



THE VIRGIN BIRTH



a believer's
bible booklet



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If there is among the distinctive articles of the Christian faith one that is basic to all others it surely is this:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, became man for our salvation.

This is the message that is wrapped up in that little bundle in Bethlehem's manger. Although there are many, many people today who maintain the message of Christmas they deny the divinely chosen method. They bow before the Christ but they impugn the virgin birth of that Christ.

There are many who openly deny this doctrine. The attacks began early in the second century when, in the Talmud, the story was given that Jesus was actually the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier by the name of Pandira. This story, concocted by the Jews, was used by the pagan philosopher Celsus in his attack against Christianity. The French infidel Voltaire, the German evolutionist Haeckel and Tolstoi, a Russian writer, propagated the same story. Right down to our present age there are such great scholars as Emil Bruner, Rudolph Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Nels Ferre, John Baillie and many others who openly deny the virgin birth.

In a recent survey published in Christianity Today (Sept. 11, 1970), it was determined that the virgin birth is denied by 60% of the Methodists, 49% of the Presbyterians, 44% of the Episcopalians and 34% of the American Baptists and 19% of the American Lutherans. The fact is that, although many of us will bow before the manger and sing the Christmas carols, in Christendom today there is a wholesale selling out of the method of Christmas - the virgin birth.

There are some, of course, who would not be quite so bold. Rather than openly deny it they just greatly distort the doctrine so that they eliminate the supernatural and the miraculous. At a recent meeting of a theological society a university professor stepped to the podium to give his peculiar defense of the virgin birth. He said that female rabbits have been known to be shocked into conception. He went on to suggest that Mary might well have conceived through the shock caused by the angel's announcement. That, you see, is a total removal of the supernatural and a complete denial of the miracle of the virgin birth. Still others simply ignore it. Emil Bruner treats it as an impertinence since, he says, it is an attempt to explain what should be left as a mystery. Many simply ignore it considering it as non-essential or irrelevant.

But if there is anything that can be said about the virgin birth of Christ it is that it is clearly, unequivocally and unassailably taught in the New Testament.

THE ANNUNCIATION TO MARY

For a clear testimony to the virgin birth consider the words of the angelic messenger to Mary as recorded in Luke 1:26-38.

The Occasion

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Luke 1:26-27, NASB

It is about six months after the angel had appeared to Zacharias in the Temple announcing to him that his wife, Elizabeth, in her old age, was going to bear a son - John the Baptist. Now the same angel visits a little town nestled in the hills of Galilee. According to Jewish tradition he visits a young 18-year-old beautiful girl who was the

daughter of very poor parents. Her name is Mary. According to verse 27 we are told that she is a virgin. The passage informs us that she is espoused to a humble carpenter by the name of Joseph.

The espousal was a legal contract that spanned a one year period during which they were formally united to such a degree that Joseph was even called her husband (Matt. 1:19). Their marriage had not been consummated. They were not officially married but were in a legal contract relationship. This one year period of time was established in the Old Testament law in order to demonstrate the faithfulness and the purity of the young lady before the marriage was consummated. It is during this period that the angel appears to Mary.

The Content (vv. 28-37)

In the annunciation there are several things that are made known to Mary. First of all, SHE IS DESIGNATED AS ONE WHO IS "HIGHLY FAVORED" (v. 28) and ONE WHO "HAS FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD" (v. 30). Now we would not read into this what the Lord does not say. We would not add to the scriptures at this point. It does not say that Mary is the fountain of grace, distributing grace to other people. What it rather says is that she is the recipient of grace! She is the one who is highly graced by God. Hers was not an inherent grace; it was a bestowed grace!

This salutation perplexed her. The appearance of the angel startled her. She wondered what it was all about. In what way was grace to be bestowed upon her? The angel explains: SHE IS PROMISED THE BIRTH OF A SON.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

v. 31

That name would cause all of the lights in Mary's mind to begin to flash. That name meant "Jehovah Savior!" Not only is Mary to bear a son but that son is to be the Savior! It is for Him that the eyes and heart of the nation Israel have been looking and waiting for centuries. Now the promised Savior is about to invade human history. Mary is the chosen instrumentality through whom the Savior is to come. How highly graced and favored by God she surely was!

