

# Matthew 1:18-25 “The Virgin Birth”

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Date: 07 December 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! Father, what a child. Jesus, we worship you. You're born the King, the Great I Am. The one who always was, took on flesh and dwelt for a while among us, for us. We marvel at that. We wonder at the glory and the greatness of that. And Father, we confess how much we need it.

And how often we forget the glory of the incarnation. Would you speak to us through your word this morning as you're already doing?

[ 1 : 10 ] That our hearts might be a fresh turn to Jesus in wonder and worship and trust and hope and comfort and joy.

Work in us by your spirit, through your word. We ask that Jesus would be exalted in our hearts, in our church, and in this world. We pray in his name. Amen.

Every single birth is special, right?

No doubt about that. Every time that I get in that hospital elevator and I'm going up to get to see a new baby and new parents, there's this energy.

I still feel this excitement in the hospital elevator of all places. Every single birth is a gift from God. The one who's the giver of all life.

[ 2 : 12 ] Who's personally knit that child I'm going to see together fearfully and wonderfully and uniquely in his mother's womb. But there are three births that I've been associated with that were extra special for me.

Every one is special, but three of the best days of my life, three of the biggest celebrations I've gotten to be a part of when my girls were born.

God's story has been marked with some really special births, too, if you think about it. Some of them to parents who were beyond childbearing age.

Some to mothers who were suffering long and praying long because they were barren and longing for a child and then God sent one.

But this one is extra, extra special, right? Because it is his son. As many of our songs have highlighted this morning, we sing of it a lot this time of year.

[ 3 : 25 ] This is the only begotten son of God being born into this world. This we saw last week is the long awaited Messiah, right?

The Christ promised for generations to rescue God's people, the one. And so after tracing that background of Jesus being the Christ, Matthew highlights now this morning the circumstances surrounding the child's birth.

And they are extra special because they highlight that the child is extra special. Next week we're going to look at this same passage and notice his names that show us that he's special in what he comes to do.

This morning Matthew highlights the unique nature of his conception that shows us he's special in who he is. This is, I'm going to read these eight verses in Matthew 1.

I want you to notice four times the unique circumstances surrounding this special child are mentioned. This is God's holy, inerrant, infallible word that you can always trust, that will guide you right today, that will endure forever.

[ 4 : 51 ] Matthew 1 at verse 18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. Thus far God's holy word.

[6:08] I promise to you that when I decided to walk through Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus for our Advent and Christmas sermons this year, that I wasn't planning on talking about the virgin birth.

More exciting, perhaps, is Emmanuel and Jesus and what those names mean, and next week we get to talk about that. But you just can't miss how important this is to the story.

It's not a footnote. So I didn't want to treat it that way. But before we get to why it's important, let's clarify what we mean by the virgin birth.

That's what it's commonly called. What does Scripture actually say here? Verse 18. Verse 20.

That which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Verse 23. Verse 25.

[7:16] Afterwards, yes, and there were siblings, but not before. This teaching, this doctrine long held by the church and many of its oldest creeds, like the Nicene Creed we said together this morning.

That's longer than we're used to, right? The Apostles Creed conceived by the Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary. Now, this teaching of the Virgin birth is actually referring more precisely to the supernatural conception.

A child conceived miraculously, not by normal means of human sexuality, but by the power of the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary.

Dr. Luke tells us, he uses a word that highlights there the special presence of God. But beyond that, there aren't a lot of details as to how that happens.

Just that God does it. Because, Luke tells us, nothing is impossible for God.

[8:32] We're just told that God, through the Spirit's power, directly places a child in the womb of Mary to develop then like other children.

No help from Joseph. Joseph is taken off guard, isn't he? During this one-year betrothal period where you were already bound to one another. You were committed, just not yet formally married and living together.

So, what a shock to Joseph, right? All of a sudden, a pregnancy. An angel has to come to him, too, to explain what's going on and how he should proceed.

But why is that important? See, this child, Joseph, has a father. He's the eternal son of God. Fully God.

Now also becoming fully man. Just without sin. There's a lot of mystery still there, isn't there?

[9:37] You got some questions still, perhaps. Yeah, but can you imagine Joseph and Mary? How they might have felt? But what do I tell my parents?

My friends? We don't get much more explanation. But I encourage you that the unique entrance of the Son of God into this world seems fitting for some mystery.

It's not repeated. It's not like anything else we know. It's not God taking over a human child.

