

Why is the virgin birth so important?

December 6, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

This morning we have a very special 'Christmas edition' Q from the pews. Back in the summer when I was collecting questions, I had this one come in and I thought, 'why don't I hold on to this one for Christmas?' And so I tucked it away for a day like today and today is a day like today and so we have a Q from the pew for this morning. And here it is:

Why is the virgin birth so important?

Matthew and Luke both take great pains to show us that Jesus was born to a virgin; the early church clearly understood it to be vital because they included it in the summary of faith that we call the Apostles' Creed. The Apostles' Creed tells us - 'He was born of the virgin Mary;' why is that important? Why is the virgin birth so special?

Well, let me start by saying that there are about a million reasons why the virgin birth is important and one of the big ones is that it is a fulfillment of prophecy. Isaiah 7:14 says that a virgin will be with child and give birth to a son named 'God with us' and Jesus is the 'God with us' son born of a virgin and so ultimately He is the fulfillment of that prophecy. The virgin birth means that God keeps His promises.

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). ff. Matthew 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). (Mat 1:23 ESV).

And there are more reasons to celebrate the virgin birth, and I can give you resources if you want to learn more, but for this morning, I want to focus on this:

Why is the virgin birth so important? Because it means that Jesus is both God and man. Why is that so important? Because it means that Jesus is uniquely able to save us from our sins. The virgin birth means that Jesus alone can be our Saviour.

Now let me unpack all of that.

First, the 'virgin birth' means that Jesus is both God and man. It's right there in the name. The 'birth' part means that He is human and the 'virgin' part means that He is God.

Through the ages, all sorts of people have come up with ways to undermine Jesus' humanity – He was just 'the appearance' of a man – that's an old heresy called 'docetism'ⁱ – or He was just God walking around, looking like a human, but not really a human. But the birth says otherwise. He was fully man. He cried and burped and peed and pooped just like every human baby. But even more important, He knew what it meant to live in these bodies of ours – He knew what it meant to be hungry, He knew what it meant to thirst, He knew what it meant to be angry and frustrated and tired and tempted – He was human like us – and we know that because He was BORN – He was like us, in every single way, except that He never sinned. And that's important.

And frankly, that's wrapped up in the 'virgin' part. The 'virgin' part of virgin birth means that there is something supernatural about Jesus. Jesus was in fact God. The Holy Spirit came upon her and power of the most high overshadowed and 'pop!' you've got the Son of God dwelling in Mary's human tummy

(Luke 1:35). Jesus is fully God. He was not a man, chosen by God for His incredible moral uprightness – that’s an old heresy called ‘adoptionism’ⁱⁱ – He was God when He was born and God when He died and He is still God now (Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 12:2, etc.). That’s why He could do all of the miracles that He did throughout His life.

For those people who attended the history night a few weeks back – the modernist minds says ‘miracles are impossible and so He couldn’t have been born to a virgin’ – the biblical mind says – ‘no, those miracles were possible precisely because He was God, born of a virgin.’ He was God so of course He can do miracles. He can act outside of the laws of nature precisely because He was the one that created them.

The virgin birth is actually a kind of test to get at your worldview – it’s like Van Halen and the brown M&M’s. People always laughed at them and said ‘what self-absorbed rock stars they were to make people pick out all the brown M&M’s.’ But the point was something larger – if the promoter went to the trouble of doing the M&M’s right, they’d probably go to the trouble of setting the stage up right.ⁱⁱⁱ The M&M’s were just an indicator for something larger.

Same sort of thing here – if you believe in the virgin birth, then you probably affirm miracles and if you affirm miracles then you’ll believe in the resurrection – the virgin birth is a kind of shorthand then to see what you believe. Jesus was BORN (which means that He is human) to a VIRGIN (which means that He is God), fully God and fully man.

Now, why is THAT important? Simply put, only a man could lay down His life to redeem mankind, but only God could offer a sacrifice like that. I’ll say that again: only a man could lay down His life to redeem mankind, but only God could offer that kind of sacrifice.

See, some people, being a little silly about it, have said ‘well, if everything is possible for God, why did He have to send His Son as a sacrifice for sin? Why couldn’t He have sent something else, like, a cucumber?’

Well, here’s the problem. If you have something that breaks and you need to replace it, then you need to buy it or something like it. Right? You need something like it to go in its place. And that’s exactly it here – bulls and goats stood in for humanity for a while but they could never truly take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). So you need a man to stand in for humanity. That’s Hebrews 2:17 - You need someone human in every way so that He might make atonement for the sins of the people (paraphrased).

17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people (Heb 2:17 NIV).

Like us in every way to stand in our place to forgive our sins.

So you need a human being to lay down his life for the sins of others, but there’s a problem. Every human being would have to pay for their own sins first. That’s Romans 3:23 - 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; that’s Hebrews 5:3 – even the priests had to ... offer sacrifices for [their] own sins, as well as for the sins of the people (Heb 5:3 NIV). You’d need a blank slate, a perfect, sinless sacrifice to die in the place of sinful mankind. And there is no human who could do that. Maybe you

could die to atone for your own sins, but then you'd have nothing left to give for anyone else. You would need a person who was perfectly sinless.

And that's Jesus. As God, He had no sin of His own to pay for and as man, He could stand in for sinners, and so He could lay down His life for all of humanity. That's Hebrews 7:26 -

26 Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself [His holy, blameless, pure self]. (Heb 7:25-27 NIV).

And, *verse 25*, 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Because Jesus was fully God and fully man, He could lay down His life to rescue me and rescue you from sin, and the virgin birth made all of that possible.

The Virgin Birth is crucial because it means that Jesus is the God-man who laid down His life to forgive mankind.

There's a lot there – I know – and I know that some of you are making use of my sermon manuscripts online – awesome – just about every sermon I've ever given is available in full text on the website – go look at this one online, because I've put all of the references into the manuscript so you can explore it at your own pace.

But for now, let's think about the implications. Why is it important that Jesus is born of a virgin? Or what does it mean for me that Jesus was born to a virgin?

Well, on one hand, it means that He alone is responsible for our salvation. When I tried to 'make myself good enough for God' back in the day – when I tried to make up for all my sinful deeds, I was fighting a losing battle. Because I could never pay for my own sin. But the virgin birth means that Jesus – God! – had no sin of His own and because He is – GOD! – His goodness could more than cover my failures. And so He was born at Christmas to lay down His life for me and that is all the atonement that I could ever need. My sins are forgiven, washed away by the tsunami flood to grace that is wrapped up in Jesus' divine sacrifice for me. I don't have to pay it back or accumulate it; I never could! But this is the gift that God has given to me. And to you. Receive it. Live in light that free, overwhelming gift of grace. Jesus' lavishes forgiveness on us because He is divine.

And on the other, He knows what it is to be human. He knows what pain is like, He knows what conflict is like. Whatever you are going through, He knows exactly what it's like and He is faithful to help. That's Hebrews 4:15 –

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.

16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb 4:15-16 NIV).

Because of the virgin birth, Jesus knows what it's like to be human, but He's also God, so He can do something about it. Bring your pain and frustration and sorrow to Him and let Him bind up the broken parts of your life, just like the shepherd that He is.

Why is the virgin birth so important? Because it means that Jesus is both God and man. Why is that so important? The virgin birth means that Jesus alone can be our Saviour.

ⁱ <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/docetism>

ⁱⁱ <https://carm.org/adoptionism>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.businessinsider.com/van-halen-brown-m-ms-contract-2016-9>