

GOD IN THE MANGER

MATTHEW 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

In my library I have a fascinating book entitled, ["Why Clocks Run Clockwise And Other Imponderables."](#)

If you have an inquisitive mind... If you hate to admit you can be stumped... if it's hard for you to utter the words, *"I don't know"*... then you'll love this book.

Its author, David Feldman, and his research staff, answer 232 bizarre and baffling “*mysteries.*”

Feldman calls them “*imponderables.*”

Here's a sampling of these imponderables: "Why don't people get goose bumps on their faces?... How do they keep raisins from falling to the bottom of cereal boxes?... Why, in any box of assorted chocolates, the caramels are square, the nougats rectangular, the nuts oval, and the creams circular?... Why do donuts have holes?... Why are there 18 holes on a golf course?...

Why do you have to dry-clean raincoats?... How and why do horses sleep standing up?... Why can't hair grow on a vaccination mark?... And why are the flush handles on a toilet always on the left side?

If you've ever asked any of these baffling questions; then get the book. Feldman provides the answers.

Yet he also admits they are some imponderables, that despite his extensive research, remain a riddle. These expert-stumpers he calls, “**frustratables.**”

And in my opinion the Bible is a book full of “*frustratables*”... The triune nature of God... Creation “*ex nihilo*” or “*out of nothing*”... The parting of the Red Sea... Joshua's long day... Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and fish... His walking on water... The raising of Lazarus... Our Lord's resurrection and ascension...

People have pondered these events for centuries. They've tried to explain how they occurred. Yet they remain as mysterious today as when they happened.

And there's one biblical "**Imponderable**" - a true "**Frustratable**" - that stretches the limits of logic further than all the others. **It's the miracle of the virgin birth.**

How can a woman, who had never experienced sexual relations with a man, possibly conceive a child?

The Great Reformer, Martin Luther, once wrote (*in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner*), "**The incarnation consists of three miracles: The first that God became man - the second, that a virgin was a mother - and the third, that the heart of man should believe this.**"

Even with the tremendous advances in the field of reproductive science: *in vitro fertilization, test tube babies, cloning, etc.* - nothing evenly remotely helps explain the mechanics of the virgin birth. The advances in obstetrics are marvelous, but they're explicable.

The virgin birth is not just *marvelous* it's *miraculous*!

Note a miracle is a phenomenon that's impossible to explain in scientific terms. It goes beyond the *scope of science*. It can't be replicated in a petrie dish, or studied under a microscope. It depends on God's direct intervention! Miracles are not just improvements in technology, or biologically breakthroughs. A miracle usurps natural laws to accomplish a divine purpose.

Miraculous events baffle the intellect - they drive us to our knees - force us to face our limits - bring us to the *brink of understanding* and the *beginnings of faith*.

The inquisitive, and technical, and mechanical, and analytical mind has to *give up* in the face of a miracle.

One can never *figure out* what only *faith* can grasp.

Tertullian, the second century Latin apologist, once commented, "I believe because it is absurd..."

It was the fact he couldn't figure God out - *His omniscience, the incarnation of Jesus, even His second coming* - that drew him to faith. And I agree.

If God's ways can be deciphered with my pea brain He's not much of a God! If the God I serve doesn't frustrate *my* thinking He's not a God worth serving!

Philosopher, Mortimer Adler, who became a Christian at age 82, made this comment, "I believe Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world. But there are elements to it that can only be described as mystery... My chief reason for choosing Christianity was because the mysteries were incomprehensible.

What's the point of revelation if we could figure it out ourselves? If it were wholly comprehensible then it would be just another philosophy." A miracle puts life in perspective. A miracle reminds me who God is, and who I am. Up against a miracle my wisdom seems so naïve - my intellectual prowess so shallow - my mental powers so weak - *while God appears more Godlike!*

Christmas is a time for humbling our *hearts* and our *heads* and marveling at a miracle! A virgin conceived. The Word was made flesh. God became man.

