

## ***Beyond Conception!***

*2 Samuel 7<sup>1-11,16</sup>; The Magnificat; Romans 16<sup>25-end</sup>; Luke 1<sup>26-38</sup>*

*Nothing will be impossible with God.  
[Luke 1<sup>37</sup>]*

I believe in the Virgin Birth! When I say this it says much more about God than me! The heart of our faith is not what we think is possible but what we think God can do. Could we, should we, trust a God that is limited to what we can imagine or contained in what we can understand?

If we can say that we believe that God created the universe and that he had such a sense of humour that he made us in his image, then believing in a God who can make a pubescent girl in a village backwater in Israel pregnant is not such a major leap of faith.

Of course, there are questions – why Mary? Why Nazareth? Why at that time? That is answered with the simple statement in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: **When the right time finally came, God sent his own son. He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might become God's children** [Gal 4<sup>4</sup>].

So how do we respond to a sceptical world in defence of that cornerstone of our faith, the Virgin Birth?

- ✘ Mary was probably around 12 when Gabriel appeared to at her family home in Nazareth. She was engaged but not married, waiting for her to begin menstruation so that she could marry. If you add the ages - Mary at 12 or 13 giving birth to Jesus' traditional 33 years old at death - that would mean that Mary was 46-ish when the Christian message was beginning to be told. Luke writes his Gospel because he isn't content that the story is adequately told by the other Evangelists and by the time he is writing (probably around 70CE) the eyewitnesses, those who knew the story because they were there or even part of it, would have corrected him. Note, too, that Luke is a Physician and so must have had very strong reasons for including Mary's **how can this be since I am a virgin?**

- ✘ The Virgin Birth is essential because it demonstrates both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus. The simple fact that a mother gives birth to a baby clearly shows that Jesus is human. Alongside that, the statement from Gabriel makes clear that the conception is not normal: **the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you** makes it clear that this is God's work and Matthew records that Joseph accepts and respects this because he **had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son**. This marriage of humanity and divinity is unique in human history and is vital to the Incarnation.
- ✘ There are supernatural births in Scripture – Isaac, Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist: none of them make any claim to avoid procreation involving both the mother and the father – their willingness to engage in 'cuddling' is an expression of their faith in the miracle God will do! It is Mary's innocent **how can this be since I am a virgin?** and the statement regarding Joseph that **had no marital relations with her** that reinforce the uniqueness of this birth.
- ✘ Some make the observation that, apart from Matthew and Luke, the New Testament makes no mention of the Virgin Birth and suggest that this means it isn't something that the Early Church thought was important. My understanding is that, in the Early Church, it was so accepted that it wasn't seen as important to mention it. In John 1<sup>14</sup> it says **the Word became flesh** which shocked the both the Hebrew and the Greek world as it is not wearing a body like a coat but becoming flesh. God stepped out of timelessness into time and from the freedom of holding all the universe within himself, is confined to a body.

If we take the miracle of Virgin Birth away, we take away the plausibility of any miracles, including the resurrection and we don't have much of our faith left! Personally, I tire of any faith that makes no demands – there are demands on our time; our money; and our service. The Creed demands from us our allegiance not our avoidance – ***Credo: I believe in Jesus Christ..... who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary!***