

Faith Pulpit

Jesus' Birth...An Act of God or an Accident of Man

Understanding the “how” of Jesus’ coming into this world has been the subject of discussion since the time of Paul the Apostle. Every generation has made an attempt to explain His birth in human terms rather than a miraculous act of God. One school of thought supposes that Joseph and Mary entered into an intimate relationship before their marriage rites were completed and Jesus was born as a result of that action. More recently liberal theologians have speculated that Mary and a German soldier engaged in immoral activity that produced Jesus. Both views are speculative and without any biblical support.

Does it really make any difference whether Jesus was virgin conceived and born as an act of God or if He came into this world by the normal course of human activity? Paul’s argument in Galatians 4 declares that if Jesus is not the virgin conceived and born Son of God, then man has no Saviour and is still under the restrictions of Old Testament law. God, not man, is seen in Galatians 4 as the primary actor in Christ’s birth. Galatians 4:4,5 specify four ways that God acts in the birth of Christ.

I. Christ’s Birth Is According To God’s Plan

It is true that when Jesus was born the culture of the world was at a low point. Religion had degenerated to mere external formalism. Morality had declined to animalistic levels. Worship to God was devoid of any real vitality. These conditions may have affected the way people lived at that time, but contrary to the writings of some, none of these circumstances had an influence upon the birth of Christ. His birth was “. . . in the fullness of time!” (Gal. 4:4).

Several meanings are given for the word “fullness.” For example in Matt. 9:16, it means to mend a tear in a piece of cloth. Farmers used this same word to describe a plenteous harvest or a full basket of grain (1 Cor. 10:26; Mk. 8:20). Here in Galatians 4, Paul uses the word to speak of that which has come to completion. He declares that Christ’s birth was fixed in the counsels of God before the foundation of the world and that predetermined hour had now arrived.

Lehman Strauss wrote of this: “The incarnation of the Son of God was not by chance nor for a single instant before or behind time. It was a scheduled event completing the period of time designated by God.” It is like setting an alarm clock before you go to bed. The night comes with all its darkness, but the clock ticks on toward the appointed hour. At the exact, predetermined hour, the alarm rings. The event scheduled, by your own choice and will, was completed at the designated time. So it was with Christ’s birth. God planned that event by His own choice and will. God put in motion the time schedule that would carry through 4,000 years of history. Creation would come, the nation of Israel would be born, priests and prophets would minister. God’s time clock for the incarnation was ticking away through all these events and now it was the hour of completion and Jesus was born!

Man had nothing to do with the birth of Christ; it was all God’s planning. What joyous confidence this message should bring to the believer! The God of heaven is in control. Let this Christmas season be a time of awe and wonder in worship of a Sovereign God who sent forth His Son to become man’s heavenly Saviour.

II. Christ’s Birth Is According To God’s Performance

The action of Christ’s incarnation was God’s sending Him into the world. Christ came as God’s messenger or ambassador. His coming is viewed as a commission from God—to serve in this world as God’s representative. Christ came from the majesty of heaven to the misery of earth; from the glory of God to the groaning of men; from the worship of angels to the work of redemption. This grand statement supports the fact that Christ was pre-existent with the Father and came forth into the world at the Father’s direction.

Isaiah saw this event prophetically when he wrote, “. . . for unto us a Son is given . . .” (Isa. 9:6). Here is the deity of Christ unveiled as the pre-existent Son of God that John wrote about. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . .” (John 1:1, 2)

This Christmas may we let the manger become a throne of worship as we honor the heaven sent, only beloved Son of God who resided there and was sent forth to the world by our heavenly Father.

III. Christ’s Birth Is According To God’s Power

Christ’s birth was highly unusual and out of the ordinary. Paul says in Gal. 4:4 that He was “. . . made of a woman.” This is not the same as making a pie or a loaf of bread. It means to bring into a new state of being. Sometimes the Greek word is translated “born” (Rom. 1:3). Other times it is translated “became” (John 1:14). Some scholars like John Eadie believe that the use of “woman” here simply means Christ had a human birth. Other men, such as John Calvin, maintain that the miraculous conception and birth was in view in this clause. Most often a genealogy identifies a child as the “seed” of the father. Christ’s birth was not by the natural power of a man and a woman coming together to

produce a child. To single out just the woman in this text is to give a clear reference to the virgin conception and birth of our Lord.

All through Scripture the promise was given that the Messiah would be miraculously born just of the woman. Genesis 3:15 called him “. . . the seed of the woman.” Isaiah 7:14 prophesied “. . . a virgin shall conceive . . .” Matthew’s genealogy records Jesus’ birth in the feminine singular as of Mary alone (Matt. 1:16). Mary’s annunciation moment supports this view of Christ’s birth as the angel, in one of the Scripture’s most holy and sacred scenes says, “. . . the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee . . .” (Luke 1:35). The power for Christ’s birth is divine, not human! All the perfection of God’s omnipotence lies in Bethlehem’s manger. The time has come for a new perspective on the birth of Jesus. That is to recognize that He came BY the power of God WITH all the power of God AS the Almighty God.

IV. Christ’s Birth Is According To God’s Purpose

Christ came “. . . made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4,5). This statement has startling significance. Christ is the Lord of the Law as its author and giver, yet in His birth He came in subjection to His own Law. Whereas His deity was unveiled in being “. . . born of a woman,” His humanity is revealed in His subjection to the Law. Being born “. . . under the Law” carries two specific connotations. First, that He was ruled or governed by the Law’s commands. Second, that He obeyed or fulfilled the Law. Christ did not come to do away with the Law of God, but to fulfill it (Matt 5:17).

Redemption becomes the far reaching result of Christ’s miraculous birth. This was the purpose of God from the beginning. For Christ to accomplish redemption He must first stand in every man’s place, under the Law, tested in all points as a man, yet without sin. In this position of perfect, sinless humanity, Christ became God’s perfect, flawless substitute lamb of sacrifice for man’s sin. Also, to redeem man from the curse of the Law He had to be in a position to take man’s curse of sin, of shame, of separation from God. The Law demanded sin’s wages of death be paid! In His body Christ paid the debt of humanity’s sin. In His body He died in full, legal satisfaction of the Law.

God is the primary actor in Christ’s birth. Man stands on the sidelines in wonder and amazement. Here is a lovely, pure virgin who is highly favored with God. Upon her comes the power of God, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and the product . . . the incarnation of God in human flesh. Without the virgin birth by the plan, performance, power, and purpose of God, Jesus Christ is no more than any historical, religious leader. Such a condition leaves man in a state of total lostness, without a Saviour and without hope of heaven.

The church stands on the threshold of the world’s 21st century since God sent forth His Son into the world. Time is measured from the timeless moment of Christ’s birth! Preaching is inspired by the

precious moment of Christ's birth. Worship is encouraged by the excitement of Christ's birth. May this Christmas season take on new meaning for you and your family as you honor the Son from heaven.

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Dr. Elvin K. Mattison (Ph.D., Wayne State University) was a distinguished pastor, educator, and theologian with a profound commitment to ministry and theological education. Dr. Mattison dedicated 22 years to pastoral ministry in Michigan and Connecticut before transitioning to academia. He served as a professor at institutions including Spurgeon Baptist Bible College in Mulberry, Florida; Northwestern Baptist Seminary in Tacoma, Washington; and Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa.

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