with verse 18 we find these words: “**Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise.**” In other words, “This is exactly how it happened.” “When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.” Matthew states that Mary’s pregnancy was a condition that existed prior to her coming together with Joseph in the husband-wife relationship. The conception of Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary differs from all other conceptions of children by their mothers. There was no human father. The place of the human father was taken by God himself. God did not appear in human form to beget the child, but in some extraordinary way, unrevealed to us, the virgin Mary was impregnated with the holy seed.

Matthew continues, “**And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.**” And all this happened “**that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.**” He would be more than an extraordinary human personality. He would be “God with us.” Jesus accepted the worship of His disciples without rebuking them. Had He been less than God, it would have been a violation of the very first Commandment to have permitted His disciples to engage in such acts of devotion.

If Jesus was not virgin born, it was impossible for Him to have been God and to have existed before His birth in Bethlehem. In **Micah 5:2** we are informed that while the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, his goings forth were from old, even from everlasting. That is, He had an existence prior to Bethlehem. **John 1:1** reveals a similar truth: “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**” Who is the “Word” spoken of here! Verse 14 gives the answer: “**And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.**” The Word, the Logos, was none other than Jesus Christ. He was in the beginning with God. He collaborated with God the Father and God the Spirit in the creative acts recorded in **Genesis 1**. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning, and the end.

2. WHY THE VIRGIN BIRTH IS ESSENTIAL

Why is the virgin birth essential to our belief! Some of you may have read of Dr. Howard Kelly, late professor of gynecological surgery at Johns Hopkins University. He was a very learned man, one of the great scientists of the past generation, and a devout Christian.

He said, "The virgin birth is the great key to the Bible storehouse. If I reject the virgin birth, the New Testament becomes a dead, man-made letter recounting the well-intentioned imaginings of honest but misguided men." Dr. Kelly recognized that a belief in the virgin birth is essential.

In the rivers of the logging country, oftentimes log jams occur. Sometimes hundreds of logs will be backed up in a single jam. It is not at all unusual for just one log to be responsible for a massive jam. If that one key log can be dislodged, all the other logs will flow freely down the river. The virgin birth is exactly like that. It is the key log, an essential doctrine that will allow the other doctrines of the Word of God to flow gently down the stream of truth.

Either our Lord was born of a virgin or He was not. The narratives are either historically true, or they are deliberate fiction. If there is no virgin birth, we have no reliable Bible. It boils down to a question of the authority of the Bible. If we don't accept the Bible in one place, then we must reject it in another. If the Bible can be disproved here, it can be disproved elsewhere. If the Bible is not faithful in relating to you the facts of the birth of Christ, it is not faithful in relating other events associated with the ministry of Christ and the apostles. If I pick up a book to read and suddenly run across a glaring error, I might well suspect that there are other errors in the book.

If the virgin birth is to be regarded as a myth, similar to Greek and Roman mythologies, who is to say whether the resurrection and the second coming of Christ are in the same category? The witness of the New Testament stands or falls as a whole. Either you accept all of it or you reject all of it, one of the two. If you deny the virgin birth of Christ, you must deny the other miracles that are recorded in the Word of God. Augustine once said, "If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you like – it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourselves."

If God created man in the first place, if He created this cosmos and sustains it, the problem of miracles and the supernatural fades away. It becomes a question not so much – if He could effect a virgin birth – but why He chose such an unusual means of entrance into the human race. The answer should be obvious to anyone who approaches the Bible without preconceived opinions.

If there is no virgin birth we have no Son of God. If we have no Son of God, we have no Saviour. If Jesus had a human father, He could not have been the Saviour of the world. He would have inherited a sin nature from His father. If Jesus had an ordinary birth, He had an ordinary death. His death upon the Cross would have been nothing

but a shameless act of a man who was deluded by His own opinions of himself, Jesus is either Christ, the Son of God, virgin born of Mary in Bethlehem, or else He is a fraud whose claims are full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

The virgin birth of Jesus takes the crucifixion of Christ out of the category of human sacrifice and puts it in the category of God's justice and mercy. In His death, Christ was carrying out the purpose for which He entered the world, that justice might be executed through Him. He was God, voluntarily paying the penalty He had imposed upon sinful man.

Paul explains that God has set forth Christ to be a propitiation **“that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26)**. Such a death could be considered just only if it were inflicted upon the one prepared for that purpose. And that is exactly what Jesus claimed to be. **Hebrews 10:5** says, **“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.”** The virgin birth is the means by which the Son of God could enter the stream of human life to effect the justice required by a righteous, merciful God.

While wars, social problems, and political ideologies usurp the attention of humanity – the crucial issue is whether or not man can stand before the Creator free and clean of sin – that is, whether he is justified in the eyes of God or not. Justification rests upon the sole act of God in providing a sin offering through the blood of Jesus **(Romans 5:9)**. To provide such a sacrifice, it was necessary that the innocent victim, the Lamb of God, enter into the world from outside the realm of man. Thus Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born without the intervention of a human father. What a cause for rejoicing! God, in the person of Christ, has come into our world, taken our flesh, and died in our place. **“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19)**.

The foregoing message was preached by Harold Rawlings and condensed from the *Landmark Journal*, November, 1971.