

# Was Jesus Born of a Virgin?

## Luke 1:26-38

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### Intro.

Why another sermon on the virgin birth? Because we live in a world that breeds doubters. And when a person starts to doubt the Christian faith, the first belief to go is the Trinity. And when the Trinity is attacked, doubts are first raised about Jesus. And the first attacks against Jesus are almost always aimed at His birth, not against the resurrection. Why His birth? Well, partly because it's easier to doubt than the resurrection (There were eye witnesses, plus the empty tomb.) But also because, if you can prove there's nothing special about the baby that was born, then it's an easy step to declare that there is nothing special about the man who died. If He is not the God/man, then He certainly cannot be the Saviour of the world.

### Text

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

- Mary's virginal conception is emphasized throughout Luke's story. But it might be worth noting here that the virgin birth as described in both Luke and Matthew is like nothing that had happened since the beginning of the world!
- Many ancient cultures had stories about divine births. But what happened in Mary's womb bears no resemblance to them. I mention this simply because a lot of critics, too many of them calling themselves Christians, make this accusation. They claim that early Christians invented the story of the virgin birth in imitation of pagan stories in order to make Jesus equal to Hercules or some other supposed son of the gods. But there are radical differences between the Christian story and everything else. Mainly, none of those pagan stories were about a *virginal conceptions*, as emphasized in Matthew and Luke.

### Favoured woman

Luke 1:28 And the angel came to her and said, "Rejoice, favoured woman! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. 30 Then the angel told her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

- Mary was favoured by God, as it says in verse 28, blessed by God to be the mother of the Messiah, but even when this passage is translated as "full of grace," or "highly favoured" it cannot be interpreted to mean that she could dispense favour to others.
- We must not pray to Mary for the grace and guidance we need in life. We look to Jesus. He

alone is the “one mediator between God and man” (I Tim. 2:5) He is Mary’s Saviour as well as ours.

## Call Him Jesus

Luke 1:31 Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.

- Mary, already twice referred to as a virgin, is now told she will give birth to a son, and that she is to name him Jesus (O.T. Joshua, God is salvation). Here Mary is told what to name her son, and in the gospel of Matthew Joseph is given the same name; thus God promotes harmony between Jesus’ earthly parents.
- Now come five of the most important claims ever made about Jesus. (1) “He will be great,” (2) He will “be called the Son of the Most High,” (3) God Himself “will give Him the throne of His father David,” (4) “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever,” and (5) “His kingdom will have no end.”
- I want to say more about Jesus’ divine sonship in a moment, but for now let’s just recognize that Jesus is called “the Son of the Most High” in the context of emphasizing Mary’s virginity. That by itself should be the clue that tells us Jesus had no ordinary, human father, that the conception which would soon take place in Mary’s womb was entirely divine and therefore entirely unique in world history.
- Now look at v. 32 where it says “the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.” We won’t spend time on the fulfilment of that prophecy today, except to note that this is just one more bit of evidence that the Old Testament is filled with references to Christmas. The many prophecies about David’s eternal throne point in one way or another toward Jesus’ unique birth.
- I guess I will say one thing about David’s kingdom before we move on. When Jesus spoke of “His kingdom,” as in “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), He was also speaking of David’s kingdom. Jesus sits on one throne, He is Lord of one kingdom. That kingdom is found wherever men and women recognize Him as Lord in their hearts, Old Testament as well as New Testament.

Acts 15:16-19 states explicitly that in sending the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and in saving the souls of Gentiles and Jews alike—giving the Spirit to all without distinction—Jesus is “rebuilding David’s tent . . . so the rest of humanity may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles who are called by My name.” As far as the Bible is concerned there is only one throne, one Kingdom, one body, One Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all (Eph. 4:4-6).

- But we can’t leave this passage without noting the similarity between v.33 (“His kingdom will have no end”) and Isaiah 9.

Isaiah 9:6 For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on His shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this.

By referring to Jesus' kingdom as having "no end" there is no doubt that Gabriel is telling Mary her son will be the fulfilment of this passage in Isaiah.

## Son of God

Luke 1:34 Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?" 35 The angel replied to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

- Mary is not doubting Gabriel's word, she is merely seeking information. She was as much as saying, "How will this happen? Is there anything I need to do?" In other words, should Joseph and I move up our marriage date? Or will it be okay to get married next year as we had originally planned?

