

The X-Mas Files

Week Four

Mission Nativity Impossible

How Strange Is This?

We have heard the Christmas story so many times it really is second nature to us. And we don't see anything wrong with it. Jesus, the Son of God became a baby, born to a virgin, it was God in the flesh, Emmanuel. But if you take a step back and imagine if you were telling this story to someone who had never heard of it, it would be quite the tall tale. And a very extraterrestrial one at that. If we replace God with an advanced being who wanted to be able to experience what humans were like and be able to communicate with them on their level and you begin to get the point. Add to that the way in which this being would enter our world by impregnating a young woman who was a virgin, well then it gets very weird. But what if you add that the story had been predicted thousands of years before and was written in an ancient text and fulfilled in such accuracy that only a being who lived outside of time could have revealed and it gets extremely weird.

It Can Be Proven

That's the part that many people can't believe even when presented with all the evidence. Many prominent people have taken all the evidence and reviewed it with the goal of disproving it only to become believers themselves. Josh McDowell, Lee Strobel are just a few of the men who set out to make a mockery of the Bible only to find it was more than true. It changed their lives. So we can make the statement that the Christmas story is other-worldly, but true. However the day and the year of His birth are a little harder to pin down, but we can try so let's investigate that now. If God really did send His only Son Jesus to be born and die for our sins, then there must be proof. We'll start with when He was born since we commonly celebrate His birth on December 25th of any given year. While we can't be certain of the month, we can be more precise about the year.

A Definable Range

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod... (Matt 2:1, NIV)

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah... (Luke 1:5, NIV)

The first time we can see is that Jesus was born during the before the death of King Herod. According to historian's accounts, Herod was proclaimed king by the Roman senate in late 40 B.C. He reigned for 37 years and died just before an eclipse of the moon [according](#) to Josephus. This occurred on March 12-13, 4 B.C. So we know that Jesus could not been born after March/April 4 B.C.

Luke, The Great Historian

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

(Luke 2:1-2, The Message)

So now we have another time frame, a census taken before Quirinius was governor of Syria and during the reign of Caesar Augustus. Augustus ruled from March 15 44 B.C. until August 19, 14 A.D. Quirinius was governor on 2 or 3 B.C. so the census took place before then. Considering the political instability of Herod and his impending death, Caesar Augustus would have ordered a census to assess the situation in Palestine. It probably occurred between 4-6 B.C. Putting this all together, Jesus was most likely born in late 5 B.C. or early 4 B.C. We have Luke to thank for so much detail.

But What About December 25th?

This day was more a traditional date than a provable one. While there are astronomers who can point to December 25th as being the time when the Star of Bethlehem guided the Magi to Jesus as a child, they can't use the stars to do the same for the birth. That may very well have been in the Spring of the year. But December 25th can be seen as the day of the first Christmas since the Magi did bring gifts to Jesus. However, is the date a pagan holiday? Yes, people like to take shots at this, but if you want to see a good argument on how the pagans actually moved their date to compete with the Christian date, there's a good [article](#) on that on *thegospelcoalition.org*. A short quote addresses this:

All this data leaves us with a quandary: is it more likely that within the third and fourth centuries the growing numbers of Christians copied the pagans, whose adherents were on a sharp decline, in some last-ditch effort to convert holdouts? Or, on the other hand, did the desperate pagans copy the Christians whose faith and practice was growing in popularity? Based on all of the available evidence more and more ancient historians are pointing to the latter conclusion being the reality.

A Virgin Birth

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus... Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 2:31, 34-35, KJV)

Now on to the point that is very supernatural – the virgin birth. Virgin birth, known to scientists as parthenogenesis, appears to be rather common in the animal kingdom. Many insects and other invertebrates are capable of switching between sexual and clonal reproduction. Among the vertebrates, virgin births have been documented in at least 80 taxonomic groups, including fish, amphibians, and reptiles. But humans and fellow mammals provide a notable exception. So far as anyone can say no mammalian species is capable of giving birth without a father.

What Are The Obstacles?

First, a mammal's egg cell usually won't divide until it receives a signal from the sperm. Second, most mammalian eggs have only half the number of chromosomes necessary for development. If there isn't any sperm, the embryo will end up with only half the DNA it needs to survive. For a virgin birth to occur there would have to be too many accidents to happen. In short, only divine intervention could explain how this happened. Yes, a miracle. But who is the father then?

