

“After putting her children to bed, a mother changed into old slacks and a droopy blouse and proceeded to wash her hair. As she heard the children getting more and more rambunctious, her patience grew thin. At last she threw a towel around her head and stormed into their room, putting them back to bed with stern warnings. As she left the room, she heard her three-year-old say with a trembling voice, “Who was that?”

After the birth, life, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, some people were saying the very same thing: “Who was that?” And some strange answers began to surface. Much the same answers that some were trying to give when Jesus was still teaching in Galilee. Most were not at all satisfactory.

Much like some might try to offer answers about Jesus’ identity yet today. Among other things, there were those who in the early church tried to deny the virgin birth of Jesus. The Church worked on supplying a fully credible statement of our faith for Christians, and a primary statement was that faith was the Nicene Creed. This was based upon scripture and solidified a faith in the Church of the virgin birth of Jesus. Looking at today’s scripture we see a clear explanation of Jesus’ birth. Let’s look at the who, what, where, when, and then, more importantly, the why and how.

[1] Questions to Answer: “Who was that?”

+Who? There were 6 figures. Elizabeth, God, the angel Gabriel, a virgin pledged to be married whose name is Mary (Luke (1:27), and Joseph who is a descendant of David, and of course, Jesus. That is clear.

+What is all excitement about? A son is to be born. Clear again.

+Where is this birth announcement occurring? The announcement is in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. This is also to offer clarity.

+When will this be? Well, it is already the 6th month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. So, the process is already in motion to fulfil God’s plan for this birth. Clear here as well.

+Why is this birth occurring? This is most important as it speaks to “who was that?” This is the birth of Jesus who is the Son of the Most High, and the One who will sit on the throne of David unending kingdom. Is this clear for you?

I hope that we can all agree on this much. Luke has clearly done his homework. Now the question that seems to bother us most is “how?” Mary herself asks this question, and we need to go no further for an answer. She tells the angel that she is still a virgin, so it doesn’t seem possible to her. (You don’t lie to an angel.)

+HOW? Now we can deal with the “how.” (Luke 1:34) “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” This is the practical question of the modern scientific mind also? The limits of modern reasoning conclude that this is impossible. Some students of the Bible today wrestle with translations and say this Greek word could mean “young woman” and not just “virgin.” However, when Mary questions, she isn’t referring to her age but her given state of life. She clearly meant virgin. So, faith must be employed to grasp the miraculous.

HOW? The angel explains that straight-forwardly. (Luke 1:35) The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on 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.”

This is how. The matter then becomes one of faith and not reason.

Luke 1:38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered, “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. There is her statement of faith in the matter. What we are ready is presented with clarity, not smoke and mirrors.

[2] Mary is not the focus of this passage, Jesus is. However, a word about Mary before moving on. There are 3 statements in the scripture not to be overlooked.

Gabriel says: (Luke 1:28, 30) and Elizabeth says: (Luke 1:42)

²⁸ The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

³⁰ But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!

Mary was highly favored in God’s sight. Let’s not take that lightly or move past the statement of an angel too swiftly. Add to that the exclamation of Elizabeth about Mary: “Blessed are you among women...” and we have one very special person before us. Mary is blessed among women, and full of favor. Now Protestant churches do not pray to Mary. Rather, they hold that Mary prays to Jesus. “...Though we are not to pray to her, yet we ought to praise God for her...” [Matthew Henry’s Commentary, Luke 1:39-56] “Interesting enough, there is not one prayer to Mary in the entire Bible—not one instance of her miraculously helping anyone, nor any promise that she could or would.”

[Danny Vierra, “Is the Virgin Mary Dead or Alive?” p. 16.]

We are concerned with the Virgin birth of Jesus. The Immaculate Conception does not relate to Jesus.

“Did you know that when you mention the name ‘Immaculate Conception,’ [some believe] the title applies to the virgin birth of Jesus? But that is incorrect. The Immaculate Conception, which is a Roman Catholic doctrine, doesn’t apply to Jesus at all. It refers to the birth of the Virgin Mary, who, according to the Roman Catholic Church, was conceived without the stain of original sin.”

[Danny Vierra, “Is the Virgin Mary Dead or Alive?” p. 12.]

Neither do we think or speak about the Assumption of Mary into heaven. Again, there is no mention of this in the Scriptures, and since we use the Holy Scriptures for our instruction, we don’t make such matters an article of faith.

We regard Mary much like we highly regard and honor Abraham, who we call the Father of faith, but we do not pray to him. We share faith with him and with Mary in Jesus our Lord to whom we all pray. We extoll Jesus, who came to free us from sin, as Son of the Highest, the Holy One, and the Son of God. If we make light of the virgin birth, haven’t we in a sense dishonored Mary and Jesus?

[3] With or Without God

By the way, Joseph gets the same message in a dream as Matthew 1:23 indicates; “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

God with us; humanity with Jesus Christ in this world. It sounds wonderful and it is God’s will and purpose, but the sad reminder comes to us on the news far too often, that such is not the case. Often the world seems to try to exist without God. I could remind you of what a world with God looks like by recanting some things you have seen and heard on the news, but really, Ralph Waldo Emerson described it better than I can: “Unlovely, nay frightful, is the solitude of the soul which is without God in the world-this chill, houseless, fatherless, aimless Cain, the man who hears only the sound of his own footsteps in God's resplendent creation.” -Ralph Waldo Emerson

[<https://www.rwe.org/the-preacher/>, Bible Illustrator, All 3 in 1, “Loneliness”, 1331, 10/95]

Jesus Christ came to provide the remedy for sin since Adam and Eve first hid from God in the Garden of Eden. Gen. 3 Why don’t people run toward and flock to the remedy offered by Jesus. Brandon Mitts suggests why some don’t in a story. The story goes:

A story is told of an elderly Christian man who was walking through a park on a cold wintry afternoon when he noticed a pile of birdseed that someone had put out so that the birds would be kept from dying. There were dozens of birds gathered for this unexpected feeding. But when the man walked closer, the birds became anxious. A step closer and they began fluttering their wings. A step closer and the birds left their feast unfinished and flew away. The man stopped and reflected on what had just happened.

Why did the sparrows scatter even though he had no hurtful intentions? Then he realized that it was not his intentions that caused the birds to scatter...it was because he was SO BIG. He could have never walked among them unless he became a sparrow, flew down to them, and shared their life. Isn't that what God did for us when He sent Jesus? Since the beginning of time, He never meant or wanted anything but love for us and yet we would not turn to Him. So, He sent Jesus to walk among us...as God and man.

[Brandon Mitts, Putting the "I" in Immanuel, SermonCentral.com]

Being in the presence of God can be an overwhelming experience as Adam and Eve show us. Just a little bit of guilt and the size of God can send us into hiding. We are to encourage others who react this way, to first just stay in the Lord’s presence, and then, more and more, to seek His holy presence in our lives.

Moses is an example of someone who overcame his fear and spent time in His presence. So was the mysterious Enoch of the Bible. We are told that: “Enoch walked faithfully with God...” (Genesis 5:24)

Do note that God didn’t walk with Enoch, but Enoch walked with God. It isn’t so much that God will go with us wherever we wander. Not at all, but we will walk with the Lord on the path he selects for us.

So, “who was that?” The Lord of heaven and earth, the Prince of Peace, the Mighty Counselor, the Everlasting Savior. That is who was born, and the why was so that we could dwell with Him. Let this faith open your heart today to Jesus.