

A Birth Like No Other

Matthew 1:18-25

There have been a number of unusual births recorded. One Indian woman gave birth on her wedding date. Oh, it gets better! She actually had the baby during the ceremony. They did momentarily pause the ceremony until she had the baby; then they continued the ceremony while the groom held the baby in his arms.

This next birth story is disturbing on many different levels. A 39-year-old artist in New York City gave birth before a live audience in an art gallery. She said, “Giving birth is the highest form of art.”

Numerous accounts have been recorded of women having babies while flying in a plane. These “Sky-High Babies” are born at over thirty thousand feet. I read other accounts of babies being born in Subway (the restaurant), in libraries, in a post office, and on a boat.

The most memorable birth story came from Mozambique, Africa. In 2000, floodwaters caused families to evacuate their homes and to find higher ground. A 26-year-old woman waited too late and could only climb a tree to escape the waters. Rescuers spotted her in the tree and lowered themselves down just in time to deliver the baby and wrench the mother and baby to the safety of the helicopter.¹

All of these stories are true accounts of real women giving birth in unusual places by unusual means. These are unusual births.

When we look at Greek mythology, the “gods” are often born in some very creative ways. I will just share one with you because these mythological stories are nothing short of ridiculous. Athena was the Greek goddess of war and wisdom. Follow me here—while Metis (Athena’s mother) carried Athena, her husband Zeus (Athena’s father) ate the fetus (Athena). He carried Athena for nine months in his head until finally he could not take the headaches anymore. He asked a blacksmith to split his head open with an axe. When this happened, Athena came out

¹ Emma Pietras, “The Most Unusual Places People Have Given Birth—from Primark to up a Tree,” *Mirror*, July 2, 2014, accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/most-unusual-places-people-given-3800798>.

fully-grown and completely dressed. Ridiculous, right? Well, yes, it is ridiculous. It is Greek mythology. Everyone knows it is not true.

We must never forget that some people believe that the virgin birth of Christ is just as ridiculous and that it is nothing more than a myth. I am not going to try to explain away this miraculous event in human terms. I am going to take God at His Word that this event happened just as it is recorded in the Bible. If you can find your way to believing that God is the author of Scripture, you will not have a problem believing in the virgin birth.

Friends, we have here a birth like no other. It is unlike any other human birth because it is scientifically and biologically impossible. It is unlike any mythological birth because it is true. It was a real event recorded in the pages of history for us.

Transition: The Scripture gives us the most unusual birth story in the history of mankind. It is epic, but not a myth.

1. Introduction to the Birth Story (verse 18)

The Bible tells us that this birth story happened **on this wise**; that means it took place this way! In a small Hebrew town, a love story was happening before everyone's eyes. The romance is heart-moving. It involves a godly young man named Joseph and a seventeen-year-old young lady named Mary.

It began around a dimly-lit candlelight dinner involving a sweet poem and a few love songs—wait, no, that's an American love story. A Hebrew love story looked much different. A Hebrew love story would begin with the parents, not the young people. The parents would agree to the terms for the wedding, and a deal would be made for the son of one couple to marry the daughter of another couple. The whole thing was arranged, sometimes when the children were very small. Imagine picking a husband for your daughter at age 8 or even at age 12. Nearly all the weddings during that time were arranged. I know what you are thinking: “That is not romantic; that is repulsive.” No, that was their culture. In some cultures today, this is still the case.

When I was the single adult pastor at a church, we had a couple of singles who were from India. They were brilliant young men and gifted in playing the piano and organ. Their parents were faithful members of our church. They were all converted out of Hinduism. I will never forget hearing their love story. It sounded very familiar to Mary and Joseph's. Their parents

arranged the wedding for them. They did not pick their mate; their parents did. They always viewed this as a positive thing and would not have it any other way.

You see, in the biblical days, they would not trust such a monumental decision to young people who tend to be driven by emotions. Typically, the father of the groom would give the father of the bride a token or dowry to make the arrangement “official.” This could range from giving cattle, sheep, money, or even clothing. Once the parents came to an agreement about the specifics of the dowry, the wedding process would begin. It consisted of three stages.

1. Engagement – This would often take place between the age of 12 or 13. It was an official promise between two families.
2. Betrothal – This period lasted about a year. In this stage, the couple would get to know one another emotionally and spiritually, but not intimately. Nothing physical would take place between the two individuals during this stage.

