

She Was Found to be With Child

Sometimes we may wonder if it is really necessary that we believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, and, if so, why. Our text reveals the answer to this question in a powerful way:

Matthew 1:18-25

¹ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Let's take a look especially at the first three verses (we'll cover the other verses over the next two weeks).

I. The genesis of Jesus was miraculous (v.18)

Verses 18 and 20, along with Luke 1:35, John 1:14, and Philippians 2:5-11, clearly teach the full deity of Jesus Christ through the humiliation of the Incarnation and the virgin birth in particular. If we have a hard time believing the virgin birth of Jesus, we should also have a hard time with creation, with the full inspiration of the Scriptures, with the resurrection of Christ, with His Second Coming—in short, with the entire redemptive plan of God! Christianity is suffused with the miraculous. It would really make no sense without the miraculous. Furthermore, in order for my sins to be forgiven, there must be a sacrifice to God on my behalf that is equal to my transgressions, that is, it must be a human sacrifice; and for that sacrifice to be sufficient in value to atone for more than merely one person's sins, the One being sacrificed must have infinite value; thus the full deity of Jesus Christ, as well as His humanity, is essential for the Church's salvation. That is why the Apostles' Creed, the ancient summary of the essentials of the Christian faith, includes these words: “...born of the virgin Mary...”

Matthew says, “...before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”

II. Even good folks have a hard time believing it (v.19)

Some remarkable things are said here about Joseph. He was a just man, and he was so kind and compassionate that he was unwilling to put Mary up to public shame. He used the method allowed by Jewish tradition of that time simply to go before two qualified witnesses and to arrange quietly for the divorce. The reason Joseph was divorcing her was that biblical engagements require a divorce to break (something not true of today's “social engagements”) and because Joseph was making his decision based upon a natural view of things. Based on Joseph's current understanding 1) when a woman is pregnant, she has had sex with a man, 2) Joseph didn't have sex with Mary, therefore, 3) Mary had sex with another man.

.....

This was how Joseph was thinking, until he received divine revelation—in his case, through a dream of an angel. Consider what Joseph would have missed if he had only operated in the realm of the natural. He would have missed the experience of knowing, loving, and serving Jesus Christ. So it is today with folks who are just and compassionate, but never really let the miraculous story of Jesus shape their lives.

III. We must all believe and act upon it (v.20,24,25)

This is the challenge for all of us. Look at what the angel commanded Joseph to do in verse 20: to take Mary as his wife and to believe the virginal conception of Jesus. The same is required of us: because we believe the miraculous, saving story of Jesus, we rise up and gladly obey what God commands us to do. You can always tell who believes in the virgin birth: they are the people who gladly obey the Lord.

Was Joseph successful in his obedience? Well, we know this much: we know he faithfully taught Jesus the Word, because Jesus at 12 years of age astonished the rabbis with His wisdom; we know that Joseph faithfully took Jesus to church, because the Bible shows us that he took him to the festivals in Jerusalem, and we know that he faithfully taught Jesus the carpentry trade. Furthermore, we know that Joseph also reared some brothers and sisters of Jesus, two of whom (James and Jude) contributed to the New Testament canon, and shepherded others in the church.

What is it that you believe God wants you to do for Him? What are you waiting for? Believe the gospel today, and rise up with grateful heart and serve Him faithfully.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do many folks today have a hard time believing the virgin birth of Jesus? Why do some think it's irrelevant? What do you think?
2. What are some ways in which good, regularly attending church folks sometimes live life merely in the natural, pragmatic realm? What difference does it make to live life with full belief in the miraculous?
3. Given the current cultural (mis)understandings of dating, engagement, marriage, and divorce, what are the greatest challenges for God's people in their romantic lives?
4. Share with your group some simple things you know the Lord wants you to do for Him in response to His great, saving love for you. Ask your group to pray for you to have the desire and the power to do these same things.