

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Deity of Christ</b>		Pastor/Teacher
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<b>Text:</b>	<b>Matthew 1:20-23; Luke 1:35</b>		
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### THE VIRGIN BIRTH: DOCTRINE OF DEITY

G. Campbell-Morgan, in a book of a generation ago, said that man's need was threefold: He is distanced from God by sin, he is ignorant of God through sin, and he is unlike God in sin. The glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the God-man, and His atoning mediatorial work, is that God finds Himself in this person and is with men, for He is man, and man finds himself in this person and is with God, for He is God. Thus, he who was distanced from God by sin is restored to God by the gift of righteousness. He who was ignorant of God through sin comes to the knowledge of God through Christ. And he who was unlike God in sin shall come to be like Him in Christ.<sup>1</sup> Job spoke long ago of the need of a Mediator. He, reflecting upon his unworthiness to approach God in his sin, cried, "For He is not a man as I am that I may answer Him, That we may go to court together. There is no umpire (AV, "daysman;" NIV, "someone to arbitrate") between us, Who may lay his hand upon us both" (9:32-33, NASB). Jesus Christ, being the God-man, qualified and has accomplished the work of union. He has borne the separating penalty of sin for His people, and He as the infinite sin-bearer has satisfied the claims of God the Holy One. Through union with Him who has represented us in the atoning work, we are brought near by Christ. Job's Daysman has been found (cf. Matthew 20:28; Acts 4:12). Note the claims of Christ. He claimed to be from Heaven and not of this world (John 6:38; 8:23). He claimed a unique relationship to God (John 10:30; 14:8, 9). He claimed prerogatives that only God could claim (John 11:25, 26; Matthew 11:27). He claimed divine authority (Matthew 28:18), the power to forgive sins (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20, 23), quicken the dead (John 5:24-29), and the power to give eternal life (John 10:28-29). One evening Near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus spoke to His disciples after a busy day of ministry and said, "Let us cross over to the other side." When the multitude of people was dismissed, the disciples took their weary leader into a boat and began to make their way across the lake. But there arose a lashing storm, which churned the little sea into a wet fury, and soon the boat and its occupants were in danger of being swamped. Anxiously and somewhat peevishly they turned to their sleeping companion and brusquely aroused Him with, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" being quite unaware of the fact that there is no sinking with the Savior aboard. Jesus arose and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush! Be still!" The wind died, and a dead calm ensued. After He had rebuked them for their fear and faithlessness, they, awestruck, murmured to one another, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (cf. Mark 4:35-41). If the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had been present, knowing what he knew when he wrote his letter, he would have replied confidently, "Why, He is the effulgence of God's glory and the stamp of God's very being, and sustains the universe by His word of power" (cf. Hebrews 1:3). Paul the Apostle might have replied, "He is the image of the invisible God; He has primacy over all created things" (Colossians 1:15).

As the devout old Scottish commentator John Eadie has said, "That the creator and upholder of the universe should come down to such a world as this, and clothe Himself in the inferior nature of its

race, and in that nature die to forgive and save it, is the most amazing of revelations.”<sup>2</sup> And yet, as the professor has declared, it is most glorious truth, sealed with the precious blood of Golgotha. The God of Genesis 1 is the Babe of Matthew 1 and 2. The One of whom Isaiah said, “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance” (Isaiah 40:12). The person of Christ is at the heart of the Gospel, and His incarnation is essential to understanding the work of Christ. The virgin birth is key to understanding the person and work of Christ. Kermit Zarley, in his heretical book, claims that the virgin birth has absolutely no bearing on the deity of Christ – which he emphatically denies.<sup>3</sup>