However, if they wanted out of this deal they would have to get an official divorce. If the man died in this period the woman would be considered a widow. Even though nothing physical had taken place yet, the only exit from this stage was an official divorce. This was the stage in which Joseph and Mary were in verse 18.

3. Marriage – At the end of the year-long betrothal period came the marriage. This is the final stage. It was here the couple consummated the wedding. There would be several days of feasting in celebration. Let me repeat: Nothing physical took place until the third stage of marriage.

Transition: During this second stage of marriage, an angel appeared to Mary and informed her that she would bear a son (Luke 1:28).

2. Creating the Arch of Tension

When the angel came to Mary, she had not conceived Jesus, and she asked, “How can this be? I am a virgin.” The angel informed her that she would conceive of the Holy Ghost.

- This does not mean that Mary had a relationship with an angel.
- It does not mean that Mary had a relationship with the 3rd person of the Trinity.
- This means the Person of the Holy Spirit would place the eternally-existent Jesus in the womb of Mary.

Mary hears this information and is broken about what to do. How will she tell Joseph? Will he believe Her? These questions, along with others, hold her thoughts hostage. She prays

and prays, not knowing what to do next. Finally, she sits down with Joseph (the man her parents picked for her, the man she would have picked for herself). She says, “I have to tell you something.” He responds, “You can tell me anything.”

This is big. Really big!

He is convinced it is a small matter, but he knows that this is an emotional time for her, so he sympathetically looks at her and says, “You can tell me anything.”

She sputters and stammers until finally she blurts out, “I am pregnant.”

Those words fell on Joseph’s heart like a ton of bricks. They crushed him. He quickly went through the grieving cycle: shock, confusion, fear, anger, denial, and depression. His mind raced with questions, and a few of them made it out of his mouth.

- How could you do this to me?
- Why is this happening?
- How long have you been tricking me—and your parents?
- What I am going to tell my father? Oh! And my mother?

He had so many questions that were going unanswered. He was receiving some answers, but they were so unrealistic. “Okay Mary, God put a child in your womb. Come on! How gullible do you think I am?”

Joseph did not believe Mary. In tears, he sat down and told his parents what had transpired. With grief, he told her parents too! By this time, the word started to spread around town. People were whispering.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!” These words were spoken by a naive person who has never been on the receiving end of gossip. Words hurt, even if they are whispered!

Joseph had three choices:

1. The law permitted that an adulteress be put to death (Deuteronomy 22:23–24). He could push for this penalty. It was the law, although no one was really put to death for such a crime like this during Joseph’s day.
2. He could write her a bill of divorcement publically and shame her in front of her hometown crowd. He could make a mockery of her. But Joseph was a good man. Verse 19 tells us this. Just as Mary was a chosen vessel, so was Joseph. Jesus came from a handpicked mother and a handpicked father.

3. Joseph's third option would be a private bill of divorcement. Keep it quiet. Let's part ways here with no hard feelings.

This was a huge decision. Joseph was young, but he was mature. He did not want to make any hasty decisions. He had Mary go stay with her cousin Elizabeth. We find this in Luke 1. Elizabeth was six months expecting with John the Baptist, and Mary would go stay with her, away from the prying eyes and judgmental looks from head to toe. Mary would stay with Elizabeth for three months. Right up until the moment that John the Baptist would be born.

Transition: Please understand this truth...Jesus was this close to coming from a divorced home.

3. Releasing the Tension (verse 20)

While Mary was away, Joseph received a special visitor. One from heaven... an angel. The angel reminded Joseph that he was the chosen step-father of Jesus. He called him the **son of David**. An important prophecy that children were taught growing up was that the promised Messiah would come in the line of David.

He told him **not to fear** (imperative force). Joseph had been filled with fear. He feared his future was ruined. He feared for Mary and the pain she would face in life. At this moment, more than any other emotion, Joseph felt fear.

When you do not understand the situation, rest on God's plan for your life. Some of you are fearing the next doctor's visit, the next conversation, the next disappointment (in a long line of disappointments). When you cannot trust the situation, trust our God who is in control of the situation.

Matthew reveals to us how this story fits into the grand story of redemption. He does this by quoting a verse from Isaiah 7:14. God tells Joseph, "What is unfolding in your life is my plan for the ages." This is not a random event. It is not incidental or coincidental. It is transcendental. This is has been planned in God's program for the ages. Here is the proof: "I wrote it in this verse 700 years before this moment."

