

Sermon Notes Dec. 4, 2016 “God Incarnate: The Virgin Birth—Does It Matter?” Isaiah 7:14; Luke 2:1-7

The Christmas story tells us about when God was going to send His son, Jesus, to the earth to be the Messiah, for good reasons, He had to send Jesus in an obscure way. The world was expecting one kind of Messiah—one who would come in power and glory; Jesus was going to be a different kind of Messiah—a suffering, servant kind of Messiah—so He had to come in secret.

But God sends angels to declare to the shepherds, “For to you has been born a Savior, He is Christ the Lord.” The Christmas story is that God sent an angel to a woman named Mary to tell her she would have a child. She was to name Him Jesus. What made this unusual was that Mary was a virgin. She was not married and had never been with a man. It was going to be a miracle. The question I want to is this:

Do you think that really happened? And does it really matter if I believe this?

Sometimes, people as well as institutions, become fuzzy on this subject. This happens a lot in our culture, in colleges and in a number of liberal seminaries. The Virgin Birth is thought of as a metaphor—a nice story that makes people feel more hopeful. People are embarrassed about the idea of examining it as a historical claim that actually happened in space & time. But it is the hinge of history. Did it really happen?

The story of the Virgin Birth is in both the Gospel of Luke and in the Gospel of Matthew. Luke writes explicitly as an historian. He writes within a generation of Jesus’ actual life. He writes while there are many eyewitnesses still around—eyewitnesses who could challenge any inaccuracies in his account. He includes the historical details of Jesus’ birth; its geographical setting in Bethlehem of Judea and its chronological setting: In the days of Caesar Augustus when Quirinius was the Governor of Syria...

As Jesus grew up, according to Luke and the other authors of the New Testament, He did and said remarkable things that no other *good* man or teacher had ever done or said before. One time, He was in a controversy with religious leaders and said: I tell you the truth. Before Abraham was born, I AM (John 8:58). In the Old Testament that little two-word phrase—I AM—is the Name by which God named Himself. It was so revered by Israel that they would not pronounce it or even write the letters down. Jesus applied that Name to Himself. His followers came to realize that this was no ordinary man. What God did, Jesus did. What God claimed, Jesus claimed. What God was, Jesus understood Himself to be. There had never, ever, ever been a man like this before. His disciples staked their lives on this.

John MacArthur writes in his book *The Miracle of Christmas*:

“The virgin birth is an underlying assumption in everything the Bible says about Jesus. To throw out the virgin birth is to reject Christ’s deity, the accuracy of Scripture, and a host of other related doctrines that are the heart of the Christian faith. No issue is more important than the virgin birth to our understanding of who Jesus is. If we deny that Jesus is God, we have denied the very essence of Christianity. Everything else the Bible teaches about Christ hinges on the truth we celebrate at Christmas—that Jesus is God in human flesh...The virgin birth is as crucial as the resurrection in substantiating His deity. It is not an optional truth. No other fact in the Christmas story is more important than the virgin birth.”

Why does it matter so much? There is a holiness and infinite distance between God and humanity. This is always the understanding in the human sense of “There’s something wrong.” Fear and guilt. It’s all through the Bible. Remember the people who were with Moses? When God appeared on Mount Sinai, the people said to Moses, “You go talk to God, but don’t let Him talk to us, because we’ll die.”

He’s way up there and I’m way down here, trapped in my mortality, my finitude, my fallenness, my brokenness, my darkness and my sin. I

could spend the rest of my life doing good deeds and I could never make it to where God is. I mess up even the good deeds I do. That's the human condition.

The Good News is that in Jesus God has come all the way down into the basement, so to speak, with you and me. Jesus, born of a Virgin, took on our humanity. God came all the way downstairs, in the stable, in the dusty streets of Galilee, and at the cross where Jesus died.

We're "downstairs" together. There is an infinite chasm between us and Him, and He bridged it. That's what is going on with Jesus. Now everything has changed. The essence of the incarnation is that by it God became man in order to achieve salvation and establish the rule of God in history and over history! The Word had become flesh: a real human baby. He had not ceased to be God; He was no less God than before; but He had begun to be man. He was not now God minus some elements of His deity, but God plus all that He had made His own by taking manhood to Himself. Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. All for us! So, Paul exclaims in 2 Corinthians 5, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

And Jesus said: "No longer do I call you My servants ... Instead I call you My friends ..." (John 15:15) "I want to be your friend." Now, in Christ, entering into relationship with Him, which happens as we give ourselves to Him, trusting in all that He did for us at the cross, He calls us His friends...

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

That is the gospel! Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants...instead, I call you friends.