Why is the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ so important, and what is at stake? This doctrine, wrote James Orr, “affects the whole supernatural estimate of Christ – his life, his claims, his sinlessness, his miracles, his resurrection from the dead. But the virgin birth is assailed with special vehemence, because it is supposed that the evidence for this miracle is more easily got rid of than the evidence for public facts, such as the resurrection. The result is that in very many quarters the virgin birth of Christ is openly treated as a fable, and belief in it is scouted as unworthy of the twentieth century intelligence.”<sup>4</sup> The virgin birth of Christ was a supernatural birth. Of course, many people will claim that the word *supernatural* can be applied to anything that is out of the ordinary. In that sense we could say that the births of Isaac and John the Baptist were also *supernatural*. I am, however, restricting the word *supernatural* to its usage of referring to that which does not and cannot take place on a natural level. A supernatural event is a divine intervention into the natural order. In other words, it is a miracle.<sup>5</sup> Is the virgin birth of Christ *essential* to Christianity? If by the term *Christianity* we mean biblical Christianity as expressed historically in terms of orthodox Christian belief – yes, the doctrine of the virgin birth is absolutely essential to Christianity. If, on the other hand, *Christianity* is primarily defined in some subjective (as opposed to objective and concrete beliefs) sense where vague and fragmented references to Jesus are allowed to define Christianity, then the doctrine of the virgin birth is hardly considered important at all. As can be seen, it is very critical that we determine at the beginning what *kind* of Christianity we have in mind in discussing the importance of the virgin birth. Christianity as set forth in the pages of the New Testament has *six* distinctive emphases, and these *six* all touch on the virgin birth of Christ.

- I. **THE SON OF THE VIRGIN.** “It is perfectly clear,” says the noted New Testament scholar J. Gresham Machen, “that the New Testament teaches the virgin birth of Christ; about that there can be no manner of doubt. There is no serious question as to the *interpretation* of the Bible at this point. Everyone admits that the Bible represents Jesus as having been conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. The only question is whether in making that representation the Bible is true or false.”<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 7:14 announces the virginal conception, and Matthew 1:16-24 and Luke 1:27-35 affirm the fulfillment. The Apostle Paul likewise presupposes this in his teaching on Christ’s pre-existence and eternal Sonship (Romans 1:3; 8:3; Galatians 4:4). The New Testament also speaks of Christ as sinless, holy, sanctified by God (John 10:36), knowing no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), a lamb without spot and blemish (1 Peter 1:19), the righteous one (1 John 2:1; Acts 3:14; Acts 22:14). On account of His sinlessness and miraculous birth, Christ is constantly represented as the head of a new race (Colossians 1:18), the first born among many brethren (Romans 8:29), the second Adam (Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:45), the new man (Ephesians 2:15).
- II. **THE SON OF DAVID.** Christ is over and over again called the Son of David, the One in whom so many Old Testament promises are fulfilled (cf. Matthew 22:42-45). Jesus was of the house of David and as such was the legal heir to the throne of David. This is implied in Acts 2:30; 2 Samuel 7:12 and Acts 13:23. It is distinctly stated in Romans 1:3 where we read, “regarding His Son, who as to his human nature was a descendent of

David” (cf. also Hebrews 7:14; Revelation 22:16). In 2 Timothy 2:8, there is a distinct creedal flavor in the words: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.” In Revelation 3:7 Jesus is introduced as “the true one, who has the key of David,” prompting Donald Guthrie to write that “this must be understood as expressing his royal authority.”<sup>7</sup>

- III. **THE SON OF GOD.** The heart and center of the Gospel message is that the Son of God has become incarnate to redeem sinners. In 1 John we are repeatedly told that confession of Jesus as the Son of God is the cardinal point of Christianity (cf. 1 John 4:15; 5:5, 10, 12). In Acts 9:20, the Apostolic message was “to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God.” In Galatians 2:20 Paul declares that saving faith is a living faith in “the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me.”
- IV. **THE SUPERNATURAL.** Anyone who accepts at face value the teaching of the New Testament acknowledges that the kind of Christianity found there is supernaturalistic from beginning to end. Everything about the Christ of Scripture is supernatural. “His supernatural birth is given already, in a word, in his supernatural life and his supernatural work, and forms an indispensable element in the supernatural religion which he founded.”<sup>8</sup>
- V. **THE INCARNATION.** The one who comes into this world by supernatural birth did so because of who He is. He comes to accomplish a supernatural salvation. The only begotten of the Father, the eternal Word was He. “Born into our race He might be and was; but born of our race, never -- whether really or only apparently.”<sup>9</sup> We cannot escape either historically or logically the fact that the deity of Christ and the Incarnation are inseparably bound together with the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ. “In point of fact,” argued Warfield, “accordingly, it is just in proportion as men lose their sense of the Divine personality of the messianic king who is Immanuel, God with us, that they are found to doubt the necessity of the virgin birth; while in proportion as the realization of this fundamental fact of the Christianity of the New Testament remains vivid and vital with them, do they instinctively feel that it is alone consonant with it that this Being should acknowledge none other father than that Father which is in heaven, from whom alone he came forth to save the world.”<sup>10</sup>
- VI. **THE REDEMPTIVE.** The virgin birth and the incarnation do not appear in the pages of the New Testament simply for their own sake. The Apostolic message does not terminate on them as such. Rather, they serve to accomplish God’s great purpose in sending His Son: redemption. The central message of the Gospel is distinctively redemption from sin. Since Christ came to redeem sinners, it was imperative that the Redeemer himself should not be in any way tainted with sin. The supernatural birth of the Redeemer safeguarded the incarnation, which in turn guarantees that redemption would be accomplished. Therefore, when speaking of the essential content of Christianity, we must not think that the doctrine of the virgin birth is somehow not important—or if we grant that it has some doctrinal significance, it really does not have any real practical value.

