

The Simple Announcement

Scripture: Matthew 1:18

Code: B111217

If you didn't pay careful attention, you might pass right over one of the most important announcements in the New Testament: the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew took only one verse to announce it. Such a concise statement, though it doesn't all by itself prove the point, strongly suggests that our Lord and Savior's virgin birth was not simply a man-made story.

A human author, writing strictly on his own initiative, would tend to describe such an amazing event in an expansive, detailed, and elaborate manner. But not the apostle Matthew. He does relate additional circumstances surrounding the virgin birth, but the basic fact is stated in one simple sentence: "After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew devotes the previous seventeen verses to Jesus' human genealogy but just this part of one verse to His divine genealogy. As the Son of God, Jesus "descended" from His heavenly Father by a miraculous and never-repeated act of the Holy Spirit; even so, the Holy Spirit chose to announce that astounding truth by just one brief, declarative sentence. As all God's Word does, Matthew's simple statement contains the solemn tone of authenticity. By contrast, a human fabrication would tend to have that false ring of exaggeration to it, being filled out with much more "convincing" material than what this inspired version needed.

Scripture gives us little information about Mary and even less about Joseph. Mary was undoubtedly a godly young woman, probably a native of Nazareth who came from a relatively poor family. Joseph was the son of Jacob (Matthew 1:16) and was a craftsman, probably a carpenter (Matthew 13:55). Most significant, he was a "just man" (Matthew 1:19), one who placed saving trust in the coming Messiah.

Most likely Mary and Joseph were both quite young when they were engaged ("betrothed"). She may have been as young as twelve or thirteen, and he not any older than fifteen or sixteen. Such youthfulness at the time of a couple's engagement was standard for that culture. Another standard aspect of the Jewish betrothal was its binding nature—society considered the man and the woman legally married even though the formal ceremony and consummation might occur a year later. The purpose of the engagement period was to confirm each partner's fidelity when the two had little or no social contact with each another.

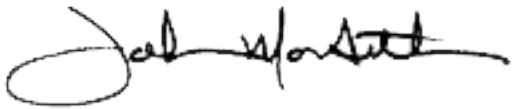
Mary and Joseph faithfully abstained from sexual relations with one another during the engagement period, as the contract required. That was also in accord with the Bible's high regard for sexual purity and God's commands for sexual abstinence prior to the marriage ceremony and for sexual fidelity afterward. Thus, Mary's virginity was an important indicator of her godliness.

However, Mary's virginity protected something much more important than her own morality and godly reputation. It ensured the deity of Christ and supported the veracity of His teaching and works as the

Son of God. Had Jesus been conceived by natural means, with Joseph or anyone else as His father, He would not have been God and would not have been a true Savior of sinners. But we know that is absolutely contrary to what God's Word teaches.

The apostle Paul, for example, was also very clear and concise when he reiterated the true nature of the Incarnation: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). Paul includes no mention of a human father for Jesus because, according to the divine plan, God was His Father. Jesus had one human parent (Mary) so that He could be a man and identify closely with what it means to be human (Philippians 2:5–7; Hebrews 4:15). And He had divine parentage so He could live a sinless life, perfectly fulfill the Law of God for us, and make the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Admittedly, all these centuries after Matthew's divinely inspired Gospel declared that Jesus was born of a virgin, His miraculous conception remains impossible to understand by human reason alone. God chose not to explain the details of it to us, even as He chose to leave unexplained the intricacies of His creating the universe from nothing, or the precise way He could be one God in three Persons. Many of the essentials of Christianity God wants believers to accept by faith. Full understanding will have to wait until heaven: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now [we] know in part, but then [we] shall know [fully]" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "John W. Stott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

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