As the angel continues, SHE IS GIVEN A DESCRIPTION OF HIS CHARACTER.

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; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.

Luke 1:32-33, NASB

He will be great; great in His power, great in His position, great in His teaching, great in His miracles, great in His ultimate dominion. He will be acknowledged as the Son of God. He will succeed to the throne of David. More than that, He will rule over the nation of Israel forever. Even beyond that, she is told that His kingdom would be a never ending, an eternal, kingdom.

What a remarkable annunciation to this young teenager! But rather than resolve her perplexity, it only increases it. Her problem is a biological one. Humbly, astonished, she asks, "How can this be? Biologically this is impossible because I do not know a man." Alfred Edersheim, noted Jewish scholar, points out that there was no current expectation of a virgin birth in Israel (Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, II, 710 ff).

As Gabriel responds. SHE IS GIVEN AN EXPLANATION OF THE METHOD OF HER CONCEPTION.

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God."

Luke 1:35, NASB

Here is the first clear statement of the virgin birth in the New Testament. There are two things that are said to her. The first is that the Holy Spirit would come upon her. The second is that the creative power of God would wrap her around, envelop her, overshadow her. Clearly, Mary is being told that she is going to conceive as the result of a

direct act of God. Without the instrumentality of a male, life is to be generated within her womb. It will be through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was to play a two-fold role in the conception of Jesus. He was to be the efficient cause in that conception. There would be no male functioning as the efficient cause - it was to be God the Holy Spirit. But also He would sanctify the human nature of that which was to be conceived, and insulate it or protect it from the pollution and defilement of Mary's sinful nature. That is the double role of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Jesus. By this time you have already noted, I am sure, that the virgin birth is really something of a misnomer. It is the virgin conception that really is the truth that we are considering here. The birth of our Lord was a completely natural birth. It was the conception that was supernatural. In view of the fact that it was to be the Holy Spirit who would be the efficient cause and who would insulate the human nature, protecting it from the pollution of the sinful nature, we are told at the end of verse 35 that the offspring of Mary would be "holy." This was not because Mary was holy but because He was being generated by the Holy Spirit.

He even goes on to say that that which is now to be conceived would be called the Son of God. You see, it is by virtue of the virgin birth of Christ that the child is to be called the Son of God. It is because God was to be the efficient cause, generating that which was to be in the womb of Mary. So the offspring is to be holy and is to be called the Son of God because it is God the Holy Spirit who is to be the efficient cause of this conception.

As the annunciation to Mary concludes, SHE IS GIVEN A SIGN TO REASSURE HER.

And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.

Luke 1:36-37, NASB

"What!" Mary would think. "She's beyond the age of child bearing. She is in her old age. Is such a thing possible?" The angel says she is already six months pregnant! The proof that Mary would conceive was the fact that Elizabeth had already conceived. It was just as humanly impossible for Elizabeth to conceive in her old age as it was humanly impossible for Mary to conceive under her natural circumstances. That is why, you see, the angel concludes his annunciation saying: "For nothing will be impossible with God."

So the annunciation to Mary is a very amazing declaration that in her virginity she is to conceive a child as the result of the instrumentality of God the Holy Spirit and that child would be holy and be called the Son of God. More than that, He would be the Savior of mankind.

The Response (v. 38)

How would you respond if you were Mary? Can you put yourself in her position? She has every reason to suspect that her marriage will never be consummated. In her betrothal period she will be proven to be an impure and unfaithful young woman. Her marriage will never materialize. She will be the subject of slander and gossip by everyone with whom she comes in contact. More than that, Joseph has the prerogative of taking her to court and having her stoned to death. That was the penalty according to the law in Israel at this time. It could mean death for her. That was not all. According to Deuteronomy 23, a woman who was found in this condition before marriage was an outcast of the temple and for ten generations her descendants could have no part in the temple worship!

