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IS THE VIRGIN BIRTH MIRACLE OR MYTH?

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“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ — which means, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23 NIV).

In an op-ed piece published by the *New York Times* (August 15, 2003), columnist Nicholas Kristof used the virgin birth of Jesus to shamelessly promote the Enlightenment’s false dichotomy between faith and reason. In his words, “The faith in the Virgin Birth reflects the way American Christianity is becoming less intellectual and more mystical over time.” Kristof ends his piece with the following patronizing comment: “The heart is a wonderful organ, but so is the brain.” Those who have a truly open mind, however, should resist rejecting the virgin birth before examining the evidence for it.

Several lines of evidence support the miracle of the virgin birth (technically it should be called the virgin *conception*). First, miracles are not only possible, but they are necessary in order to make sense of the universe in which we live. According to modern science, the universe not only had a beginning, but it is unfathomably fine tuned to support life. Not only so, but the origin of life, information in the genetic code, irreducible complexity in biological systems, and the phenomenon of the human mind pose intractable difficulties for merely natural explanations. Reason, therefore, forces us to look beyond the natural world to a supernatural Designer who periodically intervenes in the affairs of His created handiwork. In other words, if we are willing to believe that God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), we should have no problem accepting the virgin birth.

Furthermore, reason and evidence compel us to acknowledge that the Bible is divine rather than human in origin. Manuscript evidence, archaeology, predictive prophecy, and the science of statistical probability together provide a persuasive case for the reliability of Scripture; thus, we may legitimately appeal to the Word of God as evidence for the virgin birth. Christ, moreover, who demonstrated that He was God in human flesh through the undeniable fact of His resurrection, pronounced the Scriptures infallible (John 10:35; 14:24–26; 15:26–27; 16:13; Heb. 1:1–2). If Christ concurs with the biblical record, therefore, no one should have the temerity to contradict its claims.

Finally, while it is currently popular to suggest that the Gospel writers borrowed the virgin birth motif from pagan mythology, the facts say otherwise. Stories of gods having sexual intercourse with women — such as the sun god Apollo becoming a snake and impregnating the mother of Augustus Caesar — hardly parallel the virgin birth account in the Gospels. Moreover, given the strict monotheistic worldview of New Testament authors, it should stretch credulity beyond the breaking point to suppose they borrowed from pagan mythologies, especially myths extolling the sexual exploits of pagan gods! It has become all too common for people to buy into what has been well described as “a unique brand of fundamentalism” — a skepticism that values rhetoric and emotion over reason and evidence. Those who suppose that the virgin birth is mythological would be well advised to carefully consider defensible arguments rather than uncritically swallowing dogmatic assertions.

— Hank Hanegraaff

For further study, see R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).