



"Offspring of the Virgin's Womb"

Various Scriptures

December 9, 2018

Good morning! We continue in our series called *The Newborn King*. This series is based on the theologically rich Christmas carol, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*.

This morning we recognize with its author, Charles Wesley and with all those who have truly worshiped God with this hymn, the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. It is spoken of in the second stanza this song:

**Christ by highest Heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of the Virgin's womb**

That last remarkable phrase gives us both the title and the topic of this morning's message. It is the teaching that Jesus Christ was conceived in the womb of Mary by a creative work of the Holy Spirit, apart from the use of a human father and without any kind of sexual contact.

The virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ is a doctrine that is celebrated in several Christmas carols other than *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, but probably even more famously in the carol *Silent Night* with its language of a virgin mother and her child. We must let these truths sink in and think of the reality of them, because they are awesome truths that we are thinking about.

Not only is the doctrine of the virgin birth celebrated in Christmas carols but, even more importantly, it is clearly taught in the Scripture. It is given to us as a solid fundamental essential doctrine of the Christian faith. Christ was virgin born.

The language of the virgin birth is articulated in three portions of the Bible. I realize that the virgin birth may be implied in other portions of Scripture as well, but as far as the expressed language of a virgin and child, it comes to us in three places.

The virgin birth was first revealed to two men; then to one woman; then to all of us as we read the account of this wonder of God. This language is also given to us for the sake of our wonder, joy, worship, and our encouragement in the faith.

As far as those three portions of Scripture go, we will settle in to one of them this morning. But it was first revealed to King Ahaz through Isaiah the prophet. So, I guess that counts as two men right there, so maybe it was three men and one woman.

The virgin birth was revealed to King Ahaz through Isaiah the prophet during a time of turbulence that was coming upon Israel. This is stated in Isaiah Chapter 7 and Verse 14:

¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel."

That prophecy had its application in a natural way about seven hundred years before the coming of Christ in the time of Ahaz and Isaiah, but all along it was carrying a much higher level of meaning. For we find that prophecy quoted was applied to the birth of Christ in the New Testament.

It was first spoken back in that Old Testament setting, but all along there was a greater conclusion for that verse to come. The second time the virgin birth was revealed moves us forward to the time of Christ. Matthew Chapter 1 give us the doctrine of the virgin birth as it was revealed to a man named Joseph.

We know Joseph well, because his betrothed, or we might say his finance, was found to be with child before they came together. We might image how Mary tried to explain to Joseph that this was from the Holy Spirit, but that must have been a very tough pill for him to swallow.

So, the angel Gabriel approached Joseph and said: Don't be afraid to take her as your wife because what is in her is from the Holy Spirit. Then Gabriel quoted Isaiah Chapter 7 and Verse 14 as having its fulfillment in what was taking place within the womb of Mary.

Third, and perhaps the most detailed teaching of the virgin birth in Scripture comes when we see how it was revealed to Mary herself. Prior to her pregnancy with Jesus, God also sent Gabriel to her to prepare her for the things to come; to explain the things that were going to soon happen in her womb. It was a gracious message from the Lord so that Mary would know ahead of time what she was chose for by God's glorious grace.

This morning I want us to focus our attention into Luke Chapter 1, where we see this revealed to this virgin daughter of Israel. As we read this account, I pray that the Lord will reveal to you like He revealed to Mary, that nothing is impossible with God.

In Luke Chapter 1 we enter the story six months into the pregnancy of Mary's cousin Elizabeth, who was bearing a miraculous child of her own because, as a sign from God, she became pregnant later in life.

However, in this passage we focus on how the virgin birth of Christ was to be revealed to Mary, and to all of us as well. Luke Chapter 1 and Verses 26-38:

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, "the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the

Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵And the angel answered her, “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. ³⁶And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

We read how Gabriel was sent from God to Mary with a message of extraordinary importance and absolute distinctiveness. Nothing like this had happened before.

