

The Parish of Wellow

Searching Issues

Virgin Birth does it really matter?

Passage, Sermon Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these sermon notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during next week to consider the questions below.

1. Sermon Passage

Matthew 1:18-25

18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:

23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us."

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

2. Sermon Notes

2.1 Introduction

Three Observations about the virgin birth:

- i. The Virgin Birth draws us into God's mysterious method of operation.
- ii. The Virgin Birth is a vital part of God's rescue plan for humanity.
- iii. The Virgin Birth spotlights Jesus' identity as FULLY God and FULLY Man.

2.2 The Virgin Birth draws us into God's mysterious method of operation.

"Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit." Matthew 1:18

- God is a mystery! And as such he is often going to appear unconventional in his modus operandi. And the virgin birth of Jesus is one of the greatest evidences of God's mysterious and perplexing nature.
- Hebrew engagements happened in two stages - the first stage of engagement or promise was often arranged in childhood. Then a year's engagement normally happened before the happy couple moved in together.
- Joseph and Mary were at stage two.
- Mary would have probably been between 12 and 14 years old.
- We know very little about Joseph other than that he was a carpenter, the son of a man named Jacob, and crucially of the family line of King David.
- Matthew tells us in verse 19 that Joseph was a man of unusual character and grace: "Joseph, her fiancé, being a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly. As he considered this, he fell asleep, and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit."
- Mary's child therefore was not the offspring of a normal union - as wonderful as such children are.
- Mary's child is born from the mysterious intervention of God.
- The Holy Spirit somehow circumvents the normal process of insemination - and Mary finds herself mysteriously impregnated through an act of God.
- This news is so outrageous that it requires angelic visions for both Mary and Joseph to actually believe that this is God in all of his mystery at work.
- The whole virgin birth episode is so steeped in mystery our minds boggle at how such things are possible: How can a woman get pregnant without a man? What does it mean that God took on human flesh and dwelt among us, that after all is what Immanuel means 'God with us'?

2.3 The Virgin Birth is a vital part of God's rescue plan for humanity.

"And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:21

- From the beginning - the time when Adam and Eve took that illicit bite of fruit in the garden - humanity has been groaning in anticipation of the coming of the one who will "save his people from their sins."
- The virgin birth is a part of God's big plan to bring his salvation to all humanity.
- At its heart Christmas is not about some nice sweet baby born in a barn and laid in a bed of straw. Christmas is about God sending his son to save the world - according to a plan forged thousands of years ago.
- Christmas signifies the beginning of the greatest rescue mission ever. And the Virgin birth is God's chosen sign of his activity. Verse 22 -- "All of this happened to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet: 'Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel (meaning, God is with us).'"
- When the angel Gabriel delivers his message to Joseph he says, what's happening here and now is really a fulfilment of what the prophet Isaiah was talking about 730 years ago. This was a part of God's thinking from way back. God has been working to mould history in such a way that he can bring it to this point.

2.4 The Virgin Birth spotlights Jesus' identity as FULLY God and FULLY Man.

"The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35

- God is here in the baby Jesus. Born of God, hence the references to the Holy Spirit but also born of a woman who was a virgin.
- Jesus is not some kind of half-breed - half man and half God.
- No Jesus is fully man and fully God.
- The early church struggled for a long time with this dilemma trying to work out the best wording that conveys the truth at the centre of Christmas. The words they came up with are the words we say in the creed: "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man.
- The end the early church concluded that Jesus is mysteriously, at the same time fully God and fully man. He is the God-Man, of which there is no other. And this truth is rooted in the idea of the Virgin birth.

2.5 To deny the virgin birth is:

- i. To deny that God can work in mysterious ways which we do not fully understand.
- ii. To set at nought God's great rescue plan for humanity.
- iii. To deny that Jesus is the son of God.

At its heart the Virgin Birth which we celebrate every Christmas is about the mysterious invasion of God into humanity.

3. Questions to consider back at home

3.1 Imagine yourself as Joseph how would you be feeling before and after the angel of the lord appeared?

3.2 How does Matthew tell us 'in no uncertain terms' who Jesus is?

3.3 According to Matthew for what purpose did Jesus come to earth?

3.4 Why according to Matthew is it so important that Joseph is the 'son of David'?

3.5 What is so crucial about the angel's reference in verse 23 to Isaiah 7:14: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel - which means 'God with us?'"

3.6 Does God speak through dreams today or is this way of God communicating with his people something that happened only in Biblical times? If God does speak through dreams today how can we be sure that it is God speaking and not us?

3.7 A friend of yours says one day that she remembered reading somewhere that 'most Bishops in the Church of England do not believe in the virgin birth.' How would you respond?

3.8 If the virgin birth is one example of God's mysterious and perplexing nature what might be some other examples?

3.9 In what ways is this passage 'strongly Trinitarian'?

If you would like to discuss these questions further please feel free to call me on 01761 432293