

Virgin Birth – Are You Kidding?

Does Santa Claus Really Exist?

In 1947 a Christmas movie was produced called "Miracle on 34th Street". It's such a classic it's been re-made four times and twice turned into a theatrical production. The basis of the plot is that a man claiming to be Santa Claus is placed on trial. The judge is hoping to provide an answer for the age-old question, "Does Santa Claus really exist?" The judge comes to the conclusion that if you believe in something strongly enough, then it becomes true. However, in reality just believing in something doesn't make it true. For if you believe in Santa Claus, you pretty much have to believe in miracles. Flying reindeer, an overweight Santa descending into your house through a narrow chimney, delivering millions of gifts all around the world in one night...all of this would take a great deal of faith to accept. The theme of the movie "Miracle on 34th Street" is that it doesn't matter if the story is fact or fiction. The important thing is that if you believe in Santa strongly enough, he becomes real for you.

Is The Christmas Story Real?

I suspect that's the way many people view the Christmas story. The Christmas story is full of things that are so far from our daily reality, people put it in the same category as Santa Claus. Men following a star. Angels appearing to shepherds. Heavenly choirs. Mary conceiving a baby when she is a virgin and hasn't had sexual relations. The whole story is so full of miraculous events, that people think "Well, if you want to believe that stuff, I suppose it's true for you, but it just doesn't relate to the world I live in." How about you? Do you really believe in the virgin birth or do you think that part was just made up? Is this story of God coming down to earth in the form of a baby literally true or is it a myth that we have told and re-told for so long it's now taken on the status of "fact"?

As I read part of the account of the birth of Jesus from the gospel of Luke, I want you to ask yourself "Do I really believe this stuff, and if I say I do, why do I believe it?"

" In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her" (Luke 1:26 – 38 NIV)

Luke is very explicit in what he is claiming. Three times in this chapter, he points out that Mary was a virgin. He is making the point that this conception was a miracle. A miracle can be defined as "an act of God contrary to the laws of nature as we understand them." It's an event when God sort of overthrows the natural laws He established and intervenes supernaturally. Luke isn't saying this is fiction. He's stating this as fact. When Luke begins his Gospel he says "I have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, and I'm writing this orderly account to you." (Luke 1:3NIV) It's almost certain that the careful investigation that Luke is talking about is that he interviewed Mary, and any others who were alive around that first Christmas. This evening I want to talk about what it means to believe in the miraculous.

1. Faith In The Miraculous Is Essential

Christianity begins with the basic notion that miracles are a reality. By definition, a miracle is not a common occurrence. If they were, we wouldn't call them miracles. They would just be everyday events. Miracles are mysterious, but they are fundamental to the supernatural plan of God. A Christian faith without miracles is not a supernatural faith. A Christian faith without miracles is a faith where you don't need God, because you can understand it all. If you and I are to be lifelong followers of Jesus Christ, there are a couple of miracles concerning Jesus that we have to believe.

- **The miracle of the incarnation.**

The incarnation is more than believing that Jesus was born of a virgin. The incarnation is believing that Jesus was God in the flesh, born in human likeness. God living on earth in the form of a person, whose name was Jesus. It's absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith that God revealed himself to us through Jesus Christ.

- **The miracle of the resurrection of Christ from the dead.**

If you don't believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, you are not even off first base. The Christian faith started spreading around the world because those first disciples believed that Jesus had done what he said he was going to do. After being dead for three days, he came back to life, showing God's power over sin and death, and giving us hope that when we die, we too will live again. The bible says, **"...if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."**(Romans 10:9 NIV) So, it goes without saying that if you don't believe in the miracle of Jesus' bodily resurrection, you cannot be saved. This is the basis for acceptance into God's kingdom – faith in the Living Christ. The Apostle Paul said **"...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile"**(1 Cor. 15:17 NIV)

A person who calls themselves a Christian but doesn't believe that God works miracles has a faith that leaves no room for the supernatural. It's a faith based entirely on what you can understand with your own reason. It's a faith that shrinks God down to the size of you. As soon as I have a God that I fully understand, he is too small for me to worship. So faith in the miraculous is essential.

2. Doubting The Miraculous Is Normal

Do you know who was the first person to doubt the virgin birth? It was Mary. Mary's initial response was not, "What an honour! Why did you pick me?" Her first response was, "How can this be? I've never been with a man." We all know this pregnancy was contrary to the laws of nature, so she found herself puzzled. Mary was just one of a number of people in the bible who doubted the miraculous. Even though John the Baptist had baptised Jesus, and prepared the way for him as Messiah, while he was in Herod's prison, he began to have doubts. He even asked his followers to go to Jesus and ask him if he really is the one they have been waiting for, or if they should look for someone else. Despite the fact that he had been living with Jesus for three years, Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead. Here's how John describes it in his gospel. **"Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.'"** (John. 20:23-25 NIV)

Do you have doubts? Do you read novels like The Da Vinci Code, and doubt whether Jesus really was God in the flesh? Do you wonder, "Was he really born of a virgin, or is that just the writer's way of enhancing the legend? Is he really the Son of God or was he just a skilful teacher?" Maybe you were totally convinced years ago when you were young, but life has been hard, and you've been wounded, and now you wonder, "Is all this about Jesus really true?" You wonder if the miracles in the Bible are legitimate. Is the Bible really God-breathed, or are there errors and exaggerations? Maybe you feel guilty for having such doubts. You may think that you're a horrible Christian for entertaining these questions.

But let me offer you some encouragement. If you experience doubt about the supernatural, you're in good company. Mary, the mother of Jesus, Thomas, the apostle of Jesus, and John, the baptizer of Jesus all doubted...even though they stood nose to nose with him...and yet they were loved and approved by Jesus. Some of the world's greatest scholars became believers in the supernatural as a result of their honest doubts. C.S. Lewis is acknowledged by both the religious and secular communities as a brilliant scholar and teacher. Early in his teaching career, he was an atheist, but as he studied more, the Lord made a believer out of him. Soon after, he wrote a book entitled "Miracles". He admits there are times when Christianity looks highly unbelievable, but then again when he was an atheist, there were times it looked highly unbelievable as well. The Lord has always been very patient with honest doubters. He had a way of inviting people to investigate the evidence for themselves. That's what he did with John the Baptist. He sent the messengers back to John with evidence of the miracles he was doing, and left it up to John to draw his own conclusions. He didn't scold John for his disbelief, and he's not afraid of our questions.

3. Faith In The Miraculous Is Possible

In Psalm 77:14-15 we read this, ***"You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people..."*** Right from the first page of the Bible story we see God working miracles. The Bible tells us that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. When Mary had her questions, the angel said to her "Nothing is impossible with God."

Norman Geisler is a Christian theologian and writer of more than 70 books. He once wrote this: ***"God is not asking you to take a blind leap of faith into the darkness. He's asking you to take a reasonable step of faith into the light."*** The theme of the movie "Miracle on 34th Street" is that it doesn't matter if the story is fact or fiction. The important thing is that if you believe in Santa strongly enough, he becomes real for you. To me that sounds like a blind leap of faith. But to believe in the miracle of the virgin birth, the atoning death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a reasonable step of faith into the light.

The virgin birth is a miracle that tells us something about the power of God. But it also tells us about the heart of God. It tells us that our powerful God is so concerned about us that He became small. He reduced himself to a tiny cell implanted inside a virgin's womb. He crept into the world he created almost unnoticed. And not only was he born for our sake, but he also died for our sake...to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He came to be our Saviour. All of this happened as a result of an encounter with a girl named Mary, who believed in a God of miracles. Do you?

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