

## Transcript 137

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. This Christmas season and just like every year, we start receiving the same questions over and over and over again, and there are a lot of them are fun, a lot of great questions cause Christmas has so much rich meaning to it. So much importance, even with the even some of the the side questions, we can easily point people to Jesus and it's wonderful being in a season where even with all the commercialization and all the distractions, there's still a lot of people who think about Jesus more this time of year than any other time. And that's great and that provides opportunities to share the gospel, to share the message of God's grace and so forth.

Shea Houdmann

Well, last year we did two different episodes on top Christmas questions and also the should Christian celebrate Christmas. So we'd invite you to go back and check out those episodes, but today we're actually going to be discussing the virgin birth. It's obviously directly related to Christmas. A lot of people don't really understand like, did it really happen? Why did it need to happen? What's the importance and even what's the practical relevance of it?

Shea Houdmann

So joining me today discuss the virgin birth is Jeff. He's the administrator of [Bibleref.com](http://Bibleref.com) and also Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. So Jeff, why don't you start us off a little bit about why should we believe? Sort of like a defense of the virgin birth? Because we do receive quite a few questions of people doubting that it happened and questioning the reality of it.

Jeff Laird

The most important reason that we would have to believe that the virgin birth happened is because, God told us that it did. In other words, the scripture, the earliest testimony of the church all tell us that this is something that actually happened, so there's there's sort of a subtle distinction between different questions about the virgin birth. The most important question, by far, is just if it did or didn't happen. And what we see in Scripture and then what we extend from theology tells us that yes, it definitely did. And the theological side of it, we can get into later on how there's some interconnections into that and what that means and what that doesn't mean, but we see consistent themes throughout the Bible that point to it. We see New Testament references.

Jeff Laird

We also see things from a historical standpoint. So if we just want to look at the belief in the virgin birth and how that interacts with Christianity? We see early writers in the Christian Church were defending this idea within a decade or two after the last books of the New Testament were written. They weren't proposing it, they weren't arguing for it in the sense of saying, hey, I think I figured this out. They were defending it against people who said that they didn't really believe that it was true. They were defending it against different heretical beliefs. So that raises a lot of questions if it's not something that the early early immediate church believed if it if it came out of nowhere, then where like where is there time in

there while the New Testaments being written and people are discussing this for this idea to suddenly just pop up out of nowhere?

Jeff Laird

Some of the evidence that we see that this was actually an issue of contention during Jesus' life comes from the Bible itself. There's an incident where Jesus is arguing with the Pharisees and in John Chapter 8 they make a not so subtle dig at Jesus and his Mother by they're talking about sons of Abraham and different issues like that and the Pharisees make a comment by saying, well, we aren't sons of fornication. We know who our father is. Which is kind of a blunt way of looking at Jesus in a sidelong way calling him illegitimate. And then later in that same conversation they refer to him as a Samaritan. And Samaritans were people who had one Jewish and one non Jewish parent. In the most immediate sense you know or came through that half breed lineage the way that they would say. So it was another way of them sort of needling Jesus by questioning the circumstances of his birth. So from the very practical standpoint, we see tons of reasons why we should understand that the earliest church from Jesus's life and on believed in this virgin birth idea and the things that we saw that were encapsulated in that.

Jeff Laird

Now in terms of why it's important from a theological standpoint, there are interconnections to other Christian doctrines that the virgin birth affects. How important those really are, and how necessary those are are a little bit of a different question from whether or not they're there. But the framework, the structure that's built in Christian theology does require the virgin birth as a cornerstone of a couple very important ideas. Those ideas are great, but when we say that Scripture tells us these things and makes it clear, it's important for us to understand exactly what that means. I know Kevin's got some ideas of passages that are especially relevant to how we see that just come right out of the text.

Kevin Stone

Yes, the New Testament writers are very clear that Jesus was born of a virgin. You know words matter and in the New Testament, the Gospel writers and then and then Paul later on are very careful with their wording. And they are very careful to maintain the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. It's just crystal clear in the book of Matthew, for example, in chapter One, Matthew talking about Mary and Joseph being betrothed, and then the birth of Christ. Matthew says this, before they came together, Mary was found with child of the Holy Spirit. And then two verses later that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Verse 23 behold, the virgin shall be with child. Verse 25, Joseph did not know her, that is, they did not consummate the marriage until she brought forth her first born son. So Matthew is very clear through the whole narrative that Jesus was born of an actual virgin.