4. Happily Ever After (verse 24–25)

When Joseph woke from his sleep where in a real way this angel met with him, he acted on God's will for his life. The angel told him to **take Mary as his wife**, and when he awoke **he took** his wife. He did not ask for another night to think about. He did it right away. That's obedience. That was not easy.

Matthew's account of this story concentrates on Joseph, and Luke's account concentrates on Mary. Just imagine this scene. Mary has been with her cousin Elizabeth for three months and crying herself to sleep every night. She felt all alone. No one believed her and no one would come to her aid. She was hurt by those closest to her. Gossip always hurts, but it hurts more coming from those who are closest to you.

She hears a knock at the door. Elizabeth answers, and she sees that it is Joseph. She calls for Mary and they step outside to talk. By this time, Mary is three months expecting. She is now showing. Joseph looked at her stomach and knew three things for sure:

1. He knew the baby was a boy. This was before ultrasounds, but Mary and Joseph had something better than an ultrasound picture; they had an ultrasound promise. This child would be a boy.
2. Joseph also knew that the baby in her belly was not his son. It was God's son. No other man, living or dead, has ever faced what Joseph faced in that moment.
3. Finally, Joseph knew that they would call the baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph did not have the privilege of naming this boy. God named His Son. He chose the name Jesus. It means "God saves".

This was not the only boy that would be named Jesus. There were other boys named Jesus. In fact, there may have been other women expecting at this time who would eventually name their baby Jesus. The name *Jesus* was very common. Many little boys named Jesus were running around playing with the farm animals at this time.

What is unique about this Jesus is that He was the only Jesus that was also called Immanuel. Immanuel means "God with us" (verse 23). This was the only Jesus, the only child, the only person who existed before His birth and came as God clothed in flesh.

I love this little nugget of truth in verse 21. Do you notice the word *sin*? This is the first time it is mentioned in the New Testament. From here on out, sin will ravage lives, destroy families, and lead people to an eternal destiny apart from God in a place called hell. Sin is a sickness that we all have. We need a cure.

I love how God presents the cure before He presents the sickness. Notice that the word *Jesus* is mentioned before the word *sin*; before the problem is ever presented the solution is given. We are all here today in a sin-sick condition. Some of you may be seeing this sin-sickness

for the first time. The answer is found in one word: Jesus. We have offended a righteous God with our sin and He can only be appeased by the perfect life of Jesus.

The angel commanded Joseph to **take Mary as your wife**. The text then says he **took her** (verse 24). That is a simple act of obedience, but, friend, it could not have been easy. He accepted God's will for His life instead of his plans for his life.

Joseph's aspirations for his life may have been the first century equivalent of a two-story house, a white picket fence, a golden retriever, two kids, and a well-respected wife in the community. But God's will for Joseph's life did not look like Joseph's will for his life. When Joseph took Mary, he was saying, "Not my will, but your will be done. I do not understand it nor would I choose it, but Lord, I accept it." That is obedience; that is faith; that is the life God will reward.

I cannot imagine the grace that it took for Joseph to do what he did. Mary would have to have the same measure of grace. There are times in life when I look at what people are going through and I wonder how they can make it.

- A marriage partner cheating on their mate
- Losing a job, but not losing any of the bills that need to be paid
- People being lied about, gossiped about, or deserted by their "friends"
- Living with the odds stacked against them

I hurt for them; I hurt for you.

In most situations where I counsel people, I cannot say, "I know what you are going through." I cannot say it for two reasons: 1) it does not help the person hearing that; and 2) I have not been through the situation.

So I point people to Jesus and not to my experience. I do not know what it is like to watch the love of my life on her deathbed. How can someone endure this? God gives you grace. You think, "I could not handle that." But if it comes into your life, you will experience God giving you grace to live with the situation.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the most remarkable person in all of creation. Think about it:

- He had no human Father, but an earthly mother.
- He had no heavenly mother, but a heavenly Father.
- He was older than His mother and as old as His Father.

All of this (and more) is made possible by His virgin conception.

It is fascinating to think about how God has brought various persons into the world. The virgin birth completes the circle.

- Adam – no man; no woman
- Eve – a man; no woman
- Us – a man; a woman
- Jesus – no man; a woman!²

² Daniel Akin, “A Birth Like No Other – Matthew 1:18–25,” accessed September 5, 2015, <http://www.danielakin.com/a-birth-like-no-other>.

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