

Never Downplay the Virgin Birth of Jesus

We hear a lot about science these days. Politicians remind us constantly that we all must “trust the science” when it comes to wearing masks and staying six feet away from each other. Because viral infection is a scientific reality, I talk to my elderly mother through a window at her nursing home rather than visiting her in person. Science tells me there are risks if I’m not careful around the elderly.

I respect science. But as a Christian, I also know there are times when God steps into our scientific world and overrides the laws of nature. The Bible is full of these baffling moments. They are called miracles.

Many scientists today don’t believe in miracles. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, for example, called the miracles of the Bible “religious propaganda.” Physicist Stephen Hawking, who died in 2018, rejected the possibility of miracles.

And yet the Christian faith rests on the belief that God sovereignly broke scientific rules in two dramatic instances: One, in the virgin birth of Jesus; and two, in His bodily resurrection.

I was in the hospital room for the births of each of my four daughters. I had little to do in the delivery room. My wife was the hero. She sweated, strained, pushed and gasped for hours while I patted her arm and tried not to get queasy from seeing all the blood. Normal births are amazing, whether they occur in hospitals or homes or the back seats of taxis.

But when I consider the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, I’m in total awe—not just because of Mary and Joseph’s bumpy ride from Nazareth, Mary’s lack of a doctor (or anesthesia) and the crudeness of the manger, but also because of how Jesus was

conceived. Mary was a virgin. Joseph, the “father,” had nothing to do but stand in the background.

Secularists and liberal theologians have mocked the virgin birth for centuries. Thomas Jefferson called it a fable, while Episcopal heretic John Shelby Spong called it an “entrance myth.” The concept of a woman giving birth to a baby without a man’s involvement is ludicrous to unbelievers. It contradicts all the laws of biology.

Yet Mary was not a scoffer. She asked the angel how she would bear this child, and he said: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35, NASB).

I would have asked for more scientific information. (“Thanks Gabriel, but how exactly does this miraculous impregnation work?”) But Mary didn’t worry about details. She believed Gabriel’s announcement and submitted to God in childlike faith.

The Greek word for “overshadow,” *episkiazo*, is a reference to the cloud of God’s presence that materialized in Moses’ tabernacle. The Amplified Bible translates Luke 1:35 as: He “will overshadow you like a shining cloud.” This same cloud hovered over the ark of the covenant, led God’s people through the wilderness and filled Solomon’s temple with shimmering glory.

The same cloud of glory that caused Moses’ face to shine hovered over a virgin and deposited a divine seed in her womb. The God who hid behind a veil in the Old Testament clothed Himself in human flesh in the New Testament.

The Incarnation cannot be explained in purely biological terms. There was nothing sexual about it, yet Mary’s ovum was fertilized without Joseph’s sperm. Divinity merged with humanity. Jesus, fully God and fully man, began a nine-month gestation. The virgin birth is not a trivial detail in the

story of Jesus. It is a cornerstone of our faith. If it didn't happen, Jesus wouldn't be the Son of God. Everything we believe about salvation would be false if Jesus hadn't been divinely conceived.

When He was born, there was a normal amount of blood, sweat and tears—because Mary was human. But this birth was surrounded with wonder because Joseph was not the father. He came from a line of kings, but his pedigree was not enough to save the human race. He could not contribute to this miracle.

Doubters think Joseph got Mary pregnant out of wedlock. If that were true, Christianity itself would be a lie because (1) if Jesus were not born of a woman, He could not have identified with our sins fully; and (2) if God were not His biological father, Jesus could not have redeemed us.

Bible teacher R.T. Kendall put it this way: “The virgin birth of Christ shows that salvation can never come through human effort.” God did it all without our help. All we can do is receive His amazing love and forgiveness. I hope you have a Merry Christmas as you celebrate this science-defying miracle.
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