

"The Grand Miracle"

In his book *Miracles*, C.S. Lewis noted that Christianity is "precisely the story of a great miracle." To Lewis, that great miracle was the Incarnation. He said, "The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this." The miracle of the Incarnation is at the very heart of the good news of the Gospel. Lewis always found it odd when people want to believe in Christ without accepting the miracle of the virgin birth, thereby voluntarily digging away the foundation upon which their belief is based.

All Things Are Possible with God

Why is it so hard for so many, especially in the Western world, to accept the miracle of the virgin birth? Many no longer believe in the power of God and the reality of the spiritual world. But the Bible is a record of miracles. It reveals that those things which are impossible with human beings are possible with God.

The coming of God's Son is announced by the angel Gabriel. Shortly after His birth, a choir of angels welcomes Him and proclaims the greatness of the Most High. We cannot deny that the Bible abounds in appearances of both fallen and perfect angels. They meet us from the very beginning of Genesis to the last book of the Bible, and almost everywhere in between. Their vital role in the history of redemption is abundantly evident. If we are to be faithful students of the Bible, we have no choice but to speak about them. People who believe that angels don't exist are like the hireling prophet Balaam, who couldn't see the angel although one stood in his way as an adversary against him. The donkey saw the angel and was granted the gift of speech to make him aware of the heavenly being in front of him. The donkey was more spiritually in tune than Balaam (Nu. 22:21-35). As we read God's Word, we immediately notice that it does not seek to convince us of the existence of the spiritual world, it takes it for granted. Furthermore, we know absolutely nothing of the invisible world beyond what the Bible reveals. Therefore, any belief in the invisible world which does not rest on divine revelation is essentially mere superstition. The twice-born of God know heaven is as real as the earth. Like the patriarch Abraham, they can persevere because they see Him "who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

The Annunciation

The birth of Jesus was entirely normal and natural. What was abnormal and supernatural was His conception by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had a human mother but no human father. Luke introduces His mother, Mary, by means of a report that the angel Gabriel is sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee to a virgin engaged to a man by the name of Joseph, a descendant of David (Luke 1:26,27). Mary herself confesses her virginity in her interview with the angel: "How can this be since I am a virgin?" (1:34). Mary had kept herself pure in accord with God's law. With wonder we encounter Mary's acknowledgement of the angel's announcement with the words, "I am the Lord's servant."... "May it be to me as you have said" (1:38). Who then is Christ?

The Incarnation

The same person who is known in history as Jesus of Nazareth existed before He became man, as the infinite, eternal and unchangeable God, the second person of the Holy Trinity. He emptied Himself of His divine glory, became a child supernaturally conceived in Mary's womb. God's Son came down from heaven into time and space, down into humanity. Mary's virginal conception was the means whereby God became man, whereby He who "was rich for our sakes became poor, that through His poverty, we might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). With the Church Father, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 A.D), we confess, "The Son of God – He who made the universe – assumed flesh and was conceived in the virgin's womb." From the Biblical perspective, the Incarnation is no more or less miraculous than the birth of the universe, no one who believes that God could create the universe should stumble at the doctrine of the Incarnation. Rather, it should compel us to bring praise, worship, honour and glory to God. The angel Gabriel tells Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit operative in the birth of Jesus was also intimately and personally involved in the work of creation. God, the Father Almighty, made the universe through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the creation account, we read that the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30). After having stressed the divine Sonship of Christ, I want to point out that the Bible is quite adamant that Jesus' full and true humanity was in no way threatened or impaired by the miracle of the virgin birth. On the contrary, by being conceived by a human mother He "shared" in our humanity (Heb. 2:14), and was like us "in every way" (Heb. 2:17).

The Humanity of Christ

The Son of God took His human nature from the Virgin Mary. God came to us, not as an angel mighty in radiant power, but as an infant. He was real in flesh and blood like us. He grew up like any other Jewish child. He was a carpenter in a small town. He became tired and thirsty. He became tired and slept like any other man. Of course, to be hungry and thirsty, to be weary and to sleep is clearly human. But to feed 5,000 men with five loaves, and to walk on the surface of the sea and not sink, and quell the rising of the waves by rebuking the winds is without doubt Divine. As the Church Father Hippolytus (ca.170-236) puts it, "When He came into the world, He was manifested as God and man. It is easy to recognize the human nature in Him, when He hungers and shows exhaustion and is weary and thirsty. ...on the other hand, the divine in Him is equally manifest, when He is worshipped by the angels...at a marriage makes wine out of water..and raises Lazarus after he was dead for four days."

The Hope Christ Offers

What difference does it make whether or not we believe in the truth of Christ's miraculous birth? The difference is either despair or hope. Through this great miracle, God has made salvation possible for human beings separated from God by the awful abyss of sin. The Gospel is the movement from God to man. It does not tell the story of a human search for God at all, but of something done by God for, to, and about, man. The Gospel is not about human beings finding God on their own – to be better and better disciples – but God reaching to human beings. We cannot reach God in our own strength. We can do a lot of things, even

go to the moon and Mars, but we cannot save ourselves. Salvation is the work of God (John 3:16). No one can attain to eternal life, except through the mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ. (John 14:6). Human death was the result of sin and the triumph of Satan. To overcome sin and death, the Incarnate Son of God lived, suffered, and died on a cross. This is the ultimate testimony to His humanity.

Jesus is also our Immanuel which means, "God with us" (Isa. 7:14). It means that God is not a distant deity who lives in glorious isolation. He is neither cold nor inaccessible. Believing in Christ means to trust Him to know what to do when a problem or a crisis arises. On the one hand, it is encouraging to know that when we turn to Jesus with our problems, He understands us because He is like us. On the other hand, we may rejoice because this Jesus is so much more than we are. He is the sinless Son of God, and thus, with divine power, He can sustain those who trust in Him. We can trust Him to help us when we are in trouble.

The virgin birth of Christ "the grand miracle," is still confessed by Bible believing Christians around the world. The ancient *Nicene Creed* declares Christ's deity – He is "very God of very God" – and Christ's humanity – "He was made man." The Creed also eloquently declares that this view of the person of Christ has everything to do with the work of Christ. He is the God-man "*for us and for our salvation.*" Praise be to God!

Johan D. Tangelder
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