

7 THE  
PILLARS  
OF GOD'S  
WISDOM



THE  
7 PILLARS  
OF GOD'S  
WISDOM

HERBERT  
LOCKYER



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, © 1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (κῆν) are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Scripture quotations marked (κῆν) are taken from the *New King James Version*, © 1979, 1980, 1982, 1984 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (ῆν) are taken from the Revised Version of the Holy Bible. The Scripture quotation translated by Weymouth is taken from *The New Testament in Modern Speech: An Idiomatic Translation into Everyday English from the Text of “The Resultant Greek Testament”* by R. F. (Richard Francis) Weymouth. Boldface type in the Scripture quotations indicates the author’s emphasis.

## THE 7 PILLARS OF GOD’S WISDOM

ISBN: 978-1-60374-837-7  
eBook ISBN: 978-1-60374-838-4  
Printed in the United States of America  
© 2013 by Ardis A. Lockyer

Whitaker House  
1030 Hunt Valley Circle  
New Kensington, PA 15068  
[www.whitakerhouse.com](http://www.whitakerhouse.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data (pending)

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical—including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system—without permission in writing from the publisher. Please direct your inquiries to [permissionseditor@whitakerhouse.com](mailto:permissionseditor@whitakerhouse.com).

# CONTENTS

Introduction: The Significance of the Seven Pillars.....	7
1. The Pillar of Mystery.....	13
2. The Pillar of Incarnation.....	37
3. The Pillar of Vindication .....	73
4. The Pillar of Revelation.....	79
5. The Pillar of Proclamation .....	117
6. The Pillar of Belief.....	125
7. The Pillar of Glorification.....	131
Conclusion: The Fundamental Spiritual Value of the Mystery We Confess.....	151
About the Author.....	159



# INTRODUCTION

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SEVEN PILLARS

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon declares, “*Wisdom has built her house*” and “*set up her seven pillars*” (Proverbs 9:1). Who is this figure whom he personifies as *Wisdom*, and what are these pillars that uphold the house of the wise person?

Solomon’s poetic imagery is incomparable. His striking figures of speech describing persons and precepts, virtues and vices, are unique and unsurpassable. The passage of Proverbs 8:1–9:6 is a sterling example. In it, Solomon exalts the quality of wisdom and personifies it as a worker who was at God’s side when He created the world, and who was daily His delight. The delights of wisdom herself, he adds, are “*with the sons of men*” (Proverbs 8:31 κJV): If they find her, they find life. “*Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom*” (verse 14 κJV), she says, and then Solomon affirms that she has built a house resting upon seven hewn-out pillars.

Even though Solomon cloaks this figure in such rich imagery, the spiritual mind has no difficulty in identifying personified wisdom as Christ, “*whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption*” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

First, it should not surprise us to find Christ *depicted as a person* even in Old Testament times. The Scriptures record how the Lord God occasionally appeared both in angelic and human form during those times. These appearances, known as *theophanies*, have been recognized ever since the days of the early church as forecasts or anticipations of the incarnation of God the Son as the Son of Man.

Furthermore, the fact that there are *seven* pillars points to Christ as the supreme wisdom of God, since the number seven suggests sufficiency and

perfection (as, for example, in the requirement from Proverbs 6:31 [NKJV]: “*He must restore sevenfold.*”). These seven pillars are reminiscent of the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit (see Isaiah 11:2) and of the seven-branched lampstand of the tabernacle of old (see Exodus 25:37), echoed in the seven lampstands of Revelation 1:12. But, as we will see shortly, the seven pillars also point forward to seven vital aspects of the truth that the church proclaims about her Lord.

Also, Christ came to earth to *build a house*, just as Wisdom does in Proverbs. When, at His incarnation, He took on our flesh, it was because He desired to rear for Himself a “house” or “temple,” as He described His own incarnate body. (See John 2:19.) His apostles later described the church as His body using this same figure of a house. Peter wrote, “*You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house*” (1 Peter 2:5 NKJV). In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul described how believers in Jesus are “[growing] *into a holy temple in the Lord*” (Ephesians 2:21) and being built into a “*dwelling place of God in the Spirit*” (verse 22); as the God-Man, Jesus Christ Himself is the “*chief cornerstone*” (1 Peter 2:6 NKJV) of this mystic building fitly framed together.

Another association between personified wisdom in Proverbs and the incarnate Christ is found in that fact that within the seven-pillared house that Wisdom built, there was a table furnished with *bread* to eat and *wine* to drink. (See Proverbs 9:2–5.) Hippolytus of the early church commented on this passage in Proverbs:

Christ furnished His own table, exhibiting His precious and spotless body and blood, which are daily celebrated at that mystic and divine board, being sacrificed in commemoration of that ever-to-be-remembered original table of that mystic and divine supper.

But perhaps the clearest connection between personified wisdom in Proverbs and the incarnate Christ of the New Testament comes through the symbol of the *pillar*. We may be familiar with the expression “a pillar of the church,” which is used to describe an individual on whom a local body depends for leadership, guidance, and moral example. This is actually a biblical expression. Paul used it to describe the chief apostles at Jerusalem (James, Cephas [Peter], and John) in Galatians 2:9, and John depicted the Christian undaunted by persecution as “*a pillar in the temple of...God*” (Revelation 3:12). This became a popular expression early in the life of the church. Irenaeus, for example, used it to describe Attalus of

Lyons, who was martyred for his faith in A.D. 177: “He was always the pillar and support of our church.”

The figure has become so widely recognized that, in more recent years, it has been used creatively and even somewhat facetiously. William Lamb, who became the 2nd Viscount Melbourne, is credited with having said, “While I cannot be regarded as a pillar, I must be regarded as a buttress of the church, because I support it from the outside.” But those whom the Bible depicts as pillars of the church were on the inside, as an integral part of a building. And by looking at another passage where Paul used this symbol, we can recognize that when he spoke of a “pillar of the church,” he did not have only particular, faithful, sacrificial saints in mind, but all who are saints in Christ Jesus. When we consider this other passage, we will also see more clearly the connection to personified wisdom.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul said that “*the household of God, which is the church of the living God,*” is “*the pillar and bulwark of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15). Here, he was speaking not so much of an individual as the church’s pillar, but rather of the church itself as a pillar. But what is the truth that it upholds?

Paul said immediately afterward, “*Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: [God] was manifested in the flesh...*” (1 Timothy 3:16). The word translated “*indeed*” here (*kai* in Greek), which introduces Paul’s magnificent authentication of the incarnation, is like a hand linking together the phrases “*the church of the living God*” and “[*God] was manifested in the flesh,*” making them one. As *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* expresses it, this word *kai*...