At this moment Mary faces the dilemma of dedication. Is she willing to pay the cost of sacrificing her marriage, her social status, her family, and her very life? In a deliberate act of dedication Mary says:

Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.

v. 38, NASB

In simple beautiful faith and submission she presents herself to the Lord as His slave, to do with her according to His will, whatever the cost. This is one of the most remarkable scenes of surrender found anywhere in the Word of God. It speaks volumes concerning the spiritual life of Mary. As a good friend of mine says, "May the tribe of Mary increase!"

Wouldn't you agree? In this annunciation to Mary the virgin birth of our Lord is clearly, unequivocally taught. But lest you think that this is an isolated passage, let's look at the second annunciation.

THE ANNUNCIATION TO JOSEPH

Here again is clear testimony to the virgin birth You will find the record in Matthew 1:18-25.

The Occasion

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly.

Matt. 1:18-19, NASB

We are now perhaps four or five months later. Mary has gone to Judea. She has been with Elizabeth during the last three months of her pregnancy. John the Baptist has been born and now Mary has returned to Galilee. This is her first encounter with Joseph since the annunciation to her.

Apparently she has not confided in him but by this time it is obvious to Joseph that she is pregnant. Because Joseph is a righteous man he is bound to do one of two things. According to the law of Israel he could take her to the court, accuse her before a judge and have her stoned to death. That would be making her a public example. But Joseph does not choose that option.

It is the second option he chooses. He plans to divorce her privately. He has made up his mind that that will be his course of action. As he proceeds toward divorcing her privately he is stopped abruptly.

The Content

But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Behold the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with Us".

Matt. 1:20-23, NASB

To his utter astonishment JOSEPH IS INSTRUCTED TO MARRY THE YOUNG GIRL. But how could a righteous man ever consider such a thing? To clarify the situation THE CONCEPTION OF MARY IS EXPLAINED: "For that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

So Joseph is given an explanation of the conception of Mary. She is unquestionably bearing a child. The source of that conception is the Holy Spirit. Fear not to marry her. She has not been unfaithful. She is not impure. That which is conceived in her finds its efficient cause in the Holy Spirit. This is a direct act of God upon this young lady!

As the angel continues HER OFFSPRING IS IDENTIFIED AS THE SAVIOR Who will be the redeemer of Israel and deliver mankind from their sins. Finally, Joseph is told that THIS WHOLE EPISODE IS IN HARMONY WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS. The fullest meaning of Isaiah 7:14 is now made known to Joseph and applied to Messiah's birth. His was to be a supernatural birth!

The Response

How would you respond if you were Joseph? No one will believe your story. Every time you walk down the street of Nazareth friends will raise their eyebrows. They will whisper and you will be the subject of slander and gossip. No one will believe what you have to say. How would you respond? Joseph is another beautiful picture of complete dedication to the will of God.

And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife; and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

Matt. 1:24-25, NASB

It is on the basis of this verse that Jerome taught the perpetual virginity of Mary. But yet, it would seem that a very careful reading of this verse indicates exactly the opposite. It says that Joseph kept her a virgin "until" she had brought forth her first born son. The clear implication is that after she had brought forth her first born son Joseph and Mary had a normal marriage relationship. I believe the New Testament supports this.

As our Lord arrived at His home town of Nazareth in Matthew 13 the people sought Him. Notice their response as they identify Him.

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?

Matt. 13:55, NASB

It is obvious, as far as the people of Nazareth are concerned, that Jesus is the son of Mary and Joseph and that he has four brothers and a number of sisters.

How does one explain this? Often it is suggested that these four brothers are actually the sons of Joseph by a previous marriage. But that is not possible. If that were true then our Lord would not have been the legal heir to the throne of David, because the legal heir to that throne was the first born of Joseph. According to Matthew's account it is through the lineage of Joseph that our Lord has a legal right to the throne of David. If Joseph had other sons by a previous marriage, then our Lord would have had no right to the throne of David. So we cannot accept that explanation. It surely seems that our Lord had four half brothers and a number of half sisters. These were born to Mary and Joseph after the birth of their first born Jesus, whose conception was a virgin conception.

