

Matthew or only to the genealogy? Why is it called "the book of the generation"?

8. Into what basic divisions did Matthew divide the names?
9. Where could Matthew find the names in his lists to verify the accuracy of his writing?
10. What names does Matthew omit? Was this omission accidental; or, what good purpose could be served by such omissions?
11. Do omissions from Matthew's list frustrate the purpose of the list?
12. Why were the Hebrews so meticulous about keeping genealogies?
13. Is it possible for modern Jews to prove descent from David for any modern claimant of the Messiahship? Why?
14. Why is finding a practical solution to these problems important to the Bible student and important to Christian faith?

Section 2

THE ANNUNCIATION TO JOSEPH

TEXT: 1:18-25

18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.
19. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.
20. But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.
21. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.
22. Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying,
23. Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us.
24. And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife;
25. and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Mary is "betrothed" to Joseph, why does the angel speak of her as his "wife"?
- b. Why did not Joseph believe that Mary was an expectant mother by the power of the Holy Spirit? Had not Mary told him of the angel's visit to her?
- c. Why was Joseph convinced by what occurred in the dream?
- d. What do you think would be thought of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth?
- e. Why do you think God chose this method to bring His Son into the world? Or, could Jesus have been the Savior of men had He been the natural son of Joseph and Mary? Why do you think so?

PARAPHRASE

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in the following manner: When His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before their marriage (while she was yet a virgin), she was discovered to be an expectant mother whose pregnancy was caused by the Holy Spirit. Whereupon, Joseph, her husband, because he was an upright man and because he was unwilling to expose her to contempt, decided to divorce her quietly. But while he was turning the matter over in his mind, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for her child has been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to name Him Jesus, because it is He who shall save His people from their sins."

All of this occurred with the result that it fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through Isaiah the prophet—"Behold, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel." ("Immanuel" is a Hebrew word meaning "God with us.")

So, when Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had directed him. He received Mary into his house, but had no intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.

SUMMARY

Joseph, unaware of the real cause of his fiancée's pregnancy, decided upon a quiet divorce. God clarified her position to him and he, in turn, received her as his wife. The result of the entire episode is the fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14.

NOTES

1:18 Here Matthew proceeds to narrate the actual historical facts for which the genealogy has so fitly prepared; the birth of the Christ who was both Son of David and Son of God. Let it not be thought that what Matthew proceeds to record are the very first events, for the Evangelist Luke, with another emphasis in mind, records several events which must have preceded the annunciation to Joseph by at least six months. They are the annunciation to Zachariah regarding the coming birth of John the Baptist; the announcement to Mary that she was to become the mother of God's Son; Mary's visit to Elizabeth and return to Nazareth. Study Luke 1 to appreciate fully what follows here.

When his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph. The betrothal had taken place before the event now narrated, but **before they came together.** The Jewish betrothal involved a covenant made in the presence of witnesses or the solemn promise was also written (Cf. Mal. 2:14) and was equivalent to a marriage vow. By virtue of this betrothal, the couple became husband and wife in a relationship which could only be terminated by death or divorce or unfaithfulness (see Dt. 22:22-24). The ceremony of engagement was completed by a benediction and a cup of wine. From that moment Mary became the betrothed wife of Joseph, although several months might intervene before their coming together as married partners. Apparently no celebration and feasting accompanied the engagement ceremony, that being reserved for the joyous occasion when the groom would bring home his bride. Like any man in love, Joseph looked forward to that festive day when he, with his friends, would go to bring Mary to their future home. It was then that tragedy dashed his joy, shattering his hope in heart-rending anguish:

She was discovered to be pregnant. Naturally, Mary knew the reason for her pregnancy, even as the angel had announced to her in chaste and delicate language,

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 . . . 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. (Lk. 1:31-35)

Matthew squarely meets the criticism of skepticism by the unswerving

declaration that Mary's condition was produced by the Holy Spirit. He is not saying that this latter fact was part of the discovery, for obviously Joseph knows nothing of the Holy Spirit's influence in Mary's case.

But if Mary had already been informed by the angel of the miracle of the supernatural conception, would she not have repeated to Joseph what the angel had said to her? But would he have believed so wonderful a solution to his anguish? It is most likely to suppose that upon Joseph's questioning Mary, she told him of the angelic visit. The very idea of a virgin birth, or, more correctly, of a virgin conceiving is unique by its very nature. Why should Joseph have believed her? However much he must have trusted Mary, only a communication from God could remove all the questions from his heart and provide the assurance he would need for the hard days to come. Mary could only wait upon God for her vindication in the eyes of Joseph. The heavenly messenger who had spoken to her might also speak to her beloved.