...is not simply copulative [adding one phrase to another], but heightens the force of the prediction. Yes, confessedly great is the mystery—for the glorious truth which the church of God pillar-like upholds is none other than that stupendous mystery, in other ages not made known but then revealed—the mystery of Christ, in all His loving manifestations and glorious triumph. Yes, confessedly great—so great that the massive grandeur of the pillar is only in proportion to the truth it supports.

In this passage, Paul actually called the church both the pillar and the bulwark of the truth. This latter term has been rendered various ways in English translations: “foundation,” “support,” “main-stay,” even “basement.” But, however the term is translated, the meaning is that the unique foundational truth upon which the church rests, and which she in turn upholds, is that of the manifestation

of God in the flesh. The true church is built upon Him who was born, lived, and died as the God-Man. That the Son of God became the Son of Man was one of the glorious truths given among the many things surely believed by the early church. The church today must not forget that this is the mighty, glorious message that alone can heal the open sores of the world's sins and sorrows: "He who was rich for our sakes became poor, so that we through His poverty might be made rich." (See 2 Corinthians 8:9.) If this foundation or bulwark is destroyed, then what can the righteous and unrighteous do? (See Psalm 11:3.)

The early church was so dynamic in its witness because it continued steadfastly in this particular aspect of the Christian faith. And in our day, all who are "living stones," built into the "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5) and endowed with wisdom, are under the obligation of crying out "upon the highest places of the city" (Proverbs 9:3 KJV) that Jesus became a partaker of flesh and blood (see Hebrews 2:14–18) in order "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). We are not to content ourselves with sitting at the door doing nothing. (See Proverbs 9:14.) Did not the same Solomon leave it on record that "he that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30 KJV), revealing Him who is *Wisdom* in the winning of them?

It is of great interest that, in 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul presented in seven parts (when his introduction is included) the truth that the church, pillar-like, upholds:

- ✦ Great is the mystery of our religion
- ✦ God was manifested in the flesh
- ✦ Vindicated in the Spirit
- ✦ Seen by angels
- ✦ Preached among the nations
- ✦ Believed on in the world
- ✦ Taken up in glory

This is an epitome of the church's proclamation of its incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord. Many interpreters believe that Paul has preserved here a fragment of some Christian hymn or creed. (He did this in at least five other places in the Pastoral Epistles, where he introduced quotations with the expression "*The saying is sure.*") All those who would be wise to the winning of souls, and wise to the salvation and growth of their own souls, would do well to meditate on each of the seven truths presented here, and that is what we will do in the pages that

follow. We will discover that these seven facets of the church's proclamation of its Lord embody seven vital doctrinal pillars that are foundational for our understanding of God and our growth in wisdom and knowledge. One chapter of this book will be devoted to each of these pillars:

1. The Pillar of Mystery
2. The Pillar of Incarnation
3. The Pillar of Vindication
4. The Pillar of Revelation
5. The Pillar of Proclamation
6. The Pillar of Belief
7. The Pillar of Glorification

The Man Christ Jesus is the only hope of emancipation from the bondage of sin and eternal doom. When we meditate reverently on the events and truths of His coming to earth, we appreciate more deeply the great salvation that we have received, and we become more eager to share these liberating truths with others. Let us, then, examine and reflect upon each of these statements that Paul made about the incarnate Christ and that the church, like a pillar, upholds.



## THE PILLAR OF MYSTERY

*“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion.”*  
—1 Timothy 3:16

The introduction that Paul gave to his unique summary of the incarnation of Christ—*“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion”*—emphasized the validity of the virgin birth, that great mystery of the faith. It is, of course, possible to understand the word *“mystery”* here as referring instead to what follows, that is, to the mystery of the whole progress of Christ’s incarnation, earthly life, proclamation, and ascension. But the virgin birth is so essential to the redemption and regeneration of humanity that we have every reason to believe Paul would introduce his epitome of the church’s proclamation about its Lord with a reference to the wonderful divine act that was necessary to effect human salvation through the coming of Jesus.

### THE “MYSTERY” OF OUR FAITH

How gifted by the Spirit Paul was in expressing truth in such fitting and arresting language! Among the mysteries mentioned in Scripture, the particular one the apostle dealt with in the passage before us must surely be the deepest of them all. It is *“the mystery,”* or *“mystic secret,”* of our faith that he referred to when he said earlier in 1 Timothy 3 that church leaders must *“hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience”* (verse 9).

It is profitable to compare some of the ways that Paul's statement "*Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion*" has been translated:

- "Beyond dispute, grand is that mystic secret, as set forth in our confession-chant."
- "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness."
- "Great beyond question is the mystery of our religion."
- "This religion of ours is a tremendous mystery."
- "The hidden truth of godliness is great."

How strikingly emphatic is this assertion, implying, as it does, that there can be no question about the validity of the truth, namely, that Jesus was God manifested in the flesh, and that, because of its genuineness and truthfulness, it is entitled to full acceptance by faith. The mystery of how God could assume our created nature may be beyond our finite comprehension, but this greatest event in human history itself is beyond all dispute or doubt.

Prophets and apostles, by common consent, accepted the virgin birth as the basis of the Christian faith. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, hundreds of years before Christ was born, Isaiah predicted, "*The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*" (Isaiah 7:14 KJV). John opened his gospel with statements affirming his agreement with the historicity of the incarnation of his Lord, including, "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14). The incarnate Christ Himself declared, "*Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it [the preexistent One in the flesh] and was glad*" (John 8:56 KJV). This basis of our faith is further authenticated by all the apostles, principally by Paul. With boldness he made it plain, in the passage that is the subject of our meditation in this book, that he accepted, without any demur or apology, the glorious revelation that the Babe of Bethlehem was God manifested in the flesh and that His incarnation was vindicated by the Holy Spirit and by angels.

There is, moreover, the apostle's remarkable testimony to Christ's humility, as well as to the fact of the incarnation, in his marvelous description of Jesus being equal with God and yet assuming the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. (See Philippians 2:6–8.) Jesus became the *outward-fashion* of God for all to see. "*I came down from heaven*" (John 6:38), Christ affirmed, and voluntarily assumed our humanity so that He might die as the sinless Substitute for

sinners. To this authoritative statement we can add the further New Testament language of Christ becoming a partaker of our flesh and blood in order to destroy the power of the devil. (See Hebrews 2:14–18.) Rich in glory, He became poor on earth, so that all who are saved by His grace and power might, through His earthly poverty, become enriched by His mercy. (See 2 Corinthians 8:9.)

Many have stumbled over the question of the virgin birth simply because they have tried to explain it by human reasoning, but such a question baffles explanation. And so our position to all adverse criticism must be, certainly in light of the prophetic and apostolic testimony we have just reviewed: Well! Here is a scriptural fact! We cannot fully understand it, but we accept and believe it!