Would you not agree with me then that in the annunciation to Joseph the virgin birth is clearly taught? It is not hinted at, it is distinctly declared. If you look at Matthew's account and Luke's account it seems to me very difficult to avoid the fact that the Scriptures clearly teach the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. And yet it is widely rejected today. Why?

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE VIRGIN BIRTH

From the pens of the critics and tongues of the skeptics several major objections have been raised. Everett F. Harrison (A Short Life of Christ, Eerdmans, 1968, 40-48) has considered most of them.

Christianity Has Borrowed The Doctrine From The Religions of the East

Of course, it is a fact that the ancient religions of the east did ascribe supernatural or miraculous births to their great personages. It is therefore contended that Christianity simply followed the conventional pattern. Matthew and Luke did not record historical facts but later traditions about Jesus which sprang up in the church. They have, however, their true origin in the religions of antiquity.

Yet there are some serious problems with making such a claim. If Luke were present, he would strongly protest. He would tell us what he reports in the prologue to his gospel (Luke 1:1-3). What he wrote, although it was commonly taught and widely accepted, had been the subject of his scientific research. He was recording that which had been the result of his diligent investigation into the facts of Christianity as they had been taught. You won't forget that Luke was a physician. He is the one who gives us the details concerning the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb. So Luke would strongly state: "I am not simply accommodating myself to the pattern of antiquity. What I have recorded is the product of my own personal research. I have searched out the facts!"

Again, if you were a reader of the legends of the ancient east you would notice a very strong difference between the quality of the miraculous birth of our Lord and the miraculous births in antiquity. Even Charles M. Laymon (The Life and Teachings of Jesus, Abingdon, 1962), a liberal scholar who questions the historicity of the virgin birth recognizes this. He writes:

Reference is made sometimes to the similarity of the stories of Jesus' advent to the legends of the Greco-Roman world concerning the births of their leaders. For instance, there is the legend of Perseus born of Danae, a virgin who was impregnated by a shower of gold. Then there is the story of Attis, whose mother, Nana, became pregnant as the result of eating a pomegranate.

A comparison of these accounts with those of the New Testament will show that quite a different ethical ideal and spirit is found in the Christian records of the birth of Jesus. The Christian stories are highly moral and ethical and in harmony with the character of the life they celebrate (p. 69-70).

Louis Matthews Sweet (The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1906) speaks directly to the point when he says:

After a careful, laborious, and occasionally wearisome study of the evidence offered and the analogies urged, I am convinced that heathenism knows nothing of virgin births. Supernatural births it has without number, but never from a virgin in the New Testament sense and never without physical generation, except in a few isolated instances of magical births on the part of women who had not the slightest claim to be called virgins. In all recorded instances which I have been able to examine, if the mother was a virgin before conception took place she could not make that claim afterwards.

A third rebuttal to this objection is that, to me, it is inconceivable that one of the doctrines of pagan heathenism would be accepted and placed as the foundation of Christianity when Judeo-Christianity was entirely prejudicial against heathen paganism around about them. It is impossible for me to conceive that those who were so opposed to heathenism would ever accept an element of heathenism and make it a fundamental of their faith as Christians.

So, for myself, I will categorically reject any suggestion that the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, as it is taught in the Bible, is simply the borrowing of an idea from the religions of the ancient east. Every evidence points to its historicity.

Christianity Has Borrowed The Doctrine From Jewish Expectation

Such opponents say that the Jews expected their Messiah to be born of a virgin and because later they thought Jesus was the Messiah they attributed to Him a virgin birth. So, they borrowed the story from the expectation of Judaism.

Now, of course, the flaw in this argument is obvious. The Jews never expected a virgin birth. Never! There is no indication that ever before Luke 1:35 there was the expectation that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. Of

course Isaiah 7:14 had said "a virgin will conceive." The Hebrew word that was used initially was a word that meant a young woman and the primary application of this passage is to some young unmarried woman who was to have a son whose birth was to be a sign to Israel that God would be with them in their imminent attack from Syria and Israel. They did not need to go to Assyria for help. They recognized in the birth of this son the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Edersheim, an eminent Jewish scholar, has pointed out that the rabbis did not include Isaiah 7:14 in their list of Messianic prophecies (*Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, II, 710 ff.). Apparently there was no expectation of a virgin birth. We can surely say that they did not borrow this from Jewish expectation if there was no such expectation.

