The Necessity of the Virgin Birth

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Date: 26 December 2021

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone, and I join Brother Shumby in welcoming all of you here, especially those of you who are guests or those of you who are just coming back to a long time of being away, whether in university or otherwise.

It is so good to see Danielle this morning. I've almost said Danielle Nairn, but she is no longer a Nairn. She's a Richards. And I understand that we might be hearing from Danielle and Andrew on Friday, so we look forward to that.
I'm hearing a big update because we haven't heard from them in quite some time. But I trust you had an enjoyable Christmas and so good to be together this morning.
The name Rob Bell probably doesn't ring a bell with many of you, but Rob Bell is the controversial founder and former pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Granville, Michigan.
And he's written quite a number of controversial books, books that question fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith that have long been held by the church.
[1:18] One of these books is a book titled Velvet Elvis. And here's an excerpt from Velvet Elvis that helps you to see why Rob Bell was a controversial and some would say heretical pastor.

He writes, And then you find out that in the Bible, In the Hebrew language of the Hebrew language at the time, the word virgin could mean several things.
And what if you discover that in the first century, being born of a virgin also referred to a child whose mother became pregnant the first time she had intercourse.
What if that spring was seriously questioned? And by spring, Rob Bell is likening the Christian faith to like a springboard or a trampoline and referring to the doctrine of the virgin birth as one spring in the springboard or the trampoline.
And he continues, he says, When we re-examine and rethink one spring.
[3:52] Then it wasn't that strong in the first place, was it? And the point that God is trying to make from his drawn out speculations is that it does not matter whether or not Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

And sadly, Rob Bell is not alone. Rob Bell increasingly is not alone. There are many who, like him, believe that people can question and even disbelieve the virgin birth and continue to love God and continue to be biblical Christians.
And so as we consider this important doctrine of the virgin birth this morning, my question to you is, what do you believe?
Do you believe the teaching of Scripture and the confession of the apostles' creed that Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary?
And if you believe that, do you believe that Jesus and his virgin birth were necessary and essential parts of the Christian faith?
[5:18] Or do you believe, like Rob Bell, that it's just an optional spring, the removal of which changes nothing? Or do you believe that Jesus and the virgin birth?

The virgin birth from Luke's account in Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 26. So please turn there if you've not yet done so, and please follow along as I read.
Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 26. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.
And the virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.
And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

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[6:48] And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.
And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin?
And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.
Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son.
[7:57] And this is the sixth month with her who is called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.

And Mary said, Behold, I am the Lord's servant. Let it be to me according to your word.
And the angel departed from her. Let's pray together. Father, we are grateful that we are able to gather in this place this morning.
And to worship your name and to draw near to you. Through the Lord Jesus Christ and the way that he has made open and possible.
And we pray this morning that in this moment of your word being proclaimed, that you would speak to all of our hearts. Lord, you know where we all are. Do you know where we are who are gathered in this building?
[9:01] Do you know where we are among those who are watching online? And so, oh Father, I pray in your all-sufficiency and your great power, that you would speak to our hearts from your word.

Lord, where there is doubt, I pray that you would remove the doubt and fill it with faith in your word.
And Lord, I pray where there is faith, that our faith will even deepen in this essential truth of the virgin birth.
Lord, once again, I acknowledge my own insufficiency, my own inadequacy, to proclaim your word as I should left to myself.
So I ask for your grace and help to bring your word to your people this morning. Lord, I pray that above all that is said and done, your name will be glorified.
We pray in Christ's name. Amen. As we consider this passage this morning, here's the overall point I want us to see. The virgin birth of Christ enabled him to be who he needed to be in order to do what he came to do to save his people from their sins.
[10:31] This is the overarching point, I believe, that Luke labors to help us to see in this account.

And if we were to put it another way, unless the virgin birth is true, unless these words before us are true, the life that Jesus lived and the death that Jesus died are absolutely meaningless.
If these words are not true, then truthfully, this is a waste of time. Friends, the account of Jesus Christ that we read here and his birth, it is true.
And we can praise the Lord for that. That it is true. And because it is true, that is good news. It is good news that we who have put our trust in Christ have been forgiven of our sins.
And we've been reconciled to God. And we are among the most hopeful people on this earth. Despite all the gloom and all the uncertainty, we who have trusted Christ are among the most hopeful people on the planet.
[11:56] Now let me say from the outset that the critical issue in this passage is not the physical birth of Jesus. It is not his natural birth, but it's actually his conception.

