

More Than the Legend of Zeus

The Myths, Messengers and Mystery of Christmas – Part III

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Author Philip Yancey once contrasted the humility of Christ's coming to earth with a trip abroad by England's Queen. When the royal family traveled someplace to make an appearance, they were shown with flashing jewelry, and fanfare, and the attentive, ever present paparazzi.

When Queen Elizabeth visited the United States, newspapers revealed all the behind the scenes details and preparations. There were four thousand pounds of luggage. This was not your usual allotment of forty pounds or so, but four thousand.

The Queen's luggage contained two outfits for every conceivable occasion, including one outfit to wear in case someone died and she needed to attend the funeral. She brought along her own hairdresser, two valets and a dozen personal attendants. Also, carefully preserved within her luggage, were forty pints of plasma in case of a medical emergency. Listen to this – even a brief visit by the Queen to a foreign country can cost her government as much as twenty million dollars.

Having visited a number of royal residences this past summer, I noticed that the British have the custom of flying the flag whenever the Queen is actually in residence. If you see a flag flying somewhere high from a castle, it signifies, "the Queen is in".

The Queen has arrived!

The Mystery of Christmas

Here comes the Son of God!

Here comes the Prince of Peace; the Father of eternity. He is divine royalty – traveling to earth without any attendants and with nowhere to even lay, except in a feed trough borrowed from the animals who seemed willing enough to share it that night with their Creator!

This Christmas, like every other Christmas, the world is reminded, "The King has arrived!" For those of us who believe in Him, beyond December 25th, we have His flag flying from the castle of our hearts.

His flag is a flag of redemption. His majesty did not come to earth with spare blood packed away in case of an emergency. He came to give His blood away because there is an emergency – "the wages of sin is death"!

A mystery – Jesus is fully God and fully human

What an incredible mystery. God the Redeemer coming to earth, born of a virgin. God, choosing to dress in the street clothes of our flesh. The eternal second Person of the Trinity, being confined in time. The omnipresent Son, being bound in a Spirit-fertilized egg in a virgin's womb.

We can sing about it and read about it and study it, but we can never truly fathom how God did it; how He took on flesh in a virgin's womb. To put it more simply, none of us have a clue how God could become a baby.

Yet, all of our gospel depends upon this. The fact that Jesus Christ was fully God and born fully human is not optional truth, it is foundational truth.

Satan denies Jesus' full deity and full humanity through false teaching

It is little wonder then, that early in the life of the church, the enemy of the church began to originate and develop false teaching which claimed Jesus was something less than fully God or less than fully human.

It seems that even before the end of the life of John, the last living apostle, heretical attacks were being launched against either the full humanity or the full deity of Jesus Christ.

One view that arose was known as docetism. This view claimed that Christ was not really flesh; He was not really human.

John countered in his second epistle, chapter 1, verse 7, by writing,

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

The truth is, if Jesus Christ is not fully man and fully God, we cannot be saved and we have no true Christianity. In fact, as one author put it,

Apart from Jesus being both fully human and fully divine, there is no gospel. The essence and the power of the gospel is that God became man and that, by being both wholly God and wholly man, He was able to reconcile sinners to God.ⁱ

Not to mention that if the New Testament is wrong about Jesus being the divine Son of God, born of a virgin, then what can be trusted in the New Testament as right? If the gospel writers misrepresented the truth about Christ, what else did they lie about? His virgin birth, His atoning death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His return all stand together, or they all fall together.

It is no wonder that attacks against the divine and human nature of Christ began early in the church. It was not long after John the apostle died that other views arose to take away from Christ, either His deity or His humanity. For example, there arose:

- Apollinarianism – which taught that Christ was not fully human.
- Nestorianism – which argued that there were two separate people inside the body of Jesus.
- Monophysitism – which taught that Christ had only one nature – a fusion of divine and

human natures. Thus, Christ was not wholly God nor wholly human; He was at least fifty percent God and fifty percent man.ⁱⁱ

The attacks on Christ's nature have not gone away over the years. In fact, they have only intensified. For instance:

- One British author wrote that Jesus would have been horrified to think of a church, let alone people, worshiping Him as if He were divine.
- Another wrote that Jesus was a magician who had people under His sway.
- Another wrote that Jesus was a great rabbi who had no intention or desire to found a movement or a church.ⁱⁱⁱ

If this is true, then Christ cannot truly represent us as a man nor can He fully redeem us as God.