Some have described it that way. No. This God-initiated process means, as the great Scottish theologian Donald MacLeod writes, The human nature of Christ does not exist for a single moment except as the humanity of God.

As the humanity of God. Wow. What? What's going on? From the very first moment, fully God and fully man.

[10:47] The Heidelberg Catechism explains what we mean by this in the great creeds when we say it, says it this way. The eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took upon Himself true human nature from the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, He is also the true seed of David, and like His brothers in every respect, yet without sin. As I've written it, we are affirming by virgin birth the supernatural, not natural, conception of the eternal Son of God.

In other words, He already existed as God. By the Spirit of God, not in any physical sense from God's end. In the womb of Mary, though, a real woman.

So that Jesus is born fully God, fully man, without sin. Utterly unique, extra special. That's what we mean by the virgin birth.

Now, while the church has affirmed this universally for hundreds of years, in recent years, some, many even while still claiming to be followers of Jesus as the Christ, attempt to explain this away as unscientific, or passé, out of date, beneath enlightened thinkers.

[12:27] It tends to be written off alongside miracles in general. Miracles like the resurrection? Certainly not. I'm going to come back to this in a minute, but for now, I just want to demonstrate that this is the clear teaching of God's Word.

Specifically, it's emphasized here in Matthew, in his account of the birth of Jesus. You can't miss it. But just as clearly, in Luke's gospel account that I referenced a minute ago, which he seems to have sourced directly from Mary herself, among others.

Don't buy the modern mumbo-jumbo trying to reread the Bible to suit our commitments, predetermined commitments and comforts. We want it to fit the way we think.

Even when this began to be popularized, the great American 20th century theologian, J. Gresham Machen, was defending this miracle against many who were beginning to abandon it.

But he clarified, even in that context, that wasn't the argument being made about the Bible wasn't saying this. Machen writes, Everyone admits that the Bible represents Jesus as having been conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.

[13:43] The only question is whether in making that representation, the Bible is true or false. Everyone agrees. Even as they start to argue, this is the clear, repeated, long-passed-down teaching of God's word, emphasized by Matthew no fewer than four times in eight verses.

So that's what? Why? Why does it matter? Why is believing the virgin birth of Jesus so important? Why does it matter if I believe it or not?

Well, first let me answer that by telling you one sense in which it does not matter. Okay? It does not matter. It's not important as something that you must understand and believe in order to be saved. In order to be in right relationship with God. Here's what I mean by that. There's not an entrance exam that you have to pass with enough right answers to get into heaven.

That's not how it works. I feel sure that there are people in heaven who are united to Jesus, who are covered by his blood, who are trusting in his righteousness, who never heard of the virgin birth, don't know anything about it.

[15:07] Probably the thief on the cross never made it to that lesson. Yeah? Probably didn't come up. Aren't we thankful, y'all, that our salvation hinges not on exhaustive and infallible knowledge, intellectually, theologically of everything possible, but rather on relationship with the one who himself is mighty to save.

He's the one who saves. Not how much we know. So you can be saved without knowing about, therefore believing in the virgin birth.

But that said, it's really important. I want to tell you why. It's not something to be considered and then just ignored or rejected outright, except at our eternal peril.

I think this passage indicates it's important for at least three reasons that are referenced here. At first, it builds our faith in, our gratitude for, and our wonder at God's word.

See, if we reject the virgin birth due to some naturalistic refusal to believe that God intervenes in this world miraculously at times, we lose so much, a bunch of other essential miracles like the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

[16:39] We're no longer believing in a divine, supernatural Jesus whom we can trust to save us. May that never be that we would stop believing in him.

Matthew points us to the reliability of the scripture when he quotes from the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah, this Jesus, this Christ, he says, is the seed of the woman promised all the way back in Genesis. The Messiah, the Christ, promised hundreds of years before to be born of a virgin. Now, you can read plenty of debates on that Hebrew word, but the context is pretty clear in Isaiah, and it is very clear in Matthew that he means a virgin.

That's part of how it's a sign. King Ahaz, I'll tell you a little bit more about him next week, but it's not just King Ahaz, it's all of God's people, if you notice closely in Isaiah, that get a sign of God's presence with them.

Emmanuel, God's with you. Even though, to be clear, short term, that's more a threat than a promise in Isaiah 7.

[ 17 : 59 ] But by chapter 9, it's so much more. We see it's not merely a child born in Ahaz's day, although there is one, but a child coming to be wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace on David's throne forever.