It is an essential pillar of wisdom to submit reverently to the presence of mystery. When we do this in the case of our Lord's virgin birth, we are led to consider that although the revealed truth of such a fact may be contrary to human reason, yet to the believer it is faith, and not reason, that must of necessity operate. Reason would say, "Christ born of a virgin! Impossible!" The virgin birth an impossibility? So may reason declare; but faith, growing in wisdom, learns to accept the angel's word, "*With God nothing will be impossible*" (Luke 1:37), even as Mary had to when her reason failed to comprehend the truth. Yes, and faith delights to respond, even as Mary did, "*Let it be...according to your word*" (Luke 1:38). In the words of the old poem by Joseph Juste Scaliger:

Seek not the cause, for 'tis not in thy reach,  
Of all the truths prophetic volumes teach,  
Those "secret things" imparted from on high,  
Which speak at once, and veil the Deity.  
Pass on; nor rash explore the depths that lie  
Divinely hid in sacred mystery.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, it is necessary to possess a virgin life if the mystery of our Lord's virgin birth is to be rightly appreciated. By this we mean that a person cannot fully understand the revealed facts of this holy mystery unless that person's life is made and kept holy by the same blessed Holy Spirit who carried out the wondrous conception of our Savior's human body.

In fact, one wonders if any particular part of our Lord's person and work can be rightly understood unless there is a corresponding spiritual experience. For

1. Henry Southgate, *Suggestive Thoughts on Religious Subjects: A Dictionary of Quotations and Select Passages* (London: Charles Griffin & Company, 1881), 193.

instance, how can we grasp the tremendous miracle of our Lord's birth unless, first of all, we have been born again by the same Holy One who made Christ's birth possible?

Or how can we follow the Master's footsteps as He trod the streets of Galilee and other parts, living a holy, sinless life amid the pollutions of earth, "the lily among thorns," unless we ourselves are seeking to live lives of detachment, even as He did, from the ways and pursuits of this world?

Or how can we enter rightly into the sorrow of His rejection by His own people, or the persecution of His friends and foes alike, or His tragic betrayal by a professed disciple, unless, in some measure, we have had to tread the same thorn-strewn road and receive many wounds without cause?

Or how can we linger under the shadow of Gethsemane's olive trees and penetrate the meaning and mystery of His soul agony as He cries, "*Not my will, but thine, be done*" (Luke 22:42), unless we have come to some Gethsemane of surrender of our own and learned to say, as He said, "*Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?*" (John 18:11).

Or how can we grasp the significance of His cross as He dies, unless we ourselves have come to the place of death, even to the place called Calvary, that is, "a skull," suggesting nothingness, emptiness, and death?

Or how can we realize the truth of His glorious resurrection, unless we are walking in "*newness of life*" (Romans 6:4)?

You see the thought! The apprehension of the truth concerning Christ requires a spiritual correspondence. In other words, to know Christ, we must live Christ! And so, we return to our opening word, namely, that the virgin birth of our Lord can be profitably meditated upon only by men and women whose lives are virgin. Paul made it clear that "*the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*" (1 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV). This dictum is certainly true in respect to the things of the Spirit of God in connection with the conception of Jesus in the Virgin's womb.

Now, it is with the feeling of hesitation that one approaches this solemn, holy mystery of our Lord's entrance into our world as a human babe. The theme is so vast and delicate, so profound and incomprehensible, that one trembles lest one word should be expressed that misrepresents in the least degree such a wonderful revelation.

May the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed Mary as she conceived her Son overshadow our hearts and minds as we seek to set forth the revealed truths regarding the mystery of godliness: God manifested in the flesh! We readily confess there is no other theme centering on the person of our Lord in which one realizes how necessary it is to give heed to Solomon's advice in respect to "*find[ing] out acceptable words*" (Ecclesiastes 12:10 KJV) than that of the Savior being "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary" (in the words of the Apostles' Creed). Such a truth is both deep and delicate, infinite and incomprehensible, so that unless the mind is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, no progress in the study of such a foundational revelation can be made. "*Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground*" (Exodus 3:5).

### CLEARING AWAY THE "MIST"

Before we come to the main teaching about our subject, it may be fitting to clear the ground, so to speak. Although the virgin birth is in many respects a mystery, and will ever remain so, yet there is a good deal of so-called mystery that is nothing else but "mist." Now mist is not mystery and can therefore be penetrated and cleared away! Often the mist of vague, partial, mistaken notions, leading to half-truths, surrounds the fact of our Lord's virgin birth, thereby making the mystery itself needlessly greater. And so, as one can rise above the natural mist by climbing a hill or mountain, so by the aid of the Holy Spirit, our divine Teacher and Revealer, we can rise above all the false or partial conceptions of this august truth we are considering and comprehend simply and fully all that we ought to. We will seek to dispel much of the mist surrounding this mystery in the course of this chapter. The same Holy Spirit who conceived our Lord is perfectly willing to take of this matter that belongs to Christ and show it unto us! (See John 16:13–14.)

It may help to clear away some of the unnecessary mist that has gathered around this sublime, sacred mystery of the virgin birth of our Lord, if we give a somewhat brief consideration to the terms, scriptural and otherwise, that are often used to denote it.

We may consider first the phrase *Immaculate Conception*. This term is often incorrectly applied to the virgin birth, which constitutes a manifest blunder that confuses one idea with another. This term was used for the first time in a Papal Bull entitled *Ineffabilis Deus*, which was promulgated by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854. In this Roman Catholic dogma, the central proclamation is

that “the blessed Virgin Mary was from the first instant of her conception”—that is, her own conception—“by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Christ Jesus, the Savior of man, preserved free from all stain of original sin.” This doctrine was promulgated to give Mary, or the Mother of God, as the Catholic Church calls her, a more exalted place by lifting her out of the realm of ordinary human beings. Whatever we might think of this teaching, we must recognize that the phrase “Immaculate Conception” does not refer to our Lord’s birth but to the idea of Mary’s sinlessness from the moment when she was conceived within her own mother’s womb. So we should not apply the phrase to the circumstances of Jesus’ birth.

Another term connected with the birth of Jesus is *incarnation*. Although this is not a scriptural word, it is one we often employ in connection with the virgin birth of our Lord. The word *incarnate* means “to embody in flesh.” And this is what really happened in Mary’s child: “*The Word became flesh*” (John 1:14); “[God] *was manifested in the flesh*” (1 Timothy 3:16). Charles Wesley wrote of the virgin birth and the incarnation closely together in his beloved Christmas carol “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing”:

Late in time behold Him come,  
 Offspring of a virgin’s womb,  
 Veiled in flesh the God-head see,  
 Hail th’incarnate Deity!  
 Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
 Jesus our Emmanuel.

