

The Wonder About Christ Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 2:19

It has been said that the miracle of birth is one of God's greatest miracles and God's greatest blessings. Every birth is a reminder that we are a masterpiece of God, woven in the womb by Him. There is something about the wonder of birth when you hold a newborn baby and gaze into its eyes. Even though, according to the United Nations, there are an estimated 385,000 births around the world every day every birth is a miracle that leaves us in wonder.

We could pass a total stranger pushing a stroller down the sidewalk or see a carrier strapped to a shopping cart and we are drawn like a magnet to take a peak and make a comment. They are so precious. As we look at them, there is so much we don't know about what will become of that little bundle.

Will he or she grow up and make some new discovery as a scientist or archaeologist?
Will that little one become a renowned writer or be a featured soloist in an opera or a symphony?
How about a head of state or someone who will broker peace between two divisive nations?
The possibilities are endless because we just don't know what they will be when they grow up, yet we are full of wonder at the possibilities.

Throughout the pregnancy parents wonder. There is an eager sense of expectation while they look forward to meeting for the first time the child growing to the day that child is birthed and its voice is heard for the first time. All the pain of pregnancy and delivery are quickly put aside as overwhelming joy and gratitude now sweep over an exhausted mother. The joy isn't that the pregnancy is now over, but that it begins the thrill of parenting and to watch this little personality grow.

What was it like for Mary and Joseph? What wonder filled their heart? Both had different responses to the news of her pregnancy. We know the story well. As we read the gospel accounts recorded for us in Matthew and Luke, there is a lot of wonder around the birth of this special child.

Even though you know the Christmas story well, do you still wonder at the birth of Christ?
Are you held in awe of it?
Is there any doubt in your mind that He is who the Bible says He is?

Let's begin with the wonder in the pregnancy with Christ.

I. THE WONDER IN THE PREGNANCY WITH CHRIST – Luke 1:28-34; Matthew 1:18-19

We will be going back and forth between Luke and Matthew, but we begin in Luke with Mary and talk about the marvelous perplexity.

A. The Marvelous Perplexity – Luke 1:28-34

Because He can do anything, we shouldn't wonder at God's power to do the impossible, but we can wonder or be awed at how He chooses to do what He says. In this case, it is the wonder of a virgin birth, something that had never taken place before, nor would it ever occur again. You may be surprised to know that other religions and mythologies claim that a virgin birth happened. Roman mythology believed Zeus impregnated Semele without physical contact conceiving Dionysius, lord of the earth.

The Babylonians believed that Tammuz was conceived in the priestess Semiramis by a sunbeam.

In the ancient Sumerian/Acadian records written on a wall, Tukulti II told how the gods created him in the womb of his mother.

The Assyrians believed that the conception of King Sennacherib was superintended by the goddess of procreation.

Buddhists believe that at his conception his mother supposedly saw a white elephant enter her belly.

After reincarnations of a fish, turtle, boar, and lion, Hindus believe that the divine Vishnu descended into the womb of Devaki and was born as her son Krishna.

There is even the belief that Alexander the Great was virgin born by the power of Zeus through a snake that impregnated his mother, Olympias.

We would expect there to be various reports among world religions in claiming a virgin birth, but how about science? They speak of something called parthenogenesis, which comes from a Greek word meaning virgin birth. The unfertilized eggs of honeybees produce male drones.

When placed in various saltwater solutions, the eggs of sea urchins and marine worms develop.

Artificial parthenogenesis has produced female rabbits through chemical and temperature manipulation on the egg.

I hope you caught that within science, the test subjects were placed in an environment that was specially controlled and manipulated, not something that happened naturally in the due process and time.

John MacArthur states “Science, like mythology, has no explanation for the virgin birth. He was neither the son of a previously barren woman nor a freak of nature. By the clear testimony of Scripture, He was conceived by God and born of a virgin.”

Nowhere else in human history either supernaturally or scientifically has a virgin birth in a human happened – not through scientific experimentation by manipulation or preconditioned environments or even naturally. Only in the birth of Christ can it ever be said that a virgin birth has occurred in a human.

His is truly a miraculous conception and the news came from the words of an angel that brought Mary to wonder at how she, as a virgin, would have a child.

Now, there are several occasions in Scripture where parents were informed in some way by the Lord that they could expect to have a child when it was not feasible naturally.

It happened to Abraham when the angel of the Lord told him they would have a son well past the

childbearing years for Sarah.