Further, we are not told who made the discovery of Mary's condition or when the discovery was made. Several conditions help us to visualize the desperate difficulty of Mary's pregnancy in Nazareth:

1. The mosaic legislation called for the death of any espoused woman found unfaithful (Dt. 22:23, 24). While it is true that the Jews did not legally possess the power of the death sentence during that period of Roman occupation (see Jn. 18:31), yet it is difficult to see how this "obviously unfaithful" bride (as regarded by the sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued gossips of Nazareth) could have escaped notice.
2. Neither Matthew nor Luke reveal how long after the miraculous conception Joseph received Mary as his wife. His perplexity caused by Mary's condition does seem to indicate that her pregnancy had continued some time before the marriage took place.
3. From the fact that it must be Joseph to decide not to expose Mary for a public example, we may assume Mary's condition to be unknown to others but Joseph and Mary themselves. Surely, had the unsympathetic eyes of the neighbors in Nazareth noticed, or had the unbelieving family of Mary known her dilemma, they would have exposed her and her Son to the slander of an illegitimate birth.

4. Nor do we know exactly the order of events from the angel's message to Mary until Joseph received her as his wife. When did the miraculous conception occur—immediately after Mary's submission to the divine will, or quite a bit later? Did Joseph receive Mary into his home before or after she visited Elizabeth for three months? (Lk. 1:39-56)
5. The Nazarenes who attack Jesus' presumptions to divine authority (Lk. 4:16-30; Mt. 13:54-58; Mk. 6:1-6), as well as other enemies, do not give even the slightest hint of a slander regarding a "premature", thus illegitimate, birth. Rather, they refer to the mere obscurity of His birth as a child of the carpenter, Joseph.

Harmonizing the two narratives of Matthew and Luke in such a way as to produce a natural account of the course of events, we see the annunciation to Zachariah that he is to have a son, John; the betrothal of Mary and Joseph, which may have taken place before or after the annunciation to Zachariah; the annunciation to Mary that she is to have a son, Jesus (this annunciation occurs six months after that to Zachariah); the visit of Mary with Elizabeth in Judea which lasted three months and her return to Nazareth; upon returning to Nazareth, Mary is discovered to be "with child;" the annunciation to Joseph. Thus, there would yet remain only about six months for Mary before Jesus would be born, when Joseph learned of her condition.

1:19 **Joseph her husband, because he was an upright man and being unwilling to expose her to contempt, decided to divorce her quietly.** Of what sort character is this man whom God has chosen to be the foster-parent of His Son? Feel the pain in Joseph's entire being as he is torn between his deep love for Mary and his keen consciousness of what is right before God! As a true Israelite, Joseph must not consummate his marriage with Mary under the circumstances as he understood them, supposing Mary to have committed adultery. Yet, how truly he loved his espoused for what he had always known of her as the pure, gentle maiden. Only two courses lay open to Joseph now, both ending in divorce:

1. Public exposure, charging Mary with adultery, making her a public example, subjecting her to whatever Jewish law might have been in force at the time (if not the death penalty of Dt. 22:23-24);

2. Or, resolve to take advantage of a Mosaic statute which allowed an unconditional and unexplained separation at the will of the husband (Dt. 24:1). In writing the "bill of divorcement" he could be freer to state or omit the actual cause that prompted him to divorce Mary.

This latter determination stood out clearly to Joseph, that, if it must be, her letter of divorce would be handed to her privately in the presence of the two required witnesses.

1:20 **But while he was turning the matter over in his mind**, i.e. during that anxious contending of feelings and the delayed resolve to divorce Mary, God intervened: **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream**. That assurance which Joseph could scarcely have dared to hope for is now conveyed to him in a dream-vision. By visions and dreams God had often spoken. (Cf. Gen. 20:3; 31:11, 24; 37:5; chap. 40; 41:1; I Kgs. 3:5; Dan. 7:1; Job 4:13-15) Matthew mentions four: this one, a second one to Joseph (2:13); one to the Wise-men (2:12); and perhaps the dream to Pilate's wife (27:19). We may imagine Joseph unable to sleep, being deeply troubled as he contemplated his course until at last his thoughts surrendered to sleep. Then the angel appeared. The scriptures do not declare how those dreams by which God communicates to the dreamer are to be distinguished from those unreal images which ordinarily appear in sleep. Ordinary dreams are commonly characterized by great disjunctions with reality, are without sense or the normal representation of reality. Observe, on the other hand, the direct relation to reality seen in this dream:

