

# “Good Tidings Of Great Joy”

**Introduction.** John 3:16 proclaims that the birth of Jesus is an expression of love. As part of the natural order, God intends the birth of every child to be an expression of love. The world has thwarted God’s purpose in this as it has in many other areas of life.

We seem to shy away from an in-depth study and discussion of the birth of Jesus because of the way His birth has been treated by the world in general and religion in particular. But we need to examine the texts where the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding it are recorded. With these in mind, we can establish the validity of the virgin birth, and finally consider some conclusions, both true and false, about the birth of Jesus.

## I. ***A Synoptic View Of The Birth Of Jesus***

- A. An angel appears to Zacharias to inform him that John the Baptist would be born to him and his wife (Luke 1:5-25).
- B. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary to tell her that she will give birth to Jesus (Luke 1:26-38).
- C. Mary visits Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias, to tell her of the angel’s message (Luke 1:39-56).
- D. The birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-80).
- E. An angel visits Joseph to tell him of the nature of Mary’s pregnancy (Matthew 1:18-25).
- F. Jesus is born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7).
- G. An angel appears to shepherds in the vicinity of Bethlehem to tell them of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-20).
- H. The circumcision of Jesus and His presentation in the temple (Luke 2:21-38).
- I. The visit of the wise men from the east (Matthew 2:1-12).
- J. The flight of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus into Egypt to flee the persecution of Herod (Matthew 2:13-23; Luke 2:39-40).

## II. ***The Validity Of The Virgin Birth***

- A. The birth of Jesus was prophesied in the Old Testament.
  1. The time of His coming.
    - a) In the last days (Isaiah 2:2; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-17).
    - b) During the fourth world empire (Daniel 2:44; Luke 2:1).
    - c) Before Judah lost its distinctness as a tribe (Genesis 49:10).
      - (1) The ten northern tribes were no longer distinct at the time of Jesus’ coming.
      - (2) Judah lost its distinction within just 40 years of the death of Jesus.

2. The place of His birth.
    - a) Another Bethlehem existed in the territory of Zebulun (Joshua 19:15).
    - b) Micah was specific in saying, "Bethlehem Ephrathah" (Micah 5:2).
  3. His lineage.
    - a) A descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:16).
    - b) A descendant the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10; Hebrews 7:14; Revelation 5:5).
    - c) A descendant of the house of David (Psalm 132:11; Isaiah 11:1-2, 10).
  4. His special birth.
    - a) Isaiah said He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
    - b) This was a unique birth that never happened before nor has ever happened since.
- B. Some observations about the virgin birth.
1. It was not just a supernatural birth.
    - a) "Supernatural birth" is a generic term which includes the virgin birth.
    - b) The births of Isaac, Samuel, and John the Baptist all qualify as supernatural births but they are not virgin births.
  2. As Jesus, after His death, was raised by the power of God (Romans 1:4), He was born by the power of God (Luke 1:35).
    - a) Without the resurrection there would be no fitting end to His human existence.
    - b) Without the virgin birth there would be no suitable beginning to it (Hebrews 7:1-3).
  3. The only way God could use a birth of the flesh but still assure us of His deity was through a virgin.
    - a) His natural birth assures us that He truly partook of the flesh (Hebrews 2:14).
    - b) The virginity of His mother assures us of the paternity of God and thus the stamp of divinity upon Him (Matthew 1:23).
- C. Answering those who question the validity of the virgin birth.
1. The reactions of both Mary and Joseph give credence to the biblical account.
    - a) Mary's reaction at Calvary was uncharacteristic of someone who was guilty. She could have spared her son by merely naming His father.
    - b) Joseph's actions show he was not involved immorally with Mary.
      - (1) His refusal at first to marry her indicates that he was honoring the law.