According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit is the father. But the process is somewhat hard to grasp. The power of the Highest will *overshadow* Mary. That word means to come over her like a cloud of Shekinah glory and conceive Jesus. You can debate for hours just exactly how it happened and not figure it out. The final point is that God miraculously conceived His Son in Mary's womb. The miracle isn't His birth, it's His conception.

Are There Other Lessons To Be Learned Here?

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. (Luke 1:28, KJV)

While the conception is certainly miraculous, Mary should be seen as an example of some things as well. She was chosen because of God's grace but God saw something in her. He saw a willingness to be used of Him. And it can be found in her response to what the angel Gabriel told her:

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. (Luke 1:38, KJV)

We need to understand just how big this statement is in the context of how Mary's life would change. You see, she was in the betrothal stage with Joseph. She was not to become pregnant by anyone but Joseph and only after the wedding. Any woman who got pregnant at this time would be punished by being stoned to death. And what of how Joseph would view her? He knew he wasn't the father. So for her to allow this to happen was more than just simple obedience – it was a leap of faith.

What Next?

And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. (Luke 1:36,37, KJV)

It is interesting to note that Gabriel told her about her cousin Elisabeth who was also pregnant. Mary knew of Elisabeth's difficulty to conceive and at an age when she was past the ability to have a child, God gave her a child. There were many reasons for letting her know this. Mary would get her faith uplifted by someone else who knew that God can and does do the impossible. You see, Gabriel knew that Mary would need an example of God's blessing and power so to tell her about Elisabeth would help her see that what she was told is also not impossible. If God could bless her cousin with a child at her age, He could certainly perform the miracle of a virgin conception.

Seek Out Others For Encouragement

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. (Luke 1:41-42, KJV)

Mary needed encouragement and Elisabeth was six months into her miracle. She was the perfect person to go to. When we are in the beginning stages of doing something God asks of us, there will times when we doubt. There will be times when others won't see that God is working an unseen work in us that only we know about. Yes, it will soon be obvious, but in the beginning we'll need someone to assure us, that God will do what He says he will do.

You Will Get Unexpected Confirmation

For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. (Luke 1:44-45, KJV)

When God said that John the Baptist would prepare the way for the Lord, I don't think anyone could have imagined that even in his mother's womb, that would be true. And yet, it was. And seeing Elisabeth, knowing her barrenness was turned into blessing and then hearing her proclaim that her faith would be rewarded by the promises being made true were just the things she needed. And since we're here, this is a good place to see that abortion does indeed take a life. In this story you have a six month old John the Baptist leaping for joy in his mother's womb when Jesus, who could not have been more than weeks old got close to him. Yes, abortion does take an innocent life even from conception forward. I just thought I'd point that out.

Joseph Also Needed Encouragement

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth

a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife...(Matt 1:19-24, KJV)

You see Joseph could have just divorced Mary privately avoiding scorn and ridicule for both of them. And in any other circumstance, he would be thought highly of, but he listened to God and took Mary for his wife. We can't leave out that the public shame would have been difficult to handle, though. Joseph knew that he could hide things for a time, but eventually he would have to defend his decision to anyone he knew. He knew that instead of looking faithful, he would be seen as a fool. He had to face the tough questions from his family and friends. His reasoning would only make things worse. But he chose to trust God even when it looked like God had put him in a tough place.

Faith In Trying Times

I've said it before, but faith is believing in advance, what only makes sense in reverse. Both Mary and Joseph could have turned their backs on God, but they didn't. On the long journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, Mary could have easily asked if God is living in me, why am I going through this? Joseph was also in a trying time as we just noted. Both could have rightfully rejected this plan that, in the eyes of regular people would not only be seen as the stuff of an overactive imagination for Mary and logic of a starstruck lover who was letting his emotions cloud the religious leaders and family members rationale for putting his fiancé away, or worse, killed. But both grew to see that this was all part of a higher plan and it was happening at the appointed time:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. (Gal 4:4-5, KJV)

God was saying through Mary "Enough!! I will intervene! I will deliver you! There is a set time for your deliverance. The world needs a deliverer - He will birth in us the answer and the deliverance to others "Taxing" worlds. Taxes will "Tax my strength" but God said when Jesus was born that His burden is light if we accept Him.