The *ancient of days* became a *child of time*. The *infinite* became an *infant*... And ***how did it happen?***

Well, the information is sketchy, but here's what we do know, "The Spirit of God overshadows a virgin's womb. The seed of the spiritual impregnates the human egg. The Divine seed is planted into the human soil. The human and divine mingle, and blend, and become one... It's a miracle of the highest order!"

And that's as far as I allow myself to go. To me, it's inappropriate to probe any further. This is holy ground.

From the blazing bush on the side of Mount Sinai, God told His servant, Moses, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place you stand is holy ground." Well, the virgin birth is also reason to slip off your sandals.

It's not for us to scrutinize. At this we should stand in awe of God's omnipotence and wisdom. Christmas is not a time to be analytical. ***It's a time to gawk at God!***

The angel that came to Joseph knew he was a man of true faith. He didn't need an explanation to believe. All Joseph needed was a reminder of God's promise.

This is why the angel quotes the guarantee God gave the nation in Isaiah 7:14. Originally, the promise was to the Kings of Judah, of which Ahaz was one.

At the time of Ahaz, Judah and Jerusalem was under siege by invading armies. The king was petrified.

Isaiah though assures King Ahaz that God is in control and will deliver the Jews. And to prove it, *if Ahaz asks*, God will give him a supernatural sign!

Yet Ahaz was reluctant to ask... That's when God blows his mind. The prophet announces that God will initiate His own sign, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel..."

If God can enable a virgin girl to conceive a child, He can get King Ahaz out of hot water. This was the sign that was ultimately fulfilled when Mary, a virgin from Nazareth, conceived a Son, and named Him, Jesus.

Liberal scholars have tried to water down this prophecy. They note the Hebrew term "almah," translated in Isaiah 7:14 as "virgin," can simply mean "young girl." This is true. In the Hebrew language "almah" can refer to "a young girl of marriageable age."

But the word is used seven times in the OT - and in four of the seven cases the context of the passage makes it certain that the term refers to a true virgin. In two of the remaining three examples, though it's less clear, it also probably refers to virgin maidens.

But here's the real clincher... Remember this birth was to be "a sign" to Ahaz. What kind of a sign is it for a *young girl of marriageable age* to conceive a son?

That's an everyday occurrence. No big deal. A sign is an extraordinary event. It's unusual. It attracts attention. A sign indicates that God is up to something special...

If there was any doubt Isaiah meant a literal virgin, it's cleared up a little later. Four centuries after Isaiah wrote - 285

years before Jesus was born - the Hebrew OT was translated in Greek. It's called the Septuagint.

And guess how the translators render Isaiah 7:14?

They translate the Hebrew word "**almah**" with the Greek "**parthenos**" - which means absolutely, clearly, unequivocally, "**a girl who's never had sexual relations.**"

And here's the icing on the cake! When the Gospel writer, Matthew, quotes Isaiah 7:14, and writes it down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he also uses the word "**parthenos.**" Obviously, when Isaiah said "**a virgin shall conceive,**" that is exactly what he meant.

And there are other OT passages that affirm God's promise of Messiah's virgin birth. The miracle is spoken of in a number of different biblical passages...

Genesis 3 anticipates the ultimate conflict between *Satan* and *the Savior*. God speaks to the serpent, Satan, in verse 15... "**I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.**"

Satan will bruise Jesus, but Jesus will inflict on Satan a mortal wound. That's exactly what happened on the cross. Jesus got a heel bruise. But Satan got his skull crushed. Jesus absorbed a *bruise* to win the *battle!*

But notice in Genesis 3:15 how God refers to Jesus - He's "**the seed of the woman.**" This is the only occasion in Scripture where a woman is spoke of as possessing a seed. The man supplies the seed, not the woman.

Genesis 3:15 predicts a unique, supernatural birth.