Jesus was born in the exact same way that every other human being has been born into the world. If you've ever observed childbirth, if you've ever seen a film on childbirth, you've seen how Jesus came into the world, physically born of a woman like any other human being.
Mary's labor pains were real, and the physical delivery was no different from any other delivery. So Jesus is not unique in that regard.
He is unique in his conception. And what Scripture teaches us is that over many centuries, Christians have affirmed what the Scriptures teach, that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and in this way, he is unique.
He wasn't conceived the way the rest of us and other humans are conceived. We have a human father, an earthly father, but he was conceived of the Holy Spirit.

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[13:26] And he was born of the Virgin Mary, and herein lies his uniqueness, and I would add, his necessary uniqueness. So perhaps a more accurate title for the sermon this morning is rather than the necessity of the virgin birth, it would be the necessity of the virgin conception.

But because most people mean the virgin conception when they use the virgin birth, I will stick with the virgin birth to mean a virgin conception. Now to help you to follow along for the sermon this morning, I've organized it under three heads, and the first is the virgin birth announced, and we see that in verses 26 through 33, 32, sorry.
And then the virgin birth questioned. We see that in verse 34, and then the virgin birth explained, and we see the explanation in verses 35 through 38.
So first, the virgin birth announced. I think the first thing we need to see as we consider this account is that Luke, from the very outset of his gospel, is trying to make a very important point for us.
Luke is going somewhere with his gospel. He has a conclusion in mind with his gospel, and so he labors up front to lay some foundation for this conclusion that he is making, and the passage before us is part of that.
[15:08] Listen to what Luke writes in verses 1 through 4 of Luke chapter 1. He writes, Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us.

It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely from some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.
Luke gives us the reason that he is writing his gospel. The purpose for his gospel is in verse 4. He wanted Theophilus to have certainty about what he had been taught and what he believed.
And so from the very outset, Luke recognizes this reality of the possibility of uncertainty and doubt surrounding the life and ministry of Jesus.
And so he sets out to give this orderly account so that Theophilus and by extension the rest of us can have certainty about these things.
[16:29] Now here's what Luke is doing. Luke, at the end of his gospel, is going to tell us about the death of Jesus Christ, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension.

And Luke wants us to know with certainty who this person was who died on the cross, who was buried, and who rose again.
Luke wants us to know that his death was no ordinary death and so what he does is he starts by showing us that his birth was no ordinary birth. Because if we're not sure who Jesus is in his birth then we really can't be sure of who he is in his death.
And Luke is going there and so Luke wants to labor to show us who Jesus is in his birth and to show us that he is the unique son of God.
Now when we come to verse 26, verse 26, if this were like a play or a drama, this would be a change of scene. The first scene in Luke's gospel takes place in the temple.
[17:41] Takes place in the temple where there's all the pomp and pageantry in Jerusalem. That's where John's birth was announced to his father. And now we have come to the lowly city of Nazareth to a home of a young girl.

This is very different from the temple that was the pride and joy of all the Jews. The place where God had chosen to make his name known and where he had chosen for his people to come and worship him.
We're now in the city of Nazareth, a place of no significance, a place of poor reputation. Nazareth was such a poor place, a place of no reputation, that we read in the third chapter of John's gospel that when Philip told Nathaniel that he had found the Messiah, Nathaniel said, can anything good come out of Nazareth?
It was the kind of reputation that Nazareth had. It was a place of no repute. And yet, it is to this place of no repute that God sends Gabriel to a young virgin named Mary, whom he had chosen to be the mother of the Messiah.
And if we look at the account again, starting in verse 26, I think there's some important things to note. Notice, first of all, in verse 27, that even before Luke records Mary's name, he tells us two times in this single verse that she was a virgin.