It is interesting because looking throughout the pages of Scripture, you do find that in biblical history there were times when God caused barren women to conceive children, even in their later years. That happened early in the pages of Scriptures. We read about it in Genesis with Abraham and Sarah, who were given a child in their old age. Even here in Luke Chapter 1, we read how it happened with Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. They conceived a child even when, according to the King James Version, they were *stricken with age*.

But never before this time and never again after this time, would there be another time when a virgin conceived a life in her womb by the power of God, apart from the use of a human father. This was unique. This was unparallel. This would be the first time. This would be the last time in all human history when such an event would happen.

The distinctiveness of this event corresponds to the distinction of the One to be found in the womb of this precious sister in the Lord. This is the God-man. This is the Messiah. This is King Jesus, the One who would come into the world as the sacrifice for our sin, the One who would come to rescue and save us and to bring us into His Kingdom. This is unique. This is different, because Jesus is different. He is the God-man.

It would seem to me that Gabriel even realized and was moved by what a unique moment in salvation history this was. I wonder if you catch this in Gabriel’s tone in Verse 28, and how he approached Mary and said, *Greetings, O favored one*.

This is interesting because when Gabriel used that language of *O favored one*, it is the use of the Greek word *karis* which is translated to English as *grace*. This word is used here in a very heightened and elevated form. It is an elevated expression of the word grace.

So, Gabriel was saying to Mary: You are the highly begraced one. The ESV tries to capture this with the use of that word *O*. O graced one, O favored one, you have been chosen by God for something awesome and extraordinary. You are going to serve the Lord in a very, very unique way.

I get the impression as I meditate on this that Gabriel was in the moment when he was with Mary. It would seem to me that Mary was sensing something of the potency of that moment too. What always gets me when I read through this is that Mary did not ask Gabriel what kind of being he was. According to this passage Mary asked: What kind of greeting is this? She was perplexed by what Gabriel had said.

I have the impression that Gabriel approached Mary in veiled form. He would be a being that reflected the glory of the Lord. So, maybe that radiance was turned down a notch, because we see that even in the pages of Genesis, there were theophanies, these appearances of God in a more subdued form that was not so overwhelming for people to take.

We have here an angel approaching Mary and the message was one of such holiness and gravity that I think that it was evident on Gabriel's countenance. She could see it in his eyes. Gabriel said to Mary: O, highly favored one. The Lord is with you! Then Mary asked: What kind of greeting is this? What is going on?

It would seem that the holiness of the moment was coming across to her. That's when Gabriel revealed to Mary the majesty and the divinity and the wonder of the One that she would carry in her womb. Gabriel told Mary that she would call His name Jesus. That means that the Lord saves. He will be mega. Great!

Not only will He be your Son, He will be the Son of David. Not only will He be the Son of David, but He will be the Son of the Most High. He will be the Messiah. He will be the One who reigns over the house of Jacob. He will be the One who rules the Kingdom of God, and He is going to reign forever. Wow! Gabriel unleashed the good news of Jesus Christ on this sister of ours, Mary of Nazareth.

Then the first words that we have from Mary in the Bible comes in Verse 34. The first word that came out of her mouth was *how*.

³⁴...“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

Since I know not a man was Mary's concern. It was Luke's concern also because twice in Verse 27, he stated she was a virgin—get this people. She was a virgin, so Mary asked: How will this be, since I am a virgin. She seemed to understand that this was going to happen apart from her betrothed Joseph.

As I study Mary in the pages of Scripture, what I behold is a very thoughtful sister in Christ. Even as the shepherds came to her, it says that she would treasure these things and she would ponder them. We see how she prays soon with her cousin Elizabeth later in this chapter. She was a woman who had the Word of God dwelling in her richly.

It seems to me that Mary was quick in the uptake. Maybe she was studying the prophecy of Daniel and it repeatedly speaking of the Lord as the Most High. So, as much as Mary honored her betrothed Joseph, I don't know that she would refer to Him as the Most High. This is going

to be the Son of the Most High, so I think this might be taking place apart from Joseph. How is it going to happen, since I am a virgin? How is this going to go down?