Nevertheless, we must recognize that *incarnation* is a broad word and that it is identified not only with our Lord’s entrance into our world as a babe but also with His whole life from His birth forward. Throughout the days of His flesh, He was the Incarnate One—yes, and He still is, for in glory He possesses the human form that He died and rose with, although it is now glorified. He is still “*this same Jesus*” (Acts 1:11 KJV). And the wonder in heaven now, and forever, is the presence of Him who is the God-Man. The incarnation of Jesus will be the theme of our next chapter.

The virgin birth of Jesus is sometimes also referred to as a *supernatural birth* or a *miraculous birth*. Even this designation, although an oft-quoted one, will not do, unless we fully understand what we mean when we use it. The *birth* of our Lord was not itself supernatural or miraculous. By this we mean there is

no intimation that the process of birth was in any way exceptional. Mary's child was formed within her womb and then born in just the same natural way as the child of Elizabeth, Mary's cousin. Perfectly natural phenomena are suggested by the speaker in a Messianic psalm: "*Thou art he who took me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts. Upon thee was I cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me thou has been my God*" (Psalm 22:9–10). As Malcolm Muggeridge has observed:

If God chose to become incarnate as Jesus, then His birth, whatever marvels may have accompanied it, must have had the same characteristics as any other; just as, on the cross, the suffering of the man into whom the Bethlehem child grew must have been of the same nature as that of the two delinquents crucified beside Him. Otherwise, Jesus's humanity would have been a fraud; in which case, His divinity would have been fraudulent, too. The perfection of Jesus's divinity was expressed in the perfection of His humanity, and vice versa. He was God because He was so sublimely a man, and Man because, in all His sayings and doings, in the grace of His Person and Words, in the love and compassion that shone out of Him, He walked so closely with God. As Man alone, Jesus could not have saved us; as God alone, he would not; Incarnate, He could and did.<sup>2</sup>

The miraculous element was not in the formation of our Lord's body but in the manner of its begetting. The birth of our Lord is supernatural only in that He was conceived by a virgin, that is, apart from the ordinary course of nature. It is in this regard that we can view both Mary and Elizabeth's conceptions as miraculous. The birth of John the Baptist was miraculous in that Elizabeth, his mother, had traveled beyond the age when, through the ordinary course of nature, it was possible to conceive and bear. The birth of our Lord was even more miraculous in that Mary bore Him as a result of a divine creative act, apart from human generation. A. T. Scofield has observed that both births were supernatural: that to Elizabeth was because it was *too late*, that to Mary because it was *too soon*. But what we really have in view is a miraculous or supernatural conception, not specifically a birth.

So we must agree with Dr. Sweet that the only term that is sufficiently specific is *virgin birth*, inasmuch as according to the New Testament statement Mary

---

2. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975), 30.

was at the time of this birth *virgo intacto*.<sup>3</sup> But not only is virgin birth a title “sufficiently specific,” it is the only scriptural way of describing how God brought Jesus into the world through Mary, and it is, therefore, the most correct term. It specifies that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus and still a virgin when she gave birth to Him.

## THE FACT OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

It is under this term that we will now summarize what can be taught clearly about the virgin birth of Jesus, still with the purpose of dispelling mist so that we can appreciate mystery.

There are two Scripture passages that supply the *fact* of our Lord's virgin birth. The prediction of it is in Isaiah 7:14: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (κϒν). The fulfillment of it is in Matthew 1:22–23: “All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.’”

Arising out of these statements are several questions that demand our study and attention. First, what is meant specifically by the Hebrew and Greek words translated as “*virgin*” in these passages? There are actually two different meanings. In Isaiah, the Hebrew term is *‘almah*, which denotes any young woman of marriageable age. And so Isaiah's statement could originally have been understood to mean that a woman who was then an *‘almah* would conceive and bear a child with her husband after she was married. The true circumstances of Jesus' birth are communicated more exactly through the Greek term used in Matthew, *parthenos*, which signifies a woman who is able to say, like Mary, “I know not a man” (Luke 1:34 κϒν)—that is, one who has never had sexual relations. The scholars who created the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek in the centuries before Jesus used the word *parthenos* to translate *‘almah* in Isaiah, thus conveying the meaning that allowed Matthew to recognize Jesus' conception as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

So, the logical conclusion is that Mary, as a virgin, was a “young unmarried woman who had preserved the purity of her body,” as Cruden's concordance defines the term.<sup>4</sup> As we noted just above, Mary remained a virgin until after Christ was born, as Scripture clearly teaches in Matthew 1:25, which says that Joseph married her but “*knew her not until she had borne a son.*” Thereafter she

3. Louis Matthews Sweet, *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ* (London: Cassell, 1907).

4. Alexander Cruden, *A Complete Concordance to the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Philadelphia: Kimber, Conrad and Co., 1906), 780.

lived in the usual relations of wedlock with Joseph and had at least four sons and two daughters with him. (See Matthew 13:55–56.)

Another question that these scriptural passages raise is, “Why was Christ born of a virgin?” This question is not so easily answered as the other. But Thomas Watson suggested three reasons when he discussed “Christ’s Humiliation in His Incarnation” in his *Body of Divinity*.<sup>5</sup>

First, *for decency*. “It became not God to have any mother but a maid,” he wrote, “and it became not a maid to have any other son but a God.”

Second, *for necessity*. If our Lord had been born according to the laws of natural procreation, He would have been defiled. If He had had a human father, as well as a human mother, then with the psalmist He would have had to cry, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). All who are born after the ordinary course of nature have the tincture of sin within. But Christ was to be absolutely sinless—“*holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners*” (Hebrews 7:26). His substance had to be pure and immaculate; otherwise, His right to redeem would be forfeited. Hence, He must be virgin-born! In the formation of His body, there had to be no original sin, so that He could commence where Adam did; thus, in Him there was not the mixture of human seed. Well we might say:

Approach, thou gentle Little One,  
Of stainless Mother born to earth,  
Free from all wedded union,  
The MEDIATOR’S twofold birth.

What joys to the vast universe  
In that chaste Maiden’s womb are borne;  
Ages set free from sorrow’s curse  
Spring forth, and everlasting morn.<sup>6</sup>

Third, *to answer to the type*. “Melchizedek was a type of Christ, who is said to be ‘without father and mother’ [Hebrews 7:3]. Christ, being born of a virgin, answered the type; he was without father and without mother; without mother as he was God, without father” as He was born of a virgin.

5. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (Aberdeen: George King, 1838), 178.