Pay attention to these two questions, but the second one especially. "Is there anything I need to do?" Mary's question may have an implied practical side to it, but I assure you it is related to our salvation, as I hope to show you in a moment. But for now let's look at Gabriel's answer: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God."

- Essentially Gabriel is telling her, God will do everything necessary. You don't have to do a thing. Don't rush to get married; in fact, God doesn't want to be married when this happens lest the world become confused about who Jesus' father really is.
- What Gabriel is really saying is, this conception will be—not so much a miracle, but a new creation. Notice the language Gabriel chooses—"come upon you," "overshadow you." This is Genesis 1 language. "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering (moving, brooding, overshadowing) the surface of the waters" (Gen. 1:2).

The overshadowing Spirit, therefore, not only protects but He also creates. He, the Spirit, brings about a unique conception within Mary's womb. In her a new beginning for the human race will be created! I hope you see the wonderful balance here. The first woman was made from the rib of the first Adam. The Second Adam was made from and within the body of a woman.

- Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, he was untainted by Adam's sinfulness, or sinful nature. How do we know? Gabriel calls him "the holy one to be born." Contrast that with David's confession: "Indeed I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). That was David, a son of Adam. But Jesus is a new creation! The

beginning of all new creation. When we read in the book of Revelation about new heavens and a new earth, these are the supernaturally natural outgrowth of the new creation that began with Jesus' miraculous conception in Mary's womb.

- In this context let me repeat something from last Sunday, the quotation from John 1:4, "Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men." Whatever else John means by this passage, he certainly means this; You and I are the walking dead, but this was not true of Jesus in the days He walked the earth. Life, the power of life that only the Creator God possesses, was in Him.

Do you see what this means? From the moment of conception we live with a death sentence upon our heads. "Will we die?" is never the question, only when. This was not true of Jesus. He was holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners," as the writer of Hebrews puts it. "In Him was life," John says. Death had no part in Him. If He ever did die, it would be His choice to do so. "No one takes [My life] from Me," Jesus said to the Pharisees, "but I lay it down on My own. I have the right to lay it down and I have the right to take it up again" (John 10:18).

Think about it like this. Before Adam fell, before he sinned, he could die, but he did not have to die. Adam only died because he sinned. Jesus, the second Adam, could also die, but since He never sinned, *He never had to die!*

## Why this matters

Only an immortal creature is free to surrender life voluntarily as an act of self-sacrifice. All other acts of human self-sacrifice made by mortal creatures constitute only a choice of the time of dying, for death must come sooner or later in any case. Every purely human sacrifice is, after all, only a premature death, a shortening of life. Mortals can surrender a few years of expected life, but this is all they can do. *Only an immortal can surrender life itself.* Jesus did not merely choose the time to die and therefore by how much He would shorten His expected life span. He was in a position to choose whether to die at all. In this, mortal man has no choice whatever. (Arthur C. Custance)

## The Lord's slave

Luke 1:36 And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 "I am the Lord's slave," said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.

Was Jesus born of a virgin? The question is important because if the answer is "yes" then that changes everything. It makes Jesus' death on the cross meaningful. It means that He, and He alone is qualified to be "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He really can give his life for others, and just as importantly, *He can give His life to others.* "I am the resurrection and the life," Jesus said to Martha. "The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live!" (John 11:25).

If we are ready to read the Bible *as it is written*, then we are called upon to believe in the Virginal Conception (Virgin Birth) of Jesus. But there is something greater here than mere

acknowledgment of fact. Look at the last verse of our text. Just after Gabriel assures Mary that “nothing will be impossible with God,” Mary shows herself ready to accept what God is about to do.

Mark her words. “I am the Lord’s slave, May it be done to me according to your word.” At that moment Mary clearly understood how God’s grace works. Regarding the conception of the Messiah, she would do nothing, God would do everything. Of course, it was her task to respond to what God did. She would bear the baby, and birth the baby and raise the baby. But everything she did would be in response to all that God had done in her.

This is the pattern of every spiritual birth, of every work of God! We do nothing for ourselves spiritually because all we can do is nothing. We are spiritually dead, as helpless as we can possibly be. But think about Mary. Could she choose to be the mother of the Messiah? Of course not. But she could respond to God’s call.

What about us? Can we who are spiritually dead choose to make ourselves alive? Of course not. But we can respond to God’s call. Is God calling you to believe in Jesus today?