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[19:27] Two times in a single verse, she was a virgin. And Luke does that to make a point. He does it to underscore, as it were, the point that Mary was a virgin, no question about it.

she and Joseph were legally married, but she was, were legally engaged to be married, but she was a virgin.
Now, Luke is a medical doctor, and he's also a historian, and so he is being careful to lay this foundation. Mary was a virgin.
And then we see in verse 28, he says to her, well, the angel greets her and says to her, you're a favored one.
And then he, for the first time, calls her by name. He tells her, you found favor with God. And we see Mary's response in verse 29. We're told that Mary was greatly troubled at Gable's saying that she was favored and that God was with her.
[20:39] And Luke doesn't say that Mary was troubled at the sight of an angel. And normally when angels appear, people were troubled by it. Mary was more troubled by what he said. She was more troubled by the saying of the angel than the sight of this angel.

And here we see Mary's humility. She was troubled in this gracious greeting that she had found favor with God. And just imagine for a moment Mary from Nazareth, a place of no repute, boasting and saying that she is special because God chose her to be the mother of the Messiah.
But she doesn't boast. And her boasting, her lack boasting is seen in the Magnificat which is recorded a little later as her song of praise to God.
And she recognized that God had looked on her humble estate. And she was grateful that he had done that. But in verse 31, Gabriel goes on to tell Mary something that is even more shocking than telling her that she was favored of God.
He tells her, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will call his name Jesus. And then in verses 32 and 33, Gabriel goes on to help Mary to understand that the son that she would conceive in a womb was not going to be an ordinary child.
[22:16] He says in verse 32, he will be great and theologians who are much smarter than I am say that when this word great is used without qualification in the Old Testament, it almost always refers to God himself.

And so here, Gabriel is pointing to the deity of Jesus Christ by saying that he will be great description that is only used largely for God himself.
And Gabriel says in verse 32, the child that will be conceived in your womb will be God's son, the long awaited Messiah.
And that he was going to, God was going to give him the throne of his father David. And in verse 33, that he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will never end.
So that's how the virgin birth was announced. But Mary was troubled, she was puzzled by this announcement and her response to Gabriel in verse 34 brings me to my second point, the virgin birth question.
[23:32] We see in verse 34 that Mary asked Gabriel, how can this be since I am a virgin? Now clearly Mary understood what Gabriel had announced to her.

We know this because if Mary had a hint that the child was going to be Joseph's child, she would not have questioned the angel because she knew that Joseph and she were going to be getting married real soon.
But Mary knew that she was having a divine encounter, Mary knew that the angel had told her that this son that you're going to have is going to be the Messiah, the son of God, the son of David, whose kingdom will never end.
And Mary understood that human conception, she understood that the only way that she could conceive in terms of normal human conception biologically, that it would be impossible without a man.
And so Mary questions the angel and she says, how will this be since I am a virgin? Notice it's the third time that Luke underscores that Mary was a virgin.
[24:50] And again, don't forget his purpose. His purpose is to show this unique birth, this unique conception, because he's going to show us eventually that this one is going to die on a cross.

And as unique as his birth was, so was his death. This is the kind of importance that Luke puts on the virgin birth.

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This is why this is not an optional spring that we can get rid of. Luke wants to lay it clearly. Mary indeed was a virgin. Now, you might be wondering about the virgin birth this morning, questioning the virgin birth, and that in and of itself is not a bad thing.
It is not in and of itself abhorrent that one would wonder and question the virgin birth. Indeed, Mary did.
She asked the angel, how will this be? How can this be possible? But I think what we're able to see is that Mary's questioning was not rooted in unbelief.
[26:07] It was rooted in a lack of understanding. She just did not understand how could this possibly take place except through normal human conception.

And it is at this point, again, we're coming to see face-to-face the necessity of the virgin birth. If Mary indeed was going to have a son who was described as being great, who would be the son of the most high, who would be the promised Messiah, and who would be the savior of his people, he could not be the product of normal human conception.
Because if Jesus was conceived of a man, just the way every other human being is, then Jesus would himself be a part of a fallen and sinful nature.
And so Mary's question, how shall this be, since I am a virgin, is a legitimate question. to be asked.
And then starting at verse 35, we see Gabriel explain to Mary how she, a virgin, will give birth to the Son of God.
And this brings me to my third and final point. The virgin birth explained. What we find is in Luke 1, 35, the angel says to Mary, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.
[27:45] Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. That is the explanation that Gabriel gives to Mary's question.