Kevin Stone

In the Book of Luke you see the same type of thing, in chapter one verse 34, Mary asks the Angel how can this be seeing I am a virgin? Verse 35 then the Angel answers and gives her this answer, the Holy Spirit will come on you. The power of the most high will overshadow you, so the holy one to be born will be called the son of God. And then in Chapter 3 and verse 23, is Luke giving the genealogy. He says that Jesus was the son, so it was thought of Joseph. So even there they're being very careful with maintaining the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus.

Kevin Stone

And we get to the book of Mark and, you know, Mark and John don't really deal with the the Virgin birth explicitly, but they they imply it. And in in Mark's genealogy very short. Chapter one verse, one very first verse. He says the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the son of God. So there's a very simple genealogy right there. Jesus is the son of God. In John Chapter one then, we have in the beginning was the word the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in. He was with God in the beginning and then in verse 14 the word became flesh, dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the father. Full of grace and truth. So again, the origin of Jesus is the father. He is from above.

Kevin Stone

And in Galatians Chapter 4 then, Paul also alludes to the virgin birth indirectly and Galatians 4 verse four, when the set time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman born under the law to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship. But the key phrase there in that verse is born of a woman. And so Paul is careful in his wording as well that Jesus was born of a woman. There was no, there was no human man involved in that particular process.

Shea Houdmann

What I find most interesting about the conversation of the Virgin. Firmly believed it's never been something that I've ever doubted. I mean when you believe in a God who is the God of miracles, believing in him, bring a person into the world, not through normal human conception, it's not difficult for me to believe in that. But somehow the very early in my Christian life I got it in my head, I don't know if I was taught this or or what, but that the virgin birth had to happen because the sin nature is passed down from the father as if somehow sin has passed down from the father to the children, not from the mother. So if Jesus was only born of Mary and not of a human father, that's how he did not get this in nature. And you know, I don't deny that maybe there's some something going on related to that, but the Bible does not actually specifically teach that. Nowhere teaches that only human father passes on sin nature. Human mothers possess a sin nature as well, so if we're talking about physical traits, their cells would be just as much infected with sin as a father's cell. So that's it's not. Some of the reasons we think about for why the Virgin birth there may be some truth to them. May be entirely possible. That's why God did it that way, but to, as Jeff was saying earlier, to say that this is this is the reason why it had to happen, that's going beyond what Scripture actually says. And this is a learning experience for me, because really, for most of my Christian life, that was what I thought. It had to do this way so Jesus wouldn't get a sin nature, and that's not actually something that Scripture directly teaches.

Jeff Laird

I think directly is the key there because there are passages in the Bible that give us that that concept and I think it's in there for a reason. It talks about how, when certain promises in the Old Testament were made, that certain patriarchs were present in Abraham, even though they hadn't actually been born yet. Romans talks about the idea that you know sin came into the world through one man. So through one man sins are deemed. I think, the important part of what you're driving at is the idea that we don't want to take the idea and extend it too far. As if to say that there is some sort of limitation or logical conundrum here by which this was literally the only way God could have done anything.

Jeff Laird

And to stress the most important thing about this is whether or not the virgin birth did happen. It did. All the facts that we see say it does. Everything in Scripture tells us that it's there. But what we don't want to do is exactly what you were saying, Shea, which is to take that and start to stretch the meaning to go beyond what the Bible says. So for example, that you know sin comes through the Y chromosome, and I'm sure there's people out there saying yes it does. I know, well, sorry. But it's not what the Bible says. It's not telling us there's a literal sin gene that's in there. There's scientists who can manipulate cells in mice, at least for now, and they can get them to divide and become little baby mice without the male participation. If we were ever somehow to do that with human beings, I don't think anybody would argue that those people were born without a sin nature.

