

A Miraculous Birth Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction

The birth of Jesus is far from being a myth. It is an event deliberately placed in history. The apostle Paul tells the Galatians, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." ([Galatians 4:4 NKJV](#))

God really did come down in human form. But why would He do this? There are several reasons. One was to provide evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, fulfilling all of the prophecies given in the Old Testament. Another was to provide salvation for the human race to make the Messiah our Substitute.

Those who acknowledge Christ's coming and accept Him as our Creator and Savior receive His promise of everlasting life. Matthew recounts the miraculous birth of Jesus as the Christ in Chapter 1, verses 18 through 25.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother, Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS." ([Matthew 1:18-25 NKJV](#))

I. Is This History or Myth?

Many say this passage is a myth or legend rather than an event of history. The definition of a myth "is a widely held but false belief or idea; a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining some natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events.

Many who refuse to believe in God try to group the birth of Christ in with other myths. Myths are stories that cannot be documented as historical events. History is the study and the documentation of the past. Events before the invention of writing systems are considered prehistory. "History" is an umbrella term comprising past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization,

presentation, and interpretation of these events. Biblical history relies upon an accurate account of an actual event.

Since many educational institutions today have devolved from education to indoctrination, teachers and professors are eager to debunk the Bible as simply a book of mythology. You may have heard that the biblical account of Jesus' unique conception is a myth from college professors—or even liberal theologians.

For instance, William Barclay was one of the most popular Bible teachers of the 20th century. Even though he was ordained in the Church of Scotland, Barclay was a professing universalist. Barclay wrote, "This passage tells us that Jesus was born by the action of the Holy Spirit. It tells us of what we call the Virgin Birth. The Virgin Birth is a doctrine that presents us with many difficulties, and it is a doctrine that our Church does not compel us to accept in the literal and physical sense. This is one of those doctrines on which the Church says that we have full liberty to come to our own belief. If we come to this passage with fresh eyes . . . we will find that the fact which it stresses is not so much that Jesus was born of a woman who was a virgin, as that the birth of Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit." William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 10.

That may sound good to a person who just wants to be religious, but without the Virgin Birth, the Bible itself is quite meaningless. Matthew's account is very different from a myth.

First of all, myths purposefully remove history and place events in the distant past where they are unverifiable. The purpose of most myths is entertainment or moral reflection, not information. But the accounts of Jesus' conception and birth are based firmly in history, complete with genealogy, accurate chronological, geographical references, and eye-witness interviews. The New Testament authors go out of their way to say, "This really happened! It was at this time and place, not long ago at all—and you can still talk to the people who witnessed it!"

Unbelievable miracles are regular occurrences in myths. Since myths are not about the "real world," the characters are expected to perform supernaturally. But Joseph doesn't react like a mythical character! Imagine Mary explaining to Joseph when she starts to show that she's pregnant. If this were a mythical account, Joseph's reaction would be, "Oh, of course. What was the angel's name?" But instead, Joseph reacts like any normal 1st-century fiancée (1:19). He knows how women get pregnant, and it's only an angelic visitation that convinces him not to divorce her!

Some say that the New Testament borrowed the account of Jesus' birth from the pagan/Greek myths. They claim the Virgin Birth is just a different spin on a god having sex with a human woman and bearing a hybrid "super-hero" offspring.

But the Biblical account of the Virgin Birth is vastly different from Greek mythology. Jesus' conception was not the product of a sexual union (human or human-divine). The Holy Spirit supernaturally conceived Jesus in Mary's womb before she ever had

sex. Verse 25 implies what other passages confirm; that Joseph and Mary did have normal sexual relations after Jesus' birth, which resulted in their own children. The point is that Jesus had no human father because he was miraculously conceived, not that there's something wrong with sex. Verse 23 tells us that the child born of Mary is not half-human and half-divine, but Immanuel, "God with us," fully God and fully human.

The Virgin Birth is actually the second miracle in this event; the first miracle is the Incarnation! The Old Testament predicted this in Isaiah 9:6, "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us, a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6 NKJV)

It is also what the New Testament affirms in John. 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1 NKJV)

And verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14 NKJV)

Matthew claims that this account is history, not a myth and that God entered the human race by this unique and supernatural means.

II. God's Purpose

Why did God do this? Did God interrupt Joseph and Mary's lives because he was bored, to make sport of us? I don't think so! The God of the Bible is not capricious; his actions in history are always purposeful and for our good.

Matthew tells us two ways Jesus' unique conception furthered God's good plan for us.

First, God did it to alert us that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Matthew tells us this event was the fulfillment of a prediction made by Isaiah to the house of David over 700 years earlier (1:22,23). God had promised that one of David's descendants would be his chosen Messiah.

But how would Israel know which of those descendants was the promised One? One "sign" would be that the child would be born of a virgin. A virgin birth would obviously be a greater sign than the miraculous births of previous key players like Isaac, Moses, or Samuel.

