

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**December 1, 2013**

**Luke and the Virgin Birth**

Read Luke 1:26-40

**Key verse: “Look, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus” (Luke 1:31).**

Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth begins with an angel appearing to a young, poor woman named Mary. The angel tells her that, even though she is a virgin, she is going to give birth miraculously to the Messiah. At the heart of the Christmas story is the Virgin Birth. But did Jesus’ birth really involve a virginal conception? And does it really matter whether or not we believe this?

In a sermon on the Virgin Birth, Mike Woodruff addresses these questions. Here is some of that sermon:

***Introduction***

*The claim that Christ entered the world by a virgin elicits a variety of responses. There are some who argue the Virgin Birth is absolutely impossible, because miracles don’t happen. They contend Mary is neither the first nor the last person to find herself in trouble; she made the whole thing up.*

*There’s a second camp made up of those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ and acknowledge that miracles do happen, but—for whatever reason—they believe this particular miracle never took place. They want to set the story in context and move on. They argue that the term virgin was applied to Mary because she was so young. There are more people in this second camp than you might imagine, including a number of clergy.*

*I’m a little baffled by it all. If you affirm the Bible, you’re signing up to acknowledge more than a few supernatural events. What about the Resurrection or the parting of the Red Sea? What about creating everything out of nothing? Once someone has picked up his editor’s pen, how will he decide what to leave in the Bible and what to mark out? If someone is willing to omit the Virgin Birth, they have no idea how significantly they are undermining the whole narrative.*

*There's a third camp that affirms the Virgin Birth simply because it's in the Bible. They've reached the point in their spiritual journey where they say, "If it's in the Bible, I buy it." But they would be hard pressed to explain why the Virgin Birth is an important doctrine to defend. I don't want to dismiss the value of this sort of acceptance, but I assert that there's more reason to affirm the Virgin Birth than this.*

*The fourth and final camp is made up of those who not only affirm the Virgin Birth, but also understand how absolutely critical the doctrine is to the whole superstructure of the gospel. It is my hope to move as many of you as I can into this fourth camp. I want to do that by making four observations.*

### **1. The Virgin Birth was the birth of God himself.**

*John 1 begins saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word, or logos, refers to Jesus—in the beginning was the Word: Jesus. John didn't write, "In the beginning, Jesus was created," or, "After a little while, Jesus was created." Jesus was already there.*

*In John 17, Jesus talks about the glory he enjoyed with the Father before the foundations of the world. In Philippians 2, the apostle Paul talks about the fact that Jesus was God himself in heaven and enjoyed the glory of God. But Jesus set all that aside in order to take on a human body. He humbled himself to become a man; and not simply a man, but also a slave; and not simply a slave, but a slave willing to go to his death on a cross.*

*Jesus Christ is eternal. When we talk about the Virgin Birth, we're not talking about a birth like yours or mine. Our souls did not exist in a spiritual state on some shelf in heaven, waiting for God to pull us down and give us a body and send us to earth. Our lives begin at conception.*

*But Jesus Christ was present at creation. He is eternal. This is a foundational point. As a matter of fact, a battle was fought back in the late third century and early fourth century. A dynamic young man named Arius suggested that Jesus Christ was God-like but not actually God. He argued that Jesus was created—that there was a time when Jesus was not. Arius not only taught this idea, but he was clever enough to put it in a song, making it easy to spread his theology.*

*Those who affirmed the truth of Scripture were singing other songs. Among them is one we sing with some frequency: the Gloria Patri. The words "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end" were fighting words to defend the truth that Jesus Christ is eternal. The Virgin Birth was the birth of none other than God himself.*

## **2. The Virgin Birth was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.**

When we talk about the Virgin Birth, it's important to realize that the story doesn't begin with the angel Gabriel in Luke chapter one. Writing a full 700 years before Christ would be born, the prophet Isaiah says, "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel."

