

Why on Earth Did Jesus Come?

Jesus, Born of a Virgin

Selected Texts

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Introduction

Several years ago Larry King, the well-known CNN television talk-show host, was asked, “If you could interview anyone in all of history, who would that person be?”

Do you know what he said? “Jesus Christ!”

“And what would you like to ask him?” the questioner asked.

“I would like to ask him,” King replied, “if he was indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me.”²

Whatever Larry King meant, to speak of Jesus as “virgin-born” can be misleading, because there was nothing unusual about his birth. Jesus left his mother’s womb in the same way we all did. What set Jesus apart is not how he *left* his mother’s womb, but how he *entered* it—and the Bible’s testimony about this is startling!

The Bible states that Jesus was conceived in Mary’s womb *without* sexual intercourse—that is, she became pregnant while still a virgin. This is just one of the ways that Jesus is unique.

Now, some argue that in our day *in vitro* fertilization, embryonic transfer, and artificial insemination make it perfectly possible for a woman to become pregnant without sexual intercourse. So, they say, Jesus is not so unique, after all.

However, they completely miss the point, because in every case male sperm is needed. In our day male sperm is provided by a male donor. However, *in the case of Jesus there was none!*

So, it is more accurate to speak of the *virgin conception* of Jesus rather than the *virgin birth* of Jesus, because there was nothing unusual about his birth but there was everything miraculous about his conception!

¹ Much of the material for this message is from John Blanchard, *Why on Earth Did Jesus Come?* (Carlisle, PA: EP Books, 2010).

² *Just Thinking*, RZIM, Winter 1998.

Lesson

Throughout history, the idea of Jesus being born without Mary receiving any male sperm has been ridiculed for many different reasons.

In this lesson, I would like to review some objections to the virgin conception of Jesus.

I. The Virgin Conception Was a Myth to Cover Up the Fact That Jesus Had a Human Father

The first objection is that the virgin conception was a myth to cover up the fact that Jesus had a human father.

When Joseph first heard the news that Mary was pregnant, he was shattered. Since he was not the father, he could only think that Mary had cheated on him, and so as far as he was concerned the marriage was off. He decided to divorce Mary, which was what was required for a betrothal in those days. However, before he could divorce her, God told him to go ahead with the marriage, as Mary's pregnancy was not the result of adultery but the miraculous intervention of God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:19-21). So, all the testimony points to the fact that Joseph was not the human father of Jesus.

Other early skeptics said that the virgin conception was a myth created to cover up the fact that Jesus was fathered by a Roman soldier named Panthera, or Pandira, but this desperate attempt to undermine the beginnings of Christianity never had a shred of evidence to back it up.

II. The Virgin Conception Was Invented by Jesus' Followers to Outdo Stories about Pagan Gods

A second objection is that the virgin conception was invented by Jesus' followers to outdo stories about pagan gods.

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For example, Buddha's mother claimed that a white elephant with six tusks "entered my belly."³

The mother of the Greek god Perseus was supposed to have been impregnated by a shower of golden rain containing the supreme god Zeus, who had quite a reputation for fathering children in bizarre ways. He was even said to have turned himself into a serpent to fertilize Olympius, the wife of the Madeconian king Philip of Madedon, an escapade that led to the birth of Alexander the Great.

These grotesque stories bear no resemblance whatsoever to the Bible's record of the virgin conception. In fact, there is no pagan parallel to the virgin conception of Jesus.

Can we really expect that a respectable Jew like Matthew, committed to the highest moral standards, invented something that would outdo the most outrageous and bizarre births in pagan culture, and then declared this work to be God's?

The whole idea never gets off the ground.

III. The Virgin Conception Is a Miracle

A third objection is that the virgin conception is a miracle.

The specific form of this objection is that a woman conceiving a child without receiving male sperm would be a miracle, and since miracles never happen, the whole idea is preposterous.

Not quite! One dictionary describes a miracle as an event "that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws."⁴ We can accept this as a working definition, but to begin investigating something that appears to be a miracle by saying that such a thing never happens is not only irrational but dishonest, as it pronounces the verdict before examining the evidence. As the British apologist, C. S. Lewis, put it, "Those who assume that miracles cannot happen are merely wasting their time by looking into the texts: we know in advance what they will find, for they have begun by begging the

³ Cited by Robert Gromacki, *The Virgin Birth*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008), 12.

⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 1120.

question.”⁵

Since God brought all the laws of nature into existence, surely he has the right to suspend any of them to fulfill his own purposes? We cannot truly believe the God of the Bible if we trim his power to suit our own understanding of how things happen. As the British author Robert Horn wrote, “A non-supernatural God is a contradiction in terms. If God exists at all *he is God*—with powers, wisdom and knowledge infinitely greater than ours.”⁶

However unlikely they may appear to us, miracles are not a problem to God. For him there is no distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Natural events reflect God’s *usual* way of working, and supernatural events his *unusual* way of working. God designed sexual intercourse as the natural way for human beings to have children—but to deny that he can overrule this if he chooses to do so is ignorance masquerading as intelligence. As the angel told Mary when announcing that she would conceive Jesus while still a virgin, “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

IV. The Virgin Conception Is a Story Designed to Deflect Attention Away from a Physical Relationship between a Husband and Wife

A fourth objection is that the virgin conception is story designed to deflect attention away from a physical relationship between a husband and wife.

Some have suggested that the Jews were rather puritanical about sexual matters and considered sexual intercourse to be “unclean.” So, they invented a story—the virgin conception—that shied away from any suggestion that Jesus came about as the result of a physical relationship between a husband and wife.

This suggestion is ridiculous, as the Bible has a robustly healthy view towards sex and never ever suggests that within the bounds of marriage that sex is tainted in any way at all.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London, England: Collins, 1947), 8.

⁶ Robert Horn in *Evangelism Today*, March 1985.

V. The Virgin Conception Is Doubtful Because There Is No Other Mention of It in the New Testament

A fifth objection is that the virgin conception is doubtful because there is no other mention of it in the New Testament.

And not only is there no mention of it in the New Testament, say some, there is no mention of the virgin conception by the Early Church's preachers.

But an argument from silence is notoriously weak. Can we assume that because Shakespeare never mentions Canterbury Cathedral he had never heard of it?

We should also note that the apostle Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, states that Jesus was "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4), a phrase used nowhere else in the Bible and which strongly points to virgin conception.

VI. The Virgin Conception Is a Case of Parthenogenesis

And a sixth and final objection is that the virgin conception is a case of parthenogenesis.

"Parthenogenesis" is a form of reproduction in which the embryo or seeds grow and develop in the female of the species without fertilization by a male. This is extremely unusual, though it does occur in a few plants (such as roses and orange trees), and in certain fish, birds, and reptiles. It has also been noted in sharks, whiptails, geckos, rock lizards, and some other creatures—*but never naturally in mammals*.

In any case, this cannot have happened in the case of Jesus, for one very simple reason. In the genetic make-up of human beings, the male has "x" and "y" chromosomes, while the female has "x" and "x" chromosomes. If Mary's pregnancy had been triggered by some unique biological freak, *the child born would have been female*, as no "y" chromosome would have been present to produce a male child.

Conclusion

The fact is that Jesus was conceived by a virgin without receiving any male sperm. It was, quite simply, a miracle.

So, why on earth did Jesus come? Jesus said that “the Son of Man [i.e. Jesus] came to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Jesus came to save people who were lost because of their sins—and that includes all of us. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. He eventually died on a Roman cross to pay the penalty for sin, but not his sin, for he had none. He paid the penalty for sinners like you and me.

And so this Christmas I invite you, if you have never done so, admit to God that you are a sinner. Recognize that you deserve to pay the penalty for your own sin. Ask Jesus to pay the penalty for *your* sin.

If you turn from your sin and trust in Jesus Christ, you will find that God will forgive you and grant you the gift of eternal life.

I pray that you will do so tonight. Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for virgin conception of Jesus. Thank you that he was uniquely conceived and therefore not tainted by sin from birth like all of us.

If there is anyone here tonight who wants Jesus to pay the penalty for his or her sin, pray this simple prayer quietly with me:

O Lord, I know that I am a sinner. I have broken your law. I am a slave to sin. If I die in my current state, I will go to hell for all eternity. Jesus, I believe that you have paid the full price for all of my sin in order to forgive me. I repent of all my wrongdoing and sin. Receive me now into your kingdom.

Father, will you answer this prayer that has just been prayed? Would you grant the gift of faith and repentance? Would you receive each believing and repentant sinner into your kingdom?

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.