Christianity Fabricated The Idea Of A Virgin Birth

Again, if Luke were here, he would strenuously protest. I can hear him claim: "What I have written is the result of thorough medical research." He would say: "I have had consultation with Mary. I have spoken with her, with those who were directly involved, with the family; and what I have written is the result of my scientific investigation" (Luke 1:1-3).

Those of you who are used to reading the literature of antiquity where legends are being fabricated and propagated will see a major distinction between the biblical account of the virgin birth and their fabrications. In the Apocrypha, for example, where legends and stories were fabricated about Jesus, the writers went to great lengths and into great detail in order to make their stories sound convincing. Yet in the Bible the account of the virgin birth is stated succinctly, pointedly, with very little detail. No effort is made to convince you of it. It is just stated. It is indeed strange that Christianity would confine itself to only a few verses in promoting their invention! So, for my part, I do not for a moment accept the idea that the virgin birth was fabricated by Christianity.

The Early Church Did Not Hold The Virgin Birth

This shows a gross misunderstanding of the writings of the church fathers. We know, for example, that Ignatius who lived in the early part of the second century strongly insisted upon it. We know that the apostles creed in the second half of the second century affirmed it. Justin Martyr said it was a cardinal item of Christian belief. F. F. Bruce (*Basic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Henry; Holt, Rinehard and Winston, 1962, p. 127) notes that the statement of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) has been accepted as definitive by the church. This statement speaks of Him as one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin....

Mark, John and Paul Are Silent On It

One of the most subtle attacks that is brought against the virgin birth is that it was taught only by Matthew and Luke. No one else taught it. No one else believed it. It is found only in the two annunciations. Let's put the Bible to the test and see if that, in fact, is true.

...and to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Matt. 1:16, NASB

In the Greek text the pronoun "whom" is feminine, not masculine. Here, in the lineage of Joseph, it says "and Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary by whom." Feminine! That is, by Mary! Not of Joseph but of Mary was born Jesus who is called Christ. So we have no question that Matthew taught the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

What about Mark? No, he did not. There is no indication in Mark's gospel that he taught it. But that does not surprise us. Mark, you see, is presenting our Lord as the Servant and if there is one thing that is not significant about a servant it is birth. And so Mark begins our Lord's life with the beginning of His service. He omits all of the early part of our Lord's life. He does not present it but he certainly does not deny it or reject it.

Does Luke teach the virgin birth? Of course. We have already seen that in Chapter 1. Chapter 3 contains another indication of this virgin birth. In verse 23 Luke says

And when He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being supposedly the son of Joseph...

Luke 3:23, NASB

Isn't that significant? Every manuscript in the Greek text contains that parenthesis. This was not added later. The oldest manuscripts, the most reliable manuscripts and the majority of the manuscripts all contain it. "As was supposed" says Luke. Although it was supposed that He was the son of Joseph the truth has already been given in Luke 1:35.

Does John teach the virgin birth ? Let me note two verses in Chapter 1 of this gospel.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

vv. 12-13, NASB

Now I want you to note that verse 13 in the authorized version begins with a plural "who were born." There are some Greek scholars (Zahn, C. C. Torrey, O. Cullman) and some ancient church fathers (Irenaeus and Tertullian) who believe that this ought to have been a singular. Here could be a reference to Jesus Christ. By these men it reads

...even to those who believe in His name: who was born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

v. 13, NASB

If that is so, here is an explicit statement in John's gospel to the supernatural conception of Jesus Christ. But this is not widely accepted by the Greek scholars. If a plural is the true text then there surely is an implicit reference to the virgin birth. John says that the new birth of men and women who, when they believe in Jesus Christ, are born again into the family of God, is not by blood, nor is it by the will of the flesh, but it is by God. It is a work of God. John is obviously drawing an analogy. Just as the birth of Jesus Christ was a direct act of God, so the rebirth of men and women in salvation is a direct act of God. The analogy is clear between the virgin birth and the rebirth of believers. The analogy supposes the fact. So we can say then that John believed in the virgin birth. He taught the virgin birth and he used it as an analogy for the conversion experience of men and women who are born again by an act of God. John doesn't give the details of the virgin birth because Luke already has given them. This implies the virgin birth was widely held at 100 A.D.

