

Virgin Birth

Discussion Guide for Luke 1:26-38

Birth of Jesus Foretold

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed[a] 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!"[b] 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?"[c]

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[d] 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[e] of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Discussion Guide for Luke 1:26-38

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

– **Isaiah 7:14**

"I believe...in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, light of light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made Man;"

– **Nicene Creed**

One of the best parts of Christmas is that it's a holiday meant for children. We take great joy in the traditions we get to share with our children: presents, games, and teaching the story of

Christmas so they can tell it back to us.

Even though we rightfully gear most of our Christmas activities to children, there is one crucial element every child has heard, but cannot understand or appreciate until adulthood. That element is the virgin birth.

After being present for the entire process of bringing four children into the world, I can now fully understand the absurdity of the idea of a virgin birth to the natural mind.

If a cult began today that said that Kurt Cobain was born of a virgin, we would dismiss it as sheer stupidity and have many good laughs at the expense of such a cult. People would produce a birth certificate and eyewitness accounts that Kurt Cobain had a mother and father, that there was, in fact, a sexual relationship between Kurt Cobain's mother and father, and that Kurt Cobain lived a flawed life that indicated he is every bit as human as the rest of us.

The significance of Luke's account of a virgin birth is that he is writing about the same amount of time after Jesus as someone would be writing today about Kurt Cobain. Luke was meticulously showing that a prophesied event had come to pass. There was ample opportunity for living people at the time to refute the claim that Jesus was born of a virgin. Yet the early church was born and thrived holding as a central tenet that Jesus was begotten by God and born of a virgin. This birth must be something extraordinarily special!

Even though no one could refute the facts of the birth of Jesus, the virgin birth has been a stumbling block for belief in Jesus from the earliest days of Christianity.

Interestingly, for many early gnostics (a group of early-church heretics), the problem of the virgin birth was not with the word "virgin" but with the word "birth." They "knew" that God was spirit and would not defile himself with flesh. It was impossible that Jesus could have been born of a woman. Birth, after all, is a very dirty and human process unfit for a deity.

The Arians, heretics for whom the Nicene Creed was written to refute, later contended that Jesus could not have existed in eternity as God. The fact that he was born proved for the Arians that Jesus was a created being who merely possessed special divine attributes.

The ecumenical creeds from Nicene (325) to Chalcedon (451) went to great lengths to precisely define Jesus' relationship with the Father as the New Testament defines it: "begotten, not made." The theological implication of the virgin birth is that Jesus is fully God and fully man, of one substance with the Father, possessing none of man's sin nature, but with two natures wholly existing in one person. This is known as the "hypostatic union."

We need to understand what is at stake today when folks claim either that the virgin birth did not happen or that it does not matter (as Rob Bell famously did in his popular book, *Velvet Elvis*).

Science tells us that that a virgin birth could not happen. No need for us to explain the birds and bees here. If you close your mind to any knowledge that might be supernatural, then it is impossible to accept a virgin birth.

A Christian must accept that while science is a vitally important way of understanding the order with which God created the universe, it cannot give us the tools to understand how God intervenes in that order supernaturally.

It's always curious to me that Stephen Hawking tells us that miracles don't exist because science does not possess the tools with which to explain the realm of miracles. Angels did not bring messages because science does not document angels bringing messages. He then turns around and says that aliens absolutely must exist because humans do not yet have to tools to see into realm of aliens. This should be an obvious logical fallacy.

Discussion Questions

- What have been your own struggles with coming to terms with something as absurd to our natural minds as a virgin birth?
- Does the story of the virgin birth give you more confidence or less confidence in the rest of the Bible? Why or why not?
- Do you think the faith through which we are saved is any different than the faith with which Mary received the message of Gabriel?
- How do you think Mary is often misunderstood by our traditions?
- How does Mary serve as a person of inspiration to Christians today?
- Have you changed your opinion today about the importance of the virgin birth?
- Does the uniqueness of Jesus' birth give you confidence to place your faith in Him and proclaim him as the only savior?