- (2) His consideration of her to put her away privily indicates his devotion to her.
  - (3) His haste to take her as his wife indicates he believed she was pure.
- 2. Jesus, if illegitimate, violated the law by being in the temple (Deuteronomy 23:2).
- 3. "Virgin," as used in Isaiah 7:14, is the Hebrew word *almah*.
  - a) Modernists, including the translators of the RSV and NRSV, deny the virgin birth and translate the word as "young maiden," a young woman of marriageable age.
    - (1) However, *almah* is used in other six other places, and in every instance it refers to an unmarried, chaste maiden (Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Proverbs 30:19; Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8).
    - (2) Moreover, J. Gresham Machen says that it is never clearly used of a woman who is not a virgin, and Edward J. Young says that there is no evidence that the word was used of a married woman. The Greek has three other words which could have been used had Mary not been a virgin.
    - (3) In the Septuagint, the Greek word used is *parthenos*, which clearly means a virgin. Athena was the epitome of virginity. The Parthenon housed her statue.
  - b) Mary emphatically stated that she had not known a man (Luke 1:34).
    - (1) "Know" is used in ancient literature as a euphemism for sexual relations.
    - (2) Matthew 1:18 says that Mary was with child before she and Joseph had sexual relations with one another.

### III. **Conclusions About The Birth Of Jesus**

- A. A false conclusion: The birth of Jesus took place on December 25th.
  - 1. The practice began in 221 A.D. when Julius Sextus Africanus, a historian from Egypt, composed a chronicle of world events which listed Jesus' birth on December 25th.
    - a) It coincided with Saturnalia, the Roman feast of the sun.
    - b) It was made an official Roman holiday by the Council of Nicea in 325.
  - 2. Reasons why December 25th should not be recognized as the day of Christ's birth.
    - a) Scripture does not reveal and there is no way to accurately determine the exact day Jesus was born.

- b) The birth of Jesus did not take place in winter but in the summer.
    - (1) Zacharias, the father of John, belonged to the course of Abijah, the 8th priestly course to serve in the temple during the year (1 Chronicles 24:10; Luke 1:8-9).
      - (a) The Jewish sacred year began with the first new moon of spring (between March 22nd and April 25th). This means his time to serve would have occurred in May or June.
      - (b) John would have been born probably in February or March. Since Jesus was six months older (Luke 1:36), He would have probably been born in August or September.
    - (2) The shepherds were tending their flocks in the fields at the time of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8). Sheep were not kept out in the open at night any later than September, so Jesus had to have been born during the warmer months.
  - c) There was no celebration of Jesus' birth for about 220 years.
    - (1) The church, under the guidance of the apostles, did not celebrate His birth.
    - (2) December 25th was chosen by men, not appointed by the Lord. Religious Christmas celebrations is giving God something He has not asked for (Genesis 11:1-4; Leviticus 10:1-2; 1 Kings 12:25-29).
    - (3) As a result, we need to refrain from broadcasting to the world that we have no problem with Christmas as Christ's birthday. This means that we should not be sending Christmas-themed cards, emails, ornaments, etc. Also, Christmas-related activities such as singing religiously-themed songs and carols also give people the wrong impression.
- B. A false conclusion: The three wise men visited Jesus in the stable shortly after His birth.
- 1. No one knows the number of wise men except that there were more than one.
    - a) The number three is conjectured from the fact that they brought three gifts.
    - b) Any number of individuals could have been represented by the gifts.
  - 2. Their journey was made long after Jesus was born.
    - a) Months had most likely passed before they followed the star to Bethlehem.
    - b) Mary and Joseph were almost certainly not living in the stable at that point.
- C. A true conclusion: Without the virgin birth the purpose of God would have been thwarted (Philippians 2:5-11).

1. Jesus was pre-existent in the form of God but He chose to empty Himself and come to earth in the flesh to accomplish the will of the Father (John 8:29; Hebrews 10:7).
2. Being born of woman He experienced all aspects of humanity (Galatians 4:4), and being born of the Spirit He retained His deity (Luke 1:35).

**Conclusion.** The birth of Jesus certainly qualifies as “good tidings of great joy” for it brought to earth the only begotten Son of God in the flesh so that He could live a perfect life and qualify to be the Messiah, the one who would save mankind from sin (Luke 19:10).

Modern denominations, that claim to be “Christian,” celebrate Christmas as a religious event. While you may read in the Bible about the events this day is supposed to memorialize, you do not find that the Bible tells us to observe this day in memory of these events. The teaching of Christ says to remember Jesus’ death in the Lord’s supper on the first day of the week (2 John 9). Christmas is human in origin and observing it constitutes a change in the gospel. The Lord’s day is special because it is different from the other days of the week, the activities of that day honor the Lord each week, not just a few times a year.