

Truth in Grace

Truth in Grace Ministries

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Dan's Desk

God the Son had existed forever. The Apostle John said *"In the beginning"* (John 1:1). Micah the prophet said *"from long ago, from the days of eternity"* (Micah 5:2). The infinite expanse of the endless universe was His dwelling place and He filled it in His immensity.

He never knew want, for all things necessary to His existence flowed within Himself — for in Him was life. He spoke the word and the Milky Way spun in the palm of His hand. He sprinkled the stars with His fingers and with macroscopic perfection set the planets as jewels in a watch — moving with precision to record the first increments of time. His artistic genius splashed across the canvas of earth in a spectrum of colors and shapes, while a myriad species of living things tumbled out of His sculpting hand to glory in the splendor of His world.

He never knew travel, for wherever it was, He was already there. He never knew confinement, for there were no boundaries in the starless expanse and no limits upon His personal desire. He never knew exhaustion, hunger, thirst, suffering, or pain — for the riches of heaven bedecked Him in His glory, and His formidable strength procured every desire. For the immense, infinite Son of God, this was how it was — in beginning.

Then, in the fullness of time, The Son of God humbled Himself — and entered into a single cell in a woman's womb — and allowed Himself to be confined in the embryonic fluid of His fetal home — and was born of Mary with all of the limitations of a newborn infant. There are many wonders, but this is truly a wonder of wonders. The angels must have stood in awe. The universe must have gasped in disbelief. There must have been silence in heaven as the cherubim were gripped in speechless wonder. It was impossible! Yet it was done. A virgin had conceived.

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Before THE Manger



Totally Unique

Many unusual births have taken place in the history of the world, but there has only been one unique birth. Only One has ever been born as no other has been born. Contrary to all natural law, Jesus Christ was born of a virgin.

The Bible records for us numerous unusual births. The birth of Isaac, for instance, was certainly a newsworthy event. Sarah was unquestionably beyond the years of her reproductive cycle as seen by Paul's use of the phrase, "*the deadness of Sarah's womb*" (Rom. 4:19). Abraham was 100 years old and his ability to provide a viable seed was virtually impossible. That is why Paul said that Abraham was "*In hope against hope*" (Rom. 4:18) with regard to God's promise for a posterity that would rival the sand of the sea and the stars of the heavens for number. Therefore, when the angel of the Lord told Abraham that Sarah would become pregnant, the Bible says that Sarah laughed (Gen. 18:12). "No way," she obviously thought. Yet she conceived — and Isaac was subsequently born in the old age of his parents. That was very unusual, but it was not unique. The natural process of fertilization by sperm and egg was the means of Sarah's conception. Isaac was born just like every other child has ever been born.

There are other stories of miraculous births in the Bible, as well. Both the first prophet of Israel (Samuel) and the last prophet of Israel (John the Baptist) were conceived in their mothers' wombs after years of barrenness. The parallels between these two men are striking in many respects, but the similarity of their birth accounts sets them apart as men of unusual beginnings. In each case, their conception was not unique, however. Elkanah and Hannah both participated in the conception of Samuel, and Zacharias impregnated Elizabeth in the conception of John. Unusual to be sure, but not unique.

In recent years the world has been amazed at the occurrence of multiple births. 1934 saw the birth of the Dionne quintuplets, but it wasn't too long before there were also the Fischer quintuplets. The Rosenkowitzs of South Africa gave birth to the first surviving set of sextuplets in 1974 as multiple births became more frequent due to the increased use of fertility drugs. Even more recently (November 19, 1997), the whole world converged on Carlisle, Iowa (via unprecedented media coverage) to celebrate the birth of the McCaughey septuplets. Bobbi and Kenny McCaughey are perhaps the most well-known parents in the world as a result of the unusual event of the birth of their seven babies. These kinds of multiple births don't happen every day. They are unusual in the sense that they are infrequent. Yet in every case there was a natural conception. They were unusual, but not unique.

Furthermore, we live in a day of unprecedented scientific progress that is continually introducing us to amazing wonders of conception and birth. In vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, and genetic manipulation, all have us on the edge of our seats questioning the propriety and resultant moral implications of man's intrusion upon the prerogatives of deity.

Still, in every case, scientists must take the sperm of a man and the egg of a woman to make it happen. It is all very unusual, but it is still not unique.

Virgin born, on the other hand, is unique. It defies the natural laws of conception and, prior to the birth of Jesus Christ, it had never been known. Even today, after two thousand years, and in spite of man's scientific intrusion into the process, it is still unique. There has never been anything like it in the history of the world. It stands as one of God's great miraculous interventions into the affairs of men. God became a man — and He did it by a virgin birth.

Parthenogenesis

"But," someone will say, "there is a reproductive process known as parthenogenesis, where creatures are conceived without the benefit of fertilization. Aren't such creatures virgin born? Maybe it's not unique after all!"

