

Matthew 1:1-17

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 December 2024

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] If you turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 1 and Matthew chapter 1, keep a finger in both. I might be reading this book, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* by Gresham Maitin, I will speak on it next year.

It's a brilliant work, it's nearly 100 years old. It's a brilliant work, it's pretty dry stuff. Mary Maitin, who's Gresham's mother, wrote to him and said, your book, Gresham, is not one to read when groggy with sleep.

Which is a great, when your mother is saying that about the book. So don't rush on Amazon and buy it. But actually I find it really, really helpful and what I want to try and do is condense this into 25 minutes.

And you will know that there's not an original bone in my body and so what is helpful, a lot of that comes from Gresham Maitin. And we say those words, don't we, again and again and again.

Yet how often do we think, even at Christmas time, of that wonderful truth, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. I want to begin by saying that the Bible sets the mission of Christ Jesus and his ministry in the world between two supernatural events, two supernatural bookends.

[1 : 24] One supernatural event by which he entered into the world and the other by which he left it, his resurrection. The first is his virgin conception, his supernatural birth.

And the second is his bodily resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of God. Both are supernatural, aren't they? In the way that he came and in the way that he left.

And both are given in fulfilment of prophecy. So in Matthew chapter 1, it tells us this happened, that the scripture might be fulfilled. And Matthew quotes Isaiah 7.

The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. The resurrection, the exit miracle, again it's the fulfilment of lots of Old Testament prophecies. You could take Isaiah 53, verse 10. He shall prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. And so both of these events, his resurrection and his ascension, and his virgin conception, carry with them, don't they, the same message.

[2 : 28] The Lord Jesus Christ is not less than man, but he is certainly more than man. They underline his supernatural nature, his deity.

The virgin birth is unambiguously supernatural. You cannot misinterpret the virgin birth. What you have to say tonight is either I believe it, or I don't believe it.

The virgin birth, it's thrust like a stumbling block. Like a test. Right at the beginning of the Gospels, Donal MacLeod says this, The revelation of God has placed the stumbling block of the virgin birth to offend and to test us.

To ascertain whether we are prepared to do justice to Jesus' uniqueness, and to the inability of human wisdom to know him, and to the utter discontinuity between him and all else that could conceivably explain him.

Here at the right of the start of the Gospel, God sets before us this biblical, attested truth that Jesus entered into the world by supernatural conception.

[3 : 40] Three things tonight. First of all, the biblical evidence for the virgin birth. Does the Bible really teach this? And then secondly, I want to talk just about some common objections to it. And then thirdly, I want to talk about two implications and the relevance of it.

The biblical evidence. It's in Matthew 1 and Luke 1. And the two focuses of those genealogies, and Ruben didn't do well in reading their list of names.

The first of them, Matthew, focuses on Joseph's story. The second focuses on Mary's story. They are separate and independent accounts, and yet strikingly harmonious.

Most people think that Luke was closely allied to the Apostle Paul, and much of Luke's theology comes from the Apostle Paul, who calls him the beloved physician, the beloved doctor.

But it is significant. The Luke, right at the start of his gospel, if you look there in Luke 1, verse 1, he's a careful historian. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me, also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have, what's the purpose of Luke's writing?

[5 : 00] That you may have certainty concerning the things that have been taught. And so the virgin birth is recorded as sober history. He's a careful historian, he's a qualified physician, and Luke sets out the virgin birth as sober history.

The account Matthew gives us sets out the account of Joseph, the heartache of Joseph in many ways. He's betrothed to be married to Mary, and she turns out to be with child before.

So if you go to Matthew 1, verse 18, she's found to be with child before they come together. And immediately Matthew says, this conception was by the Holy Spirit, verse 18.

It's important to realise, isn't it, that betrothal is not the same as engagement. Engagements can be broken, but a betrothal could only be broken by a legal divorce.

And that's why we go on to read that Joseph comes to the conclusion, doesn't he, that she has been unfaithful to him, Mary. There's heartbreak there. She was bound to him in the same way as a wife is to her husband, and her husband Joseph, being a just man, unwilling to put out a shame, he resolves to divorce her quietly.

[6 : 19] He clearly thought, didn't he, Joseph, that Mary had been unfaithful. But to him then, the angel of God appears to him and interprets the situation in a completely different light.

Look at verse 20. But as he considered these things, Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Supernatural conception. You'll notice, won't you, that Jesus' birth is natural. His conception is supernatural. And the messenger of the Holy Spirit of God, he interprets that as the Spirit of God at work to fulfill the promise of Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14.

So verse 20 again, Joseph, son of David, do not fear, so it marries her wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. And all this took place, why did it take place?

Verse 22, to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel. Now, some people have suggested that perhaps the word in Isaiah chapter 7, and verse 14, the word virgin, it may mean young woman.