6. M. Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, *The Nativity of Jesus Christ*, quoted in Southgate, *Suggestive Thoughts on Religious Subjects*, 195.

Yet another question that has doubtless troubled some minds in light of the scriptural teaching is as follows. The Bible asks, “How can he who is born of woman be clean?” (Job 25:4). How then could Christ be born of a woman, even if she were a virgin, and yet be without sin? In other words, Christ, we declare, was made of the flesh and blood of a virgin; and since the purest virgin is stained with original sin, how could our Lord be without sin? The Catholic Church, as we noted above, seeks to address this concern through the doctrine of Mary’s “Immaculate Conception.” But there is a straightforward answer to it in the Scriptures. This seemingly difficult knot is untied for us in Luke 1:35, where Gabriel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.”

Mark the phrase “The Holy Spirit will come upon you” (or “overshadow you”), for it means that

the Holy Ghost did consecrate and purify that part of the virgin’s flesh whereof Christ was made. As the alchemist extracts and draws away the dross from the gold, so the Holy Ghost refines and clarifies that part of the virgin’s flesh, separating it from sin. Though the Virgin Mary herself had sin, yet that part of her flesh, whereof Christ was made, was without sin; otherwise it must have been an impure conception.

The Bible also lets us see the birth of our Lord from its divine side, just as the prediction about the virgin birth and its fulfillment let us see it from the human side. The angel of the Lord, in banishing Joseph’s doubts about Mary’s purity and morality, announced, “That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20). Professor James Orr remarked in his article in *The Fundamentals* on “The Virgin Birth of Christ”: “There is another factor—‘conceived by the Holy Spirit.’ What happened was a divine, created miracle wrought in the production of this new humanity which secured from its earliest germinal beginnings freedom from the slightest taint of sin.”<sup>7</sup> From both of these perspectives, we can understand how Jesus could be born of a woman and still be entirely free from sin.

And so Paul declared, “When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). Such a phrase describes the perfect humanity of our Lord and gives us His wondrous birth from the human

---

7. James Orr, “The Virgin Birth of Christ,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 18.

standpoint. But one may ask a further question: “Why was Christ born of a woman?” Well, there are one or two answers to such a question.

First, it is a *fulfillment of a promise*. The great redemption promise of Genesis 3:15 was that the seed of the woman would break the serpent’s head. Woman, who was made a sinner by the serpent, would produce One who would destroy the serpent’s power. Some scholars find an allusion to the promise of Genesis 3:15 in 1 Timothy 2:15: “*She shall be saved through the child bearing*” (RV). It is evident that woman is saved from her sin through the Child born of the woman, even Mary, who is highly favored among women.

Second, it is also a *removal of reproach*. By being born of a woman, Christ has rolled away the reproach from woman, which became hers by the seduction of the serpent. In taking her flesh, our Lord honors her sex and thereby unties the knot of Eve’s disobedience. The writers of the early church, we are told, often pressed this analogy between Eve and Mary in language similar to this: “As at the first the woman had made man a sinner, so now, to make him amends, she brings him a Savior.”

Of course, none of us should imagine that we can fully explain or understand the mystery of the virgin birth, even after as much of the mist as possible has been dispelled. No matter what light we may receive, the mystery of the God-Man in one Person remains. Bishop Handley Moule asserted that “in Scripture a mystery may be a fact which, when revealed, we cannot understand in detail, though we can know it, and act upon it....It is a thing only to be known when revealed.”<sup>8</sup> And in reference to the virgin birth, it is certainly true that “we cannot understand it in detail, though we can know it, and act upon it.” In the presence of such a holy miracle, “there can be no fitting attitude,” to use the words of Dr. Morgan, “of the human intellect save that of acceptance of the truth, without any attempt to explain the absolute mystery.” This, as we have said, is a first pillar of wisdom: to accept mystery without attempting to explain it.

Truly, Paul was right when he declared that the mystery of our religion is “*great indeed*.” Yes, this mystery is great, too great for our finite minds to comprehend! Mystery! Why, who can unravel this?

Behold here a sacred riddle or paradox—“God manifest in the flesh.” That man should be made in God’s image was a wonder, but that God should be made in man’s image is a greater wonder. That the Ancient of Days should

---

8. Handley Carr Glyn Moule, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Cambridge: University Press, 1893), 50.

be born, that he who thunders in the heavens should cry in the cradle...; that he who rules the stars should suck the breast; that a virgin should conceive; that Christ should be made of a woman, and of that woman which himself made; that the branch should bear the vine; that the mother should be younger than the child she bare, and the child in the womb bigger than the mother; that the human nature should not be God, yet one with God... Christ taking flesh is a mystery we shall never fully understand till we come to heaven, when our light shall be clear, as well as our love perfect.<sup>9</sup>

No wonder a divine of old said, "I can scarce get past His cradle in my wondering to wonder at His cross. The infant Jesus is, in some views, a greater marvel than Jesus with the purple robe and the crown of thorns!"

Fathom the mystery! Never! We can only bow before it in holy wonder and marvel at the greatness of the God who could make such a wondrous birth as our Savior's possible. Let us take heed, lest we rush in where angels fear to tread. Rather, let our attitude be one of wisdom, as depicted here:

I will seek to believe rather than to reason, to adore rather than to explain, to give thanks rather than to penetrate, to love rather than to know, to humble myself rather than to speak.<sup>10</sup>

## CONTROVERSIES OVER THE VIRGIN BIRTH

And so, in this spirit, we come to the main teaching about our subject. Earlier in this chapter we noted some of the ways in which Paul's introduction to his epitome of the church's proclamation about Christ—"Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion"—has been translated. The phrase "we confess" actually represents a single adverb in Greek, *homologoumenos*, meaning "confessedly," that is, "admittedly." This term has been translated in various ways: "beyond dispute," "no one would deny," "beyond all question," "by common confession." Behind each translation is the idea of a united confession; this is certainly implied in the Greek word *homologoumenos*, which signifies "by consent of all." The King James Version appropriately translates this term as "without controversy."

---

9. Thomas Watson, "Christ's Humiliation in His Incarnation," in *A Body of Divinity: Contained in Sermons upon the Westminster Catechism's Assembly*, 1692.

10. Quesnel, "Le nouveau testament, avec des reflexions morales sur chaque verset," translated and quoted in Edward Meyrick Goulburn, *Thoughts upon the Liturgical Gospels*, vol. 1 (London: Rivingtons, 1886), 105.

It is highly ironic, therefore, how much controversy there has been about the virgin birth! Although substantiated throughout Scripture as an undisputed fact, no other part of the Christian doctrine has been so keenly assailed as the subject of our Lord's virgin birth. One trembles when one comes to examine the criticisms leveled at it, because they not only seek the destruction of the miraculous, and of the very foundation of our gospel revelation, but such unworthy and unwarranted criticisms shamefully dishonor our blessed, adorable Lord. For the help of believers, we offer the following summary and refutation of these criticisms, trusting that it will help many to strengthen their faith in this wonderful means by which Jesus came to earth.