**CONCLUSION:** “All wrong concepts of the person of Jesus Christ stem from a denial of His eternal deity and of His virgin birth entrance into our time-space universe.”<sup>11</sup> The promised child of Isaiah 7:14 is not to have a human father by ordinary generation, but as the creed rehearses it, He “was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” This miracle, wrote Machen, “is one of the things that will show the child to be rightly called *holy* and *Son of God*. . . the term *Son of God* is here used in some very lofty sense. It does not designate the promised child merely as the Messiah, though sometimes the Messiah was called *Son of God*. Evidently the term is used here in some unique and stupendous sense.”<sup>12</sup> If Jesus Christ is in fact God incarnate (and the church *must* be governed by this truth), then we must likewise insist that Jesus is more than a great religious teacher on par with (or even a little higher than) the great religious leaders like Buddha or Muhammad.

“Historically, this uniqueness resides in His birth; His obedient life and sacrificial death; His resurrection, ascension, and present session at the Father’s right hand; and His eschatological return as the Judge and Savior of men. Theologically, it resides in the incarnation, the Atonement, and the several (including the cosmically final) aspects of His exaltation. *If Jesus Christ is in fact God incarnate, Jesus must continue to be proclaimed as the only saving way to the Father, as He said (John 14:6), His the only saving name among men, as Peter said (Acts 4:12), and His the only saving mediation between God and man, as Paul said (1 Tim. 2:5).*”<sup>13</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> G. Campbell-Morgan, *The Crisis of The Christ* (Revell, 1936), p. 39. This is an outstanding book. It is composed of sermons that Campbell-Morgan preached at Westminster Chapel in London. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones was Morgan’s associate and later succeeded him.

<sup>2</sup> John Eadie, *A Commentary on The Greek Text of The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (T & T Clark, 1884), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> K. Zarley, *The Restitution of Jesus Christ* (Triangle Books, 2008), p. 235.

<sup>4</sup> James Orr, “The Virgin Birth of Christ” in *The Fundamentals For Today I*, ed. C. L. Feinberg (rpt. Kregel, 1958), p. 241.

<sup>5</sup> The word *miracle* is almost worthless today. It is tossed around, especially in Charismatic circles, in a very careless and haphazard fashion. Almost any unusual or unexpected thing is declared to be “a miracle!” Warfield provides the following definition: “A miracle then is specifically an effect in the external world, produced by the immediate efficiency of God. Its *differentiae* are: (1) that it occurs in the external world, and thus is objectively real and not a merely mental phenomenon; and (2) that its cause is a new super-natural force, intruded into the complex of nature, and not a natural force under whatever wise and powerful manipulation.” B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings II* (P&R, 1973), p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> J. G. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (rpt. Guardian Press, 1975), p. 382.

<sup>7</sup> D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (IVP, 1981), p. 258.

<sup>8</sup> *The Works of B. B. Warfield III* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 451.

<sup>9</sup> Warfield, *Works*, p. 453.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.

<sup>11</sup> Gromacki, *op. cit.* p. 167.

<sup>12</sup> J. G. Machen, *The Christian Faith In the Modern World* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1947), p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *Jesus: Divine Messiah* (P&R, 1990), p. 26.

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