Never, that's yet another child. And now, as that promise is fulfilled in the miraculous conception of Jesus, our faith is strengthened in trusting every one of God's promises in his word.

If we reject it for its miraculous character, we're going to be rejecting God and his word as a whole. That's really the other option. And Professor McLeod again, the virgin birth is posted on guard at the door of the mystery of Christmas.

Still a mystery, even to the great professor. None of us must think of hurrying past it. It stands on the threshold of the New Testament, blatantly supernatural, defying our rationalism, informing us that all that follows belongs to the same order as itself.

All that follows, supernatural. You can't read a page of any of the Gospels with a merely naturalistic explanation of what's going on there, of a merely human Jesus.

[ 19 : 29 ] It doesn't make sense. Try it. Read through the Gospels. It just doesn't hold up that way. The Bible is clear about the virgin birth.

And we must marvel and trust God. Secondly, why is it important? Believing the virgin birth aids our gratitude for God's work in this world, and specifically, his work for our salvation.

I don't know about you, but it makes me deeply grateful to know that God can supernaturally intervene in the natural processes that he has created for his sovereign and good purposes.

Because I live most days in the midst of those natural processes, and I need him to be able to show up there. I don't want to lock him out of here, and of my life, and of our lives.

Especially not when what he's doing is working for our salvation, right? This is the child, verse 21 says, who will save his people from their sins.

[ 20 : 46 ] See, the Bible is really clear about this sin problem that we all inherit all the way back from Adam. Every person born with this problem that we're separated from the relationship with God that we were made for.

And Paul discusses this at length in Romans, how Adam, as the head of the human race, when he sinned, brought death into the world for all men through his sin.

Paul states it very simply in 1 Corinthians 15. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

In other words, we need a new representative. Representative number one brings death through sin, and we need a new representative, a new head of our race, a new head of a new creation, one who is not marred by Adam's sin, who had a different origin altogether.

And how do we see that coming here? The virgin birth, with its explicit clarity that no man is involved in the conception of the Messiah. It highlights the uniquely divine, heavenly origin of Jesus.

[ 22 : 03 ] Now I'm not saying that it was definitively the only way that that could have happened. The Bible blames neither the male gender nor human sexuality for sin.

Okay? So maybe, hypothetically, there's another way besides a miraculous conception that God could have brought his son into the world to be the second Adam who remains sin-free and brings life in place of death.

I don't know. Maybe. I don't know if there's another way, but I know the virgin conception is the biblical way, and that's the only one I need. One way. And that's the way he came. See, God wants us to know something.

I think there's a particular reason we need to understand this. God wants us to know for sure, even if we don't know all the details of how that happened, that our salvation is about his rescue, not our recovery.

In this supernatural birth, God is most evidently not picking up something man started, but initiating something man needed, right? Just so, just like that.

[ 23 : 14 ] He is the one who initiates our new birth, Jesus tells us in John 3. The new birth that we all desperately need if we want even to see the kingdom of God.

New birth from above. Born, not of natural descent or human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. God sees our need and he acts to meet it rather than demanding that we live up to the task, that we figure it out ourselves, that we get it done.

Hey, new birth, you have to have new birth. Do it yourself. Good luck. I don't know how. Give yourself life.

What? I can't do that. That's why I say we reject the virgin birth at our eternal peril.

We dare not reject the God who saves because we can't save ourselves. We don't have a God who helps those who help themselves, who comes along the great processes we've started and kind of fixes it all up for us.

[ 24 : 27 ] No, we have a God who helps those who cannot help themselves. We have a good God who even as he sends the one who will accomplish our salvation makes sure that we know even in how the child is conceived that our salvation is in his strong and loving hands.

It is safe with him. You are safe with him from any weakness or failure in us. Amen? It has to be there. We have to be able to trust him because we can't trust ourselves.

I love the way the Heidelberg Catechism again explains the benefit to us of the holy conception and birth of Christ. Jesus is our mediator, the one who goes between us and God, who represents us to God.

And so with his innocence and his perfect holiness, he covers in the sight of God my sin in which I was conceived and born.

King David writes for all of us, doesn't he? Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me, sinful from Adam, passed down before anyone teaches us how to sin, before we start writing up a list of things we've done wrong.

[ 25 : 52 ] We were sinful from birth and conception, but Jesus was not sinful. Specifically, he was holy from birth and conception. Holy.

