Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

God Became a Man
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by John MacArthur

God became a man. That foundational gospel truth is pictured in every manger scene you'll see around town this Christmas. Though the incarnation is culturally familiar, it's utterly foreign to the unbelieving world.

Unfortunately, a heart attitude of unbelief concerning Jesus' identity has characterized the majority of men and women since the Fall. The Jews who opposed Christ vividly illustrated that attitude on more than one occasion (John 5:18; 7:28–30; 10:30–39). But such hostility and lack of faith should not discourage us or deter us from embracing and defending the truth of Christ's virgin birth. The apostle Paul reminds us, "For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:3–4, 10:16; Isa. 53:1). The world's opinion, popular as it might be, is rarely a reliable source of truth.

Undoubtedly, therefore, the Holy Spirit acted with significant purpose in devoting an early passage from the Gospel of Matthew, at the front of the New Testament, to establish right away the humanity and deity of our Lord. His incarnation, properly understood, is foundational to Christianity. There could have been no genuine work of redemption apart from the fact of God becoming man and, by being both completely God and completely man, reconciling people to Himself through His substitutionary death and physical resurrection. If Jesus had not been both human and divine, there would be no gospel.

Many skeptical New Testament commentators will concede that Matthew and other authors of Scripture sincerely believed and taught that the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus without any assistance from a human father. But such interpreters nevertheless glibly discount the validity of Scripture's claims by immediately asserting that its writers were naive, uneducated, and subject to the myths and superstitions of ancient times. According to the critics, the Gospel writers merely adapted some of the familiar virgin birth legends to the story of Jesus' birth.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Matthew's account, for example, reads as history, but it is history he could know and record only because God revealed it and accomplished it by miraculous intervention. Matthew's words are far superior to the immoral and repulsive nature of the secular stories he and the other writers allegedly drew from. Here is his clear, uncomplicated narrative of the

Incarnation:

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. (Matthew 1:18–25)

Matthew declares Jesus’ divine lineage in that passage and reveals five aspects of His virgin birth: its first announcement, Joseph’s response to it, the angel’s clarification of it, its connection to prophecy, and its actual occurrence. We’ll look at those five aspects one at a time, beginning with the announcement in the next post.

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