Just like people in our day, they knew very well back then that babies did not get brought by storks, so this was a very honest and humble question Mary asked. She was not kicking back. She was not resisting. She just asked how it was going to work and what is going to happen.

Mary asked a how question with genuine interest and wonder. Before Mary got the how, she got the who. Before telling her the how, Gabriel told of the who, the one who is going to bring it to pass. The first statement in the answer to the question is the Holy Spirit. I love that.

Before it is a how, it is a who. The working of God in our lives is first and foremost relational. It is personal before it is methodological. The Holy Spirit would come, and He would come with His power. Brothers and sisters, whenever we feel like life is languishing, if there is anything that seems dead, God gives life and it is a matter of a Who before a how.

It is the presence of the Spirit, and we need to be praying: Lord, fill my life and my witness and my pursuit of holiness with the Spirit of life. Let it be all about the work of Your Spirit in my heart and life and soul, conquering the flesh. Let it be the Spirit!

The Holy Spirit is the Who and there is also a how. That is explained in Verses 34 and 35:

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;

There is a parallel statement. The power of the Most High is going to overshadow this woman. The Spirit is going to come, and He is going to hover over her it would seem. That word *overshadow* is a beautiful thought and concept. It is a perfect rendering of the Greek word *Episkiazo*.

This word means exactly what the translation says. It depicts a portion of shade moving over somebody. You and I know that you can't touch or feel a shadow, but you know when you are in the shade. And somehow Mary would be under the power of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is such an awesome thing to think about.

We read this, and we are reminded of the beginning of all things created for the planet earth and in this universe that God has made. At the very beginning of Genesis, we find that the earth was without form and that it was void and that it was dark and that it was empty, and according to Genesis 1:2, the Holy Spirit was found hovering over the surface of the deep.

Then God spoke and then there was light. Soon, as God continued to speak for seven days, the whole earth would be teeming with life. So, in Luke 1, the womb of Mary was empty. It was void. There was nothing in it that was anything close a life. There was nothing but darkness.

However, soon the Spirit of the Living God would be brooding and hovering over Mary with omnipotent power, and a life would be conceived in her womb as a miracle from the third Person of the Triune God, the Spirit of God Himself. That child would be pure, holy, and He would be totally distinct. He would be totally sinless, while being one hundred percent human.

What we have here is a moment of creation and consecration because it says in Verse 35 that:

³⁵...the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—"The son of God.

Not only was a King entering in to Mary's womb, but this was also the Lamb of God who would be slain for the sins of the world. This Sacrifice was then being prepared within the womb of a precious sister in the Lord. This is an awesome picture for us to see.

Jesus was pure and holy. He is the One worthy of everlasting rule and dominion. He is the holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, now found within the womb of a woman. Soon after that, God would be a zygote. Wow, our God is an awesome God!

Then He would grow within the womb of His mother. He would be born into the world. He would live a perfect and pure and sinless life of sacrificial love and righteousness. He would proceed to the cross, where He would be slain as a sacrifice for sin. But, praise God, on the third day He would conquer death by rising from the grave.

Then Gabriel added some things. He said: Guess what? This is not the only supernatural conception that is taking place. God visited Elizabeth, and she is six months into her pregnancy. You two can probably encourage each other.

I think Gabriel was giving Mary a little nudge. She would go, and they would rejoice because they would understand with us now that Christ, He is by highest Heav'n adored. He is Christ the everlasting Lord. Late in time behold Him come. Offspring of the virgin's womb.

That is the story, and I hope it gives a little bit of reflection that helps us to see and understand the wonder and the majesty of the story. I want to continue here and think about three implications for our lives that are drawn from happened in the life of Mary.

What happened with her was very, very unique. It was one of a kind experience but there are things about the working, character, and the nature of God that echoes for all of us in these events; things for us to take to heart.

Let me offer three implications for our lives as well. First, this teaching of the virgin birth:

1. It spotlights God's Supernatural power (1:35, 37)

God still applies His supernatural power according to His will in this day.

