

Christ's Incarnation

*“God was Manifest in
the Flesh”*

The life of the Man Jesus Christ commenced with a miracle and concluded with a miracle. It commenced with the miracle of virgin-birth, and concluded with the miracle of resurrection from the dead. His life itself was a miracle: we refer not to the mighty deeds that attended His public ministry, but to the moral character of His life, a life absolutely free from sin, in the midst of a world in bondage to sin and dominated by the prince of tempters, Satan himself.

Such a life in this scene as a real Man possessing body, soul and spirit, free from every taint of sin, flawlessly perfect even in the all-seeing eyes of the Most-Holy, lived by One who sprang from a race, the history of which bears eloquent testimony to its moral and spiritual ruin, was nothing less than a continuous miracle from first to last. It requires an adequate explanation. Such an effect demands a sufficient cause. A unique life demands, at least, a unique birth.

Unique in Character

The birth of Christ was unique, and that in a number of ways. It was **Unique in Character**. Every other 'birth' since the dawn of the human race has been the commencement of an individual existence, the formation of a new personality. It was not so with Christ's birth. His birth in Bethlehem-Ephratah was the entrance into manhood of One **"whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"** (Micah 5:2). It was the "becoming flesh" of the Word who "was", even in the beginning before all things were made: who was with God, and who was God (John 1:1 ff.). Far from being a beginning, the birth of Christ was the entrance into a new mode of existence of One who never had a beginning. In short, His birth was an incarnation, a coming in flesh, not just having the outward appearance of a man, but a coming into literal Manhood even as we possess (1John 4:2).

Unique in its Result

Secondly, the birth of Christ was **Unique in its Result**. It produced the only perfect Man ever born into this world. This was miraculous, for Mary, though a virgin, was yet a child of Adam's ruined race, a lost sinner who needed a personal Saviour as she herself recognised and confessed (Luke 1:46-47). Two thousand years earlier it had been asked and the answer acknowledged, **"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one"** (Job 14:4), yet the angel Gabriel could say to Mary, **"That Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"** (Luke 1:35).

But how could this, so contrary to the nature of things, be effected? By this means – **"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing, etc."** John writes, **"In Him is no sin"** (1John 3:5). The sinlessness of Christ is

presented as an essential, timeless, immutable fact. It is not merely that "on Him was no sin" but that **"IN Him IS no sin"**. His Person is essentially free from sin. There never could be sin in Him, it is contrary to the nature of His Being. Only a **"Holy Thing"** could ever be **"called the Son of God"**. His humanity could in no wise compromise the moral perfection of His deity. While in grace He stooped to accept the confines of humanity, entering fully into His new mode of existence, the acceptance of defilement by that which is diametrically opposed to the very nature of His Person was a moral impossibility. And this of course is the explanation of His sinless life, to which reference has already been made: His pathway was sinless because His Person was sinless.

This is all the more pronounced when we consider that He was raised and lived in Palestine at a time of significant spiritual, social and political disorder, associating with all classes of people having great physical and spiritual needs and was constantly harassed by His many adversaries in their quest to ensnare Him. Yet He never faltered or could be seduced in His thoughts, His walk or His talk. The four Gospel records bear adequate and undeniable evidence of this truth! In stark contrast, Adam with Eve his wife, living in such a perfect environment, so easily succumbed to the wiles of the devil and defiled the whole race of mankind (Genesis 3).

Unique in its Mode

When we consider these two weighty facts, that His birth was unique both in its character and in its result, we have no difficulty in accepting the plainly taught truth of Scripture that it was **Unique in its Mode**. Christ was born of a virgin, being conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). Nor does this constitute any affront to the Christian's intelligence: he would, in fact, find

it impossible to accept that Christ was born according to the normal mode. That which is naturally impossible was accomplished, just because **"with God nothing shall be impossible"** (Luke 1:37). The incarnation of Deity was a miracle the like of which this world had never known. The commencement of earthly existence for the Son of God could not possibly be a normal birth, it must be unique, if only to preserve His humanity from the ruin of sin transmitted by natural generation. This in fact was the "problem" of the incarnation: how could the Son of God become a true member of the human race, participating in real humanity, without inheriting the inbred taint of sin? The answer is given in the New Testament narrative of His virgin-birth. David says, **"In sin did my mother conceive me"** (i.e. a sin nature inherited from his father – Psa. 51:5), but Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20) and therefore without sin.

