

Christmas Lesson

The Miracle of the Virgin Birth

MAIN IDEA

The miracle of Jesus' incarnation reminds us that God specializes in doing the impossible.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

In John 3:16, what do the words “only begotten son” mean?

STUDY AIM

The life of Jesus is the most significant evidence of his supernatural birth and deity.

QUICK READ

There is a continual decline of Christians who believe in the virgin birth. Unbelief is man's greatest problem.



Introduction

Like many, I grew up around a garden. My earliest days were filled with a sense of wonder as my grandfather explained the miracle of growing vegetables. I remember tilling the soil, dropping in seeds, covering them with dirt, watering them, and then waiting. Every day, I would walk to the garden to see if the miracle had transpired. Every day, I thought *Today might be the day!* Finally, there came that glorious moment when I could see little green shoots peeking up through the soil. Wide-eyed, all I could say was, “Wow!”

How sad it is that we tend to lose that sense of wonder as we age. Especially in western cultures, we quickly explain away miracles. We have a scientific explanation for why plants grow, for example. We know all about DNA and photosynthesis and the like. Therefore, there’s no miracle to see. Right?

Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is because science has discovered the reality of things such as photosynthesis that the miracle of life is evident! Because I know about DNA strands and how they work, I can see it is truly a miracle beyond all miracles that life exists. These miracles scream at us that God is real, and he created everything. Life, itself, is a miracle.

Matthew 1:18–25

¹⁸ 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.

The Miracle of the Virgin Birth (1:18)

Yes, life is a miracle. An ordered beautiful world is also a miracle. Our Almighty God has created everything. Genesis 1 tells us that in six days the Lord created everything: the heavens and the earth, light, the waters, dry land, plants that reproduce after their type, animals that also reproduce after their type, the sun, the moon, the stars and the seasons, the birds, the fish, and other animals both domesticated and wild. Then, as the crown of his Creation, God created humankind in his image to have dominion over all that he had made. Everything you know and experience in this world—the sunlight, the cool breezes that blow across your face, broccoli, your dog, and, of course, all of the people in your life—is a miracle of God. While we may deem these things routine or ordinary, they most certainly are not. For our Creator, even what we may call ordinary is still the greatest of miracles.

Sometimes, however, God chooses to perform a miracle that surpasses the day-to-day marvels of life. The virgin birth is such a miracle. The Holy Spirit of God made Mary pregnant. Luke’s Gospel describes that miracle:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin . . . and the virgin’s name was Mary . . . And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High . . .” And Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of

the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (Luke 1:26–35 excerpts)

So, the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, and she became pregnant. Matthew 1:18 states simply, “before they came together [Mary] was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” An extraordinary miracle of God transpired, and Matthew made sure we know that Joseph (the man to whom Mary was engaged) and Mary did not have sexual relations until after Jesus was born. Jesus indeed was virgin born.

The Miracle of Joseph’s Vision and Heart (1:19–20)

Was Joseph hurt by the revelation of Mary’s pregnancy? Of course. Mary’s perceived unfaithfulness would have brought shame to Joseph and his family. He could have used the laws and cultural pressures of his day to take his revenge against Mary. Joseph had every right to do so, but he chose restraint. He did not want to punish Mary with public judgments and humiliation. He was a good man, indeed. Matthew’s Gospel tells us: “being a just man, and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly” (1:19).

Notice that it was after Joseph had displayed his kind heart that he received the angelic vision. Look carefully at the difference made by the angel’s message to Joseph. Before the angel’s visit, Joseph, the good man, was still going to divorce Mary but not publicly disgrace her. After the angel’s visit, Joseph decided to follow through with his marriage to Mary,

The Greatest Miracle

Some people say God doesn’t do modern-day miracles. Open your eyes. Life itself is a relentless and powerful testimony to God’s presence, love, and sovereignty. Miracles, such as our ability to see beauty, give and receive love, have cherished relationships, are on display daily. The greatest miracle of all is that God saves people through Jesus Christ!

believing, alongside her, that God's Holy Spirit conceived the child she carried. Don't miss this vital point. We know that Mary was asked to believe that God's Holy Spirit would conceive the baby, but Joseph was asked to believe as well. From both Mary and Joseph, obedience to God required faith and action.

Jesus' Miracle Purpose (1:21–25)

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Every believer should memorize this verse. It is the gospel in twenty-one words. Call him, "Jesus," the angel said.

The Gospels of Luke and Matthew tell us that the angel told Mary and Joseph what to name the baby. Why call him Jesus? Because he would save his people from their sins. The name Jesus is simply the Greek version of the Hebrew name Joshua. The name Joshua means, "The Lord saves." Jesus came to the earth and lived among human beings as one of us for a singular purpose: to save us from our sins. God chose to bless the world with forgiveness of sins made available by the death of Jesus on the cross.

The Book of 1 Peter describes Jesus' sacrifice for sins this way: "For Christ also suffered for sins. The righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (3:18). Again, a few words encapsulate the whole gospel. We are sinners who will die separated from God in an eternal hell, and there's nothing we can do about it. But God could and did. And because Jesus, the righteous one, died for us, the unrighteous ones, we can be brought home to God. We can have salvation and eternal life through Jesus. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Implications and Actions

What now? All we have to do is believe in him; to put our faith and trust in him. Have you? When I was eight years old, I said a simple prayer in which I confessed I was a sinner, expressed my belief in Jesus and asked him to

In the Lineage of God

While we don't say "begat" today, the word retains weighty meaning and speaks of the importance of lineage. Used of Jesus, it expresses with certainty that he is the Son of God.

forgive my sins and save me. I believe Jesus did so in that very moment. I knew little about the Bible or theology when I was eight years old, but I knew enough. And now this verse lives in me through the power and promise and Holy Spirit of God: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The greatest miracle God desires to work in your life is your salvation. Why not pray and ask Jesus to save you right now?

Questions

1. Have you asked Jesus to be your Savior? Tell someone about it!
2. How difficult would it have been for Mary and Joseph to believe the virgin birth? How do you think they talked to their friends and family about it?
3. Do you think most Christians today believe in the virgin birth of Jesus? Why or why not? What different do you think it makes?

Our Next New Study

(Available for use beginning March 2020)

Faith Under Fire

A STUDY OF DANIEL

Lesson 1	A Diet for Success	Daniel 1:1–21
Lesson 2	The Impossible Dream	Daniel 2:1–30
Lesson 3	The Dream Revealed	Daniel 2:31–49
Lesson 4	Cool in the Furnace	Daniel 3:1–30
Lesson 5	Put Out to Pasture	Daniel 4:1–37
Lesson 6	The Handwriting on the Wall	Daniel 5:1–31
Lesson 7	Living in the Lion's Den	Daniel 6:1–28
Lesson 8	Back to the Future	Daniel 7:1–28
Lesson 9	A Glimpse of the Future	Daniel 8:1–27
Lesson 10	Daniel's Prayer of Confession	Daniel 9:1–23
Lesson 11	The Beginning of the End	Daniel 9:23–27
Lesson 12	The Power of Prayer	Daniel 10:1–21
Lesson 13	History in the Making	Daniel 11:1–45
Lesson 14	Shine Like the Stars	Daniel 12:1–13
Easter Lesson	Because He Lives	Matthew 28:1–15