

NOTES ON THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

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Soli Deo Gloria!

IMPORTANCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH. The supernatural conception and virgin birth of Christ is clearly taught in Scripture and cannot be compromised. It is a vital and indispensable element of Biblical Christology for the following reasons: 1) the hypostatic union brought about in the incarnation (i.e., the uniting of divine and human natures in the Person of Christ) cannot be achieved by natural conception—it necessitates a divine/supernatural work of creation, and 2) the blood curse pronounced on King Jeconiah and all of his physical descendants (Jer22:29-30) disqualifies Joseph (Matt1:12,16) from ever reigning on the throne of David; if Jesus were the natural offspring of Joseph, He would likewise be disqualified from ever reigning on the throne of David (cf. Luk1:31-33).

**MATTHEW 1:16-25**

(JOSEPH'S PERSPECTIVE)

[16] Though the English can be ambiguous, the Greek is emphatic. The Greek pronoun  $\eta\varsigma$ , translated "of whom" in this verse, is *feminine* and *singular*. Thus, the text clearly asserts that Jesus was born of Mary, **not** Joseph. No explanation for this peculiarity is given here, but the stage is set for the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ that is presented in the section that follows.

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[18] Verses 18-25 are an elaboration of v16. Mary and Joseph were espoused, but had not consummated their marriage, when Mary was "found with child of the Holy Spirit".

[19] Joseph naturally assumes Mary is guilty of adultery, which carries the death penalty under Mosaic Law (Lev20:10). However, being a "righteous man", Joseph desires to divorce Mary discreetly, so as not to call public attention to her presumed sin and its consequences, which the Law allowed (Deut24:1).

Note that Jewish espousal, prior to consummation, is considered marriage, and requires a formal, written divorce to dissolve. This formality of Jewish marriage gives rise to the so-called "exception clause" in Jesus' teaching on divorce, which is peculiar to Matthew's Gospel written to a Jewish audience (Cp., Matt19:9; Mk10:11-12; Luk16:18; Rom7:2-3; 1Cor7:11-12,39).

[20] Undoubtedly Mary had explained to Joseph the supernatural circumstances of her conception, but it was too incredulous for him to believe based on her testimony alone. The appearance of an angel with a message for him from the LORD was necessary for Joseph to relent. Note that the angel addresses Joseph as the "son of David", calling attention to his royal heritage.

[21] God makes clear to Joseph, as He does separately to Mary (Luk1:31), that the child is to be named "JESUS" as previously prophesied (Cp., Zech6:11-12). "Jesus" is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means "Jehovah saves". That the mission of Jesus will be to "save His people from their sins" is an allusion to Isaiah 53:5-11.

- [22] Matthew calls attention to the fact that the virgin-birth of Messiah is in accordance with the prophecy of Isa7:14.
- [23] The Greek word translated "virgin" is **παρθένος**, which just like the English is technical and specific, indicating one who has never engaged in sexual intercourse.
- Jesus would also be known as "Immanuel", which means "God with us". This title calls attention to the incarnation/hypostatic union, that Jesus is God come in the flesh (Jn1:1,14; Philip2:5-8; 1Tim3:16; 2Jn7); thus, Matthew emphasizes the Deity of Christ in the very opening chapter of his Gospel.
- [24] Submitting to the LORD, Joseph took Mary in her already-pregnant condition as his wife. This righteous act, however, committed both he and Mary to a life of shame, as all presumed that the birth of Jesus was illegitimate, resulting from unlawful premarital sex between Mary and 'perhaps' Joseph (Cf., Jn8:19,41).
- [25] Though Joseph immediately took Mary as his wife, they did not consummate the marriage until after the birth of Jesus, who is called "her first-born son". After Jesus' birth, however, Mary and Joseph had normal marital relations, which resulted in the natural birth of additional children (e.g., four sons are named and multiple daughters are indicated in Matt13:55-56).

#### LUKE 1:26-35

##### (MARY'S PERSPECTIVE)

- [26] The time of this visitation is the "sixth month" of Elizabeth's pregnancy with John (Cp., v36). "Gabriel" is one of the few angels named in the Bible; his missions to earth recorded in Scripture seem to be as God's messianic herald (cf. Dan8:16; 9:21; Luk1:19). The "Galilee" also has messianic significance, as Isaiah had prophesied 7 centuries before that Messiah would in some sense be associated with Galilee (Isa9:1).
- [27] Gabriel visits "Mary" (in Hebrew, Miriam), who is twice in this verse asserted to be a "virgin" (again, the technical term **παρθένος** in Greek) by Luke, a physician (Col4:14). Mary is "espoused" to Joseph. During Jewish espousal, the man and woman are considered husband and wife, though they do not live together, nor do they have sexual relations; the espousal period typically lasted a year or more. Attention is called to the fact that Joseph is "of the house of David", which is a Messianic requirement (1Chron17:11-14).
- [28] Mary is "highly favored" by God in His selection of her to be the mother of the Messiah, the desire of every Jewish woman. In this, she is uniquely blessed "among" (not above) all other women.
- [30] Mary's selection is a "favor" (Greek **χάρις**, meaning 'grace') of God.
- [31] Gabriel informs Mary that she will conceive and give birth to a "son", and that He should be named "JESUS", just as Joseph will be instructed (Matt1:21).
- [32] Her son Jesus will be "great", He will be the "Son of the Highest" (i.e., the Son of God, not the son of Joseph), and He will be heir to the "throne of His father [ancestor] David", meaning He is to

be the messianic fulfillment of God's covenant with David (1Chron17:11-14). Note that at this time there has been no descendent of David on the throne over Israel for more than 6 centuries.

- [33] The destiny of Jesus, as Messiah, is to reign over "the house of Jacob" (i.e., united houses of Israel and Judah; 2Sam7:16; 1Chron17:14; Ps89:3-4,28-29; Ezek37:21-22,24-26), **forever**. This prophecy was yet future at this time; it was not fulfilled during Christ's 1st coming, but it will be fulfilled at His return to establish the Millennial Kingdom.
- [34] Mary recognizes the implications of Gabriel's message, that she will conceive and give birth to this son as a virgin (cf. Gen3:15; Isa7:14). Though espoused to Joseph, she has not had sexual relations with him or any other "man".
- [35] Mary's conception will be supernatural. It will not involve sexual intercourse with any man, but "that holy thing" formed in her womb will be a divine creation of "the Holy Spirit". In this way, Christ will be the genetic offspring of Mary, with a bloodline that is traced back to King David (Luk3:23-31), but not a blood descendent of Joseph (who falls under the curse of Jeconiah). As a supernatural creation of the Holy Spirit, Christ will also be "the Son of God"; in Hebrew language and thought, this is an expression of **equality with God** (cf. Jn10:30-36).