1. Accepting the reality of the supernatural realm upon the evidence for its existence in the data provided by the well-attested history contained in the biblical record, we observe here that God simply sends an angel messenger to communicate a message from the spirit-world of reality to the sense-experienced world.
2. The message given is directly related to Joseph's immediate problem, to the Old Covenant Scriptures, and to the plan of God for man's redemption.

This reality of Joseph's dream as a reception of God's communication cannot be gainsaid by appeal to the irrelevant evidence of normal dream patterns. To reduce this divine communication to a non-supernaturalistic explanation by saying that Joseph's "vision" is easily

resolved by analysis of his emotional disturbance and the undigested material in his stomach, is nothing short of attacking the entire historical fabric of Matthew's work. Joseph did not "dream up" this angel. God sent the angel and communicated to him the message. The God who sends such messages to men is thoroughly able to make the dreamer know their reality.

Joseph, son of David. Indeed, Joseph was a descendent of the royal house, as attested by his genealogy. This is the occasion for him to prove himself a true son of David, possessed of the faith of David. Now princely things would be expected of him: to be the protector of heaven's Prince. This he must do in spite of his poverty and obscurity.

Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. What authority could be higher or what directions clearer? Joseph was not to fear for Mary's virtue and purity nor fear future betrayals. The incredible story told by Mary of the angel's appearance to her and the miraculous conception were exactly as represented after all. Joseph now would be in no way compromising his conscience, condoning sin, risking his own future happiness, nor otherwise doing something doubtful by fulfilling his promise to take Mary as his wife. The Holy Spirit is really the Father of her child.

1:21 She shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins. The wonderful tidings of the angel contains three great truths:

1. The miraculous foreknowledge of the sex of the child to be born. The seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) is to be a boy. No father or mother can ever accurately know about any of their children before birth. How the definite concern of God for every particular part of the incarnation makes itself known!
2. The thrilling revelation in the name of the child. God is formally regarding Joseph as the legal father of the unborn child, for it must be Joseph, as Jesus' foster-parent, who will give the name to the Boy at His birth. However, the choice of the name remains the right of Him who is the true Father, and the name He chooses is profoundly full of meaning. The name JESUS means "Jehovah is savior" or "Salvation of

Jehovah" and, although it is a relatively common name (see on 1:1), yet it is especially significant as the name of **this** child.

3. Clear announcement of the future ministry of the child. Though there were many who bore the name of Jesus in those days, whose parents, hoping in God to save His people Israel, so named their sons, yet the divine messenger emphasizes, "It is **HE**—He alone—who shall save." No parent ever knows exactly what their babe will do in life, but God knew what this babe would do and named Him accordingly. The phrase "his people," as Joseph would have understood it, evokes the image of political deliverance from Israel's enemies and of freedom from the ills that servitude brings. But Jesus shall save His people "from their sins," the real evils from which they suffered. Yet, in delivering the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" to whom Jesus was principally sent (Mt. 15:24), He would lay the basis for the salvation of the Gentiles also (Jn. 10:16).

1:22 **Now all this is come to pass.** Did Matthew say this, or did the angel? The Greek verb is perfect tense (present abiding result of a past action) and is difficult to interpret as to whether the time involved is present regarding the angel's speaking or Matthew's writing. If the former, then we behold the Holy Spirit who prophesied these words through the prophet Isaiah, now interpreting the prophecy through the angel. If the latter, then we witness the same Spirit at work through Jesus' Apostle. In either case, the full authority of God stands behind the speaker and the interpretation of the prophecy given. **That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.** Here is clear, convincing evidence of the supernatural inspiration of Isaiah's prophecy: the obvious fulfillment of what was predicted and the declaration of an inspired apostle that Isaiah's message came from God. This expression is frequently used by Matthew throughout his Gospel to demonstrate the veracity of God in graciously keeping his promises. Study these prepositions carefully, for they reveal the process of divine revelation: "spoken **BY** the Lord **THROUGH** the prophet." God revealed to Isaiah what was to happen, and now brings it to pass as predicted. Although God could have worked in human history without any advance notice to men, yet He chose to announce His plans in advance in order that men might be aware of the supreme importance that God placed upon His plans

and prepare themselves for Jesus' coming. God did this also that men might have the full assurance that God has spoken in their history both in the unequivocal prophecy and in its well-attested fulfillment.