Jeff Laird

I think what we see in that is that the virgin birth is 2 main things. One, it's a miracle, and two it's a sign. Which is sort of the same things. But one is, it's meant to be something God said. This is how I'm going to do it when you see it happen, that's going to be one of the signs that you will know. And Jesus virgin birth is very different from miraculous births in other cases, Samuel, John the Baptist and other people like that. Those were miraculous births. But they weren't virgin births. That's a pretty big sign, and I think what God did was God created the circumstances where he said I'm going to do it this way. I'm going to arrange a framework that helps you understand why my Messiah is going to be uniquely qualified to be the Messiah. And part of that was the idea that logically, philosophically, spiritually, sin and sin nature is passed down from the father. So when I bring you a Messiah who doesn't have a human earthly father, we're creating that condition to where you can tell that does not actually apply to this. So if we pull that all apart and put it all back together. We could. We could, I guess, come up with a system where God could have done something different, but He he, I suppose, could have made life on Earth based on helium instead of water, but what would that look like? I don't know. I just know that I don't want to get in the habit of saying God absolutely could not ever possibly have done this, that, or the other. What's important is that he said he would, he did, and this is what he intends us to mean when we see it, and when to interpret it.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, and there are several reasons why God chose to do it that way, as we as we look through scripture and we, we see how all the pieces fit together and how God's framework as, as Jeff mentioned, all came together and was built upon. Then it it's just a wonderful thing. Scripture, just it all just fits, and so we see in the virgin birth that we are as we accept the virgin birth as a historical fact, we are, we're supporting the inspiration of Scripture. Because again, with some of those verses that I that I just read a minute ago. Scripture is very clear that Jesus was born of a virgin, so we've got the doctrine of the inspiration and the veracity of Scripture at stake. Scripture presents it as a fact. And we also have the doctrine of the Trinity that comes into play here because we have the the spirit who is giving conception to Mary. We have this is being done and to carry out the father's plan, the fathers will. And then of course, it's the virgin birth of the son. So father, son, and spirit are all involved in the in the virgin birth. And and so there is that doctrine that comes into play as well.

Kevin Stone

Virgin birth also informs us of who Jesus is. Because the Bible presents Jesus as being fully God and fully man simultaneously. And so without the virgin birth, you know Jesus is just a man. If he had come into the world the the normal way, with a union between Joseph and Mary, he would just been a natural man like anybody else. And without Mary's involvement though, then Jesus is not a man at all. If he just dropped out of the sky, he would be otherworldly, but the Bible says he was both God and man. And the virgin birth teaches this that he wasn't half man, half God, but he was full, fully God, fully man. And in the person of Christ, the two natures are are not diminished, they are working together, they are united.

Kevin Stone

And then the virgin birth is also important because of what Jesus did on the cross for our salvation. He had to be a human. He had to be a human being in order to die to shed his blood. But then he had to be fully God in order for his death to be infinitely worth something. And this is exactly what had to happen. And he had to be the perfect man. When John the Baptist points to him in John chapter one sees Jesus coming toward him, he says, look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. And then Peter says, and first Peter 1:19, that Jesus is the lamb that's without blemish and without spot. So he's the perfect man who provides the perfect sacrifice. He actually died of physical death. He actually rose again physically from the from the tomb, and he is also at the same time fully God. And so his, in his perfection and His Holiness He's able to, to provide that atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. He had no sin of him of his own, that he had to atone for, his atonement is for the sins of all of us. And this is a wonderful truth that also goes back to the virgin birth, God and man, in one person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Kevin Stone

And uh, and then I just I, I always, I always go back to the fact of grace and how our salvation is all of grace. And we see this in the virgin birth as well. Shows us that salvation has to come from God. We had no part in undoing the curse of sin. Only God could undo that curse. Only God can save us. We cannot produce our own Redeemer. Our rescuer had to come from above and rescue us. And we see this even in the enunciation of Gabriel to Mary as as the angels telling her what's going to happen because Mary's question was, how can this be? And then Gabriel's answer to her is all about what God is going to do and Mary, Mary's job was simply to be accepting of that and to be receiving of that. But the Angel says, you know, it's going to be the Holy Spirit that comes upon you. The power of the Almighty is going to overshadow you. It's God's work. And then Mary says, well, behold the handmaiden of the Lord. You know, let it be according to your word. And she responds in faithful obedience. And then the virgin birth happens, but it's of God. The virgin birth is the beginning of the good news of God. The good news of our salvation. The gospel has its start here in the virgin birth. It is because it's the means by which God chose to send the savior into the world. It's the grace of God.

