

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

By Mike Burnham

The *Virgin Birth* is taught clearly in two NT passages; Mat. 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38, and in one OT passage, Isaiah 7:14. In the early Church it was questioned only by Ebionites (who denied Jesus' Deity) and by Docetites (who denied his true humanity). With the rise of liberal theology it has increasingly come to be questioned. This is largely because of the belief that the bible as a whole is not the Word of God, but contains the Word of God, and sometimes because the possibility of the miraculous is denied. John ascribes to the spirit of antichrist any denial that *Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*, 1 John 4:2,3.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

1. The doctrine of the "*virgin birth*" of Jesus Christ is important because it is required for the fulfillment of scripture, Isa. 7:14--Matt. 1:18; Gen. 3:15--Gal. 4:4.
2. If Christ was not *conceived of a virgin*, He could not be our *Redeemer*. He would have been a child of natural conception as we are, a sinner with a sin nature. He would have had to die because of his own sins and *we would not have a Saviour*, Rom. 3:23. But Praise God He was born of a virgin and sinless, Luke 1:26-35; 2 Cor. 5:21.
3. If Jesus was not *conceived of a virgin*, He could not be *King* of Israel. The Messiah was to receive his *body* through the loins of David and His *royal standing* through David's son Solomon, 2 Sam. 7. Christ received his body *through Mary* who was a descendant of

David's son Nathan, Luke 3:31, so he was from David's loins. Joseph's royal lineage goes back through Solomon to King David, Matt. 1:6, but when we come to a godless king by the name of Coniah (Jeconiah) we read in Jeremiah 22:30 that "*no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.*" Joseph is seed of Coniah and therefore has the curse of Coniah upon him and his seed. But Jesus is his *legal son*, not of his *true seed*, and as the legal son of Joseph Jesus inherits the throne of David through Solomon. In fact, *Jesus is the only living Person today who has the LEGAL right to the throne of David.*

THE TIME AND DATE

Because of errors in the calendar introduced by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. it is generally agreed that the birth of Christ should be at least 4 B.C. We are told in the gospels that Jesus was born while Herod was still living and his death has been placed at March 12,13, 4 B.C. by astronomers using Josephus' history, who wrote that Herod died after an eclipse of the moon and before the Passover, which fell in that year on April 4. This would suggest that Jesus was born about 5 or 6 B.C.

The date accepted by most Christians for Christ's birth is December 25th. Though the New Testament does not designate a particular day, there are indications which point to a date other than December 25th. **(1)** We are told, for example, that when Christ was born in Bethlehem, "*There was no room in the inn.*" This is improbable unless it was in the seasons of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, when Jewish pilgrims flocked from all parts of the known world and took every available accommodation in and near Jerusalem (including

Bethlehem---six miles away). These feasts were observed in the spring or autumn, not in the winter. **(2)** It seems inconceivable that, if his birth was in the dead of winter, anyone occupying a room would not have yielded his room to a woman in such need. **(3)** The Roman government would not have chosen winter as the time of year for taxation or registration, if such command necessitated long journeys on the part of the people.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH & THE INCARNATION

The virgin birth and the incarnation are not exactly the same. The virgin birth speaks of *Christ's humanity*. The *virgin birth* states: **(1)** that this man, Jesus, did not have a human father, but was the Son of God, Luke 1:31-32,35. **(2)** That his birth was supernatural, but that he was a Man, born into the Human Race, Rom. 1:3-4; Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Jn. 4:2; 2 Jn 7. He was the *Son of Man*, that is, *the Son of Humanity*, Matt. 26:64. Whenever Jesus calls himself the Son of Man he uses the Greek word "*anthropos*" (humanity), never "*aner*" (meaning the human male). Notice Mat. 1:16: all the preceding verses have so and so begat, but not Joseph, he is referred to as the husband of Mary "*of whom*" (feminine genitive referring back to Mary not Joseph) Jesus was born. **(3)** That he had no human father further states that he *was not in the image and likeness of Adam* and so he was not conceived in sin, or with a sin nature, Gen. 5:3; Psa. 51:5; Job 14:1,4; Rom. 5:12 (the sin nature is hereditary); Eph. 2:3.

The incarnation speaks of *Christ's deity*. The doctrine of the *incarnation* states: **(1)** that Christ existed previous to the virgin

birth, was God, and that he became flesh, Jn 1:1,14. **(2)** That the Second Person of the trinity became man in all his *weaknesses*, but without sin, Phil 2:6-8; Heb. 4:15. He was *weary*, Jn. 4:6-7; He was *hungry*, Mk. 11:12; Luke 4:2; He became tired and fell *asleep*, Luke 8:23; He *wept*, Jn. 11:35; He *thirsted*, Jn. 4:7: 19:28; He *increased in wisdom and stature (age)*. **(3)** The incarnation means that, in some sense, God without ceasing to be God, was made man, 1 Tim. 3:16. **(4)** God, who is Spirit, *prepared a body* for Himself so He could offer Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of His people and *die* in their place, paying the penalty of sin, the transgression of His Law, Heb. 10:4-5, 10-17.

