



## **“Misconceptions About the Birth of Jesus”**

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The story of Mary and Joseph and the birth of the Christ child is rightly one of the most beloved and cherished stories of all time. But the sad reality is that there are many who will gladly adore the baby in the manger, but reject the man on the cross. They'll love the baby, but loathe the man. To understand who the baby *was* is to also understand who the man was and *is*. You've likely heard the story of the birth of Jesus many times and in many ways, but did you know that what many people believe about His birth simply isn't so?

**Matthew 1:18 “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.”**

Some months later, we find Joseph and Mary in the little city of Bethlehem, holding heaven in their arms. But what do we *really* need to know about His birth? We'll look at some misconceptions about the birth of Jesus in this study.

On one hand, it's encouraging to see millions of people interested in the birth of Jesus Christ. I wish more people were interested in His birth: who this baby really was, how He entered this world, why He was born...His birth split time in two. He came from an eternal and unseen world and entered time and space. His entrance into this world occasioned a grand concert of angels who appeared to that group of shepherds on that starlit Judean night, shouting the good news, *Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will toward men!* (**Luke 2:14**).

It's wonderful to see a little baby come into the world. There's a tender feeling of sympathy and love that can soften the hardest of hearts. That's the way God chose to enter the world. He could've entered with a great show of power and might, as He will when He comes the second time. But, no. Instead, He came tenderly, as a harmless child to be adored and loved. There should've been more than a handful of shepherds to welcome Him that night. All of human kind should've gathered around that tiny cradle and rejoiced. Rather, Isaiah said that He was a *Man of Sorrows*, and so He was. He came to earth leaving His

glory behind, but not His deity. *Immanuel, God with us*, was born that night. He entered this dimension for a time to reveal the person, the mind, and the heart of God to a fallen race. He came to show us the Father.

As I said, on one hand, it's encouraging that people would claim to honor His birth. But on the other hand, honoring His birth doesn't mean very much if we don't also honor His life, His death, His message, His mission, His kingship and His authority. Worshipping the babe in the manger is even sacrilegious if we don't bow before Him now as King, and obey Him as our Lord.

The birth of Jesus means so much more than many who claim to celebrate it realize. There are many misconceptions about His birth that we're going to see the truth about today by looking in God's word. The first one we'll notice is the misconception that He was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>. Have you ever wondered how it became so widely recognized to observe December 25<sup>th</sup> as the birthday of Christ? Is there some reference in the Bible to that day as the day Jesus was born or that we should recognize it as such? The truth is, no, and that may surprise you.

Not only does the Bible never indicate December 25<sup>th</sup> as being the time Jesus was born, but it never recognizes ANY particular day as a day that should be set aside to celebrate His birth. There is no type of religious ordinance, no holy day, no biblical or apostolic tradition by which the early church celebrated the birth of Christ. For one thing, we know that December 25<sup>th</sup> is almost certainly NOT the day or even the time period when Jesus was born for a number of reasons:

1. Just before Jesus was born, you recall that Caesar Augustus ordered all people to go to their own cities to register, likely for taxation purposes (**Luke 2:1-3**). Many would've had to have journeyed on foot or by beast for days, even up to a week. It would've been unpopular under the best of circumstances to make that trip for that purpose, but it is highly unlikely that the Caesar would've made them take such a journey in the dead of winter.
2. The shepherds were outside at night, keeping watch over their sheep. We recognize that from the familiar narrative in **Luke 2:8**. That happened in the warmer months; not in the cold of winter. Shepherds would not have been keeping their sheep outdoors at night.
3. The angel's visit to Zacharias announcing the impending birth of John the Baptizer came while Zacharias was serving in the temple. He was of the priestly division of Abijah, and the different divisions served in the temple at two set times of the year, for a week or so each. According to the Hebrew calendar, Abijah's division would've served in about June and then again in November. John was conceived after Zacharias's time in the temple, and Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John when the angel then visited Mary announcing the conception of Jesus. That would place the time of Jesus' conception in the late Spring/May or in December, and nine months later from either date would be approximately February or early Fall/September.