The doctrine of the virgin birth spotlights—and I’m not talking about a warm little night light or a cell phone flashlight—I’m talking about how it puts a spotlight on God’s supernatural working in this world. The virgin birth has been described as a blatantly supernatural event; something that flies in the face of any human need to explain everything by the so-called natural laws that are at work in this world.

If you are going to be a follower of Jesus Christ, you are going to have to believe in the miraculous. You will have to have confidence that God can and does defy the laws of nature that He implemented in this world. He can do what He wants when He wants. He is the Lord God Almighty, the Creator and the Sustainer of everything.

He intervenes according to His will, even to doing miraculous things. What was Gabriel’s final word to Mary?

³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.”

I wonder if another way to say it might be:

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.

Someone said that at the one end of Jesus’ life lies His supernatural conception and birth, and at the end you have His supernatural resurrection from the dead and His ascension to God’s right hand. I love how both those show us about God’s ability to bring life where there was no life, or life where there was death before.

We need to have confidence as we pray for people to be saved, that God has power to raise even the sinner we think would never come to faith in Christ. God can raise them up from death to life in Christ.

We might think of relationships that seem like they are dead as a doornail. Guess what? God breathes life into things that seem dead and are dead. We have seen how God has restored people and relationships.

So, we are a people that don’t lose hope, exclamation point, in what God can do. There is the sense that where there is faith, the power of God follows. Didn’t Jesus talk about that a lot? But in the end, we are going to trust in God’s ability to sustain us, even supernaturally through things that seem impossible; things that seem like they are going to bury us in this life.

God works supernatural power in this world. That is something we receive from the virgin birth. Not only that, here is a second implication:

2. It displays God’s gracious initiative (1:28, 30)

It is how God moved into Mary’s life with His plan for her. Did she ever see that coming? What we read here is that the angel did not ask Mary about her willingness. He announced:

³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

God did not ask Mary for permission. He gently and decisively informed her of His plan for her life in that through what came through her birth canal would be that which saves sinners like us. That's how grace works. God moves decisively into our lives, according to His sovereign will, even so that it says in Romans 8:29:

²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...

He saves us by His saving-choosing grace. He chooses for salvation. That in the Bible too! That is God's gracious initiative. I pray that we, with the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1, can say: O the glory of His grace. Wow! God is awesome.

God, by His gracious initiative, He does something in us kind of like what He did in Mary. What God did in Mary physically, He does in us spiritually. Jesus was found in Mary physically. Now, that is not going to happen to us. But Jesus is found in us spiritually by grace through faith.

Paul said to the Colossians: It is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Paul said to the Galatians: I want Christ to be formed in you. The Holy Spirit's intent for His people is that we keep growing like Christ to the point that we are conformed to His likeness. This is the gracious will of God for all of us in Christ.

It does not stop with saving grace, but also gifting grace. Did you know that the gifts that you have with which to help support the building of the Kingdom on earth were given you by the decision of God? God decided what gifts you and I would have.

I remember there was a time in my life where I sat in those pews and said: I will never go up there and do what Pastor Paul is doing. Ha ha ha! Where am I now? I got a burning desire to teach, then suddenly one door led to another and here I am preaching the Word!

It says in I Corinthians 12:11 in that section on the spiritual gifts that supernatural abilities are given to the people of God to build up the church are gifts of grace. It is that language of Karis again. All these gifts are the work of one and the same Spirit and He distributes them to each one just as He determines.

Did you know that according to Ephesians 2:10 that God decided beforehand what good deeds you would walk in? That is awesome! That is a gracious thing. So, with all these teachings of Scripture, I pray that we would look to our sister Mary as an example on how to respond to these things.

Gabriel had two "beholds" and Mary responded to it all with a "behold" of her own when said:

³⁸...“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your.” And the angel departed from her.

Maybe that is the spirit we each need to have telling the Lord: I am all ears. Put a burning in my heart. Show me what you are leading me to do. Make it clear. Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. I am going to walk according to Your will. I am going to walk according to Your design for my life.

That is the best place you can ever be. Don't resist that. Go with the flow. Like it says in John 7:38:

³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’

By this, John meant the Spirit who comes to reside within the people of God. The Spirit streams forth from us in the form of worship and service. God use of Mary's life is a display of God's gracious initiative in our lives as well. Mary was the begraced one, that heightened language of grace that applies to us as well.