1:23 Just because a virgin birth is without example among men, let it never be supposed that it was unknown to God! During a threatening national crisis when the combined armies of Israel and Syria launched a concerted attack against Judah's capital, Jerusalem, her king and her people trembled. (Study II Kgs. 16 and Isa. 7 to appreciate the full impact of this historical situation.) Isaiah is sent to the frightened king to promise divine deliverance on the basis of belief of God's willingness to help (Isa. 7:3-9). The idolatrous king was urged to seek a miraculous sign from God which would confirm His promise. With a pious phrase he refused. Soundly rebuking the hardened king, Isaiah rejoined that God Himself would provide the sign anyway: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isa. 7:14) Continuing, Isaiah declared that the sign lay in the fact that before this virgin's son should reach the age of discretion, the kingdoms of Syria and Israel would be destroyed. Although God would bring deliverance, it would come no thanks to Ahaz, nor to his son, nor to the house of David generally as represented in that perverted generation, but rather a nameless maiden would give birth to the true Immanuel.

But, it is asked, can this interpretation given by Matthew (or by the angel) be certainly the true one? The following objections are often urged against such an application of Isaiah 7:14 to the virgin birth of Jesus:

1. "The Greek term *parthenos*, a virgin or maiden, is misleading, as the Hebrew term *'almah* simply means 'an adult woman,' and is certainly by no means confined to virgins." Has Matthew then falsified the evidence and concocted, by deliberate mistranslation, the virgin birth fiction? No, he is rightly following the then-current Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, the Septuagint version of 285 B.C. The Jewish scholars, who prepared that translation, used the term *parthenos* to render the Hebrew *'almah*, and they could scarcely be accused of endeavoring to create a fictitious support for a virgin birth of Jesus. Rather, they were intending to give the true meaning of the word as used in Hebrew by Isaiah.

2. "Isaiah 7:14 was not interpreted by the ancient Synagogue in a Messianic sense, so the passage cannot be taken as referring to a 'virgin-born Messiah.' Such a theory should be more appropriately explained as the zealous search of Jewish Christians for Messianic proof-texts, their striking upon Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy and their constructing a virgin-birth theory as its supposed fulfillment." Indeed, it might seem strange that if the passage really be a prophecy of the Messiah's virgin birth, that the Jews should have so completely failed to interpret it in that way. However, they clearly missed the vicarious sufferings and death of the Messiah as foreseen in Isa. 53 or in the graphic descriptions of Psalm 22. The inability of the Jewish scholars to grasp the unity between God's Messiah as the ruling, victorious Son of David sitting upon David's throne, and God's Christ as the sacrificed Lamb of God, the Suffering Servant, must not color the true interpretation of the predictions. The suggestion, that Jewish-Christian enthusiasm invented the supposed virgin-birth fulfillment to Isaiah's words, fails to supply an acceptable substitute "sign" to king Ahaz. That is, if a miraculous virgin birth were not the actual intent of the Spirit speaking through the prophet, an event which would be especially clear as a sign after the event actually occurred, they where is the force of the sign Isaiah offered Ahaz? Why should an ordinary birth be regarded as a "sign"?
3. "The '*almah* or 'young woman' who is meant is Isaiah's wife and the son to be born is Isaiah's." But four objections immediately arise to this solution:
 - a. The prophecy declares that a *virgin* (LXX and Matthew) is to bear a son; Isaiah's wife could hardly be called a *virgin*. The proof is entirely sufficient to establish *virgin* as the proper translation. If it were his wife to which he referred, he could hardly have expressed himself in a more ambiguous manner.
 - b. There is no further allusion made to any son of the prophet by the name Immanuel or anything similar. A sign based upon the prophet's own family affairs would have been, at best, one of a very precarious nature.