It happened to the wife of Manoah who was barren but told by the angel of the Lord that they would have a son and given the name of Samson.

It happened to Zachariah when the angel told him his wife Elizabeth who was also old and barren, would have a son. He was told that this child would be the forerunner of the Messiah.

Mary was visited by an angel and told that she was favored and had been chosen to be the mother of the Christ. **Verse 29** says she was **“greatly troubled and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.”** It was an odd salutation for sure. If I had been in her shoes, I would have been troubled at such news as well.

The Greek word **“favored”** comes from the word for grace. God had looked down on Mary with grace and chosen her. It implies that she was living a life of integrity in every respect. She was not perfect, but she was the person God had chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. She also fit the criteria of belonging to the lineage of David so that this child could claim the eternal throne as noted by the angel who greeted her.

We are left to wonder if she knew this was an angel. But what the angel said clearly created a number of questions in her mind, the most obvious was how she could become pregnant since she was a virgin. She was no doubt thinking through the natural process of getting pregnant.

Her question was not one of disbelief, as was the case with Zechariah, but one of wonder since she had been chaste. To her it was a marvelous perplexity since she was a virgin. The angel assured her that with God all things are possible. As I said at the beginning, I think birth is a miracle in itself, but this particular birth would be a miracle because it would occur through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The wonder of what happened to her is expressed in the song she sang to her cousin Elizabeth in **vs. 46-55**. (Read **vs. 46-51**)

What God has done for humanity through the virgin

birth of Christ should bring wonder to our hearts and invite a song filled with awe. To Mary, this birth was a marvelous perplexity, and in it we see a marvelous pregnancy.

B. The Marvelous Pregnancy – Matt. 1:18-20

Mary and Joseph were pledged in marriage to each other. Usually it was arranged by the parents, sometimes even before they knew each other. We tend to think of the betrothal as an engagement time before you walk the aisle and say “I do.” But in that era, the betrothal was a much stronger arrangement than engagement. Today if a couple breaks off an engagement, they just part ways. Under a betrothal, the couple had to actually go through a formal divorce to dissolve the relationship. It was almost like being married but without living together. It typically lasted for a year followed by a formal ceremony that united the two in marriage. So when Joseph thought that Mary had been unfaithful, after some thoughtful consideration opted to pursue a quiet divorce out of desire to protect Mary. I truly believe that he was less concerned about his reputation than hers. His decision had come with a lot of thought.

To alleviate Joseph’s fears, we are told an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. He put to rest Joseph’s erroneous assumption that she had been unfaithful and explained why and how Mary was pregnant. Her pregnancy was the work of the Holy Spirit, which was all the explanation Joseph needed. He didn’t need to know the science behind it, but he was given the reason for it.

One popular religious personality said in an interview that he couldn’t deny the virgin birth of Christ, but because he couldn’t understand it, he couldn’t then preach on it. He simply chose not to deal with something he didn’t understand.

[After visiting the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Robyn and I were discussing jet propulsion, not that either of us understand it in the least. Robyn said to me that she didn’t understand how someone could think that a bunch of metal pieces of different sizes put into a tube that went around really fast would](#)

[generate enough power to break the speed of sound.](#)

I will never, ever understand the virgin birth – how God could become man and still be God. All I know is that the virgin birth is essential to the foundation of Christianity. He had to be both God and man to one day atone for sin. To ignore the virgin birth, is to ignore His deity or the importance of the reality in this dual nature. We cannot accept some parts of the Bible and deny other parts. We must accept that the Bible is true in every part and that includes the virgin birth. Many people get all hung up on how it happened and won’t believe until they know it. God’s Word says Mary was a virgin and she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. That’s all I need to know. God said it, that settles it.

If we only accept certain parts of the Bible as true, that sets us up as being above it and above God who wrote it and calls into question God’s character. If we don’t believe some of the Bible, we call God a liar. If His Word says He was born of a virgin, that’s what happened and **John 1:1, 14** say He was both God and man.

John 1:1, 14

If Jesus was not both God and man, there is no gospel, no hope of eternal life or atonement for sin. His incarnation is central to Christianity. If He was only a man, He could only hope to atone for His own sin, so He had to be God in order to atone for all sin. His incarnation, and atonement rise and fall together. Without one, you have neither.

What troubled the Pharisees the most about Jesus, was His claim to be deity. They believed that the Messiah would not be divine.