Satan dilutes Jesus' full deity and full humanity by counterfeiting the message

Another way Satan attacks the authenticity of Christ's full deity and full humanity is not to just outright deny it through his false teachers, but to dilute the uniqueness of the virgin birth by counterfeiting the message.

Just study the religions of the world and you will be exposed to stories of virgin births. These include:

- The Romans believed that Zeus impregnated Semele without contact with her, and that she conceived Dionysus, lord of the earth.
- The ancient Sumerians, long before the birth of Christ, inscribed on a wall that was discovered centuries later by archaeologists, that their emperor was created in the womb of his mother by their gods.
- Six hundred years before the birth of Christ, it was claimed that the goddess of procreation brought about the conception of King Sennacherib in his mother's womb.

These stories can be interpreted in one of two ways:

- First, you could arrive at the conclusion that all of these virgin conception stories mean Christianity simply borrowed the idea from other religions and came up with its own version.
- Secondly, you could understand it as the enemy's strategy to predate Christianity with

similar versions of the gospel, so that when the event of the gospel occurred, people could say, "That's nice . . . but it's old stuff."

Now, did Satan know ahead of time what God had in mind regarding a virgin born Messiah?

Yes. Go back to Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15, when God said to Satan (paraphrased),

. . . the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent . . .

Every other time in the Bible that you read about seed, or literally, sperm or offspring, it is in reference to the sperm and offspring of man. But in Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15, you find this phrase and it is, in fact, the only time in the Bible that you read about "the seed of the woman".

Why? Because she conceives without a man and her offspring, which is uniquely independent of the seed of man, will crush or defeat the serpent. This is a reference to the Messiah defeating Satan.

Add to that another text that Satan would have access to, centuries before the birth of Christ. Isaiah prophesied, in chapter 7, verse 14,

. . . Behold a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Satan knows about all of this. He happens to be fairly bright, although not entirely bright, because he still refuses to surrender. He says, "Aha! God's plan is for the Messiah to be virgin born. So, I'll dispense and originate and manipulate and encourage and facilitate the development of pagan thought to incorporate the idea of virgin birth."

So there is a mother who one day sees a great white elephant enter her belly and she conceives and births a baby boy named Buddha.

Vishnu, after reincarnations as a fish, tortoise, boar, and lion, eventually descends into the womb of a woman and is born to her as her son named Krishna, and Hinduism is created.^{iv}

During the days of Christ, the legend persisted that Alexander the Great was virgin born by the power of Zeus through a snake that impregnated his mother, Olympias. He too, was the son of god, born of a virgin.

Imagine – these major world religions and philosophies claim a son, born as the offspring of their god.

So Christ is born of a virgin and the world can easily say, "We've heard that before. Christianity just has its own version of a virgin-born-son myth."

Your Philosophy professor in college might tell you that is what happened. That is what he believes. He believes it and he will go to hell. That is, unless hell is a myth too – which he is depending on.

Why would Satan spend so much energy and passion and time and effort to deny, attack, dilute and counterfeit the message of God's Son, the virgin born Messiah?

Satan, in fact, counterfeits in so many details – even down to the point where the scribes had grown accustomed to the title, "King of the Jews". Herod had that title already, remember? And Caesar Augustus had already taken the title, "The Savior of the World".

So the angels appeared to the shepherds and announced, "Listen, we have a great news, born to you this day in the city of David is the Savior."

"We've heard that before."

Satan has counterfeited so many of the great truths of Christianity: the virgin birth, resurrection, begin born again, baptism.