Kevin Stone

And we see this even in the the name of Jesus. Angel told Joseph call him Jesus. And here's the reason why, he will save his people from their sins. Jesus means the Lord is the Savior or the Lord saves, and so his very name says what his job was going to be here in this world. And with man this is impossible. But with God nothing is impossible. Luke 1:37. There in the Christmas story, with God nothing shall be impossible. God is gracious and he's the one who carried out his plan to send our Redeemer into the world through this miraculous means.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin, I like the way you ended that section talking about how this is a miracle. I know Jeff mentioned that earlier and we get questions quite a bit from people who are trying to explain how Jesus performed a certain miracle. And we've recently received ones about how he turned water into wine or how he walked on the water. Well, actually, so by the chemical process is just how water could be transformed and wine or how well there was this underwater land bridge that suddenly appeared under Jesus allowed, and the whole point of all this is it is a miracle. I mean, would it be any less of a miracle if God actually caused land to appear underneath the water where Jesus was walking? That's still a miracle. But anytime we tried to explain the miraculous by scientific means, I think we run into trouble. We take things too far where we say like I was saying earlier that it had to be this way for this reason. Well, if Scripture doesn't give that as the reason that's not a direction that we need to go or need to spend too much time with.

Shea Houdmann

But one thing I do want to talk at least briefly about because it's directly related to this is where the idea of the virgin birth is actually first mentioned in Scripture. Is it obviously fulfilled in the early chapters of Matthew and Luke where they mentioned that Mary was a virgin. Jesus was born of a virgin. But Matthew actually quotes from Isaiah chapter seven and verse 14. Isaiah 7:14 reads, therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign the Virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel. So this passage, which is quoted in Matthew like, lays the foundation for the Virgin birth. Well, in this passage in Isaiah, not going to go too much in what was going on, but essentially the king of Judah, Ahaz was about to be attacked by some of Israel's enemies, and he was asking the prophet Isaiah how can I? What will be a sign? Isaiah says the sign will be identifying a specific virgin who will give birth to a child. And the verses after that talk about and before this child reaches this point in his life these two kings will be completely destroyed. So it's a message of deliverance that Ahaz you don't need to worry about these nations before this time period ends. Those nations aren't even going to be a problem anymore. And so that was like the actual direct fulfillment of that passage.

Shea Houdmann

But then in the New Testament we have the New Testament writers quoting this passage referring to the birth of Jesus. And so there are a few other examples of this in Scripture. What appears to be what we'll call a double fulfillment that had an immediate fulfillment in the time that Isaiah gave the prophecy. But there was more to it than that. God was pointing to another sign, another miracle that will occur that will point to that, actually the ultimate deliverer, Jesus the Messiah who will deliver us from our sins. And so there's an amazing connection between these two passages. But in the Isaiah passage it's also interesting and some people will want to argue, well, the Hebrew word there doesn't actually mean virgin, it only means a young woman and that actually that is correct. There are different Hebrew words. There's one a very specific word that means virgin. There's one that means young woman, but in the Hebrew mind, I'm not saying premarital sex never happened in that culture, but generally speaking, the vast majority of young women were virgins. But then to kind of clarify how people were understanding this passage later when the Hebrew Old Testament was first being translated into Greek in the Septuagint, the translators, who were Hebrew scholars actually chose the specific Greek word that means virgin, not a generic word for a young woman. So they're already in about 200 BC, understanding that this is talking about something more than just a young woman. And so

even the idea of a virgin birth preceded Christ. So we didn't fully understand it until Jesus was born of a virgin, but it was prophesied approximately 600 years before. In an amazing way, it the original fulfillment of the virgin birth prophecy provided deliverance in the time of Ahaz. The ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ provides deliverance to all those who receive him as savior by faith.