[7 : 37] It doesn't strictly mean virgin. But that actually isn't the case. The overwhelming balance of probability of the word is that it is, the word is that of a virgin, somebody who's not had sexual intercourse.

But for those of us who believe the Bible tonight, when you come to Luke chapter 1, what you discover is, again, when the angel comes this time to Mary, Mary is greatly troubled, isn't it, in verse 30.

Can you see why? I do not be afraid, Mary, verse 30 of chapter 1, Matthew chapter 1, for you found favor with God, and behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you'll call his name Jesus.

He'll be great, he'll be called son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. He'll reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there'll be no end. That is the announcement of the angel to Mary.

Now, can you see what Mary's response is? This is the key thing. Verse 23. Verse 33. And Mary said to the angel, how will this be?

[8 : 40] Since I'm a virgin. She's saying, isn't she, the reason why this is such a mystery is I've never known a man. I've never had that kind of union.

She's describing herself, isn't she, in the clearest possible terms as a virgin. And so whatever the ambiguities are of Isaiah chapter 7, there's no ambiguity in Mary's mind.

She says, I am a virgin. So the New Testament sets these facts before us and presents us a virgin birth. It is an account, isn't it, of supernatural conception.

The real issue that the virgin birth presents us with is not a biological or a philosophical issue. It is an issue of the authority of the Bible.

If I live and think under the authority of the Bible, the virgin birth is a clear part of the teaching of the Bible. And I believe it.

[9 : 44] And so you either accept the Scripture or you do not accept the Scripture. But you cannot deny that Scripture clearly teaches it. So let's look, secondly, at the common objections to this.

The first objection is it's a biological absurdity, isn't it? The virgin conception. Of course it's an absurdity. So, is the resurrection of Jesus as well, isn't it?

Biology is no more sympathetic to a dead body being raised than it is to a virgin conceiving. And the problem people have is not with science, but with the supernatural.

Do I believe the supernatural possibility of God raising the dead? Well, if I do, then the virgin conception is in the same category.

If God is able to enter into the whole realm of the working of his created order and to produce such phenomenon, miraculously bringing into being the Lord Jesus Christ in a virgin's womb.

[10 : 58] It's a question of whether I'm willing, again, to believe the Scriptures. The other objection is that this makes Jesus less than fully human.

It's more of a doctrinal objection, isn't it? You might say, well, it affirms his deity. You might say the virgin birth protects his godness.

The whole issue of the supernatural entry of Jesus into the world. And it protects his deity, but it detracts from his humanity. To be truly human, doesn't Jesus have to be procreated in exactly the same way as we are?

And the Bible's answer to that is no. Why is it no? It's no because Adam, Adam was not formed as we are.

Adam was not formed as we are, and yet he was truly human. Adam was not procreated as we are, and yet we acknowledge his full humanity.

[12 : 10] And God has so ordered that if Adam's creation was different to ours, here the creation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam, the appearance of Jesus as a man, was accomplished by a miracle in the same way that Adam appeared.

Adam is the prototype of one who has a supernatural origin. Here's the third objection, and I think the one I've probably heard most of.

The rest of the New Testament scarcely mentions it. The rest of the New Testament scarcely mentions the virgin conception. It's here in Matthew 1 and Luke 1.

But the rest of the New Testament is by and large silent about the virgin birth of Jesus. Matthew and Luke mention it at his birth, which is, isn't it, the natural place to talk about it, but neither of them mention it again.

But that doesn't mean, does it, that they regarded it as unimportant. Its significance lies precisely in the area as the entry miracle by which Jesus came into the world.

[13 : 25] And this argument from partial silence is a really dangerous one because you'll know that neither Mark nor John say anything about Jesus' birth. But does that mean that it's unimportant?

It simply means, doesn't it, there's a focus and a concentration here. Elsewhere, the virgin birth was not a matter of controversy. That is one of the reasons that it doesn't occur in the rest of the Bible.

But one of the very significant things is that here, by the time these books are being written around 60 AD, the virgin birth is being affirmed by Luke, who'd received his training under the Apostle Paul. And when you come to the early church, the very earliest creeds of the church, one of the primary things that is affirmed is that the Lord Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary.

So let me add here that the deity of Jesus Christ and his divine human nature are revealed truths.

[14 : 30] That is who Jesus was. It's not a truth to which the mind of men and women have unaided access to.

It is a revealed truth and God has revealed the truth of the deity of the Lord Jesus partly through the miracle of the virgin birth. He's saying that in the virgin birth there is a new beginning.

The living God is beginning a new humanity and he's beginning it with one who is fully God and fully man. I think this is illustrated later on.

So Matthew chapter 16, the issue of Peter's confession in Caesarea Philippi. Who do you say that I am, Jesus says. Who do you say that I am? And they say, well some say you're God's spokesman, you're like a prophet.