In pagan religions, predating Jesus Christ, initiates into pagan beliefs were said to be "born again". They went through ceremonies involving the covering of blood and, after coming through the initiating rights, were considered born again to a new life. They were then given a cup of milk to drink as if they were newborn babes.

Did Jesus Christ and His church borrow these ideas? No, Satan had already been at work through his teachers and world religions to counterfeit the claims of Christ.

The virgin birth of Christ was one of the key doctrines Satan sought to undermine. Why? Because he knows, better than most, that without the virgin birth of the Messiah, who is fully God and fully man, the world is without a Savior.

Ravi Zacharias wrote about talk show host Larry King, in his response to the question, "If you could select any one person across all of history to interview, who would it be?"

Mr. King's answer was that he would like to interview Jesus Christ. When the questioner followed with, "And what would you like to ask Him?" King replied, "I would like to ask Him if He was indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me."^v

Ladies and gentlemen, if the story of Christ's virgin birth is just another legend; just another story, then so is the rest of what the Bible tells us about Him. You can just write it all off. But if it is true, it does indeed define the truth of history for us all.

It is no wonder then, that one of the most important verses in the New Testament about Christ is one of the first verses in His earthly biography. Matthew, chapter 1, verse 18, says it simply enough,

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.

What a mystery!

In Luke's account, the angel Gabriel is explaining to young Mary how it will happen. He says, in chapter 1, verse 31,

. . . behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus.

Skip to verses 34 and 35.

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you . . ."

That explains it!

Does it? No. Do you understand how God can fertilize an egg in a virgin? No.

No more than I can understand how God's Son could die for sins I have not yet committed and could view me as seated in the heavenlies. No more than I can understand how He will bring my dust together and one day, split open my tomb and reunite my spirit, which has already been with Him, with my resurrected body, which is now glorified, to remain with Him eventually in a newly constructed heaven and earth forever and ever and ever and ever and ever.

Only God can understand His ways – and I am not God!

It would do you good every once in a while, to look at yourself in the mirror and deny the message of your flesh and from your world by looking at yourself and saying, "Hey, I don't know who you think you are, but you are not God."

Then, comb your hair and go eat breakfast.

The apostle Paul said, in I Timothy, chapter 3, verse 16a (NIV),

Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: God appeared in a body . . .

Jesus was really human; He was not just pretending. He did not pretend to cry; He did not pretend to learn how to walk and how to talk. As we are told in Galatians, chapter 4, verse 4,

. . . God sent forth His Son, born of a woman

. . .

Why must Jesus Christ be fully human?

Now why must Jesus Christ be fully human?

1. Jesus must be fully human so that He would in fact, be a representative of the human race in His obedience.

The redeemer had to be a man. The Bible says, in Romans, chapter 5, verses 18 and 19,

. . . as . . . one [man's] transgression [led] to condemnation to all men, . . . so . . . one [man's] act of righteousness [leads] to life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, . . . so through the obedience of the One [man] the many will be made righteous.

By the way, let me insert an important truth at this point. Jesus was fully human because He had a human parent. From Mary, He received His human nature so that He was truly a member of Adam's race.

However, while Jesus received from Mary His human nature, He did not receive from Joseph, the father, a sin nature. Sin nature is what orthodox theologians call inherited guilt which comes through Adam's sin.

Now follow me carefully – the only way Jesus could be fully human, and yet not be corrupted with the legal and moral guilt of Adam, was to be born apart from the seed of Adam. There is only one way that could happen and that is, to not have a human father; to be born of a virgin.

2. Secondly, Jesus had to be a man so that He could be a substitute for the human race in His sacrifice.

If Jesus had not been a man, He would not have been able to die in our place and pay the penalty that was due the human race.

The writer of Hebrews said it this way, in chapter 2, verse 17,

. . . He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become . . .

propitiation [an atoning sacrifice] for the sins of the people.