God. And if we were to summarize it in one word, the one word would be God. How is this possible? God. It's possible through God.
And notice in this explanation that Gabriel gives, that we see the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit referred to, helping us to see the divine activity of the triune God in saving us, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And so what we have here in this explanation is this indication of a unique moment in human history where a human is going to be born into the world who is not a direct descendant from Adam as all other human beings have been.
He was fully human but he didn't inherit the legal guilt and the moral corruption through Adam and all the who was the father of all earthly fathers.
[29:09] Jesus had no human father. Jesus interrupted the line of descendancy from Adam. And we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 45 that Jesus is referred to as the last Adam.

He is the Adam, the last Adam, who overcame where the first Adam, who was our head, failed. And Jesus became the head of a new race.
A new race of people who put their faith and their trust in him. And so all of us who have put our trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning, we are actually connected to two Adams.
We are physically connected to the first Adam, haven't been born through his lineage, and then we are spiritually connected to the last Adam, having put faith in him.
But for those who have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ, you are only connected to one Adam, the biological connection to the first Adam. But we need to be connected to both Adams.
[30:23] And this is why the Bible talks about us requiring two births, a physical birth and then we need a spiritual birth. We need to be born again.

And that new birth is in the line of the last Adam. So the question arises, how does Jesus become born into the world without original sin and without moral corruption?
some would say, well, that's because he didn't have a human father. But that's problematic because he had a human mother.
And so he could actually, if that's the concern about a connection to a human being, then he could have original sin and moral corruption transmitted through his mother, through Mary.
On this point, the Roman Catholic Church has become creative and they have said that this issue of original sin was addressed and was not an issue for Jesus because Mary, they say, was immaculately conceived.

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[31:40] Meaning that from the moment that Mary was conceived in her mother's womb, that she was preserved free from disdain of all sin. But that's a novel teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that only came about in 1854.

It's taught nowhere in Scripture, but they recognized that there was an issue to be addressed and so they sought to address it, but it falls short of the witness of Scripture.
But as virtuous as Mary was, Mary was a sinner like the rest of us. And Mary, like the rest of us, needed a Savior.
She needed the same Savior that she carried in her womb. So then how was Jesus preserved from sin? Well, the answer is in verse 35.
The angel said to her, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, therefore, therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.
[32:54] The reason that Jesus was able to be born of a sinner, Mary, is because he was conceived of the Holy Spirit.

and therefore, he was born holy, the Son of God. That's the only reason, because of the Holy Spirit who brought about this conception.
And here's important to see that Jesus did not become the Son of God in Mary's womb. Jesus was the eternal Son. He's the eternal Son who came down from heaven and became clothed in human flesh.
This would be called the incarnation. God coming down from heaven to earth and taking on human flesh, conceived of the Holy Spirit, and thus fully God, and born of the Virgin Mary, and thus fully man.
And in this way, Jesus becomes the perfect mediator. Because he is God, he's able to represent God from whom we are estranged, and because he is also man, he's able to represent us.
[34:14] He's able to represent sinners like us. And so he becomes this mediator between God and man. And he's able to faithfully do that because he is God and because he is man.

He's able to do both in his divinity and in his humanity. God and God and God and God and God and God and God.
And so he is in the deep end of the theological pool for all of us. The doctrines connected to the virgin birth and the incarnation are not easily understood.
And we should not be troubled by that because we are finite. We are limited in our ability to grasp and comprehend all things. If we could, then we could actually say that we are God ourselves.
But here's the issue this morning. The issue is not so much do you understand the virgin birth. The issue is not so much do you understand how God can come down and take on human flesh and be fully God and fully man.
[35:24] That's not the issue that we are called to face this morning. The issue about the virgin birth is not understanding but it is belief. It is not do you understand the virgin birth, it is do you believe the virgin birth.