- c. It is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive how, in such a context, a woman who had been long married, like the prophet's own wife, could be called "a young maiden of marriageable age" without any explanation.
- d. No child born in the time of Isaiah possessed the many attributes which are predicted of the Messiah in Isaiah's fuller context: The child is born whose endless, good government proceeded from the throne of David, and is entitled Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God (cf. "God with us," Immanuel), Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. (9:6, 7) The child is to be the branch out of the root of Jesse, upon whom the Spirit of Jehovah should rest and whose beneficent reign ultimately brings true peace. (11:1-8)
4. Another interpretation, which attempts to discredit Matthew, finds the '*almah*' in Abijah, the wife of Ahaz and mother of Hezekiah. Hezekiah, the righteous reformer, thus becomes the promised child. However, Hezekiah must have already been born before the commencement of his father's reign (II Chron. 28:1, 27; 29:1) during which the prophecy of a child to be born of a virgin is given. Nothing else in the context draws attention to Hezekiah. Again, how could his mother be the "young maiden"?

Such interpretation which would attempt to discredit the inspired Apostle's appropriate quotation of Isaiah's prophecy finds its basic origin, not in sound Bible exegesis, but in a pseudo-scientific anti-supernaturalism. The translation of the Hebrew '*almah*' is not the prime difficulty. The real entanglement lies in a disbelief in predictive prophecy and its historic fulfillment or a disbelief in the power of God to bring about Jesus' supernatural birth or else in the wilful desire to reject the unique Sonship of Jesus.

And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us. It might be thought strange that the prophecy quoted predicts that the child so born is to be called *Immanuel*, while the angel specifies to Joseph that the child is to be named *Jesus*. The fact that Matthew offers no comment upon this difference plainly suggests that there is no problem. The term *Immanuel* is properly the title of Him whose proper name is *Jesus*. Other titles are to be found in Isa. 9:6, although Jesus was not known by these during

His earth-life. The earth-shaking significance of this announcement is that it reveals our God, discontented to sit above the heavens and deal with His creation at long distance, coming down to tabernacle among men. The finest comment is still that of Phil. 2:5-10; Heb. 2:14-18 and Jn. 1:1-14. The very Word who was God is now to become flesh and dwell among men! These, too, are tidings of great joy which are for all people.

1:24 And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel commanded him, and took unto him his wife. All his doubts resolved and his mind divinely set at rest, Joseph could no longer hesitate. His immediate duty to Mary and the unborn Child required an immediate marriage which would give Mary his good name and would save the Child the reproach of an illegitimate birth. It is not known at what point during the pregnancy the marriage took place, nor how many persons were aware of her condition. Thus, it is impossible to say with certitude whether this couple suffered much public shame and abuse as their (apparently) fabricated story of visions of angels was (apparently) disbelieved as an invalid excuse. It would seem that the whole phenomenon of Jesus' life is better explained if He grew up in what from the human point of view, especially that of the Nazarenes, was a blameless home. And the attitude of His contemporaries both toward Him and the household in which He had lived does seem to be more natural if the conduct of Mary and Joseph was of a really, and not merely apparently, worthy kind. Above all, Joseph acknowledged Jesus as his legal Son. Here is to be found the real barrier against slander. If Joseph was really the "righteous man" he is said to be (1:19), his character would be known and his acknowledgement of the Child the best shield against any likelihood of slander. Further, according to Luke's narrative, the birth of Jesus occurred at a place remote from Nazareth, where Mary would not be under the gaze of prying eyes. Nor is the time known from the departure from Nazareth for Bethlehem during the census until the time of the return to Nazareth from Egypt. (Cf. Lk. 2:1-39) So an apparently early time of birth would not necessarily have ever been known.

The next morning and the days following must have been days of joy as Joseph reported his dream to his beloved and proceeded immediately to bring his wife to his home and thus consummate their marriage begun at the time of their betrothal. Far beyond all earthly

joys was their supreme moral satisfaction of being submitted to God's will and of being permitted to become the guardians of God's Son.

1:25 and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS. Normally the consummation of marriage would include marital relations ("to know" is a Hebrew euphemism for sexual relations; cf. Lk. 1:34). The revelations given to Joseph and Mary concerning the divine nature and future of the child apparently caused Joseph to forego his marital right; thus, he kept his wife a virgin until the birth of the Baby.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

1. *As a matter of RECORD.* The text of Matthew which contains the unequivocal narration of the virgin birth of Jesus possesses the same unanimous documentary attestation as the rest of the matthaean history. There is no textual evidence that even suggests that the history of the virgin birth might be the "fanciful invention of later, uncritical Christians who desired to clothe the history of their Master's birth with supernatural elements entirely unknown to Mary and Joseph." There can be little doubt that the first chapter of Matthew has always formed the original beginning of the book, since there is no full Greek manuscript of Matthew that does not contain this section, notwithstanding some minor textual variants within the passage.

