

“The Lord Himself Will Give You a Sign...”—Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:35; Isaiah 7:14

Brandon Holiski
Southern Oaks Baptist Church
December 12, 2021

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Let me invite you to take a Bible and meet me in Luke 1...

Christmas is such a wonderful time of year, particularly when we don't lose sight of what it is truly about. I'm so grateful to Tony, the choir, and the orchestra for all their hard work that went into reminding us about the true meaning of Christmas—Christ Himself, born to save.

We live in a place that takes very seriously Christmas, but not nearly so seriously the meaning of Christmas. May it not be so for us. Our Christmas Eve service is always dedicated to reading the New Testament's account of this story, so I would encourage you to join us again for that service. This morning, I would like to highlight one piece of that story and one specific feature of that piece. To do so, we need to hear the Word of God. I'll begin reading in verse 26 of Luke 1. Please follow along as I do. This is God's Word...

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ ³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.’ ³⁸ And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.” (Luke 1:26-38)

There are many interesting aspects that we could consider from these verses. But I would like to focus on, in our brief time this morning, the fact of the virgin birth (or conception). Luke tells us that this was meant as a sign and fulfilled a prophecy uttered hundreds of years before by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 7:14). And it is a key and mysterious part of the Advent story.

It is Matthew and Luke who tell us about the virgin birth, and neither of these men would have been the gullible type. Matthew, prior to following Jesus, was a tax-collector for the Romans. When have you ever known a tax-collector to just take your word for things? No. Tax-collecting, especially in that day, was *not* a profession for the gullible.

Similarly, Luke was a medical doctor. Sure, our understanding of medicine has come a long way, but it would be pretty ignorant and arrogant for us to think that they didn't understand the circumstances that lie behind a pregnancy. When we read the biblical account of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph's “problem arose not because he didn't know the facts of life, but because he did.”¹ And it seems likely that Luke consulted with Mary herself because he twice records statements that she “treasured up all these things” in her heart (Luke 2:18, 51),

suggesting that she shared with him some of her thinking. This is another example from his writings that he did his research.

The miraculous circumstances of Jesus' birth, while often acknowledged in our day by Christians, are not often enough lingered over. "Without any compromises to his true humanity, God gave markers that this man [born to Mary] was more than a mere man."² And chief among those markers was the virgin birth. Donald Macleod wrote the following:

"The virgin birth is posted on guard at the door of the mystery of Christmas; and none of us must think of hurrying past it. It stands on the threshold of the New Testament, blatantly supernatural, defying our rationalism, informing us that all that follows belongs to the same order as itself and that if we find it offensive there is no point in proceeding further."³

I love that he describes it as "blatantly supernatural" and "defying our rationalism." Is it any wonder that it has been so often attacked in recent centuries? Yet denying the doctrine is dangerous because it opens "the door to denying anything plainly affirmed in the Bible."⁴ Those who deny the virgin birth will find that it's not the last part of the Bible they eventually go on to deny.

What I would like to do though, with the remainder of our time, is to reflect on this choice of God to send His Son in this fashion. I have no interest in detailing an apologetic for Mary's conception. I simply assume it today and am happy to describe it as both supernatural and unique. But the question I would like for us to consider briefly together this morning is "Why might it be that God chose to do things this way?"⁵ David Mathis offers four suggestions that I think are worth considering, so I've adopted and adapted them for our purposes. This is not an exhaustive list. I do not presume to know the mind of God and all the reasons He may have chosen to work through the virgin Mary. But I do believe these are viable suggestions. Number one...

The Virgin Birth Showcases the Inexplicable *Only God Can Do It*

I've mentioned this already, but it's worth saying again: the circumstances of Christ's conception were supernatural. There was nothing ordinary about it. It was a miracle that would not have been possible apart from a divine act. Mary knew this. When she was told that she was about to endure a pregnancy, she asks "*How will this be?*" (Luke 1:34). And the Scriptures tell us...