In other words, do you believe God? Do you believe the account that we find in God's word? Do you believe the explanation that we find in God's word?
Whether we understand it or not. God's word is not God's word. Notice again in verse 34, when Mary asks Gabriel how the birth that was announced to her would possibly happen, Gabriel goes on to tell her two things.
Again, which we already saw in verse 35, he tells her how the child was going to be conceived and why the child will be holy. The second thing he tells her in verse 36, he tells her that her relative Elizabeth, who was barren, who could not conceive, had conceived the son, and she was now in her sixth month of pregnancy.
And he concludes and says these words to Mary in verse 37, for nothing will be impossible with God. to that Mary responds and she says, behold, I am the servant of the Lord.
[37:03] Let it be to me according to your word. Now think about it. How did Mary move from questioning to believing?

How did she move from questioning the virgin birth to believing the virgin birth? was it because she understood what Gabriel said? I don't think so.
I don't think she understood all that it meant that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon you and the power of the Most High is going to overshadow you. I think Mary came to believe the virgin birth after being told by Gabriel that God had done an impossible thing with her relative Elizabeth.

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Elizabeth was unable to conceive when she was a young woman. And when she is past childbearing God enables her to conceive.
And Gabriel says there's evidence she is six months pregnant not she's going to be she is six months pregnant and you know she could not have children and you know that she and her husband advanced in age and now she's six months pregnant.
[38:25] And Mary believed the virgin birth because she believed God and she believed that nothing is impossible with God.

And so friends the relevant question for us this morning about the virgin birth is not do I understand it but do I believe that nothing is impossible with God?
because to question the virgin birth is ultimately to question God and to question his power.
But God is unlimited and so nothing is impossible with God. As I thought about this this morning I recognize that for some of us this may be very personal as well in terms of believing that nothing is impossible with God because of circumstances that we may face that are mountainous and that are daunting and that are probably long and lingering.
suffering. We think of all the uncertainties that we and our world face in this pandemic and how easy it is to worry about tomorrow and worry about the days ahead and the face of all those doubts and worries the question comes to us do you believe God and do you believe that nothing is impossible with God?
[40:07] If anything is impossible with God then God is not God and we believe the virgin birth because we believe in the unlimited power of God and this is why we believe that God is able to take lost sinners who are enslaved to sin and transform them so that they become instruments of righteousness.

They become people who no longer love sin and love God and love fellow man because nothing is impossible with God. And so in this season of Christmas how are you going to respond to the teaching of scripture concerning the virgin birth in a world that is increasingly filled with raw bells. Is it an optional spring as he says that the removal of which changes nothing? I say to us this morning friends it is a necessary and foundational truth about the Christian faith.
If we lose that we lose everything else. If Jesus Christ was not born as we read in scripture if these things about him are not true in his immaculate conception his conception without sin his being holy then we waste our time in all that we do this morning.
But Mary was told through a divine act you will conceive a divine son and you will call his name Jesus which means God saves. and we are reminded in that that salvation is in no other one and by no other means other than the Lord Jesus Christ.
[42:29] I know there are those who would still primarily believe that if we got rid of the virgin birth we could still believe in Jesus because he was a great teacher he was a great moral example and all these other things.

But if that's all Jesus needed to be then John the Baptist would have done. John the Baptist would have been suited. Indeed there would have been any number of other godly examples who could have filled that role.
But no we needed a Messiah. We needed one who was born as Christ was born sinless and perfect so that he could be that substitute that we all need for our many sins.
And so I pray this morning that the Lord will help us to truly believe in our hearts with conviction though we don't fully understand all the ins and outs of the virgin conception but to believe that what scripture teaches is true in order that we might believe that he will save his people from their sins. He can do that if he is not who the scriptures say that he really is. if you're here this morning or listening by watching by live stream if you've never trusted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord I called you to put your trust in Christ today.
[44:06] I call you to turn from sin and look to Jesus and he makes this promise. He makes the promise that all who come to him he will turn none of them away.

Let's pray. Father we thank you for the truth of the virgin birth.
We thank you that Jesus Christ was born into this world as the son of God as the son of David and as the Savior of the world and that all those who put their trust in him will know forgiveness of sins. I pray Lord that you would bring us all to a place of conviction and belief about this truth and may we like Mary believe it because it is your word.
We pray and ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Let's stand for our closing song.

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