Is the virgin birth found in the Book of the Acts? No, it is not. But that is not a problem to us. C. H. Dodd has demonstrated that the preaching content in Acts began with the public ministry of the Lord. There is no denial of it in this book then.

Did Paul teach the virgin birth ? Yes, but not explicitly. W. C. Robinson has pointed out that there are four occasions when Paul speaks of the birth of our Lord and in each case he uses a verb which is translated "made" rather than a verb which is generally translated in the New Testament "begat" or "begotten" or "born". There are these two verbs that contain basically the same idea, however the second verb is always the one that is used when there is an agency involved. It is used when you read that so-and-so begat so-and-so! There is a

human agency involved and that is emphasized in this second verb. Paul never uses this verb in relation to the birth of Christ. He always uses the verb which simply means "He was made." In Romans 1:3 we read He was "made of the seed of David according to the flesh." Philippians 2:7 says He "was made in the likeness of men." In Galatians 4:4 the apostle writes of Him as made of a woman, made under the law. So on the four occasions when he speaks of the birth of our Lord he chooses carefully a verb which simply says He was made rather than that He was begotten. Moreover, every mention of Jesus, by Paul, as the Son of God is an implicit declaration of the virgin birth (cf. Luke 1:35).

We conclude that the New Testament writers uniformly believed in and taught the virgin birth. It is taught either explicitly or implicitly by almost every writer in the New Testament and when it is omitted it is in accord with the purpose of the author. It is never denied nor rejected.

It Is Not An Essential Doctrine

This last argument that is raised against the virgin birth is the most disturbing of all. This person says it is irrelevant and so we will simply ignore it. Now let me make it very clear to you, my dear friend, that the foundations of Christianity are five fundamentals. The first is the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word of God. The second is the eternal deity of Jesus Christ. The third is the substitutionary atonement of our Lord. The fourth is the bodily resurrection and second coming of our Lord. But there is one more. It is the virgin birth of Christ. It is foundational to the Christian faith.

TO DENY THE VIRGIN BIRTH IS TO DENY THE WORD OF GOD

Even Karl Barth could say

"No one can dispute the existence of a biblical testimony to the virgin birth." (Dogmatics 11, 176)

If I can not believe part of the Bible I can not believe any of it. If I can not believe the how of His birth, then I can not believe the why of His birth. If I can not believe the fact that He was born of a virgin then I can not believe the fact that He came to be my Savior, that He died for my sins, that He was raised again and that He is able today to save me and to free me from my sins. If I can not believe part of it I can not believe any of it. To deny the virgin birth of Christ is openly to deny the Word of God. It is explicitly taught there.

The reason it is rejected is not the lack of scripture or creeds or history. It is the antisupernaturalism of our age which opposes miracles. Laymon expresses the problem of a naturalist with the virgin birth when he says

We hold to the concept of natural law in the universe, by which we mean that all life, everywhere, proceeds in causal sequence through uniform and orderly processes. These can be observed, charted, tested, and validated through the application of the scientific method.

*A virgin birth, as such, lies beyond the scope of these processes as we know them today. Strictly speaking, on these terms one may accept such an occurrence only by positing the existence of unknown modes of procedure, not yet observed and validated. Some choose to do this. Others reject such an event outright, and still others reserve judgment in the expectation of further knowledge (Laymon, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus*, p. 70).*

TO DENY THE VIRGIN BIRTH IS TO DENY THE DEITY OF CHRIST

You see, the meaning and the method of Christmas are inseparably intertwined. The virgin was to bear a child and that child was to be called Immanuel, "God with us." This is the message of Christmas. If His was simply a human birth, He is simply a man; a good man, a great man, but only a man. But, you see, the meaning of Christmas is that this man is God who became man in order to become our Savior. The person who denies the virgin birth of Jesus Christ denies the instrumentality whereby God became a man. He is starting down the road that will ultimately lead him to deny the deity of Christ. This is why the virgin birth is so crucial and significant.

