

“The Birth of a Saviour”

25 December 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome

Lighting of the Advent Candles

Hymn of Preparation: Love Came Down At Christmas

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-20

Sermon:

I. The miracle conception

Mary is a young girl, from a small-town called Nazareth, who is pledged to be married to a man named Joseph from the tribe of David. She is visited by the Angel Gabriel and told she is highly favoured, and the Lord is with her. The visit by the angel and the message he delivered greatly troubles her, that she will become pregnant with a very special child. *“Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his Kingdom will never end.”*

Mary naturally enough has a question; she knows how babies are conceived (v34) and this is not the way! She understands this is highly unusual and will create difficulty for her, but she does not appear to doubt God. There would be numerous issues raised in her mind, how will this be, since I am a virgin and she and Joseph (Matthew’s account) worried about the difficulty of the perception that she had sex outside marriage. Having a baby outside of marriage was considered an evil disgraceful thing, such evil was to be purged from Jewish society, the lawful punishment was death by stoning. This was so difficult for them, particularly Mary, and as we see God does answer her question and he deals gently and tenderly with her in his explanation of the miracle conception.

God speaks to her through the angel, in an honest but respectful way, Luke records it in v35 *“the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy one to be born will be called the Son of God”*. It appears Mary fully understands that reality and wonderfully communicates that understanding in her song of praise, which we call the Magnificat. (v46-55)

Our theme miracle births have focused on births to older couples, primarily to show that the birth was totally due to God’s intervention and making the conception possible. The Christmas story conception of Jesus raises the issue to a different level of miracle because the angel’s explanation is that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and there was no human involvement. It is really the most incredible miracle in the Christian story. The child born to Mary was God come to earth in full humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Humanly speaking it is impossible, and that is accepted by the angel, but he concludes with reference to both Mary and her cousin Elizabeth who was old and barren, in v37 *“nothing is impossible with God.”* It was an impossible thing and of God, that we are being told to believe.

Some argue that the miraculous conception is not important. They want us to focus on Jesus and his good life, not on the impossibility of how he was conceived. Yet rejecting the virgin conception will suggest the bible cannot be fully trusted if we reject what Matthew, Luke and John all say was the truth about Jesus' conception, then it would lead us to question the truth of the bible narrative on everything. However more importantly to reject the conception narrative as untrue strikes at the very heart of who Jesus was. Was he only human, and not fully divine? The miracle conception confirms Jesus was both fully God and fully man and because of that fact he became the mediator between Holy God and sinful humanity and therefore our only saviour.

The miraculous conception is fundamental to saving faith. Mary believed it and she said, *"I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said."* *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour."*

If you and I are to be similarly blessed by God, we must believe his word to us and allow it to be planted with power into our hearts and minds to conceive God within us and grow a relationship with him. Jesus is the word. This is how we become God's children, born not of natural descent or of a husband's will but born of God.

II. The virgin birth

Mary and Joseph must go to Bethlehem because Caesar Augustus, the Roman ruler had called a census, and they must register in the tribal home of David. The baby is due shortly, it's going to be a tough journey all the way there, but what can they do but go?

The labour started while in Bethlehem, but there was no place to stay, and Joseph could only find an animal stable because the inn was full.

While Joseph and Mary recover from the birth of their baby in what were very difficult circumstances God sends a message to shepherds on the hills above Bethlehem and they go to see if what the angels told them was correct. *"Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord."*¹⁶ *So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.*

Mary contemplates the reality of all that she has seen and heard, pondering them in her heart. It is my prayer that we will do the same.

Read these words, believe these words, explore the truth of these words, and experience the reality of God's salvation as Mary and the Shepherds have done as the word of God the Lord Jesus Christ is born in our hearts.

Praise: While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks

Announcements

Prayers for Others

Closing Hymn: O Come, All You Faithful

Benediction

