

## Christmas 2017

### Silent Night, Holy Night

Silent Night, holy night  
All is calm, all is bright.  
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child,  
Holy infant so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace

During this Christmas season we are looking at some of the traditional Christmas carols. Last Sunday we sang "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." God promised His people a Redeemer and for hundreds of years people waited for the Savior to be born. At the right time Jesus was born. And we read about two people Simeon and Anna in the gospel of Luke who were waiting for God's promised Savior. And they saw him 40 days after he was born.

Today we are waiting for the Savior, not for his birth, but for his return to give us everlasting life and glory and to establish his kingdom on the earth. And there are some people who mock our hope in Christ's return. But just as sure as Jesus was born so he will return. Peter wrote about this in his second letter.

knowing this first: that scoffers will come in  
the last days, walking according to their own lusts,  
4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?  
For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue  
as they were from the beginning of creation."  
(2 Peter 3:3, 4)

There will be people who mock the Lord's return saying that it has been thousands of years, so he will never return. But God's Word says otherwise.

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing,  
that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years,  
and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not  
slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness,  
but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any  
should perish but that all should come to repentance.  
(2 Peter 3:8, 9)

There is a day coming when Jesus will return in glory and then those who believe in him will receive everlasting life, but sadly those who don't will perish. God desires all people to be saved and the delay in Christ's return is to give people time to believe.

Today our song is "Silent Night, Holy Night." And what we will focus on is the line "virgin mother and child." We sing this song every Christmas and as we do we declare our belief in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. But is it true? And if it is true why is it important?

The virgin birth or more accurately the virgin conception and birth is true. But it has been challenged by those who want to discredit Christianity. And it has been denied even by some Christians. The pastor of one of the biggest mega-churches in the United States denies the virgin conception. I wrote to a pastor last night in Canada who teaches that Joseph was Jesus' biological father. And the ministry I was with many years ago did not deny the virgin conception. But they did deny the virgin birth claiming that Joseph had sex with Mary before Jesus was born.

All of that is biblically untrue. Now, the first suggestion of a virgin conception of the Redeemer is in Genesis 3 where God condemns the serpent, Satan, who tempted Adam and Eve.

So the LORD God said to the serpent:

"Because you have done this,  
You *are* cursed more than all cattle,  
And more than every beast of the field;  
On your belly you shall go,  
And you shall eat dust  
All the days of your life.  
<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel."  
(Genesis 3:14, 15)

This is the prophecy of the battle between Satan and the seed or offspring of the woman. The woman's seed we now know from the whole story of the Bible to be Jesus Christ. In the battle Satan will "bruise" or more accurately "crush" the savior's heel—Jesus was crucified, but then God raised him up from the dead. But the Redeemer will crush Satan's head—there will one day be a total destruction of Satan and all evil.

This is the first suggestion of the virgin conception of the Savior, because biologically women do not have seed. Women contribute an egg in the development of a baby and men contribute the seed. So let's read Matthew's and Luke's account of the virgin conception. And then we will look at why it was necessary.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows:  
After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,  
before they came together, she was found with  
child of the Holy Spirit.  
(Matthew 1:18)

Jewish betrothal was like a modern engagement, but it was much more official and as binding as a marriage. A betrothed couple were legally thought of as husband and wife, but no physical union had taken place. And so before the actual marriage ceremony and the actual physical consummation of that marriage, Mary became pregnant by the power of God's Spirit. Joseph was probably confused and hurt by this news and was about to give Mary a quiet divorce, but then something miraculous happened.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows:  
After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph,  
before they came together, she was found with  
child of the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Then Joseph her husband,  
being a just man, and not wanting to make her a  
public example, was minded to put her away secretly.  
<sup>20</sup> But while he thought about these things, behold,  
an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream,  
saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid  
to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is  
conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> And she  
will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name  
Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."  
(Matthew 1:18-21)

The angel explained to Joseph how Mary became pregnant. It was by the power of God's Spirit. The Greek word translated "conceived" in verse 20 is gennaō which means begotten, to beget. We have the same word translated "begot" in verse 2.

Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob,  
and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.  
(Matthew 1:2)

To beget someone is to bring that person into being, into existence. At one point he or she did not exist and then he or she was begotten and came into existence. Gennaq is a form of the word Genesis which means to bring into existence. So Mary's child was brought into being in Mary's womb not by having sexual relations with a man, but by the creative power of God's Spirit. Just as God created Adam so He created the life of Jesus in Mary's womb.

So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."  
(Matthew 1:22, 23)

The quote that Matthew gives us here is from Isaiah 7:14. In Isaiah the Hebrew word for virgin is almah. It can mean young woman or virgin. In the ancient Hebrew culture young women were assumed to be virgins before marriage. In the context of Isaiah 7 two armies were seeking to conquer Judea and Jerusalem and King Ahaz was fearful. The prophet Isaiah approached the king and declared that these two armies would not conquer Jerusalem.

God offered Ahaz the opportunity to ask for a sign to prove that what Isaiah said was true. But Ahaz refused to put God to the test by asking for a sign. So God gives Ahaz a sign: the virgin shall conceive and bear a son. And before the son is old enough to know right from wrong the two armies Ahaz feared would be laid waste. The birth of the baby will be a sign that Jerusalem will be saved and that God is with His people.

The virgin was most likely Isaiah's betrothed wife.<sup>1</sup> By divine revelation Matthew understood Isaiah 7:14 as having a dual fulfillment. Mary's baby would be the ultimate deliverer and the proof that God has not abandoned His people. So Mary was a virgin when God created the life of Jesus in her womb. And she stayed a virgin until after she gave birth.

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, <sup>25</sup> and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.  
(Matthew 1:24, 25)

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 8:3

The phrase “did not know her” is a polite way of saying Joseph and Mary did not have sex until after she gave birth to Jesus. Now, let’s look at what Luke tells us.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!”

<sup>29</sup> But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

<sup>34</sup> Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”  
(Luke 1:26-34)

When Mary said “I do not know a man” she meant that she had not ever had sexual relations with a man. She was betrothed to Joseph, but she was a virgin. Mary understood the angel was speaking of an immediate conception, but she and Joseph were still in the betrothal period. So her question was not one of doubt, but of wonder. How will this conception happen? Here is the answer.

Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” <sup>35</sup> And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*”

(Luke 1:34, 35)

For Gabriel, Jesus is conceived and comes into existence in Mary's womb by a miracle of God's power. The terms "Holy Spirit" and "power of the Highest" are not two different things. This is a figure of speech called Metonymy of the Subject where the second term "power of the Highest" defines the first term "Holy Spirit." God's power created the life of Jesus in Mary's womb.

The word "therefore" in verse 35 is in Greek *διο και* and means for this reason, because God created Jesus he will be called the Son of God. If you look at Christ's genealogy in Luke 3:38 it goes all the way back to Adam who is called a son of God.

*the son of Enosh, the son of Seth,  
the son of Adam, the son of God.*

Adam is called the son of God, because He came into existence without a human father. Adam was created by God just as Jesus was. But why was there a need for a virgin conception? The virgin conception shows that we need a redemption that we cannot bring about on our own. We will see this from Romans 5.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered  
the world, and death through sin, and thus death  
spread to all men, because all sinned—  
(Romans 5:12)

The one man who brought sin and death into the world was Adam. And then passed down to Adam's descendants and then to everyone, generation after generation is a sin nature. All of us are born with an inherited inclination to sin. Psalm 51:5 says of all humanity that we are all brought forth in iniquity. We cannot save ourselves because we all fall short of the glory of God.

But Jesus was created by God in Mary's womb and did not have a sin nature. Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we are, but unlike Adam Jesus obeyed God even to the point of death on the cross. He gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins. And when we trust in him for salvation we are made righteous and saved.

For if by the one man's offense death  
reigned through the one, much more  
those who receive abundance of grace  
and of the gift of righteousness will reign  
in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

<sup>18</sup>Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment came* to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. <sup>19</sup>For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.  
(Romans 5:17-19)

As our song "Silent Night" says with the birth of Christ there came the dawn of redeeming grace. Because of what Jesus Christ accomplished God is no longer our Judge, but our Father. And God's Spirit that brought Christ into being is now in us making us children of God!

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by [which] we cry out, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup>The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.  
(Romans 8:14-17)

We are now the children of God and heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. And when he is revealed in all his glory to rule the world, then we too will share in this glory. That's quite a Christmas present! Amen!