From the earliest days of the Christian church, the virgin birth has been bitterly opposed by various schools of learning and religious thought. The *Ebionites*, for example, were a particular sect of early Jewish believers who were not regarded as part of the true church because they held that the Mosaic law was binding on Christians, they denied the apostolate of Paul, and they rejected the virgin birth. Because of these three important matters, they remained outside the recognized Christian church until their sect disappeared around the end of the fourth century.

These Ebionites possessed a gospel based on Matthew's, but from which the story of the virgin birth was absent. Yet such was a spurious copy, a mutilated and corrupted form of Matthew's gospel. Because they used it, the Ebionites held that Jesus was a man, naturally born, and not the "offspring of a virgin's womb." They recognized, of course, that He was above the ordinary man in that He resembled the Spirit-led man or prophet of Old Testament times. But even with such endowments, they thought He was still a mere man who sprang from human parents. (Such a view has passed into the thinking of many today, for "the Ebionite being dead, yet speaketh.")

The *Gnostics* were another early sect. They, or at least their forerunners, were prevalent in Paul's day and are possibly referred to in Colossians 2:18–19, where Paul tried to warn the believers at Colossae against mystical heresies. The word *Gnostic* comes from the Greek word *gnostikos*, which means "good at knowing." And so these Gnostics were the "know-it-all" of Paul's day; that is, they presumed to know after the order of a "fleshy mind" more than the revealed truth of God, such as the apostle was declaring.

In respect to Christ, they allegorized away His person and work. They held that He possessed two forms—one called Jesus, born in a natural way, and another

called Christ, which came upon Him at His baptism and which indwelled Jesus until just before the cross, when the Christ part went back to heaven, and the Jesus part that was left died upon the cross. Keeping this teaching in mind, one is enabled to understand the epistle to the Colossians more clearly, since Paul's purpose in writing it was to counteract this error of false mysticism. In a masterly way, the apostle showed that our Lord "is not two Beings (Jesus and Christ) somehow united, nor two persons with two minds, two wills, two conflicting existences, wedded in impossible bonds; but one being, harmonious, symmetrical, consistent—not God in man, or God and man, but the God-Man."<sup>11</sup> Would that we could hear the apostle's warning of Colossians 2:8, "*See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit,*" more often than we do!

Coming to present-day criticisms and theories, one is appalled to find how generally the virgin birth of our Lord is denied. It is openly declared from the professor's chair, as well as from the church pulpit, that your Savior and mine did not come into the world as the Bible says He did, but that He was a man, just as other men, and that in respect to His conception, there was nothing miraculous. Professor Orr said it would be a perilous day for the church when, in obedience to the demand of so-called "modern thought," the belief in the virgin birth was parted with. He did not believe that, in really faithful circles, that day would ever come. Ah, but apostasy is rapidly spreading; and since Professor Orr's day, many in the church have yielded to the demands of so-called "modern thought" and have parted with their faith in the virgin birth.

## The "Non-miraculous" Criticisms

Now, in order that we might be able to meet the modern skeptical view regarding the virgin birth and, at the same time, confirm our faith, let us classify the objections raised. There are, first of all, the "non-miraculous" criticisms. The trend of modern thought is to deny everything supernatural and explain all that appears to be of a miraculous nature in the Bible from a natural standpoint. By the process of human reason, the seemingly inexplicable matters are explained as natural phenomena. And so the finding of Professor Orr is perfectly true in this respect, that the chief cause for the denial of the virgin birth of our Lord is the rise and rapid spread of a school of historical criticism that aims at the complete expurgation of the miraculous element from the life of our Lord all through. Such a method of

---

11. Arthur Tappan Pierson, *"Many Infallible Proofs": The Evidences of Christianity* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1886), 239.

attack is, to say the least, satanic, for it weakens the fact of God's omnipotence and also refuses the reliable testimony of the New Testament writers.

The sum of the teaching of this particular school is that of the Ebionites, namely, that Christ was an ordinary man after the natural order. The argument goes that since the Creator has decreed that the production of a child can come only by human contact, it is, therefore, impossible for Him to break that law. But the simple answer of faith is: "*With God nothing will be impossible*" (Luke 1:37). He is the Lord of all law, as well as the Lord of all life!

## The "Documentary Defects" Objection

Other critics claim that the virgin birth must be rejected on the grounds of a lack of evidence. We may call this the "documentary defects" objection. Now, since there is no adequate reason why any intelligent believer should have any uncertainty as to the verity of this most important fact of our religion, even though its references are meager in New Testament documents, let us take this objection of documentary deficiency upon its own ground. First, let us consider the reliability of the evidence.

Perhaps, by way of introduction, we may be allowed to quote from a product of the so-called "Higher Criticism," namely, Peake's *Commentary*. In it, we read: "As regards the birth stories of Matthew and Luke, we find ourselves in doubt on many points, and there is reason to believe that a reverent imagination has been at work on traditional material."<sup>12</sup> Now, this is a very serious allegation; and if true, it destroys the validity of the Scriptures, which have been inspired by God. The questions before us, then, are these: Can we rely upon the Gospels as being genuine productions? Or are they merely the product of "reverent imagination" woven together out of "traditional material"?

Such a question is important, because if the contention of the higher critics is proven, then the writers of the New Testament records were guilty of falsification and gross deception. Well, on turning to the Gospels themselves, what do we find? Why, that Matthew and Luke are the only two who give us any account of our Lord's birth and infancy and that their united testimony is that He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Let us try to prove the orthodox position. First, these two gospels are genuine documents of the Apostolic Age. There is abundant evidence that the

---

12. Arthur Samuel Peake, ed., *A Commentary on the Bible* (London: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1920), 14.

early disciples treated Matthew and Luke as genuine documents. For instance, Professor William Sanday considers them to be the oldest and most obviously authentic parts of the New Testament.<sup>13</sup> Their evidence may therefore be accepted without reservation.

Next, the virgin birth narratives are genuine parts of these gospels. In the oldest manuscripts and versions we have of Matthew and Luke, even though some of these are mutilated in parts, the chapters that recount the virgin birth are still to be found. And yet, some of the critics discredit the genuineness of these parts. The chief source of their information is a German critic named Wellhausen, who issued an edition of the Gospels "translated and explained," from which he dropped out entirely the story of the virgin birth, giving no note or explanation of his omissions. Why, such a treatment would be unallowable for anyone dealing with any classical work!