3. Jesus had to be a man, so that He could experience the penalty of the human race in His death.

Paul wrote to the Philippian believers, in chapter 2, verses 7b through 8,

. . . [Christ was] made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus Christ faced the wrath of God by becoming sin for us.

So, Jesus Christ had to be fully man in order to:

- be a representative of the human race in His obedience;
- be a substitute for the human race in His sacrifice;
- experience the penalty facing the human race in His death.^{vi}

Why must Jesus Christ be fully God?

Listen carefully – there is no salvation in the birth of Christ. There is no salvation even in the fact that He lived a sinless life. Even His teaching could not save us.

There was a price to be paid for our sins – someone had to die and then, rise victoriously from the dead. Jesus Christ was born so that He could die and then come back to glorified, resurrected life.

Ah, but in that case, Jesus had to be more than fully human. That’s right – Jesus also had to be fully God. Only one who is fully God could fully bear the penalty for all the sins of the world.

John wrote in his first epistle, chapter 2, verse 2,

. . . {Christ} is the satisfaction for our sins; and not of ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

How do you bear the sins of the whole world? We would have trouble bearing the load and guilt of our own, right?

Think about it this way. If you are a good person – and I’m sure you are because you are in church – although you could have come in here to hide from the law – but if we suppose that you are a good person and you sin only three times a day – that is great! But that is still a thousand sins a year.

Now multiply a thousand by your age, give or take two or three years before you consciously began to sin. For some of us, conscious sin began at a very young age; some before we were barely home from the hospital. When you had an unkind thought; did some selfish act; had a lustful idea; had a covetous thought; did not do something you should have done – the Bible says that is also sin.

But you are a good person and you only commit three sins a day. I can do that before I even get to work! For instance:

- I am late and I am going to need to speed – that is one;
- I think, “Wow, I like that guy’s pickup truck better than mine” – that is two;
- I think, “Hey, don’t pull in front of me, you pagan!”

Okay, that is my three for the day – and I am still on Penny Road!

Frankly, there is no human way I could possibly atone for all my sins and the fact that I am sinful; much less the sins and sinfulness of everyone in my neighborhood. I certainly could not atone for millions of people, and I certainly could not atone for the whole world!

Only God could pay that penalty. Aha! That is precisely the point!

Conclusion

Imagine my Bible being the record book of your life. The front page is your birth certificate, the last page is your death certificate, and all the pages in between are all your sinful thoughts, selfish deeds, wicked ideas, etc. Everything is in this book that you never put on your resumé.

The Bible says,

- ***It pleased the [Father] to bruise Him [the Son] . . . (Isaiah 53:10a KJV)***
- ***. . . the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6b KJV)***
- ***. . . He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities . . . (Isaiah 53:5a)***
- ***. . . He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree . . . (I Peter 2:24a NIV)***
- ***. . . the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)***

Who is Jesus Christ to you? A baby in a manger? A seasonal interruption? A warm feeling of temporary sanctification? A nice man who got treated cruelly when He did not deserve it? Is He just one more legend of religion; just another virgin story borrowed from the legends of the world? Is that who Jesus is to you?

You might be right! You might be right!

But what if you are wrong, and the Bible is right?! What if the Bible is telling the genuine virgin birth story? What if Christ is more than a myth, more than a baby, fully God and fully man?

The question remains, “Who is Jesus Christ to you?”

I declare to you today, on the authority of the Biblical record, Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God. Since He is all of that, He is the One who is fully able:

to die;

to redeem;

to forgive;

to one day return!

I invite you to trust the record of scripture today and receive this virgin born Savior into your life.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/19/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John MacArthur, Matthew (Moody Press, 1985), p. 13.

ⁱⁱ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology (Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 554.

ⁱⁱⁱ Stephen Davey, When Heaven Came Down, Volume One, p. 6.

^{iv} MacArthur, p. 12.

^v Ravi Zacharias, “Questions I Would Like to Ask God,” Just Thinking Winter, (1998).

^{vi} Grudem, p. 540.