

Part I: Did the virgin birth really happen?

The text of the Bible says God sent the Angel Gabriel to Nazareth to “a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph,” the virgin’s name being “Mary.” Luke 1:26-27.

Gabriel and Mary then have the following exchange:

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> 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 ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born<sup>[d]</sup> will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

In Matthew’s account, “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means ‘God is with us.’ (Matthew is referencing Isaiah 7:14.)

1. The Hebrew word for the woman who gets pregnant in Isaiah 7:14 is *almāh* which means “young woman.” The Greek translation of the word “virgin” means “I do not know a man.”

- Is it possible the Gospel writers, using the Greek translation, came up with idea that Jesus’ mother *needed* to be a virgin (i.e. not know a man) in order to fulfill the prediction of Isaiah and simply made it up? (Were they just imitating pagan and Jewish myths that credit virginal conception to spiritual heroes?)
- Do we really believe that Mary was a “virgin” as we understand the term today? If so, why is that important to Christianity?
- Science has shown that parthenogenesis (asexual reproduction) is possible in plants and some animals, if extremely rare. Could one “explain” the virgin birth this way? Would that help counter the argument that belief in a virgin birth makes Christians “less intellectual”?
- Could being born of a virgin be Jesus’ first miracle? Is this less believable than any other miracle Jesus did? (E.g., feeding the 5,000; turning water into wine; walking on water; resurrecting Lazarus from the dead)?

Part II: Do we even care?

Megachurch pastor Andy Stanley said: “If somebody can predict their own death and resurrection, I’m not all that concerned about how they got into the world. Christianity doesn’t hinge on the truth or even the stories around the birth of Jesus. It hinges on the resurrection of Jesus.” What are your initial thoughts?

## Theology Pub December 2019

- If the story that Jesus was born of a virgin can't be trusted as true, can the gospel of Christ be trusted as true?
- Can you have a "fully God fully human" Jesus if the virgin birth story isn't true?
- How important is the virgin birth to your faith, if at all?
- Is Christmas or Easter more theologically important to you? Which is your favorite holiday?