And finally, the very texts have come down to us in their integrity. Here, said Professor Orr in his monumental work on the virgin birth, whom I am following closely under these critical theories, we encounter a new line of attack. The narrative of Luke is a genuine part of the gospel, but have we the text in its original form? The evidence of manuscripts and versions is again decisive. Apart from a few various readings, such as occur in all texts (the chief of them may be seen in the margin of the Revised Version), the chapters in Luke are vouched for as coming down to us in their integrity.

But this evidence does not satisfy some of the critics, and so they set out to delete from the narratives in this way: "Leave out, for example, verses 34 and 35 of chapter 1," that is, Mary's question, "*How shall this be?*" and the angel's answer, which is the crucial verse, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you,*" and so forth. Cut out or change a few other clauses, and the story of the virgin birth disappears. You have simply the promise of a son, as in the cases of Isaac, Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, to be born in the ordinary way, in the estate of marriage. Especially is Luke 1:27, where Mary is twice spoken of as a virgin, to be deleted; and there are some sequential changes. Then, said Harnack, "After these few and easy deletions...the narrative is smooth and nowhere pre-supposes the virgin birth." But Professor Orr countered: "Even then [the] trouble is not over, for...if these deletions are made, one would expect to find some notice of a marriage of Joseph and Mary."<sup>14</sup>

13. See, for example, William Sanday, *Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1902), 14.

14. James Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Scribner's, 1907), 55.

## The “Contradiction of the Evidence” Objection

Another objection raised is the supposed contradiction of the evidence. Matthew and Luke appear to contradict each other in many features; some claim that such contradiction discredits the truth of the virgin birth. Let us turn again to Professor Orr. What had he to say to such an objection?

First, that the narratives are independent of each other. Matthew does not copy from Luke, nor Luke from Matthew, nor both from a common source. That is evident from the whole structure of the narratives and from the so-called discrepancies.

Next, that the narratives are nevertheless related to each other. Now, all the difficulties raised by the critics immediately disappear when we remember that Matthew and Luke gave their accounts of the virgin birth from different standpoints. Take Matthew: In his gospel, he gave us the standpoint of Joseph, and so we have hardly any reference to Mary. Matthew told the outward, or public, experiences that followed the facts that came to Joseph’s knowledge; and this account, it will be found, is in dramatic contrast to Luke’s version. There is:

- ✦ Joseph’s perplexity and suspicions (Matthew 1:19)
- ✦ His thoughts and purposes (Matthew 1:20)
- ✦ His difficulties removed by a divine revelation (Matthew 1:20)
- ✦ His gracious, manly, unquestioning response to such (Matthew 1:24–25)

Luke, on the other hand, gave us the standpoint of Mary, and so Joseph is hardly noticed, except as the one to whom Mary was betrothed. As a tender physician, Luke told us the story of the virgin birth from an inward point of view, as only a physician can, and recorded experiences that are deeply personal. And so we have:

- ✦ Mary’s call to motherhood (Luke 1:28)
- ✦ Her maidenly fears (Luke 1:29)
- ✦ Her chaste, pure life (Luke 1:34)
- ✦ Her royal submission (Luke 1:38)
- ✦ Her sacred joy (Luke 1:39–56)
- ✦ Her deliverance (Luke 2:5–7)

Now, not only is this relationship observed in the details surrounding the birth of our Lord, but it can also be traced in the two genealogies that are given

by Matthew and Luke. It is affirmed that the two genealogies are totally different from each other and bear apparent marks of contradiction. But, here again, the difficulties disappear as quickly as the morning mist when we remember the standpoint of each writer.

There are two genealogies because the descent of Jesus is traced along two distinct lines. As Dr. W. Choritic pointed out, all confusion is banished when we remember that, to begin with, the natural answer is that every man has two genealogies, that of his father and that of his mother; and that, even in our own legal matters, cases might arise in which the production of both was necessary. To this there is something of a similarity in this present instance.

Take Matthew: This first gospel sets out to show the kingly descent of Him who was “*born king of the Jews*” (Matthew 2:2), and so our Lord’s royal or legal descent is traced back to King David. In writing for Jewish readers, Matthew realized it was imperative, at the very outset, “to establish Christ’s earthly claim to the throne as the successor of King David.”

Take Luke, on the other hand: Luke presented Christ as the perfectly human One, the Son of Man, that is, as the One who became the representative Man; and so, in his gospel, he stressed Jesus’ human history; and in the genealogy he gave, he proved the natural descent of Christ by traveling back to Adam.

## The “Mythical Theories” Criticism

There are others who would have us regard the virgin birth as a late myth that sprang up to account for the impression that the divine character of Jesus made upon His disciples. These are the “mythical theories.” Such a course is perfectly understandable, for if one discards the genuineness of the gospel narratives of the virgin birth, then one must seek to explain its existence with such theories.

According to some critics, the virgin birth is a product of Jewish imagination, a myth that sprang up on Jewish soil, arising out of the prophetic passage of Isaiah 7:14. But, unfortunately for this explanation, it can be shown that in Christ’s time, this prophecy was not applied by any Jews to the Messiah, for as we saw above, the Hebrew word used in Isaiah (*almah*) does not specifically mean *virgin*, but rather a young woman of marriageable age. The idea of a virgin birth was not one likely to spring up in a Jewish mind at all. It had no precedent in the Old Testament, where high honor was put on marriage. (See Deuteronomy 22:20–21.) The sons of promise in the Old Testament were all born of marriage.

Because a Jewish origin is therefore so unlikely, other critics describe the virgin birth as the product of Gentile myths. We find newer theories that assert that the early Christians borrowed or imitated pagan myths of sons of the gods and applied them to Jesus. But such theories are contradicted by the fact that until the middle of the second century, the church held itself strictly and uncompromisingly aloof from everything savoring of paganism. It is useless spending time discussing such absurd and shameful explanations for the doctrine of the virgin birth, for it could be easily shown that there is no comparison between the lustful tales of the sons of gods in heathenism, in which there is no real instance of a virgin birth, and the simple, chaste, beautiful narratives of the Christian Gospels. We can afford to leave the matter where Professor Sweet did in his book *The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ*: We may with confidence assert that wide excursions into ethnic mythology and folklore have failed to produce a single authentic parallel in fact or in form to the infancy narratives.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Now that we have traveled so far in seeking to prove the fact of the virgin birth, thereby confirming our faith, let us go on reverently to handle the mystical truth that such a sacred theme presents. In doing so, let us remember our opening thought—that the mystery itself cannot be explained. With reverent, adoring hearts, we accept and believe it. So, even as we now seek to appreciate God's wisdom in sending His Son into the world through this means, we will also seek to grow in godly wisdom and rest on the Pillar of Mystery by accepting in faith a divine truth that reason cannot comprehend.

