

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

UNDERSTANDING THE VIRGIN BIRTH

by the Rev. Christopher R. J. Smith

The Virgin Birth refers to the way in which Jesus was born. The angel Gabriel had told Mary that she was going to have a child. Mary did not see how this could be true, for she was still a virgin. She said, "I know not a man," meaning that she had not received a man's seed that is necessary for conception. (Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but they had not yet begun to live together as husband and wife.)

In spite of not "knowing" Joseph, Mary was going to have a child, according to the angel. How could this be? When Joseph noticed that Mary was pregnant, he naturally assumed that she had been unfaithful to him, that she had committed adultery and he decided to divorce her.

"But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'"

If anyone had reason to doubt the possibility of the Virgin Birth, it was Joseph and even Mary herself. But they showed a real willingness to believe what the Lord explained to them by means of an angel.

If a person should deny this explanation, refusing to believe that the Virgin Birth was possible, then that person must assume that Joseph, or perhaps some other man in the village of Nazareth, was the father of Jesus. If that were true, then Jesus Christ could not be God. He could not be Divine. He would have to be considered as just an ordinary man, although a great leader and prophet like Moses or Elijah.

The reason that Jesus is not an ordinary man, but is God Himself, is the fact that Joseph is *not* His father. Unlike us, He already existed before He was born on this earth. Therefore He had to be the father of Himself!

For a woman to conceive a child, there must be a father. From the father comes the soul. It is the soul that is the secret place in which the Lord lives and is able to give life to every single person. By our soul, the Lord organizes the physical and spiritual food that is taken from the world and makes our body and mind. Without a soul, we could not exist; any more than mixing the right proportions of chemicals together could turn into a human being!

Jesus, the first child to be conceived in Mary's womb, had a father and therefore a soul. But the soul was provided in a very special way—by the Lord's own direct action—by the power of the Holy Spirit that comes from the Lord.

Without going through the seed of an ordinary man, the Lord worked directly in Mary's womb to build a little body for Him, taking the necessary food from Mary's body in the way any child is formed. The Lord was still working by His own laws of nature!

After birth, the little helpless Child that was born was like any baby. But different from any other child, the soul of the baby Lord was God Himself—our Father in heaven. That is why, long before His birth, it was prophesied by Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means God with us)" (Isaiah 7:14; Matt. 1:23).

Gradually, during the thirty-three years He was on this earth, the Lord "glorified" His body. Everything that had been taken from Mary was slowly removed so that the actual body the Lord had was all His own. It was the Lord Himself, in His very own body (the Divine Human), which the disciples saw after the Resurrection.

You may have asked why did the Lord take so long to make a body for Himself? Why thirty-three years? Why didn't He just somehow come into the world as a grown man to give us His teachings and to show us the miracles He did? *That* would have been impossible. It would have meant breaking His laws of order, and that the Lord would never do. How could the Lord suddenly arrive as a man from nowhere?

By being born of a virgin, the Lord not only followed His own laws of creation, but He showed us that He is willing to live the same kind of life that we do. He had the same kind of struggles and temptations. So He has not only given us an example, but, by what He did on this earth, by His teachings, His miracles, and His conquering and putting back in his place every single evil person in hell, the Lord has made it possible for people on earth to live happily.

Now, because of the Virgin Birth, because He took on a body in this world, the Lord is no longer just a voice that spoke from the Holy of Holies, or a voice that spoke to the prophets. He has shown us that He is a Man, that He is a Person, and that He very much cares for us.

Because we now know this, it is much easier to picture the Lord, or to see Him in our mind, and therefore much easier for us to believe Him, talk to Him, appreciate Him, follow Him, and, yes, to love Him.

Texts: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38