The late Edwin Louis was surely right in saying that to surrender Bethlehem's "stone of offense" precludes a high view of Christ. He wrote

The evidence is overwhelming that when men begin to surrender belief in the virgin birth... they are also getting ready to surrender that belief regarding Christ Himself (the incarnation) which is the vital center of the whole body of faith.

TO DENY THE VIRGIN BIRTH IS VIRTUALLY TO DECLARE THAT JESUS INHERITED A SINFUL NATURE

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh." A natural birth produces a natural man. If the sinful nature is communicated through the male, and if our Lord was born by the means of a natural birth, He inherited a sinful nature and He is a sinner among sinners. To deny the virgin birth of Christ is to make Him a sinner. Clearly then, it was the means whereby God became truly man without inheriting the fallen nature of man.

TO DENY THE VIRGIN BIRTH IS TO DISQUALIFY JESUS FROM BEING A SAVIOR

My friend, there is nothing that you need more than a Savior. Nothing! Before God, you and I stand guilty, having offended His righteousness and broken His law. Everyone of us stands guilty as sinners before Him. Because He is a righteous God, He must judge sin. God can not act the way you act with your children so often. He cannot simply overlook sin and forgive sin and forget it. He can not sweep it under the carpet. That would be loving but it would not be righteous. Righteousness demands payment for sin. Because you and I are sinners standing under the wrath of God, we need a Savior to save us from the judgment that we rightly deserve.

Yes, my friend, there is nothing you need more than a Savior. But where should you find one? To be your Savior He must die because "the wages of sin is death." The righteous judgment of God upon the sinner is eternal death and if you are ever to find a Savior then you must find a Savior who will die for you, who will die in your place, who will take the punishment that you deserved as a sinner, who will bear the penalty that God has already passed upon you. Jesus Christ came and did just that.

But God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for Us.

Romans 5:8

To be your Savior He must be a man because only a man could die for a man. Jesus Christ became a man to die for men. To be your Savior He must be an infinite man. A finite man could only die as a substitute for one other person. To die for all he must be an infinite man. Jesus Christ as God is that infinite man.

To be your Savior that infinite man who is to die in your place must himself be innocent, or else he will bear the punishment of his own sin. Jesus Christ is that innocent One "who knew no sin" and "did no sin."

Now will you follow me very carefully. The virgin birth of Christ is essential for these truths. To deny the virgin birth makes Jesus Christ less than infinite (He is only a man), and less than innocent (He is a sinner). Therefore He is disqualified from being your Savior! That is why the virgin birth of Christ is a fundamental of the Christian faith. It is as essential to the Christian faith as the foundation is to a building.

But, let me assure you my friend, you may believe in that doctrine and never be saved. You may believe with all of your heart, because you have been taught it in Catechism or in Sunday School, that He was conceived within the womb of that young lady by a direct act of God and that it was a supernatural birth. But I assure you that believing that doctrine will never save you. You see, salvation is not by believing a creed. It is not by joining a church. It is not by living our lives to a certain code of ethics. Salvation is by receiving a gift.

"The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 6:23

It is only those who have received the gift that are saved. If you have believed all that I have been saying but have not received the gift, then you are not saved - you are not a child of God - you do not have God's salvation. I consider it a tremendous privilege to remind you that the gift that God offers to men and women is the gift of eternal life and that that gift is wrapped up in Jesus Christ. So that when you receive Jesus Christ into your life you possess the gift of God which is eternal life.

On the front page of the Chicago Daily News for many, many years there was published, at Christmas, a cartoon that was drawn by Nobel Prize winner Vaughan Shoemaker. The center of the cartoon was a beautiful Christmas tree, gorgeously decorated. Under the tree there was an unopened present. The gift was labeled "Eternal Life." Scrawled through the cartoon were the beautiful words of scripture, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The title of the cartoon was "The Untaken Gift."

Have you ever taken that gift? Have you received it? It is wrapped up in Jesus Christ who died for you. Will you receive Him just now?

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

John 1:11-12, NASB