An essential question from the most ancient book in the world is: "*How can he be clean that is born of a woman?*" (Job 25:4 κJV). And the miracle of the virgin birth is that our Lord was absolutely clean, although He was born of a woman. How such a miracle was effected we have already seen—through the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit. But let us view the matter from another aspect. Look for a moment at the pedigree of Christ in Matthew's genealogy. Four women are mentioned there. Who are they? Tamar, who deceived her father-in-law, Judah, into fathering her child when he denied her his younger son as a new husband in her widowhood. Ruth, who was a woman of great faith, but also a Moabite, a Gentile foreigner. Rahab, who sheltered the Israelite spies and is numbered among the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11, but who was previously a prostitute. Bathsheba, whom David took in adultery, even though

she was married to another man. And this is just to consider the experiences of the women in the genealogy, not to mention the men, who include wicked, idolatrous, murderous kings like Manasseh. From an ancestry so filled with human sinfulness, despite the faith and obedience of so many of the figures, it would have been impossible to have produced one who, like our Lord, possessed a sinless nature, unless some miracle had taken place. And the miracle of the mystery of His birth is that in spite of the sinful pedigree He possessed, through the conception of the Holy Spirit, He came into the world a perfectly sinless person.

And in this, there is an evidence of His peerless grace. He who was the highest stoops to the lowest; He who was so holy makes Himself of no reputation but identifies Himself with sin-stained humanity so that He might go down to the lowest depths of human need and debasement to raise fallen humanity up to purity and back to God.

Let us reverently consider the stupendous mystery that reposes within the heart of the miracle of the virgin birth, like some precious jewel within a box. There are, it would seem, two sides of the mystery.

## The Union of Deity and Humanity

There is, first, the combination of deity and humanity. It is a very great wonder indeed to realize that the Holy Spirit framed the body of Christ within the Virgin's body, but the wonder and mystery are intensified when we remember that the Holy Spirit united deity and humanity together. God and man were taken hold of by the Holy Spirit and formed into one person. This is a great mystery, baffling explanation, and one that the angels pry into with adoration. (See 1 Peter 1:12.)

Dr. Handley Moule remarked that "God did not send His Son to join a man born of a woman, which would have been an alliance of two persons, not a harmony of two natures in relation to one person."<sup>15</sup> Oh, beloved, how incomprehensible is the mystery! Through the Holy Spirit, our Lord became not God and man but the God-Man. He was truly God manifested in the flesh! That man should be made in God's image was a wonder, but that God should be made in man's image is a greater wonder.

---

15. Handley Carr Glyn Moule, *Outlines of Christian Doctrine* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890), 62.

In his despair, Job cried, “Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both” (Job 9:33 KJV). But Christ is our Daysman—“The God-Man!” said Dr. Pierson,

...the daysman betwixt us both, who can lay His hand upon us both, because He is of us both! The way of God to man—the way of man to God; the true Jacob’s ladder between heaven and earth, God above it, to come down—man beneath it, to go up! The God-Man is Himself our pledge that as God in Christ became a partaker of the human nature, so man in Christ becomes a partaker of the Divine nature. Born of a woman, made like unto Him! The God-Man is not only a mystery and a miracle but a prophecy and a promise....They used to say of Mozart that he brought angels down; of Beethoven, that he lifted mortals up. Jesus Christ does both, and here lies the central mystery of the God-Man, a mystery which is blessedly revealed to him who by faith has personal experience of His power to save.<sup>16</sup>

And so one side of the mystery of the miracle is that, at the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, there came into existence one personality, such as, with reference to the duality of its nature, had never had existence before, as Dr. Morgan put it.

## The Preexistent Christ Born as a Child

The other side of the mystery is that the eternally preexistent Christ was born as a child. We now come to a phase of our holy meditation that fills our hearts with adoring wonder, namely, why and how Christ was begotten apart from the ordinary course of nature. If Christ had come from human parents, such would have meant that He was not existent before His human birth, but that His beginning commenced with His birth. Every child born into the world marks the beginning of a new life, a life that has not existed before. That Christ was the preexistent One is seen clearly in such Scripture passages as John 1:1–3, in which we read, “*He was in the beginning with God*” (verse 2). And so, the virgin birth, because it was not a birth according to natural generation, that is, the result of the sacred relationship of human parents to each other, did not create Christ; it only gave Him who existed from all eternity a human body in which to come and die for all humanity. And as one can easily see, nothing but a virgin birth could produce such a preexistent One.

---

16. Pierson, “*Many Infallible Proofs*,” 264.

Why was it that our Lord condescended to limit Himself in this fashion? Why did He, the preexistent One, take upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh and commence from the same starting place as ourselves? The answer is that the virgin birth was essential to the redemption and regeneration of humanity. This was described by Dr. Morgan in an excellent way:

Man's ruin was so terrible and so profound, as witness the darkened intelligence, the deadened emotion, and the degraded will, that there was but one alternative open to the Eternal God. Either He must sweep out and destroy utterly the race or else in infinite patience and through long processes lead it back to Himself. He chose the pathway of reconciliation in His infinite grace, at what cost the story of the Christ alone perfectly reveals....The God-Man then is the gateway between God and man. Through Him, God has found His way back to man, from whom He had been excluded by rebellion. In Him, man finds his way back to God, from whom he had been alienated by the darkening of his intelligence, the death of his love, and the disobedience of his will.<sup>17</sup>

Or we can give the message of our Lord's virgin birth in the following summary, which is enlarged upon in Thomas Watson's *Body of Divinity*, in answer to the question, "Why was Jesus Christ made flesh?"

The *causa prima*, and impulsive cause, was free grace....Not our deserts but our misery made Christ take flesh....Christ incarnate is nothing but love covered with flesh.

Christ took our flesh upon Him, that He might take our sins upon Him. He was...the greatest sinner, having the weight of the sins of the whole world lying upon Him....

Christ took our flesh that He might make the human nature appear lovely to God, and the divine nature appear lovely to man....

Jesus Christ united Himself to man, that man might be drawn nearer to God.....

He was poor that He might make us rich....He was born of a virgin that we might be born of God. He took our flesh that He might give us

---

17. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Crises of the Christ*, 5th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903), 64–65, 66–67.

the Spirit. He lay in the manger that we might lie in paradise. He came down from heaven that He might bring us to heaven.<sup>18</sup>

And what was all this but love? If our hearts be not rocks, this love of Christ should affect us. Behold love that passes knowledge! Such, then, is the message of our Lord's virgin birth, which we can appreciate only by resting upon the Pillar of Mystery.

---

18. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (Aberdeen: George King, 1838), 179, 181.