"...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 1:35)

Her pregnancy was inexplicable without God. It was supernatural. And this means that Jesus' first coming was bracketed by miraculous acts. As Mathis explains:

"At one end of Jesus' earthly life lies his supernatural conception and birth; at the other, his supernatural resurrection and his ascension to God's right hand. At both ends, the God-man's authenticity is attested to by the supernatural working of his Father."⁶

Second...

The Virgin Birth Showcases Human Inability *Only God Can Save*

Human sin creates a rift between God and man. Every sinner—and the Bible says that all of us have sinned—is separated from God. When we die, the outworking of that separation takes a terrifying shape—a literal hell—

that is full and final. When we speak of salvation, we are speaking of a salvation from that divine judgment, the judgment that God owes us for our sin since He is a just God. No one wants to experience that. And when it dawns on us that this is what we deserve and where we are heading, it's understandable that we would want to be saved from such a fate.

The problem is that, while we need saving, we cannot save ourselves. The standard is perfection, and we all missed the mark. We can't make ourselves holy any more than a muddy kid can wipe off the mud from his clothing with his muddy hands. It's not going to happen. The virgin birth is meant to remind us that "humanity needs a saving that it cannot bring about for itself. The fact that the human race couldn't produce its own redeemer implies that its sin and guilt are profound and that its Savior must come from outside."⁷ Mary couldn't orchestrate the arrival of the Savior, because only God can save. He acted in a way that reminds us that only He can bring the salvation that all of us need. And, in this way, third...

The Virgin Birth Showcases Divine Initiative *Only God Has Saved*

Salvation begins and ends with God. It has to. We saw that last week from Romans, where Paul describes a salvation that begins with God's choice (election) and ends with glorification in His presence. Every step along the way is attributed to God. He is the subject of every verb. It's what God does. In short: God saves. As Mathis writes,

"[I]n the virgin birth, God's initiative is on display. The angel didn't ask Mary about her willingness. He announced, 'Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus' (Luke 1:31). God didn't ask Mary's permission (although she would have readily granted it, Luke 1:38). He acted—gently but decisively—to save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)."⁸

And thank God He did! For without His initiative, we would still be in our sins and would have no hope of salvation.

Finally,

The Virgin Birth Showcases the Incarnation *Only One God-Man*

Christmas is a holiday about the arrival of the Savior—Jesus Christ. But God the Son became one of us. He became human. The virgin birth that we remember at Christmas "hints at the fully human and fully divine nature united in Jesus' one person."⁹ One theologian by the name of Wayne Grudem put it like this:

"God, in his wisdom, ordained a combination of human and divine influence in the birth of Christ, so that his full humanity would be evident to us from the fact of his ordinary human birth from a human mother, and his full deity would be evident from the fact of his conception in Mary's womb by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰

What an extraordinary thought. He truly is Immanuel, God with us. Fully God. Fully Man. The God-man. The only one who can save. The perfect mediator between God and man. Jesus.

You know about Him because you live in a place that celebrates His birth. But there is a difference between knowing *about* a person and knowing a person *personally*. You can know Him in a personal way this morning, if you don't already. He invites you to come to Him. To receive Him as your Lord. To trust Him to do what you

cannot do for yourself—save. And His Word assures us that He will not turn away any sinner who turn from their sinful ways and sinful self-reliance to trust instead in Him to save.

This is why Jesus came. This is why Jesus came as a man. He came to offer Himself up in our place on the cross, taking the penalty for our sin, and emerging victoriously over sin and death so that all who trust in Him could experience the same fate. Have you trusted in Christ alone as your only hope in life and death? If so, then you know the true gift of Christmas because you have a true relationship with Christ Himself. If not, you can. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you will be saved. You've never really celebrated Christmas, until you have been able to celebrate the forgiveness of sins and the eternal life that He offers freely to all who believe. Trust Him today and you'll know the true meaning of Christmas...

Let's pray...

¹ N. T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (Eerdmans, 1993), 78.

² David Mathis, *The Christmas We Didn't Expect* (The Good Book Company, 2020), 29.

³ Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (InterVarsity Press, 1998), 37; also cited in Mathis, 29-30.

⁴ Mathis, 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 1994), 530; also cited in Mathis, 31.