2. *As a matter of HISTORY.* The announcement of the virgin birth of Jesus is a matter of historico-biographical fact. The account makes no attempt to explain or justify a doctrine of incarnation or a virgin-birth doctrine or the like. Rather it is rigidly confined to the matter of fact concerned. What Matthew writes is an event wholly real or totally imagined, completely true or entirely false. As a historical statement it cannot be insignificant or irrelevant. If it contributes to our information about the incarnation or else seriously mutilates the truth, the virgin birth narrative cannot remain a matter of historical indifference.

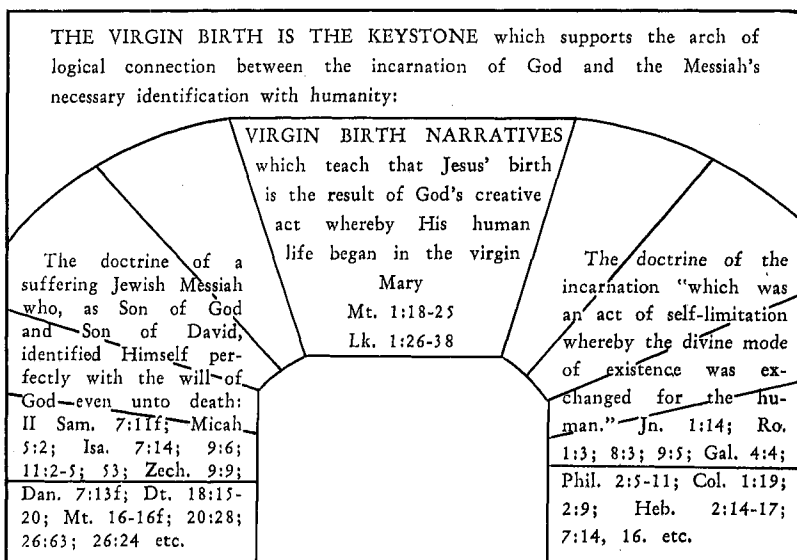
To the leaders of the early Church these facts held utmost importance, for the integrity of their personal character is brought into question, if they fabricated the virgin birth story and succeeded in foisting it upon the Church so early as to dominate its scripture and mold the form of its creed. These men were not the kind of men to accept uncritically or proclaim presumptuously such stories which lacked positive and authoritative certification and which, in turn, could be used in any way by unbelievers to discredit their Master or His

family. That such certification must have been used is seen from the nature of the material: it contains information that could only have come from the principle characters who did the deeds and experienced the marvelous events told in the history. To charge the leaders of the early Church with fraud on the basis of their supposed imposture on so grand a scale as to produce the universal and instantaneous acceptance of the supposedly unauthenticated legend as part of the authoritative documents which narrate the life and ministry of Jesus, is completely unwarranted. The story could not have been honestly composed nor sincerely published as having been derived from any other source than the persons who could have guaranteed its truthfulness.

To those of the gospel writers and other NT penmen who do not mention the virgin birth event, the evidence already presented by Matthew and Luke rested upon a sufficient basis as to require no other artificial strengthening. Nothing negative can be proved about the so-called "silence" of John and of Paul on the subject. The fact that they do not mention the supernatural birth of Jesus cannot be construed to mean that they therefore did not know of it. The truth is better stated: they had not the occasion to treat the virgin birth. Rather, they teach as might be expected of men who were thoroughly acquainted with the fact. The doctrine they preach of the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14) and of the Christ "who being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men," (Phil. 2:5-11) becomes comprehensible only in the light of the facts narrated by Matthew and Luke, and form a tacit acknowledgement of their veracity.

The fact that even Matthew and Luke, who do narrate the supernatural conception and birth, do not draw any conclusions from it nor teach any doctrine based upon it, certainly argues for its historical truthfulness, as no apparent end could be served by its inclusion in the narrative. Although Matthew notices that the virgin birth fulfills prophecy, yet he does not state the conclusion that "therefore, Jesus is the Messiah," or some other similar apologetic statement. Naturally, Matthew's ultimate aim was to demonstrate the unique human nature of the Messiah who had been promised to the Jews, and the nature of the miracle-working Son of God who possessed all the authority of God for His actions. Matthew pictures Jesus, outside the infancy narrative, not as the Pre-existent One who deigns to dwell in human