Some say you're a holy man, I'm like Elijah. Others say various things. But who do you say that I am, Jesus says. And here's the confession of faith in Jesus as the son of God and the Messiah.

[15 : 39] You are the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus says to Simon Peter, he says, blessed Simon, son of John, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father.

The revelation of Jesus is in his person, is supernaturally given. And it is given to us in part here in the virgin conception of Jesus.

And so you cannot defend the virgin birth. No one gives evangelistic talks to students defending the virgin birth, do they? But what do we do? We proclaim it.

We proclaim it. Here's the third thing. First of all, the biblical evidence. Secondly, the objections. Thirdly, what are the relevance to us?

Why is it relevant to us tonight? First of all, it's related to the sinlessness of Jesus. When Jesus came to offer himself to God, he offered himself as the fulfillment of the perfect Lamb of God.

[16 : 50] Do you remember John the Baptist sees him behold the Lamb of God? He is a Lamb and without spot and without blemish. He himself bore no sin so that he might bear our sin.

He had no sin of his own to atone for and so he was free and able to atone for our sin. The sinlessness of Jesus is so important.

The virgin birth does not prove the sinlessness of Jesus but it's certainly related to it. What the Bible teaches is that we are not isolated individuals.

Whether we like it or not, we belong to humanity. We are members of a union and Adam the first man he is the head of that union.

And the Bible teaches that in Adam all those who are connected to Adam are brought down in our sin. You watch, well I hope you don't watch Eurovision but you watch Eurovision isn't it?

[17 : 53] And they will say the different countries go around voting isn't it? And they will say Great Britain gives, I don't know, six points. and all of Great Britain is counted by that one person's vote.

By that one person's vote. They carry millions of votes in their one vote. And Adam, he is the head, it is his vote, he is the federal head of the old order.

He is the head of the old humanity and he brought us down by his act of rebellion and we are involved in that. It's not just the things we do, it's what we are, isn't it?

The twist in our nature that all of us know so well. The crookedness, the tendency in our heart that turns us towards sin. But what God is doing here in this new creation is that God has brought forth the Lord Jesus Christ and he calls him 1 Corinthians 15 the last Adam to be the head of a new humanity.

And so as in Adam all die, so in Christ all are made alive. And it is in union, being connected, trusting, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that we find newness of life now.

[19 : 14] The line of sin goes right through the old order until, until the conception and birth of Jesus.

And by setting aside man as the procreator, God is saying, here is a new humanity. Here is a new humanity and the head of that new humanity, the Lord Jesus, is offering himself without spot to God.

The virgin conception of the Lord Jesus marks a break in the transmission of sin. To be fully human, Jesus was born of a woman.

We saw it this morning, Galatians 4, didn't we? Born of a woman, born under the law to be sinless in his humanity. He was born of a virgin woman, not a sinless woman, but a virgin woman.

And so the virgin conception helps us in that it is related to the sinlessness of Jesus. Jerry Packer says this, in the virgin born Christ, in the virgin birth, Christ did not inherit the guilty twist called original sin.

[20 : 28] His manhood was untainted by it. So it relates to Jesus' sinlessness. Second thing is this, the last thing is this, it's related to the saving initiative of God.

It's related to the saving initiative of God. It's God who's acting here. an ordinary conception, an ordinary birth of Jesus, if it was like our conception and birth, would have meant that the initiative in Christ, the saving appearance in the world, lay with man.

man. But here, what is God doing in the virgin birth? What is God doing in the virgin birth?

He is setting man aside. He's doing it resolutely and he's doing it deliberately. He is putting man aside and saying from that line, from the line of Adam, there is no hope for man's salvation.

And so he brings by supernatural means the last Adam. The last Adam comes onto the field as the firstborn of the new creation and he sets man aside.

[21 : 53] and in his place stands the God man, Christ Jesus. And that is the message of the virgin birth. What he's saying in the virgin conception is that salvation will never ever flow from man's initiative.

By searching and by seeking, you will never by yourself unaided come to God. By working hard, by laboring, by attempts to do things that will satisfy God, you will never find acceptance with him. And the virgin conception and supernatural appearance of Jesus Christ tell us that it is God that takes the initiative. It is God who has to provide a divine saviour.

Not a human saviour, but a divine saviour, the God man. One of the messages, surely, is that you will never find salvation from man, but you will find it from the God of the Bible who sent his only begotten son into the world, born of a virgin, to declare that salvation is all of God.

And salvation is all of grace. And salvation is all in Christ. Christ. And that is the message of Christianity, isn't it?

[23 : 26] Certainly the message of Christmas. All of God, all of grace, all in Christ. And so the choice that's before every single one of us tonight, the choice that the virgin conception presents you with is either a Jesus who is supernatural, and sinless, and God saviour, or a Jesus who is something less, and something not.

Let's pray. Amen.