Also consider Jeremiah 31:22, "For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth - a woman shall encompass a man." The Hebrew rabbis, writing before the coming of Jesus, understood this verse to refer to a birth by miraculous means. One rabbi explained the verse as follows, "Messiah is to have no earthly father."

Another Jewish rabbi rendered the verse, "The birth of Messiah will be without defect. The birth of the Messiah will be like that of no other man."

Here's a third rabbinical comment on Jeremiah 31:22, "The birth of Messiah will be like the dew of the Lord as drops on the grass without the action of a man." This is provocative. Jewish scholars before the time of Jesus understood that the prophet Jeremiah had predicted the Messiah would be born of a virgin.

And understand, the virgin birth is not only prophesied in the OT, it's also essential to NT doctrine.

If Jesus was the bastard child of Mary's infidelity - or even the legitimate offspring of her marriage to Joseph, rather than be *God*, Jesus would've been a mere mortal - a common sinner like you and me. If Jesus were not God, He could not have been our Savior!

Spiritually speaking, the human race inherited its sin nature from its dad, not mom. Romans 5 tells us in the Garden of Eden, both Adam and Eve sinned against God, but sin passed down through Adam, not Eve.

Thus, the reason we're born into sin - the reason every human is *wicked from the womb* - is due to our *distant daddy*,

Adam. When he sinned it was *the first Adam bomb*, and its fallout has been felt ever since.

Yet because Jesus was born of a virgin, He had no human father. Since His father was God, Jesus bypassed the rebellious bloodline of Adam!

Jesus' humanity came from His mother, Mary, while His spiritual nature came through the Holy Spirit. Jesus inherited Mary's Jewish nose, but God's divine nature.

In Jesus, God became flesh. Jesus was born sinless.

If He'd been born into sin - even if He'd lived a perfect life afterwards - He still would've died for *His own sin*, not *our sin*. To die for us, in our place, Jesus had to be guiltless not only *from birth* but *in birth!*

Understand, the Virgin Birth and the Deity of Jesus are the underpinnings of all Christian theology. These are not optional doctrines. They're absolutely essential.

Hey, kick out the cornerstones and the whole house will come tumbling down. Without these vital points of faith all Christianity becomes a *"house of cards."*

Without the Virgin Birth, Jesus is not the *God-man*, He's a *con-man*. Our salvation becomes a sham.

Never mind *"peace on earth, and good will toward men"* - forget Christmas is for kids - take back the presents - spit out the eggnog - ignore Christmas cheer and charity... there is **no reason for the season** if Jesus is not born of a virgin. Without the miracle of the virgin birth, our Lord Jesus is not who He says He is!

Years ago I watched a Christmas special on television. It was a fun-filled variety show hosted by Casey Cason. But in his closing comments he made this statement, "Christmas use to be for Christians who worshipped Jesus, but today Christmas is for everyone who wants peace on earth and good will toward men."

That bogus statement ruined the show for me! I couldn't disagree more! The foundation of Christmas and Christianity are identical, **God was in the manger!**

If it was just another child Mary laid in the manger, then the world is no better off than before His birth.

"Peace on earth and good will toward men" would remain a pipe dream. Christmas without the Virgin Birth and the Deity of Jesus might still be used as an excuse to *party*, but it would be no reason to *praise!*

The *holiday* we call "Christmas" would become a *hollow-day*, not a *holy-day*, without this special miracle.

And this is why Satan has worked *so hard* for *so long* to attack this vital doctrine. *Satan's strategy is twofold:*

He encourages us to **doubt** the truth of the Virgin Birth and the Deity of Jesus... and if he's unsuccessful with doubt, He tries to **distract**. If we're distracted we'll never consider the implication of these truths...

Even in Jesus' own day, Satan stirred up **doubts** about Jesus' roots and origin. In the Gospels, enemies try to drape a shroud of suspicion over His parentage.