For Mary to be a virgin, not only protected her own reputation, but more importantly it protected the divine nature of God’s Son. Had Jesus been born by the seed of man, He would have inherited the sin nature of man because that nature is passed on through the seed of man. How important are the words in **Genesis 3:15** that tell us that the seed of the woman would bring the promised redeemer. The seed normally belongs to man, but for the incarnation to be possible, this one time the seed

had to be through the woman. The virgin birth is a divine mystery, done only by the One through whom all things are possible. The incarnation is the only time in history where the seed in woman did not come from man but by the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 4:4 tells us that at just the right time, God sent His Son, born of a woman to redeem those under the law to receive the rights of a son.

What the angel told Joseph emphasizes the supernatural pregnancy, that it in fact is marvelous. It isn't ours to try and figure it out, but to accept by faith because if there is no virgin birth, there is no Savior and there is no sacrifice for sin. **When you ponder the birth of Christ that we celebrate at Christmas, do you wonder with awe in the pregnancy and just how uniquely special it is for each of us as believers in Christ?**

Truly there is wonder in the pregnancy with Christ. We also see wonder in the proclamation about Christ.

II. THE WONDER IN THE PROCLAMATION ABOUT CHRIST– Matthew 1:20-21

I see two important truths.

There is wonder in the affirmation – it's essential.
There is wonder in the aim – it's extraordinary.

A. There Is Wonder in the Affirmation – It's Essential – v. 20

Being a righteous man, he lived as best he knew by the Old Testament law. The law said that if a woman got pregnant outside of marriage, she was to be stoned to death. How else could he explain her being with child, except for unfaithfulness. When you think you know someone, and something like this happens, it must have really broken his heart. To think that the woman to whom he had been betrothed had been unfaithful was too much to bear. But while on the one hand the Law said she should be stoned, it also said something that perhaps or seemingly contradicted the law.

Years later someone would ask Jesus what the greatest commandment was. He said it was to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

He continued by saying that the second was just like the first – love others as yourself. Essentially, love God and others with all you have. So while the law said she should be stoned for infidelity (because who would really believe a story like the one she told Joseph about an angel and the Holy Spirit), the law also said that others should be loved and essentially shown grace and mercy. That's why after some considerable time of searching his own heart and truly what would be best for Mary, he opted to pursue a quiet divorce.

If we were writing the Christmas story, we would have the angel show up one day while Mary and Joseph were together having a picnic. That way there would be no confusion on his part from the beginning of the whole thing. It would have saved him a lot of mental anguish trying to come up with a solution that would have saved him from anxiety and damaged reputations. But then, we know that God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. His plan and purpose are right all the time and so we can only conclude that God was going to work out good through this situation.

The angel came and alleviated the fears of Joseph and affirm to him that it was okay to take Mary as his wife, that she had not been unfaithful. The affirmation also came with another piece of information that was essential in the story. Joseph was a descendant of David giving him rightful place as heir to the throne as we see in the opening verses of **chapter 1**.

What the angel shared with Joseph through the dream was not only essential to put aside any fears he had, but to also affirm the story Mary told him was true. This news was not only essential, it was also extraordinary. There is wonder in its aim.

B. There Is Wonder in the Aim – It's Extraordinary – v. 21

He was to be given the name of Jesus, a name that means Savior. But how would He be a Savior. Many thought the Savior would deliver them from political oppression. Just as God had delivered Israel from the tyranny of Egypt, this Savior would

deliver them from Roman rule. But the angel delineates the purpose of His birth and what kind of Savior He would be. He would save from sin. Every person is born in sin. It has separated us from God. Without Christ coming, we could not be saved from sin. There would be no hope, no salvation. God loved the world so much that He sent His only son to be the Savior, by dying in our stead, taking our sin on Himself as the sacrifice God desired to pay for sin. Those who believe, according to **John 3:16**, will not perish, will not be forever separated from God for eternity, but will instead have eternal life in His presence. The Bible tells us that we will become part of His forever family – all because Jesus came to save us from sin, a condition we can do nothing about on our own, but something God did for us by sending His Son.

Do you wonder why God would love you so much to do that for you? Do you wonder at the extraordinary reason, the aim of the incarnation? He did that for you and me.

What the angel proclaimed to Joseph about the baby Mary was carrying was essential to affirm the aim of the child, that He would save people from sin. That is the message to us today. If we ever doubt that Jesus came or the reason He came, let the words of the angel affirm His purpose and wonder in awe that He is the Savior.

The angel had one more piece of important news to share with Joseph. We see it in **verse 23**.