The point is this: what evidences we have for any kind of date are far removed from the traditional December 25<sup>th</sup> date of the supposed birth of Jesus. Well, where did the observing of December 25<sup>th</sup> as the birthday of Christ come from? That date coincides with the pagan celebration of the sun god, which occurred at the Winter Solstice. *Christmas*, or *Christ Mass*, as it came to be known, was a compromise between the apostate Catholic church and the Roman Empire to meld Christianity with pagan tradition in the interest of pagan converts. No such observance is ever hinted at in the scriptures or in any recorded history of the first-century church. There's no mention of any

celebration with trees or lights that go along with the modern-day supposed celebration of the birth of Jesus. That's the first misconception about Christ's birth: He was not born on December 25<sup>th</sup>. Secondly, we also commonly hear the story repeated that three magi or wise men came to the manger of Jesus to worship Him. While it is true that magi from the east made a journey to find and worship the Christ, the common nativity scene of three wise men gathered around the Bethlehem manger where Jesus was born is not supported by scripture either. We don't know that there were three; the Bible never says that. There could've been twenty-three, as far as we know. We don't know how many there were. There was a group of them.

More importantly, the Bible says that when they encountered Herod, He asked them when the star had appeared to them that was to lead them to Christ, because Herod wanted to know when the child had been born (**Matthew 2:7**). You may recall that after they were gone, Herod ordered that all of the children two years old and younger be killed. The Bible says when the magi found Jesus, He is called a *young child*, and that they found Him *in a house*—not a stable—with His mother, Mary. The indication here is that the visit of the wise men came some time after Jesus was born; he could've been several months up to a year or two old. The ones who came to see the baby in the manger were not the wise men, but the shepherds who were out watching their sheep that night. The Bible says nothing about them bringing gifts to the Christ child; the magi brought those later, to the house where they worshipped the young child. Again, the oft told story of Christ's birth is really steeped in tradition that finds its origin somewhere besides the Bible.

Thirdly and most importantly, the greatest misconception that people have about the birth of Jesus is who this child was and how He came to be. The story of His birth is a beautiful and touching story by any account, but to many, that's really the extent of it. It's a romanticized tale about a little baby who had to be born in a barn because there was no room in the inn for His mother and foster father. It's a lovely story that we tell and our hearts break for the fate of this family. At the same time, we are filled with inspiration and awe at the sight of the Christ child in all His beauty and innocence. But it's much, much more than that. Liberals and modernists have tried to strip the Christ child of His deity; to disrobe Him of His divinity. To make Him merely a man. Certainly, Jesus WAS a man.

**Galatians 4:4** "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law..."

**Philippians 2:7-8** "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

**Hebrews 5:7** "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;"

These passages not only affirm that Jesus WAS a man; they also affirm that He was MORE THAN a man. Before He was a man, He was in another place, in another form, and He *became* or *took on the form of* a man. This is what took place when the Christ child was born of Mary. That occurrence was the portal of time through which the Christ left eternity and entered time and space. The conception and birth of Jesus was more than the advent of a special character in history or a great teacher or a good philosopher. No, it was the advent of God into our own world in a form that we could see, hear, and identify with. He was a man but He was much more than a man; He was God in the form of man.

But how could that be? It's because His conception was not by ordinary means. Rather it was a supernatural conception. After all, the Bible affirms that He was *born of a virgin*. He had no earthly father. Joseph, the husband of Mary, was not her husband when Jesus was conceived. The Bible says that she had *never known a man*. Liberal scholars and modernist theologians try to tell us that the word *virgin* means nothing more than *a young woman*. Thus, identifying her as a virgin doesn't mean that there was anything extraordinary or miraculous about the conception and birth of Jesus; He was merely born to a young woman, so they tell us.

Let's see if that's really what the Bible means. For example, in one of the great narratives of the birth of Jesus, the Bible says this:

**Luke 1:26-27** "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary."

**Luke 1:30-32** "And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:"

**Luke 1:34** "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."

There is simply no doubt, if you accept the testimony of inspired scripture, and I do, that Jesus' earthly beginning was the result of a miracle. A miracle unlike anything that had ever occurred, has occurred since or ever will occur! He was a heavenly child with an earthly mother. If that is not the case, there are some questions that you must answer:

1. If Jesus was not born of a virgin, who was Jesus' father? One might think it would be Joseph. But how could that be, when **Matthew 1:18** states that she was with child *before they came together*? And Joseph was called a just and upright man. How could that be if he became a father of a child out of wedlock? That would be sin. Why would Joseph have been surprised and perplexed at the announcement of Mary's pregnancy? The Bible says that *he knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son (Matthew 1:25)*.
2. If He wasn't born of a virgin, was Jesus born out of wedlock? He was, if He wasn't born of a virgin. Yet, one time, some curious by skeptical Jews sneeringly accused Jesus of that very thing. **John 8:41** "...Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God."