As mentioned earlier, there are some who say that the word translated "virgin" from the Hebrew should be translated as "young woman." This is partially true but misleading. The word occurs nine times in the Old Testament. Of the other eight occurrences, seven clearly refer to a virgin and not simply a young woman. That's absolutely the case in Isaiah 7:14. Speaking on behalf of God, the prophet Isaiah says: I'm going to give you a sign, and this is how you will know for sure that God has sent his Messiah.

What is the sign the prophet promises? That the Messiah will be born of a young woman? No! That doesn't exactly narrow things down! The sign is that he will be born to a virgin. Furthermore, Matthew quotes this verse in the first chapter of his Gospel, claiming that all these things took place so that the prophecy would be fulfilled. When he translates the verse from Hebrew into Greek, the Greek word he uses can only be referring to a virgin.

## **3. The New Testament bears witness to the Virgin Birth.**

A third observation is that the New Testament bears witness to the Virgin Birth in connection to the Old Testament. In Luke, the angel says to Mary, "You've found favor with God. You are going to give birth to the Messiah." Mary responds, "How is that possible because I am a virgin?"

Matthew develops his birth account around the character of Joseph. The angel expects Joseph to believe Mary when she says she has no idea how she got pregnant. "It was God's doing," she says. "The Holy Spirit came upon me, and I'm pregnant." What a shock for Mary's fiancé! Engagement in that culture was even more serious than engagement in this culture. In essence, the couple was married. If your fiancé died during the year of your engagement, you were considered a widow. If you were unfaithful to your fiancé, you were put to death. This was a serious relationship.

When Mary comes back from visiting her Aunt Elizabeth for three months, she is pregnant. Joseph knows he's not the father, so he begins making plans to quietly divorce her. The angel Gabriel is sent on a return visit to Nazareth to stop Joseph from ending the relationship: "You are to marry this woman," he tells Joseph. "What is conceived in her is of the Spirit of God."

## **4. The Virgin Birth is a critical piece of God's plan for salvation.**

***The Virgin Birth is an absolutely critical piece of God's plan for salvation. It's included in most of the ancient creeds. In the Apostles' Creed we read, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, born of the Virgin Mary."***

***Although the Nicene Creed doesn't speak of the Virgin birth directly, it nevertheless goes to great length to make the point that Christ's birth was altogether different from anyone else's birth: He was begotten of God, not made. The word "begotten" here means he was fathered by God. C.S. Lewis says, "When you beget something, you beget it after your own kind." A human male would beget human children, a beaver would beget little beavers, and a bird would beget eggs that would become birds.***

***The writers of the Nicene Creed protected the doctrine of the Virgin Birth when they wrote, "We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible, And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." Because Jesus was begotten of God, Jesus is God.***

***These things serve to defend the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. But why is it so important that we defend it? We do so because it is absolutely critical for our salvation that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man. He is the Savior of the world, uniquely positioned as mediator between God and fallen man—which is exactly what we need in order to be reconciled to a holy God.***

***In the second century people had no problem affirming that Jesus was God, but they often waffled as to whether or not they believed that he was a man. That's why the writings of the early church fathers—such as Ignatius and others—defended the manhood of Jesus.***

***In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, it's the divine side of the equation that we have to protect. We must protect the Virgin Birth, because it is only through the Virgin Birth—it is only when God bypasses the sin of Adam—that God is able to provide a Savior who is unstained by original sin.***

***Sin entered the world through one man and death through sin. The viral infection of sin has infected all of us. We're not called sinners because we sin; we sin because that's our nature. We have inherited it as people. In order for us to have a perfect sacrifice, Adam's work had to be bypassed. The Second Adam—the perfect man and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ—was sent to us through a virgin's womb and the agency of the Holy Spirit, in order to perform a union of God and man without sin. The Virgin Birth isn't just some casual notion or quaint doctrine. It is absolutely critical to our salvation, because what we need is a Savior.***

***(Contact Michael at [msigler@fumcfwb.com](mailto:msigler@fumcfwb.com).)***