FIVE WAYS TO MAKE A BODY

God has *five* ways of making a human body. **(1)** He can make a body without using either man or woman, like He did Adam, made of the dust of the earth, Gen. 2:7. **(2)** He can make a body by using just a man, as He did Eve, Gen. 2:21-22. **(3)** He can make a body using both man and woman, Gen. 4:1. This being the natural way, the way we received our bodies. **(4)** He can make a body using just a woman, as He did our Lord Jesus Christ, Gal. 4:4. **(5)** And He is going to make a new body, a spiritual body, 1 Cor. 15:42-44; 51-53; Phil. 3:21.

THE GENEALOGIES

Matthew 1:1-17...As we began to read Matthew's account we discover that it is written from the viewpoint of Joseph, and for Jews. It is to Joseph that the angel Gabriel announces Mary's conception, Mat. 1:18-25. The genealogy is the genealogy of Joseph according to

the legal Jewish method, Mat. 1:16. Matthew wants to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the hopes and promises of Israel, so Matthew goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jews. The Gospel of Matthew shows Christ as King, being in the royal lineage of David and Solomon. Being Joseph's legal son Jesus is in the royal lineage. The Bible specifically states that Jesus shall reign on the throne of his father David, Luke 1:32; Psa. 132:11; Psa. 89:3,4.

Luke 3:23-38....As we read Luke's account we see that it is from the viewpoint of Mary. It is to Mary that the angel Gabriel announces her conception, Luke 1:26-38. It's interesting that Satan appeared to Eve in order that through her man might be separated from God, and Gabriel appeared to Mary to reveal that through her God and man would be reunited by Christ. The genealogy in Luke shows Christ's broader relation to humanity, by going back to Adam, but it also shows that Jesus is *a true seed of David* in fulfillment of prophecy, Luke 3:31; Rom. 1:3; Acts 2:29-30; 13:22-23. The Gospel of Luke shows that Jesus is the *perfect, ideal Man, kinsman to the human race, a Kinsman Redeemer*, John 5:27, and the fulfillment of the hope of all nations, so Luke goes back to Adam, the father of all mankind. Luke is writing to a Gentile, Luke 1-3.

Mary's genealogy, though Luke 3:23, is confusing because of the words, "*the son of heli*" which actually go back to Jesus, not Joseph. The words "*the son*" are italicized and not in the original manuscripts. If left out the passage makes more sense.

Mark does not have a genealogy in his Gospel because he pictures Christ as *a servant* and a servant's pedigree is not important. Likewise, the Gospel of John does not contain a genealogy because John pictures Jesus as the *Son of God* who is eternal and therefore had no beginning and no genealogy.

THE STORY OF THE MESSIAH'S BIRTH

Luke 2:26...An angel, named Gabriel, came to a virgin named Mary and told her she was highly favored and blessed was she among woman (notice he didn't say "*above woman*") and of the son she was going to have, verses 27-35, 38. The prophecy of verses 32-33 have not been fulfilled yet, but they will at the *Second Coming* of Jesus Christ as *Kings of kings* and *Lord of lords*, Rev. 19:16. Notice in Luke 1:34 that Mary testifies herself that she is a virgin. She conceived by the power of God through the Holy Ghost and he that was conceived was *holy*, different in a special way, the Son of God, verse 35. After Mary was with child, she went to visit her cousin Elisabeth for about three months, verses 39-40, 56.

Matt. 1:18...It was after Joseph and Mary were espoused (engaged), before they were married, that Joseph found Mary with child, presumably after she returned from Elisabeth's. Jewish custom was that the man and woman would be engaged for ten to twelve months before they were married. But they were bound together as if they were married. If at the close of this period the bridegroom was unwilling to marry the bride, he was bound to give her a *bill of divorce*, the same as if she had been his wife. If, on the other hand, the bride had been guilty of an illicit affair during this time, she was condemned to be stoned, the same as if they had been married, or she could be put away privately in the presence of two or three witnesses. When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, he thought that she had been untrue and decided to put her away privately, verse 19. As he was thinking the angel, Gabriel, came to him, verses 20-25. Because Joseph married Mary *before* Jesus was born, he became Joseph's legal

son.

Though Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost in a despised little town called Nazareth (Jn. 1:46), He was born in a town about six miles south of Jerusalem called Bethlehem, in fulfillment of prophecy, Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1-7. From Matthew 1:25 we read that Jesus was her *firstborn*, meaning she had children after His birth, Luke 2:7; Matt. 13:55-56; 15:40; Mk. 6:3. Jesus received his name and was circumcised according to the law (*because he was born under the law*, Gal. 4:4) when he was eight days old, Luke 2:21. Jesus means "Saviour" and He was to save His people, Matt. 1:21 (see center reference).