

Jesus being born of a virgin was essential to His mission in coming to earth. For this purpose, God chose a young (likely teenage) woman named Miriam, or Mary, who was engaged to a carpenter named Joseph . When the angel appears to tell Mary of her calling, she lovingly submits to God's plan. Although the Bible calls this wonderful lady "Blessed among all women," Mary was not sinless, as some teach, for we later see her bringing a sin offering to the Lord . When she later observed Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross (John 19-25), she was watching Him die for her own sins as well . Finally, we see her assembled with Jesus' disciples as the church is born at Pentecost (Acts 1:14), which launched her into a whole new life of service to God in ways she had never before imagined.

Not as much is known about Jesus' stepfather, Joseph, although it is understood that he was a just and honorable man. He is believed to have been considerably older than Mary. He and Mary did later get married and have more children (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:19). Since nothing more is said about Joseph, it seems likely that he died somewhere in Jesus' early life.

Both Mary and Joseph were descendants of King David. This is reflected in the two distinct genealogies that open the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. This way, Mary could provide the link to the royal bloodline while Joseph, even though he was not Jesus' biological father, could still provide the legal link to King David's family tree.

Although some attempt to explain it away, the virgin birth of Jesus is an absolutely essential doctrine to the Christian faith. A common argument is that the prophecy of this miraculous event recorded in Isaiah 7:14 uses a Hebrew word ("almah") which can simply be translated as "young woman" rather than "virgin." However, the Greek word used in the New Testament, "parthenos" (Matthew 1:22-23) is much more explicit. Its only possible meaning is "virgin."

Why is the virgin birth so important? The Bible teaches us that life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11), so this is how the sin nature, which is inherently a part of every person (Psalms 51:5; Romans 5:15-19), is passed down through the generations. Medically speaking, a child inherits its blood line from its father. Since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, rather than by a human father, His blood line was untainted by sin. In his insightful book "The Chemistry of the Blood," Bible scholar and physician M.R. DeHaan points out:

How wonderfully God prepared for the virgin birth of His Son. When He created woman He made her so that no blood would be able to pass from her to her offspring... Conception by the Holy Ghost was the only way the virgin birth could be accomplished...The Holy Spirit contributed the blood of Jesus. It is sinless blood. It is divine blood. It is precious blood, for there has never been any other like it (3).

Since Jesus is the only person to ever be born from a sinless bloodline, only He was able to be the Holy, perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people.

We'll talk more about this in the next lesson when we discuss the Christmas story. Until then, keep it real!