C. There Is Wonder in the Announcement – It’s Exciting – v. 23

“They will call Him Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us.’”

According to orthodox interpretation the name means the same as God-man. It refers to the personal union of the human nature and the divine nature in Christ.

Philippians 2:5-8

Verse 8 doesn’t mean He just looked like a man, but that He actually was a man. He was fully God – **verse 6**. He was fully man – **verse 8**.

Hebrews 2:14-17

John 1:1 tells us that Christ was fully God.

John 1:14 tells us that Christ was fully man. He is God with us.

In the Old Testament, God promised His presence with us. It was symbolized in the Tabernacle and then the Temple – both were places where He “tabernacled” with man. They were a prophetic voice looking forward to the time when God would dwell with man in the person of Jesus Christ. It also looked forward to a future event.

Revelation 21:3 “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God Himself will be with them and be their God.’”

We have the assurance of God’s abiding presence with us wherever we go, and in whatever we face.

Psalms 23:4 “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me.”

Isaiah 41:10 “Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yea I will help you, yea I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness.”

Imagine if you will, some dignitary coming to your home. As a matter of fact, they are going to stay with you from now on. After you get over the initial shock and then the need to hire a cleaning crew to clean every inch of your home, you look forward to the day that person will arrive.

God in the person of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, came and tabernacled with mankind, lived on earth for about 33 years and then He returned to heaven. But before His departure He informed His disciples that He would be sending the Holy Spirit who would from then on live within those who by faith trust Christ as Savior. He would not just live among us, but would live in us.

Romans 8:9 states that God’s Spirit is in you if you are a believer.

I Corinthians 6:19 “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”

At His incarnation, God was literally with us in the person of Christ. Now God is with us in the Holy Spirit.

Do you find wonder in the announcement that God is with us? It should be exciting to you.

Love was when God became a Man,
Locked in time and space, without rank or place;
Love was God born of Jewish kin;
Just a carpenter with some fishermen.

Love was when Jesus walked in history,
Lovingly He brought a new life that's free,
Love was God nailed to bleed and die
To reach and love one such as I.

Love was when God became a Man,
Down where I could see Love that reached to me;
Love was God dying for my sin
And so trapped was I my whole world caved in.

Love was when Jesus met me, now it's real;
Lovingly He came, I can feel He's real!
Love was God, only He would try
To reach and love one such as I.

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There is one final passage I want to consider this morning and that is in **Luke 2:19** where we see the wonder in the praise for Christ.

III. THE WONDER IN THE PRAISE FOR CHRIST – Luke 2:19

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

Wonder is first of all a matter of hearing.

A. It's A Matter Of Hearing

To ponder means she kept these things to herself and turned them over and over in her mind, determined to remember each detail. It speaks of deep reflection and meditation on the significance or importance of what was happening.

In the preceding verses, the shepherds heard the news from the angel and committed to going and seeing for themselves this wonderful news that had

been told them about the birth of the Savior. They no doubt excitedly shared all that had happened to them that brought them to the manger scene. Mary heard all they had to share and stored it up in her memory. But we also read that while they shared the same news with others, whom Scripture says were amazed, we get the impression that they went back to their lives almost as if nothing happened.

Matthew Henry writes “The truths of Christ are worth keeping; and the way to keep them safe is to ponder them. Meditation is the best help to memory.”

As Mary heard the praise from the shepherds and then later from Simeon, Anna and then the Magi, it was not just a matter of hearing, but also a matter of the heart.

B. A Matter Of The Heart

The wonder of Christmas, the wonder of Christ is lost on those who look past the significance of His coming. Many missed it. When the Magi showed up on King Herod's doorstep, his heart was troubled. On the other hand, Mary's heart could be filled with wonder at what she heard knowing that God's redemptive plan was now unfolding. Just like He promised, He had sent the Savior of the world. Her wonder caused her to treasure up all these things.

In a letter we just received from my Dad, he writes: “As we read the Christmas story in the Bible, we see that people who came in contact with Jesus, or who talked about Him, experienced joy. Their inward feelings of joy were so great that it was visible on the outside.”

During this Christmas season, does your heart wonder after Christ as you once again reflect on why He came?

Does your heart wonder about Him leading you to praising God for His unspeakable gift?

Is your heart filled with joy today as you once more hear the story of Christ's birth?

Last week we saw the worship around Christ. Today we considered the wonder about Christ. Next week we will talk about the witness for Christ.