And that marvelous truth helps us grasp this glorious reality. would you take just a minute this Christmas to stop and say, yes, Jesus, thank you.

Thank you that it was for us and for our salvation that you came down from heaven and were incarnate by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. I'm so grateful for the reminder of my desperate need of such a Savior who was conceived not in sin but in holiness, who lived not in sin but in holiness, who passed to those united to him not death but life.

Thank you, Jesus. Finally, in all of this, in case you can't tell already, what we're seeing most importantly is that believing the virgin birth helps us wonder at Jesus' unique person and nature. It's about him. what could be more important than knowing and loving Jesus as he really is? That's why you need to know about this, friends.

[ 27 : 14 ] That's why it's in the Bible. That's why we're slowing down on it this morning because we need Jesus. It's okay if parts of this remain a mystery to you.

You don't have to have a PhD to know Jesus more. Jesus is unique, okay? I bet you don't know anybody else who came here from the Holy Spirit, right?

It's okay if you can't explain it all but as God gives you glimpses, they can lead you to greater worship of and love of and living for Jesus.

Remember, that's what Matthew's up to. He wants to help us understand Jesus as the Christ. first with his lineage that we talked about last week and now with the special circumstances of his birth. Matthew says, open your eyes. You can know from the very beginning that this is no ordinary baby because this is not the way babies come. His conception and his birth involve angels, dreams, prophecies, the Holy Spirit, supernatural circumstances for sure.

[ 28 : 27 ] He doesn't want you to miss that. That's the point of four times highlighting this miraculous conception. The virgin birth highlights that the baby is the promised seed of the woman, the long-awaited Messiah, the coming king.

In case we need help seeing it, this baby is the son of God and the divine God-man. believing the virgin birth as the Bible presents it helps us to wonder at the incarnation of God himself.

The infinite and eternal word become flesh to dwell among us and to share with us his glory. As John says it that way, remember this baby is the humanity of God.

God. Fully God and fully man. Never been another one like this baby. Never.

Utterly unique person. Utterly unique nature. But that's who he is and that's what it took to save us. Listen, a merely human Jesus may live perfectly, but that doesn't give me righteousness.

[ 29 : 46 ] It just gives him righteousness. Just a good man if that's all he is. A merely human Jesus may die a death that is sacrificial and exemplary, but it doesn't pay for my sins.

If he's just one man, he just pays for his own. A merely human Jesus may teach about a theoretical resurrection, but that would not give me relationship with him today and my lonely pain or hope for life eternal from him.

He couldn't give that to me. But friends, listen, we don't have a merely human Jesus. No. We have an infinite, holy, supernatural Savior. Praise the Lord. Just marvel at that for a couple minutes as we close.

Think about who he is. Think about who our favorite Christmas songs declare this baby to be because you're going to sing these many times starting tonight.

[ 30 : 53 ] Christ, the newborn King, Son of God, loves pure light. Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth, Lord of all creation, King of angels, angels, the incarnate deity, Prince of peace, Son of righteousness, the great I am.

Perhaps the best description of his divine character is in O come all ye faithful, him calling us to come and adore him, adore him.

Stanza reads, God of God, light of light, lo he abhors not the virgin's womb, very God, begotten, not created, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ, the Lord.

Lord. Just keep marveling and adoring him with me. This child is God breaking into the normal operations of the world in order to save the world and that means that at Christmas as we behold Jesus, we see the Lord of all creation lying among animals, the king of all of the nations in one tiny town, the eternally spiritual being in a tiny body held by a teenage mom, the prince of peace in Trinitarian relationship in the Godhead entering a family with conflict, the eternal God who exists outside of time waiting nine months to be born and many, many painful days to grow up, the savior of

Mary in her tummy, the one who breathes life into Adam, who gives life to the dead, breathes air for the first time himself, the great I am, Yahweh, the eternally self-existent one, begins a new form of existence, or perhaps most simply and amazingly, God becomes man, what a special baby, no one else like him for us and for our salvation, come let us thank him, come let us trust him, come let us adore him, Christ the Lord, let's pray, Jesus we bow because you are unlike us, we are not worthy, but you are holy, holy, holy, holy, and yet you took on flesh, we worship you, we ask for faith to trust you more, we ask for your help that the worship of our hearts, the adoration that we feel in a moment might be that which sustains throughout the week and throughout our lives, we ask for your help in that, in your name, amen.

[ 34 : 51 ] For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host).