Title: “THE VIRGIN BIRTH: Does It Really Matter?”
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Evening Service – December 18, 2011
Smythe Street Cathedral
Fun Introduction

Video “What’s In the Bible?” – 12 Questions of Christmas – Day 2
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiqW0Hmnnxk&list=PLCB285AAA8ACAB1A&index=2&feature=plpp_video

Taking Things for Granted…

I like the video (and I really like the What’s In the Bible series). If you have an older child (mid elementary school and up), I heartily recommend this video series (don’t tell my kids but they are getting a couple for Christmas).

One of the things I like about this video, is it gets me to take a look at something I as a young child just took for granted, that Jesus was born on December 25.

In life, and in our faith, we can easily take things for granted.

I’ve taken the virgin conception & birth for granted all of my life. I grew up in the church, so I’ve always assumed it to be true.

Not everyone else does. For some people this is a major stumbling block to faith.

Arguments for:

- Unparalleled – pregnancy without intercourse
  - In that time there were stories of God becoming like men and making out with women, but this is without parallel
- It doesn’t make sense to make it up
  - Why complicate an already complicated story?
- Jesus referred to as the son of Mary (uncommon)

The Other Question: Why should / does it matter?

If God does everything for a purpose, even those of us who by faith believe this is true must ask ourselves, why is it here? Why did it happen that way?

Let’s read the two accounts just so we remember what the text says:

Luke 1:26-38 (NIV)
26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a
descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” 35 The angel answered, “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. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

Matthew 1:18-25 (NIV)

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Jesus is fully human

In the early days of Christianity, some of the bigger challenges were with those who couldn’t believe Jesus was really the messiah (Jewish), or a person (Hellenistic).

Irenaeus (an early church father), referred to the virgin birth not to point out Jesus divinity, rather to combat Gnostics who denied Jesus full humanity.
Primer on Gnosticism & Surrounding controversies:
Gnostics (which is a broad term encompassing a number of different groups) believed the secret to salvation was obtaining ‘secret spiritual knowledge’ (gnosis = know).
These groups often had a dislike for flesh and the physical world, salvation is to escape it. They saw a truly physical incarnation (and suffering) as incomprehensible. They thought the spirit ‘Christ’ came upon Jesus at baptism. (and left him at the crucifixion). Their worldview contrasts with traditional Christianity in that God calls the physical world good.

Galatians 4:4
But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Jesus was Born as a human
The Gnostics didn’t have a problem with Jesus divinity, but with his humanity.
The virgin birth is first of all a real birth, from a real human.
The early church remembered this teaching because it happened, and because it couches Jesus among us. Christ was not just ‘hanging around with Jesus’ but was the person of Jesus.
Jesus shared our experience, born like us, lived like us, was tempted as we were, and suffered like us.

This Is a Challenge for Us as Well
While we wouldn’t go as far as the Gnostics, sometimes in our ‘taking the story for granted’ forget Jesus humanity.
We read the ‘sermon on the mount’ and forget it Jesus was a person, who lived, breathed, had enemies, when he spoke it. Because we worship Jesus as Lord, the risen Christ, his words can become like the voice that spoke to Moses on the mountaintop.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV)
15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in
Jesus was tempted.

**Jesus Is God**

In our day and age, the virgin birth & conception, is important because it is unique.

The German theologian Karl Barth says it like this:

The virgin birth is “a single sign that this life is marked off from all the rest of human life.” More specifically, the virgin birth denotes the mystery of revelation, namely, that God stands at the start where genuine revelation happens.¹

*Luke 1:35 (NIV)*

the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

John refers to this in his gospel saying,

*John 1:14-15 (NIV)*

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The one making his dwelling (literally pitching his tent) living among us, is the God who created the universe and holds it all together.

**You think we would have this clear...**

Today, we can have this problem. Not with our affirmation that Jesus is God, most people who call themselves Christians do well affirming that, but do we take Jesus’ words and teachings like the teachings of God.

¹ As mentioned in Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, (page 317).
The non-Christian world (and even we) can suffer from giving Jesus the “Just another good guy” syndrome. We pick and choose what he says, and do combine it with other teachers to make our own cocktail of truth.

Jesus’ virgin conception and birth undoes that, he stands alone. Saying he comes from God, and is God doesn’t allow us to pick and choose.

**What it means to us…**

As I stand looking at the virgin birth, we shouldn’t just dismiss it. If you are not a believer and have, I invited you to look into it. I believe that this, just like the resurrection stands tough intellectual scrutiny. Many times those who have attempted to study Christianity to disprove it end up believing. Jesus said it, seek and you will find.

As a believer, the virgin birth is not something to take for granted. It stands at the beginning of Christian faith as the first miracle, the first revelation that Jesus fulfils the ancient prophecy,

**Matthew 1:23 (NIV)**

> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

**God with us**

Jesus was fully God, and God became like us, fully human.

If you have doubts about God caring for you, know this, he cares enough to feel pain and walk among us. Then not just to leave us there but to redeem, save and change us.