Parthenogenesis is defined by the Encyclopedia Americana as "reproduction by means of an unfertilized egg or, very rarely, an unfertilized male gamete." The article goes on to say, "It is common among various species of lower animals, including many insects." The word parthenogenesis actually means "virgin born," and describes a reproductive process whereby the eggs of certain species do not need to be fertilized to develop into adults.

The most common occurrence of parthenogenesis is among rotifers, microscopic organisms that live in both salt and fresh water. The presence of a ciliary apparatus on the anterior end has led many to refer to them as "wheel animalcules". These little creatures really do reproduce in a virgin born fashion. Other invertebrates, such as water fleas, aphids and honey bees, also reproduce parthenogenically. The honey bee is an interesting study in this regard, in that the queen bee reproduces both parthenogenically and sexually. The unfertilized eggs (parthenogenesis) develop into drones and the fertilized eggs (sexually) develop into workers.

The Encyclopedia Americana also says, "Parthenogenesis can be induced experimentally in eggs of several animals in which the process apparently does not occur naturally, including sea urchins, frogs, and even rabbits." In fact, it was a man by the name of Pincus in 1940 who actually produced several rabbits simply by inducing chemical and temperature effects upon the ova. The interesting thing here, however, was that all of the offspring produced in this fashion were females. You see, in mammals, all females have two X chromosomes, while all males have one X and one Y chromosome. Therefore, if the unfertilized female egg duplicates its chromosomes in response to some artificial stimulation, it can only produce other X chromosomes. The point is that artificially induced parthenogenesis in mammals can only result in female offspring, since the introduction of a male Y chromosome can only happen through fertilization.

So what does all of this have to say about the virgin birth of Christ? Well, even though virgin births (parthenogenesis) do happen naturally in some invertebrates, and even though they can be induced artificially in certain vertebrates — this unusual reproductive process in the animal kingdom cannot be used to explain the virgin birth of Christ. As Pincus proved, if Mary had conceived parthenogenically, she would have had a daughter, not a son. For her to have had a son would have been scientifically impossible.

The Revelation of God

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is not something we believe because we can prove it by some scientific explanation. We believe in the virgin conception because the Word of God says that that is how it happened. It is a matter of revelation, not a matter of reason. God said so, and that settles it for us.

That does not mean, however, that there are not reasonable evidences to support the biblical claim of the virgin birth. The fact that the Bible does reflect a virgin birth for Jesus Christ is not hard to prove. There is the predictive prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 that specifically says that a virgin would conceive (see the word study on “almah”) and that the product of that conception would be “Immanuel”, which actually means “God (Elohim) with us” (cf. Matt. 1:23). Then Matthew, in his description of the Messianic conception, included specific phrases to insure that we not miss the point. Consider what Matthew has to say:

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... *kept her a virgin* until she gave birth to a Son; he called His name Jesus.”
(Matt. 1:18, 24-25 — emphasis mine)

Furthermore, Luke in his account tells us that Mary responded to the angel’s announcement of her conception with incredulity — “*How can this be, since I know not a man?*” (Luke 1:34, *KJV*). There are liberal clergymen who deny that the Bible teaches the virgin birth of Christ, but I don’t understand how they could miss it. I know Junior Highers that are more precocious in their understanding of “*before they came together*” than those clergymen seem to be. Perhaps those liberals still believe in the stork. Oh well, forgive me for being facetious. The point I am making is — just read it. It’s a no-brainer. The Bible does teach it.

The word used by the Septuagint (OT in Greek) translators of Isaiah 7:14, as well as the word used by Matthew in his first chapter, for the English word “virgin” was the Greek word “parthenos” — a word that means a virgin woman. Therefore, the Bible does say that Jesus Christ was conceived in the womb of a woman (Mary) who was truly a virgin. He was born parthenogenically — not the natural parthenogenesis of lower



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forms of animal life, nor the artificial parthenogenesis of external stimulation on the ova (remember Pincus), but a miraculous parthenogenesis arranged by God that transcended all of the laws of natural reproduction.

According to Isaiah and Matthew, this is the way it had to be. If the offspring of the virgin woman, whom Matthew identifies as Mary of Nazareth, was to truly be “God with us” (“Immanuel”), then the process of His conception could not have been by natural means. All children born of men and women since the days of Adam and Eve have been only human in their nature. It is true that many have become great men who have accomplished amazing things, but none has ever been “Immanuel” — “God with us”. For this reason the virgin birth was a necessity.

Furthermore, if the offspring of Mary were to be a genuine incarnation of deity, then that offspring would have to be both God and man. That would certainly necessitate a human birth (the Word **became flesh** - John 1:14), but at the same time it would necessitate an offspring generated by God. In other

words, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ was a necessity for Him to be “*God with us*” and at the same time for Him to be a genuine incarnation of God in human flesh as the God-Man. Even though the virgin birth cannot be explained apart from the revelation of God, there is therefore, good reason as to why it had to happen that way.