The main point seems to be that Christ was born without paternal generation. This fact receives fullest evidence in His being born of a virgin. This is important because one of the major factors in the miracle of Christ's birth is that it is a **"sign"**, as Isaiah declares (Isaiah 7:10 ff.). Many modernistic tendencies have denied that this passage refers to the birth of Christ, or that the Hebrew word used, **"galmah"**, really signifies **"virgin"**. Let the following points be well noted:

1. Delitzsch, a renowned Hebrew scholar, says that **"galmah"** springs from a root meaning "to be strong, full of sap and vigour, of the age of puberty", and itself "signifies the girl who is near to marriage, ripe for it". He expresses the view that it might be used of one who is affianced or even given in marriage, yet in every one of the seven occurrences in the Old Testament the sense "virgin" is appropriate, and in some cases is demanded by the context (Gen. 24:43 cf. v16; Song

of Sol. 6:8). There is no instance in which the sense “married woman” is evident, as with the word “*bethulah*”, which occurs 49 times, and is said to be the word which would have been used had “virgin” in this sense been intended (see Joel 1:8).

2. The translators of the Septuagint (Greek OT) evidently understood “virgin” to be the sense in this passage, for they rendered it “*parthenos*” which definitely signifies “virgin”. Be it understood that the Septuagint was translated by Jews approximately 200 years before Christ was born: they were not in any wise influenced by Christian thinking. This is an independent and very weighty testimony to the true meaning of the passage.

3. For a young married woman to bear a son is the most natural event in the world. This birth is a divine miracle, a “*sign*” of great power such as the depth beneath or height above might afford (Isaiah 7:10 ff.).

4. The passage is the first of a series predicting the advent of the Messiah. See also Isaiah 9:6 ff. and 11:1 ff.

5. The child of this miraculous birth is named “*Immanuel*”. We never read of one bearing this name, and since the passage is linked with other Messianic prophecies it seems clear the word is not a name merely but a description (cf. Ch. 9:6). The child is an advent of Deity, how then could He have an earthly father? It would be a very strange and sententious way for Isaiah to speak of his own wife, as some assert. His wife could not be called a “*galmah*” (cf. Ch. 7:3), nor is any of his sons called “Immanuel”. “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (Ch. 8:1,3), witnesses of coming judgment, not blessing.

6. The New Testament quotation of the passage, which is not drawn from the Septuagint but is an independent rendering, also employs the word “*parthenos*” (Matt. 1:23).

7. The one to whom the prophecy is referred is said to be a virgin, both by word (Luke 1:27) and in fact (Luke 1:34; Matt. 1:25).

For the Christian, the New Testament application of the passage is decisive and final. The virgin-birth of Christ is a God-given “*sign*” that He will preserve the nation of Israel and the house of David even through days of captivity and devastation. In the light of this fact, the pronouncement of Luke 1:32-33 has special significance. The Assyrian invasion in Isaiah’s day (≈700BC) was the precursor of Gentile domination of the land, and the resultant impoverishment continued up to the advent of Messiah. Note that Ahaz is addressed as representing the “*house of David*” (Isaiah 7:13).

Note also some incidental references. In Genesis 3:15 Christ is specifically called “*her (the woman’s) seed*”. As the woman, independently of the man brought in sin, so independently of the man she brings in the Saviour. In Jeremiah 22:30 the throne of David is denied to Jeconiah’s seed forever. Joseph was of his line (Matt. 1:11-12), so that if he were the father of Jesus, Jesus could never fulfil the Messianic prophecies (e.g. Isaiah 9:6-7). But see Luke 1:32-33. Note the circumlocution of Matthew 1:16 after the constant repetition of the word “*begat*” in the preceding genealogy. The careful wording is a clear testimony to the virgin-birth narrated in the following verses.

See also the significant parenthesis of Luke 3:23 which teaches the same blessed truth. Note how the Lord’s brethren are defined in Psalm 69:8 as “*My mother’s children*”, not “My father’s children” for Joseph was not His father though he was theirs. The virgin birth of Christ is clearly taught in Scriptures, and is as fitting a commencement to His sinless life, as His resurrection was an end.