Isaiah's prophecy is one of many predictions of what we call Jesus' first coming. These Old Testament prophecies were not vague or cryptic predictions but clear, detailed, and preserved in writings hundreds of years beforehand, making it possible to confirm their fulfillment. God doesn't want us to be in the dark about who his Savior is, so he provided this unique way of identifying him.

What are the odds of chance fulfillment of these predictions?

There are over 300 prophecies that point directly to the Messiah.

If you take just 8 of these prophecies:

- The time of His birth (see the Daniel 8 & 9 Timeline).
- He would be born in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2)
- He would be born of a virgin. (Isaiah 7:14)
- He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. (Zechariah 11:12)
- He would be mocked. (Psalm 22:7,8)
- He would be crucified. (John 3:14)
- He would be pierced. (Psalms 22:16)
- He would die with the wicked, but He would be buried with the rich. (Isaiah 53:9)

Mathematics & Astronomy Professor Peter Stoner has stated that the chances of just eight prophecies (like these) coming true by sheer chance are 1 in 10^{17} (100,000,000,000,000,000). That is a lot of zeros! (A number way past the national debt!) It would be equivalent to covering the whole state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep, blindfolding a person, and then expecting them to walk across the state and, on the very first try, find the ONE coin you specially marked. Which takes more blind faith? — to believe that Jesus fulfilled these predictions by chance, or to believe that Jesus is God's chosen Messiah?

God does ask us to take a leap of faith, but it's a reasonable leap, but it's not a blind leap!

The second way Jesus' unique conception and virgin birth furthered God's good plan for us was to provide salvation for the whole human race. Joseph is told in 1:21 to name the Child "Jesus" ("God Saves") because he will save his people from their sins. According to the Bible, "salvation" is realizing that we are being rescued from God's judgment for our sins.

Our need for salvation is rooted in the character of God. God is totally righteous, morally perfect, and completely just. His righteousness and justice demand death as punishment for all violations of his character. All of us have fallen short of his perfect standard, and because of it, we have real moral guilt and deserve his condemnation.

But God is also loving. This doesn't mean that God's love cancels out his righteousness and justice, but because he cares about us so much, he provides a way to pay for our sin and guilt so that he can accept us without compromising his moral character. The heart of biblical theology is the good news that God's love for us provides Jesus as a blameless substitute for us. His death on the Cross pays for our sin and guilt.

Animal sacrifices were central to Old Testament worship to illustrate and instruct people about the nature of their broken fellowship with God and his solution to the problem.

III. God's Perfect Provision

Clearly, these animal sacrifices were just *pictures* of the real solution.

Both logically and biblically, the right Substitute:

- would have to be a member of the human race (Heb. 2:17). Animals can't represent human beings; they aren't even free-will moral agents (Heb. 10:4). Only a human being can take the place of human beings.
- would have to be a sinless human (Heb. 7:26,27). Otherwise, he could only pay for his own sins.
- would also have to be God (1 Tim. 4:10). If he were only a sinless man, he could only die for one other human being. Because Jesus is also God, his death has infinite value. He paid for *all* of the sins of *all* people for *all* time.

This is what the prophets predicted. (Isaiah 53:5,6). There is only one way that such a Substitute could come into the world:

- To be a member of the human race, he would need to be physically born into it through a human mother.
- To be God, he couldn't have a human father, or he would be only human.
- But since God doesn't have a physical body, this Person can't be conceived in the usual way. It would take God supernaturally conceiving this Person in a human mother's womb.

That is precisely what the virgin birth is!

The account of Jesus' supernatural birth is authentic history, not a myth. The Virgin Birth was necessary, so we could recognize and know that Jesus is the Messiah and believe that he could die for the guilt of our sins.

Conclusion

The birth of Jesus is a historical issue, but it is more than that. It is a theological issue, but it is more than that. It is God's personal offer to reconnect with Him spiritually for the purpose of eternal fellowship. It is an offer that requires your personal response.

If you had a life-threatening illness that required major surgery, would you let just anyone do it? I hope not! You would probably look for a recommended surgeon and then check the surgeon's credentials to see if he has the skill and experience to perform your surgery. But finding a trustworthy surgeon alone would not help you because he can't operate without your permission. You would have to make a decision to personally place your life in the surgeon's hands for him to save you

through this surgery. You would have to sign the permission form and allow them to wheel you into the operating room and anesthetize you.

After the surgery, when you regain your health, you would know two things:

- The operation was successful, and the surgeon saved your life, and
- your decision to trust the surgeon was the right thing to do!

God says it is exactly this way with our spiritual sickness. Our sin and guilt before him are spiritually lethal. It is so lethal that only the death of his Son, Jesus, can remove it.

God has provided us with plenty of evidence to know that Jesus is his Son and that he is ready and willing to perform this operation. The truth is, you can know and mentally agree to all this and still die in your sins. Unless you personally entrust yourself to Jesus, the Great Physician, to remove the sins that will destroy your life, he will be of no benefit to you.

The final decision is up to you!