This Christmas, as you look into the manger at the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, remember that the most incred-

ible part of the birth of Christ happened “before the manger.” The miraculous parthenogenic (virgin born) conception of Mary was perhaps the greatest wonder to ever occur in the universe — rivaled only by the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God — who had been born parthenogenically.

Perhaps we should celebrate Christmas on March 25. Think about it. But, then again, I think it is doubtful that Jesus was born in December. Something else to think about. •

A Word from the Word

VIRGIN

Isaiah 7:14

In order for Jesus Christ to be “*God with us*” (Immanuel), He had to be virgin born. The union of a divine nature and a human nature in one Person could not have been accomplished by natural conception. The prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 anticipates this, when it says,

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign:
Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son,
and she will call His name Immanuel.

Yet, there have been liberal scholars, choosing not to believe in the deity of Christ (nor the miraculous), who have challenged this translation of Isaiah 7:14 saying that the Hebrew word translated “virgin” really means “young woman.” The Revised Standard Version of the Bible and the New English Bible, for instance, translate this verse to say “*A young woman is with child.*” Since they don’t believe in the virgin birth, the translators chose the meaning “young woman”, rather than “virgin.”

The word in question is the Hebrew word “*almah*”, which according to *Langensheidt’s Hebrew Dictionary* means “a maiden, a young marriageable woman.” Actually, this word comes from the root word “*alam*” — a verb meaning “to hide, conceal, cover.” The idea, then, is of a young woman that is covered or veiled, who is being protected (hidden away or concealed). That is why *Strong’s Concordance* reflects the meaning of “*almah*” as “a lass (as veiled or private).” The implication, then, is that she is young, inexperienced, protected by her family, and reserved for the man who will become her husband. It is truly the idea of a virgin woman.

This word is used seven times in the Old Testament — Gen. 24:43; Exod. 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Prov. 30:19; Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8; Isa. 7:14. Sometimes it is translated “maiden” or “damsel” where the virgin nature of the woman (or women) is implied, but not stated. The first time it is used, however, there is no question about the virgin status of the

woman. Abraham’s servant is explaining to Laban how he had prayed to the Lord saying “...and may it be that the maiden [“*almah*”] who comes out to draw (water)...” would be the right woman to become Isaac’s bride (Gen. 24:43). Earlier in the chapter, however, a description of Rebekah is given in verse 16 which says, “And the girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her...” It is very clear in this text, therefore, that “*almah*” is referring to a virgin woman.

In addition to the use of the word in the Old Testament, there are two other factors that are conclusive in their proof that “*almah*” in Isaiah 7:14 should indeed be translated as “a virgin”. The first is to notice how the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) reflects this verse. It uses the Greek word “*parthenos*” as the translation for the Hebrew word “*almah*”. In Greek, the word “*parthenos*” specifically means “a virgin”. These Hebrew scholars, seeking to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, understood “*almah*” in Isaiah 7:14 to be referring to a virgin woman.

The second conclusive factor, is to observe how the Holy Spirit led Matthew to translate Isaiah 7:14 in his Gospel. In Matthew 1:23, he actually quotes from Isaiah 7:14 and, just as the Septuagint translators had done, he chose the word “*parthenos*” (a virgin) to render the meaning of “*almah*”. Furthermore, he used descriptive phrases like — “...before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit” (v. 18), and “and kept her a virgin [parthenos] until she gave birth to a Son” (vs. 25) — so there could be no misunderstanding about what he was saying.

So there you have it. “*Almah*” in Isaiah 7:14 really does mean “a virgin”. This prophetic pronouncement concerning the coming Messiah was astounding — a virgin woman would conceive and bear a Son. The Bible does teach the virgin birth of Christ — a fact that is foundational to the truth that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

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Truth in Grace

Bits & Pieces

...In our last Bits & Pieces, we anticipated the possibility of a European Reformation tour in the summer of 2000. Y2K predictions are causing many to be cautious about plans for touring in 2000, however — so, we're going to hang tight too. No plans for now, but stay tuned.

...Response to our first tape album "The Prayer Puzzle" has been encouraging. Many have expressed how it has helped them gain a better understanding of prayer. Praise the Lord!

...We're still plugging away at preparation for a radio ministry, but we're having to exercise a little patience with timing. Pray for us as we continue to seek the Lord for His direction in this endeavor.

...Two new tape albums — we're excited! Thanks Robert and Scott for all of your hard work. So, what's next?

...Many new faces at Grace Church these days — people seeking the Lord and anxious to study His Word. What a blessing! It's encouraging to see God at work in the hearts of people for His glory. We hope that's also true for you.

...With talk of global recession and Y2K computer failures, it will be important to keep our eyes on the Lord in '99 — that is 1999. Remember, God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

The Truth in Grace Staff

wishes you

A Christmas

filled with

the inspiration of

God's Truth

and

A New Year

in which

you truly rejoice in

God's Grace

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