Once, the Jews were boasting that Abraham was their father. They thought you got to *heaven* through *heredity*. But Jesus set the record straight, if Abraham was their dad they would've mimicked his faith in God.

That's when the Jews mocked Jesus. In John 8:41 they sneered, "**We were not born of fornication; we have one father - God.**" But notice the insinuation - the Jews suggested Jesus was born of illegitimate birth.

Jesus goes on to tell them that God is His Father, and their father is the devil. But obviously, Satan tried his best to attach a sinful stigma to the birth of Jesus.

Another attack was launched later in the first century by a heretical cult called the Gnostics. Many of the extra-biblical books that recycle through the news even today - like the [Gospel of Thomas](#), and the [Gospel According to Judas](#) - are Gnostic writings that were known by the early church and roundly rejected!

Much of the NT was aimed at defending the Christian faith against the false assertions of the Gnosticism. The term "[Gnostic](#)" comes from the Greek word "[gnosis](#)" or "[knowledge](#)." The Gnostics were heretics who claimed to possess a special knowledge.

In essence, the Gnostics believed God was revealed like sprinkling pixie dust. He'd been scattered through the universe. *Thus, a little of God was in all things...*

In holy men of ages past - in the angels - in the mountains - in animals - in plants - even in man... God was everywhere

and in everything. The divine pixie dust had been sprinkled across the vast universe.

Thus, the Gnostics taught that there was nothing unique about Jesus. He was just one of God's many revelations... *A way to God, but not THE way to God.*

And the early church stood staunchly against this heresy. In Colossians 2:9 Paul takes aim at the Gnostics, "For in Him (Jesus) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." In short, God is no pixie dust.

God is not sprinkled out. The totality of God resides in one human body - the body of our Lord Jesus.

Imagine, the eternal God - the Almighty God who overflows all universes - somehow compressed, and compacted, and capsulated into a tiny baby's body.

That means, if you want to find the revelation of God to mankind there's only one place to probe...

God has placed all the eggs of incarnation in one basket - *or better yet, in one manger!* All that God wanted to say to you and me He has said in Jesus!

That first Christmas morning in Bethlehem do you think anyone actually grasped the significance that God - the God who shares His glory with no one - the God Who is so holy no man is allowed into His presence... *that same God lay sleeping in the straw?*

Satan encourages *doubt*, but when doubt fails, he tries to **distract**. And here's a sly maneuver! For what's the difference between *ignoring a truth* or *doubting it?*

Practically speaking if you believe in the Virgin Birth and Jesus' Deity - yet ignore these truths - are you any better off than the person who doesn't believe at all?

Neither person worships...

Neither person carries out a commitment...

Neither person bothers to obey...

Neither person really loves the Lord!

If Satan can't get you to doubt the truth about Christmas, the next best thing is to get you to ignore it.

And I'm always surprised at how successful Satan is at creating this indifference - especially at the one time of the year when our devotion should be at its peak.

Too often, folks act like the residents of Bethlehem that first Christmas morning. *God was in the manger*, but they were all too busy with life to go and see Him.

It reminds me of the tragic tale, of a young couple who invited friends to a christening party for their baby.

Before the guests arrived they laid the infant on the bed in the master bedroom so he could nap. Out of habit, the guests entered the house, walked back to the dark room - *and not knowing the baby was sleeping* - they tossed their coats onto the bed.

The party went on in the living room while the baby suffocated under the pile of coats and sweaters.

I'm not sure if the gruesome story is true, but it does capture what happens so often at Christmas. At what is suppose to be a time to worship, the Baby lies in the manger forgotten under all our shopping and partying.

Somebody needs to remind us... *That's God under there! Watch out, that's God beneath our piles of stuff!*

One year, I was looking at the public HS's December calendar. It listed several mundane events - *the day for soccer physicals, a teacher's work day, a Dugout Club meeting* - but *the 25th* was conspicuously blank.