Jeff Laird

Some of those objections I understand where people are coming from on in a sense, some of those. But I do think that some of the things that people object to when they look at the the doctrine of virgin birth and how it incorporates itself into scripture, you just have to think them through all the way. So if the prophecy given to Isaiah was 100% just about a young woman giving birth, you you kind of look at that and you go, so what? Like it's that's not that big of a deal, for it to be, you know, given as that strong of a prophecy that's meant to look forward that far. So when you see the double fulfillment that that does make sense. I know some other people complain if you want to call it that that there's a a verse in the scripture that talks about Jesus, this Messiah being called Emmanuel. And people say, well his name wasn't Emmanuel. His name was Jesus. Well it's important to remember that in the ancient world people's names were really they were phrases. They were words. They were phrases that had other meanings. It wasn't until we started using the same names over and over and over and language changes, but the names don't. So eventually names just start to stand on their own. They're just words that are proper names instead of a phrase or a meaning, and so and so forth. But Isaiah 9:6 gives a whole sequence of, He will be called this and this and this and this. So really, what the passage is saying is he'll be called God with us. Not necessarily saying the phonetic pronunciation of his name is going to be Emmanuel. So when you actually follow these things through, they make more sense.

Jeff Laird

The other thing that I've noticed from from people sometimes is a complaint about the adoption concept with Joseph. There's debate over whether or not Jesus being the biological son of Mary counts to being part of the lineage of David, or whether it doesn't. And to some extent those are irrelevant because Joseph was Jesus adoptive father and there actually is biblical and Jewish traditional support for the idea that that counts perfectly well. The Old Testament talks about this concept of a levirate marriage. If a man dies without having any children his brother is supposed to provide children to the widow. Those children are considered the heirs, the legal descendants of the deceased husband, not the biological father. And then in the the writings of the Sanhedrin in the Talmud there's multiple references to the idea that when you would when you take in an orphan and raise them as your own, they are your child, not the child of whoever was they're literally and biologically. So I think we see just so many different threads and ideas that tell us that this really is God's intent.

Jeff Laird

Even going further back into Genesis. I know Isaiah is the first time we see something really explicit, but some people look at Genesis 3:15 where when the reference is made to this Messiah somewhere that there's a sort of a weird phrasing that's used where God tells the Serpent and Mary I'm going to put this struggle between your seed and her seed. And the specific word seed is used. That's almost always used of males, of men. So it's sort of a curious reference when it's just there all by itself. You put it in his crawl. This broader context of what we're looking at and it really helps to solidify this idea of what's in there.

So what's not really beyond any question or doubt is that the virgin birth is something that God really did predict he chose. That's the method he used, and that is exactly what happened.

Kevin Stone

Amen

Shea Houdmann

As we were talking before, I mean there's way more material when we could go on and on about there's a lot of really fascinating aspects to this conversation. But even looking into the genealogies of Jesus a little bit, we could probably do a whole episode on the differences between in the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, but generally speaking, most Bible scholars view Matthew's genealogy as a shortened genealogy, tracing the line through Joseph, his adoptive father, the legal rights all the way back. Then with Luke, those views, since they're different names throughout, especially once you get past David that trace that that's actually Mary's genealogy. So through Joseph's line, the adoptive line, he had the legal right to be the Messiah, the the King of Israel. And then through Mary he actually had the, He was legitimately a son, biological son of David through that line. So there's so many little bits and pieces here that when you see the grand picture it's like wow. It's amazing to see how God did this and how Scripture predicted it. And some of the things you couldn't really understand what the Old Testament was predicting until you see the fulfillment. And it's, it's a beautiful picture once it all comes together. And the virgin birth is a crucial part of the entirety of it.

Shea Houdmann

And so this Christmas season let's not forget about the the virgin birth and as Kevin was saying earlier, how it points us to the the grace of God. How just as we need salvation, we cannot save ourselves. We could not even bring the Messiah into the world on our own. That God had to bring that about a miraculous means. All out of his grace, his mercy, his his love for us. So this Christmas season as you celebrate, remember the amazing miracle of the virgin birth and everything that went on the Christmas season. How God did it. And remember all of that was done out of his love for you and his desire for you to come to Jesus as your savior. Trusting in him alone. By grace through faith as the atoning sacrifice for your sins.

Shea Houdmann

So we'll include some links to where you can learn more about both the virgin birth and some of the other side issues in the show notes @podcast.gotquestions.org, and also the description on YouTube. So many great questions that come around at Christmas time. And keep studying God's word. Keep digging to these issues and may your focus, may our focus continue to be on our savior as we celebrate his birth this year. This has been the Got Questions podcast and discussing the virgin birth. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.