flesh, but rather as the divinely-authorized, truly human, truly Jewish Messiah. Throughout Matthew's selection of incidents from Jesus' life, from chapter three to the end, Jesus' ethical character and authoritative doctrine are presented without the precise definitions of His supernatural Person that are seen throughout John's Gospel and in the epistles. Therefore, the infancy narratives, which announce the supernatural conception of the Son of God, are absolutely essential to providing the historical facts upon which the Jewish Messiahship and the divine incarnation must be based. Without the actual facts surrounding the virgin birth, these grand doctrines must forever be left suspended, ungrounded in verifiable history obtained from the eyewitnesses. Without the narrative of the supernatural conception, we may expect no satisfactory answer to the demand: where and when did the incarnation occur in such clear fashion as to fulfill all of the expectations of messianic prophecy? But, note carefully, the formulation and defence of these doctrines is our assimilation of the facts stated in these narratives plus other materials elsewhere; Matthew and Luke limit themselves to simple narration. This permits the doctrine to rest upon the statement of the facts. Thus, since the Evangelists were not trying to serve apologetic purposes, the historical veracity of the narration is the better guaranteed.



The virgin birth narrative is important, for it involves a clear, consistent account of the Lord's birth without which nothing sure could be known.

3. *As a matter of* INTEGRITY.

a. The honesty of all who confront the virgin birth: this fact puts to the proof, not the mental equipment of the skeptic, but his moral character. The problem before the critic is not the adequacy of the testimony, for the whole body of the early Christians attest the factuality of the virgin birth of Jesus, and the rejection of this testimony involves the radical undermining of confidence in all the testimony of the gospel witnesses. (See Machen, *Virgin Birth*, Chap. XI in which he proves that silence does not prove ignorance of it, but rather shows that the Apostles assumed it.) The denial of the miraculous conception of Jesus is not based upon well-attested history to the contrary, but rather upon the false philosophy of what can or cannot be known about God and His actions, a philosophy based upon the "accepted principles of thought of our day." This false philosophy is nothing more than a mistaken view of natural law which holds that the uniformity in nature is an exact and immutable force which governs the universe. Thus, the appearance of a virgin birth disturbs the "law of normal human birth" as conceived through scientific observation of all observable cases and drawing probable conclusions about all others. While the scientific method leads to generally certain knowledge of repeated and repeatable events, it cannot speak with authority on the virgin birth, a unique event having no parallels. The scientific method can search the historical backgrounds, certify the reliability and veracity of the witnesses, but having done so, must listen to the testimony they bring. The question of the virgin birth, then, remains, "Will we accept the testimony of the eye-witnesses and the universal acknowledgement of the early Church as recorded in the documents of the Church, or, rejecting this, will we adhere to a mistaken view of natural law, a view which decides *a priori* that all miraculous events are impossible?"

b. The honesty of God is brought into the question of the virgin birth inasmuch as He promised to bring Immanuel into the world in just this fashion (Isa. 7:14). As this Child is conceived in Mary, a young woman who is a virgin, the sure word of prophecy is fulfilled and God's promise is kept.

c. The virgin birth touches the life of Jesus at the point which separates the most degraded and the most sacred in human life: either Jesus is the illegitimate son of some man known only to Mary or the offspring of fornication or the natural son of Joseph, or else He is the virgin-born Son of God. The clear, factual reporting of the gospel record is decisive in its declaration on which choice alone from the beginning stood above suspicion and doubt. That which involves the personal history and public honor of our Lord and His family cannot be a matter of indifference. The fact cannot be over-emphasized that the entire New Testament witness stands or falls as a whole. There is no objective standard by which certain portions of Jesus' life, as recorded by the gospel writers, may be excized, which does not also destroy every basis for secure knowledge about Jesus.

For further study see encyclopedic articles, such as those in ISBE: "Person of Jesus Christ," "Virgin Birth," "Messiah." A classic work in this field is J. Gresham Machen's *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, especially chapters VII-IX, XIII.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What does the Bible teach about Mary regarding her perpetual virginity, her sinlessness, her office as mediator for Christians, and her place in the church?
2. State the importance of the virgin birth to the Christian faith. Why believe in the virgin birth?
3. Give the proof for the virgin birth as a matter of historic fact.
4. What is the relationship between the genealogy which preceded the virgin birth narrative and the narrative itself?
5. Is this birth narrative recorded by Matthew the first event immediately connected with the life of Jesus? Or, are there other important events. If so, what are they?
6. At what time during the engagement of Mary and Joseph was she found to be "with child"? What difference would the time make?
7. What was the true cause of Mary's pregnancy? What difference would it have made were it otherwise?
8. What was the punishment for marital unfaithfulness under the Mosaic law?
9. In what order did the events probably occur from the betrothal of Mary and Joseph until they were married by their "coming together"?