Imagine, its okay to mention a Dugout Club meeting, but not the King of the universe's birthday? Do we really believe that's God in the manger!

It's no secret that our world today has taken Christ out of Christmas, but what about us, the Christians?

We who affirm our faith in the *doctrine*, are we any different in *practice*? Author Joseph Stowell makes this observation, "Many of us have found our sensitivities insulted and our convictions offended as court rulings removed the nativity scenes from the lawns of our city halls. It's far easier to object to that swipe of secularism than to realize that for years many of us have been living through the Christmas season with, figuratively, no nativity scene on the front lawn of our lives. Caught up in the swirl and storm of the holiday, who of us has taken the time to proclaim Jesus?"

Your Christmas celebration will include *parties and presents*, but what about *praise and proclamation*? At Christmas time, *do we really celebrate Jesus?*

It's amazing that the Grinch thought he could steal Christmas from the good folks of Whoville. But they knew a secret he didn't. Christmas isn't about *the stuff*.

As the poem goes, “And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags.

And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store? What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more?” I'll bet it means a little more than you've been thinking. Has it hit you, *that's God in the manger!*

It's true, though the *mechanics of a miracle* are imponderable, the *meaning of a miracle* is crystal clear.

The virgin birth means the baby Mary laid in the manger *is God!* The King of kings and Lord of lords has come to earth... And Christmas is a time for two things... It's for **stepping back** and **stepping out**.

This is the time of year we need to **step back and worship**. At Christmas let's make time to contemplate a miracle - to allow ourselves to be smitten again with wonder and awe over an event we'll never understand.

I need to let the force of the Christmas miracle whittle away at my *high-minded haughtiness*, my *know-it-all arrogance*. Christmas is the *holiday that humbles*.

This year let the miracle of Jesus' Incarnation bring you back to a simpler faith, a child-like faith - *faith, though I don't understand what God is doing* - *faith, though I could never in a million years, figure it all out*.

To be brought to my knees in simple faith and absolute trust is good, good medicine for the soul!

To be *baffled* once a year can be a *blessing*...

We spend so much of the rest of the year questioning God... *Why has He done this, or allowed that?* Christmas reels in my curiosity. The meaning of Christmas is a reminder God doesn't owe us an explanation. He calls on us to bow to His omnipotence.

Christmas encourages me to rest *my probing mind* in God's *loving arms*. I have a motto I picked up several years ago. It reads, "I love God because I know Him. But I adore Him, because I cannot comprehend Him."

Christmas is the time to *ponder and praise*.

It's a time to realize the glory, and grandeur, and greatness of the God we serve! At Christmas time we once again find ourselves standing on holy ground.

Christmas is a time to take a *step back and worship*, but it is also a time to take a **step out and witness**.

Despite the distractions Satan manufactures at Christmas, it's still the year's prime time for people to think about religious themes. At Christmas, hearts soften, and spiritual-sensitivities heighten. At Christmas time even *the hardest sinner considers the Savior*.

I've heard it said, "Our world never comes as close to being in contact with its greatest hope as it does at Christmas time." We need to realize the *Spirit of Christ* still likes to take advantage of the *spirit of Christmas*.

Thus, this is the time of year we need to go on the offensive - declare to the world around us that heaven has invaded earth - *that God can be met in a manger!*

On the first Christmas, shepherds were in the fields when suddenly angels appeared, and announced the news Messiah was born! They rushed to Bethlehem to locate the Child, and worship their newborn king.

Afterwards Luke 2:17 says of the shepherds, "Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child." And here too is our Christmas commission - in the words of Luke, "they made widely known the saying!" Let's also make our love for the Savior "*widely known.*"

Christmas is for *stepping back and stepping out*. It's for *worship and witness - for praise and proclamation*.

Let's adore the Christ this Christmas - and let's announce to the world with the same enthusiasm as the shepherds, "**Hey, that's God in the manger!**"