

# THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

**M**ary and Joseph are not afforded any fast or comfortable mode of travel for their journey from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. The Roman Emperor's census has been ordered and all must gather in the town of their birth. Joseph, being of the family of David, journeys with his wife to the city of David. His concern for her, already great with child, is not lessened on arrival at Bethlehem. There is no room in the inn and now the time for Mary to give birth is come. A stable is the only place available and here she brings forth her firstborn son and lays him in a manger. An angel announces to shepherds tending their flocks in the field, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). The Saviour of the world is born.

His name and all the miraculous events associated with his birth are already known to Mary and Joseph. Nine months before this, the angel Gabriel had visited Mary in Nazareth, telling her that she had found favour with God and adding, "Thou shalt conceive

in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS" (Luke 1:31). Mary, a virgin espoused (promised in marriage) to Joseph, on hearing such news was somewhat perplexed. "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" The angel's answer revealed that a supernatural conception would occur: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Mary would conceive in her womb as a result of the direct operation of God the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:18 records: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." Joseph, on learning that Mary would become a mother before they were married had anxious thoughts. What should he do? Considering his options and not willing to make her a public example he "was minded to put her away privily" (Matthew 1:19). He did not want to expose what he



wrongly thought was his espoused wife's sin. Soon, assurance from heaven came to take away his doubts and fears: "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:20).

All of these events fulfilled the prophetic words of Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). This is a clear prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ. The word translated "virgin" is the Hebrew word *almab*. It is never used to describe a married woman or one whose virginity is open to question. Matthew, in quoting this prophecy, uses the Greek word *parthenos*, which is the same word used by Luke (Luke 1:27). Again, this word means "virgin" in the strictest sense of the word. The Holy Spirit is affirming that, contrary to the opinions of rationalist sceptics, the Hebrew word *almab* is correctly translated "virgin." The argument that the word denotes a young woman, not necessarily a virgin, only reveals the rationalistic prejudice of those who refuse to accept the possibility of anything supernatural, however clear the evidence. Professor Robert Dick Wilson, one of the most learned Biblical linguists of the twentieth century, was right in saying of Isaiah 7:14, "The language is not the difficulty. The greatest and only difficulty lies in disbelief in predictive prophecy and in the almighty power of God."

So a virgin gave birth to a child without a human father. That is a miracle wrought by the Holy Ghost, an event unique in history. Certainly there must be something special about the person conceived in such a unique way. His identity is revealed: He is the virgin-born Immanuel. *Immanuel* means "God with us." So in the virgin-born Saviour, God Himself is with us. Mary His mother was told by the angel, "He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:32). John speaks of Him as the Word made flesh (John 1:14). The Word (who is God, John 1:1) does not cease to be the Word, but becomes flesh. The One who came into Mary's womb existed from all eternity. The Father sent his Son into the world by way of the virgin's womb. The eternal Word came into the womb of the virgin and took to Himself a true humanity by means of the Holy Spirit. The truth is, God prepared a body for His Son (Hebrews 10:5) in the womb of Mary. The *Westminster*

*Confession of Faith* says that He was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. Before His entrance into the womb He had no humanity; He existed as the eternal Word. By the mysterious activity of God the Holy Spirit acting upon Mary's substance a virgin-born Saviour with a true and sinless humanity came into the world as the God-man. He is God and man, two distinct natures in one person forever.

Not only is His person revealed but His purpose in being born is told: "He shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). To be saved from our sins we must have a Saviour who is God, for only God can break the power of sin and take away sin. We must also have a Saviour who is separate from sinners. If Jesus Christ had been born by natural generation He would have been tainted with sin. Only one without sin (Hebrews 4:15) can bear the sins of others, and only a virgin-born Saviour is holy, harmless, and undefiled (Hebrews 7:26). If He had sin in Himself, His death would have been for His own sins. So there is need of a Saviour who is sinless in Himself as man and yet who is truly God. Paul reminds us that "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4, 5). The first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15 speaks of the seed of the woman that will bruise Satan's head. The woman's seed is Jesus Christ (see Galatians 3:16). He who is God's eternal Son, became man, and by way of the virgin birth is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

Charles Wesley's lines are a fitting conclusion:

*Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the Everlasting Lord.  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of the Virgin's womb:  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
Hail, th' Incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel. ■*

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