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The Incarnation of the Son of God

The Prophetic Forerunner of Christ

John the Baptist occupies the peculiar role of being a prophetic bridge from the Old Testament prophets to the New. Luke gives in detail the account of his birth as subject to special revelation to Zacharias his father. In the chronologies provided in the first chapter of Luke the Annunciation to Mary occurs three months before the birth of John the Baptist. The subsequent birth of Christ is therefore presented in the context of prophetic divine preparation that a great work of God is about to be consummated. John the Baptist later in his public ministry was also to be a forerunner of Christ in the sense of providing a spiritual preparation and warning to the people of Israel culminating in the baptism of Christ by John and the transfer of John's disciples to the Lord Jesus.

Apart from the denial of the supernatural, there is no bona fide reason for questioning the account given by Luke, substantiated as it is, by the historical events which followed.

The Annunciation to Mary

In the Gospel narratives only Luke records the Annunciation to Mary. With fitting restraint and simplicity Luke unfolds this dramatic incident which he may have heard from the lips of Mary herself.

The Annunciation is given the background of a similar announcement to Zacharias by an unknown angel. In the account of the Annunciation to Mary the Angel Gabriel is

especially mentioned, an important angel earlier sent with a special revelation to Daniel the Prophet. His tidings to Mary were introduced by the fact that she was highly favored and had been chosen of the Lord for an unusual honor. She was to bring forth a Son whom she should call Jesus. This Son would be called the Son of the Most High and to Him the Lord God would give the throne of His father David and over the house of Jacob He would reign forever as there would be no end to His kingdom.

In answer to the natural question raised by Mary concerning how this should come about, since she was an unmarried woman, the angel replied: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God." In these unmistakable terms Mary is informed that her Son would have no human father, but that He should be indeed the Son of God who would fulfill the promises given to David of a Son to reign over His house forever. In confirmation of this unusual promise and evidence of the supernatural power of God, Mary is informed that her kinswoman, Elizabeth, had also conceived a son in her old age as a demonstration of the power of God.

To these tidings Mary replies in devout submission: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." The simplicity of this narrative, the avoidance of all extravagant details, and the very natural movement of the conversation between Mary and the angel testify to the genuineness of this portion of Scripture and lead to the theological conclusion that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. The Magnificat of Mary recorded in Luke 1:46-55 gives eloquent

expression to the godly faith of Mary and provides some indication as to why God chose her for this unique honor.

The Annunciation to Joseph

It is in keeping with the purposes of the Gospel of Matthew that it, rather than Luke, should record the Annunciation to Joseph. In Matthew the narrative deals with the legal right of Christ to the throne of David. The Annunciation to Joseph apparently was subsequent to that of Mary, and the time interval between the two annunciations was undoubtedly a test of faith both to Mary and to Joseph. When Joseph became aware of the fact that Mary to whom he was betrothed was with child, though he was a righteous man as the Gospel of Matthew indicates, he was not willing to make his problem public, but intended to break the betrothal privately. As he contemplated this action it is recorded in Matthew 1:20 that an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. To Joseph the tidings were given: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." The angel goes on to explain: "And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." The angel further points out to Joseph that this is a fulfillment of the prediction recorded in Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." In keeping with this instruction Joseph took to himself his wife, thereby avoiding any scandal that might attach to Mary and at the same time giving to the Son that was born the legal right to the throne of David.

The Birth of Jesus Christ

Though the Apostle Paul in his epistles gives frequent indication of knowing the details of the birth of Jesus Christ, only Matthew and Luke give us the precise account, Matthew dwelling upon the fact that Christ was born in Bethlehem and Luke tracing many of the lesser details. Here again, as in other aspects of the narrative, the simplicity of the account is one of the important testimonies to its authenticity.

Luke goes to great detail to date the birth of Christ, linking it with a decree that went out from Caesar Augustus when Quirinius was governor of Syria (cf. Luke 2:1-2). Because of this decree Joseph needed to go to Bethlehem to register and Mary accompanied him.

The account of the birth of Christ is given in only two sentences. Luke records: "And it came to pass, while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son; and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." In utter contrast to the dignity of the Son of God and His ultimate glorification as King of kings and Lord of lords, the birth of Christ was in the rudest circumstances. Some have pictured it as being in one of the outer buildings of the inn used for cattle. Others have favored a cave nearby. The Scriptures indicate that He was laid in a manger, a rude improvised crib by the loving hands of Mary herself. His obscurity, however, was soon ended by the visitation of the angels to the shepherds in nearby fields. According to Luke's account: "And an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore

afraid." Unto the shepherds the angel said: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you: Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." As the angel delivered his message, suddenly, according to Luke's account, a multitude of angels appeared in the heavens chanting: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Under the stimulus of this dramatic experience the shepherds lost no time in coming to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in the manger.

Much of the discussion on the virgin birth takes for granted that it is possible to ignore the carefully worded record of Scripture. It should be noted that not only does Luke give us a very specific account which states in plain language that Christ was born of a virgin, but the account of Matthew written by a different author and from a different point of view confirms this explanation.

Throughout the rest of the New

Testament there is constant assumption that Christ is indeed the very Son of God and that He was born of a woman but not a man. This is the teaching of Paul in Galatians 4:4 as well as the prophetic record of the book of Revelation 12:1-2. The sign promised through Isaiah 7:14 of a virgin bearing a son to be called Immanuel and the description of this child as One who bears the title Mighty God in Isaiah 9:6 add additional confirming evidence. If the supernatural power of God to perform such an act as this be admitted, there is no logical reason for not accepting the plain intent of the

Scriptural portions bearing on this great theme. The wisest of scholars as well as the most simple of humble believers have bowed alike at the manger in Bethlehem and acknowledged that the infant, born of the virgin and laid in swaddling clothes, is their Lord and Savior in whom is resident all the attributes of the infinite God.