They were insinuating that He was indeed born out of fornication. To which, Jesus replied:

**John 8:42** "...for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me."

Jesus was NOT born of fornication. He was NOT born illegitimately. He was the product of a miracle.

3. If Jesus was not born of a virgin, how could His name rightly be *Immanuel*, which means *God with us*? That was His name, assigned in prophecy and its fulfillment (**Isaiah 9:6, Matthew 1:23**).
4. If Jesus was not born of a virgin, how could He be called *the only begotten Son of God* as the golden text of the Bible, **John 3:16**, declares? Some modern translations remove the word *begotten* and simply say that God gave His only Son, but that's a mistranslation because Jesus is not the only son of God.

**I John 3:1 "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..."**

But we're not the sons of God in the same sense that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. You see, the two English words *only begotten* translate the compound word in the Greek *monogenes*. Within that term is implied more than merely the word *only* or singular in nature, but also what makes Him the only Son of God in that special sense; in that He was begotten of the Father. Not begotten *spiritually*, as we have been begotten of God, but *physically*. That claim belongs only to Him. He was the only begotten Son of God because God, through the Holy Spirit, was His Father, miraculously conceived in Mary. She was chosen to carry the child who would be God, manifested among men.

5. Jesus is called *the seed of woman* in **Genesis 3:15**. That is the first prophecy or *primal prophecy* given in the dawn of time of the coming of Jesus thousands of years later. Within that first prophecy, there is an illusion to His virgin birth because the *seed* belongs to the man, of course. But He is called *the seed of the woman*. In Christ's case, you see, it was different. Interestingly, when you get to that long lineage of the Christ child recorded in **Matthew 1**, going back two thousand years, all the way back to Abraham, over and over it is said that a certain man *begat* a certain son. *Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob*, and so on. It appears all the way down to the generation of Christ.

But when we come to Christ in **Matthew 1:16**, the language is entirely different.

**Matthew 1:16 "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."**

That's because Jesus was born to a virgin.

But why? Why did God come down and take the form of man? Why did Jesus enter the world by means of a virgin birth? Why did Jesus come at all? That's a sermon to itself, but let's allow the Hebrew writer to summarize for us.

**Hebrews 2:14-18 "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on**

**him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”**

You see, He came to die, to destroy death and take away our sins. Thank God for that baby in a manger. Not only for His divine deeds that He grew up to do. Not only for His marvelous miracles He performed or His wonderful words He would go on to teach. But for His supreme sacrifice to take away the sins of those who would surrender to Him in faith and obedience.

Why celebrate the birth of Jesus one day a year when it's not even the day He was born? The Bible never even tells us to set aside a day to celebrate the birth of Jesus. That's an unbiblical practice. Isn't it better to celebrate the birth of Jesus EVERY DAY by imitating His life and rejoicing in the spiritual blessings He brought down to earth? Instead of finding comfort in the misleading image of wise men leaning over a manger and giving Him gold, shouldn't we rather be giving Him the gifts of love, sacrifice and service EVERY DAY we live? To understand and truly celebrate the birth of Jesus is to obey His gospel. To live every day rejoicing in the salvation that He brought and serving Him with all that we have and all that we are.

Do you want to honor Jesus and honor His birth? Do you want to express your thankfulness to God for the fact that Jesus entered this world? Then not one Lord's Day a year, but EVERY Lord's Day. You become a Christian and you go to the house of God and render the kind of praise and obeisance that God has asked for within His word. Become a part of a community of believers in which you can rejoice together the great blessings that Jesus brought to earth when He entered time and space in that manger so many years ago.

Thank God Jesus was born. There was never a baby born who did more to change the course of human history, but more importantly eternity, than Jesus Christ. It's important that we understand the truth about His birth and its significance. It's important that celebrate it not on one day of the year, and especially on a day that's not even His birthday. Rather, God help us to honor His birth by the life that we live and the faith we profess every single day that we live.

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