10. Describe Joseph's character from what may be known of it from all available information (Mt. 1:18-25; 2:13-15, 19-23; Lk. 2:4, 21-24, 39-49).
11. What courses of action were open to Joseph while he was yet ignorant of the true cause of Mary's condition?
12. List other occasions on which God had revealed His will through dreams or visions.
13. What does it mean to be a "son of David"? To Joseph? To Jesus?
14. What is the relation of the name the Babe is to wear with His ministry to the world?
15. List the objections offered to the consideration of Isa. 7:14 as referring to the virgin birth and answer them.
16. What is the significance of the title "Immanuel"?
17. Show the different facts in the case of the birth of Jesus that demonstrate the protection from slander that might have arisen from ignorant gossip.

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER ONE

"THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD"

God's Faithfulness is demonstrated:

- I. IN HIS FIDELITY TO THE FATHERS. (v. 1) God had promised Abraham that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed. He had sworn with an oath to David that He would set one of his descendents upon his throne forever. The genealogy of Jesus proves the marvelous fulfillment of God's promises. God can be completely trusted. Isaiah's prophecy came true in the most astounding way.
- II. IN HIS JUSTIFICATION OF JOSEPH'S JUDGMENTS.
All that is seen of Joseph reveals a guileless Israelite, especially in his decision how he would divorce Mary. It was the only righteous thing to do, yet God had other plans. Even after the vision of the angel, Joseph yet had to decide whether he would take the risk that was clearly involved and trust God to do what He had said. The obedience of Joseph (1:24, 25) is a heroic demonstration of faith. God fully justified Joseph's decision by bringing to pass what He had promised.

III. IN HIS SAVING SINNERS FROM THEIR SINS.

- A. "JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (1:21)
- B. Immanuel, God with us (1:23)

What this means:

These three demonstrations of God's trustworthiness mean something! We learn something of the character of God:

- A. God's fidelity to the fathers means that however distant may seem the fulfillment of His promises, however unlikely and visionary, God always keeps His Word. God has promised His Church many precious, glowing gifts both present and future. Though we may never live to see them personally received in our lifetime is no indication at all that they are not sure and forthcoming.
- B. God's Justification of Joseph teaches us that the doubts, fears and perplexities of His people may be turned into God's advantage and into a clear manifestation of His own glory, as well as to His people. God is therefore to be trusted even though we do not understand the reason for our doubts and frustrations. The obedience of Joseph illustrates the lesson that from the time a man is sure he has understood God's Word for his case he must dispute his doubts no more, but shut his ears to all human reasoning and obey God.
- C. God's Son's Salvation of Sinners shows two significant truths:
 - 1. God has shown us the true character of sin by presenting it in such a light that we should hate it in our own souls and cry to be saved from it. If God took on human flesh to deal personally, finally and mercifully with sinners and die for sin, then how unspeakably evil sin must be!
 - 2. God has shown us the true character of His fellowship. The great secret of our Christian joy lies in this fact that we do not believe in an absent God. Rather we serve one who is ever present ever so much more, since Jesus came as our "Immanuel, God with us."

Try to grasp what these great truths mean and then see what they do to you!

- A. They ought to make us humble. If the Son of God, King of Kings and Lord of Glory, chose to come to this earth in the lowliest manner; if He chose a manger to be born in, a working man's home in which to live, the commonest food and clothing; and if He did all this just to die for sinners so that God could deal with men through grace, then, we have no basis for pride. We have all been one of the class of moral lepers and all our best righteousness was just make-believe. (Ro. 6:21, 22)
- B. God's being ever with us to save and sustain us ought to make us brave. If God be for us and with us, who can stand against us? No temptation will ever be too strong to be conquered, no difficulty will ever be too hard to be surmounted by us who know that Jesus our Immanuel is God with us.
- C. What God has done in Christ ought to make us love men—all men—in spite of what they are. Look on your fellow-men and learn, from God's coming in the flesh, to respect man, every man, as wearing the flesh that Jesus wore.