Finally:

3. It speaks of God's provision of eternal life. (1:32-33)

We see that in this language of a Kingdom that will never end. Over the past decade or so, the Christmas season which I love has been a reminder of the brevity and frailty of life.

Nine years ago today my brother-in-law, Kristy's brother, succumbed to a valiant battle against cancer. Eight years ago, Christmas day was the last day my boys would spend with their Mimi-Maureen on this earth. Yesterday we learned that my dad's brother passed on. After more than eight decades full of life on this earth, he is with the Lord now. We also learned yesterday of a beloved uncle back east who is now entering in to his own battle with cancer.

Life is a vapor. Life is frail. It comes and goes, and it comes and goes quickly, and we better have our attention on that fact. Those are some things that have and are happening in our family, but I think you all have stories of your own as well. It seems like the last several years at Christmas, I receive phone calls from precious brothers and sisters in Christ with broken hearts, because people that they love have passed on.

Even yesterday, we had a Memorial Service for a wonderful man of God, a brother named Pete. But nine days ago, we never would have seen that Memorial coming. So, we have got to pay close attention to the fact that life is a vapor, and it vanishes very, very quickly. Young people, you are going to realize how quickly life passes by. And as the decades pass, the accelerator of life goes faster and faster.

In contrast to the reminders of the brevity and frailty of life, in the statement from God through the angel Gabriel, we have this message of an everlasting Kingdom; of a reign of a Messiah that

is never ever, ever going to end. In contrast to how this life and world flies by, we have a Kingdom that will endure forever and ever, never fading in its glory.

It is ruled by a virgin born God-man, who is the Son of the Most High. His Kingdom is a reign that will last forever. Live for that, not for the seventy or eighty years in this life. Use this life to serve in view of what is yet to come.

Something about the Kingdom of the Messiah: It is going to be absolutely pristine in holiness, in love, in joy, and in purity. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Those angels were declaring that in Isaiah Chapter 6, and they are declaring that even there today. We declare it here today as well.

Our sin disqualifies us from such a Kingdom. Our sin would stain such a Kingdom. So, praise God for the Lamb of God who entered through the birth canal of a virgin woman in Israel. He came into the world as a pure and holy sacrifice of love to take away our sin.

Jesus came on a great rescue mission to cleans us, cloth us, and to remove our iniquity. Jesus did not only leave us neutral before the holiness of God, but to adorn us in the robes of His perfect righteousness, so that we are properly dressed for the Kingdom that will last forever.

The virgin birth teaches us that Jesus is both human and divine. His dual nature uniquely qualifies Him as Mediator between God and man. We rejoice today that not only was Christ the baby in the manger, not only was Christ the Sacrifice who hung on the cross, but we praise God that Christ *is* the Lord who conquered the empty grave and that Christ *is* the King who is going to reign forever.

If you are here and have not become a Christian and have not entered in to Christ, I pray that you would understand that, like me, like Pastor Keith, like the worship team, you are a sinner. Your sin offends the holiness of God. His eyes are too pure to look upon evil without judging it.

I thank God that He is my Father, but God is also a judge. He has declared this repeatedly in the pages of Scripture. But praise God that the One who was entrusted with judgment, Jesus, entered in to the world as a sacrifice, as a lamb. He died on the cross to take the plenty of our sins. He was punished for our sin so that God could be both just and the justifier of the ungodly. The penalty was paid.

All this should produce humble repentant hearts saying: I want to turn from sin to Jesus the Savior. Put your faith in Jesus today. You are invited right here and right now to trust in Jesus. Look to the Lord and enter in to life through Jesus.

If you are here and you are a Christian, I pray that you would rejoice in King Jesus, your virgin-born Savior. His love for you is deeper than you can ever imagine. It is higher than you will ever know. We are going to be part of a Kingdom that lasts forever, and we will get to explore all the wonders of His love for us.

Let's close in a word of prayer.