

# **Sermon Text for November 2, 2014**

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Isaiah 7:10-14, Matthew 1:18-25

## **“The Holy Spirit and Mary”**

Who can tell me why just saw that totally random video? Why is that? Who knows? Come on, say it with me: I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary. This last line in our Apostles' Creed tells us that that we believe in the Christmas story as told to us by the Gospel writers. We believe that Jesus Christ had God as his father and Mary as his mother.

Now, today is one of those PG-13 Sundays when we are going to be talking about some issues that might cause me to blush. I mean it is hard enough to say virgin birth in public and in church at that, much less give an entire sermon on why we believe in this classic theological doctrine. What do we mean when we say that we believe that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, and what difference does it make to us?

Biologically we know what it means, but today we will see the impact theologically this statement has upon us. This declaration tells us that Jesus Christ was someone completely different from anyone who has ever walked upon the face of the earth. Yet it also confirms the fact that Jesus did walk the earth and undergo what we experience every single day. The miraculous virgin birth of Christ points to God's undeniable presence with us. And it also reminds us that miracles are not proof of God's presence, but rather God's intimate, immediate presence with us is proof that miracles should and do abound.

You know when you grow up in a family with four boys, there are just some issues that never come up and you just never learn. Being a dad of three girls has opened up a brand new world to me that sometimes leaves me breathless and dumbfounded. I need to tell you that this was a hard sermon to preach on. I almost chickened out and asked Stacy and the girls to go to Wesley but then I heard he was preaching on Rahab so I decided not to.

I had a hard time dealing with the concept of how to preach the Holy Spirit conception and the virgin birth. Then, I got away from the details and tried to look at the big picture and things started to get clearer. Matthew, more than any other Gospel, insists

and repeats the birth narrative as we traditionally have heard it and believe it. He begins with a genealogy, then our first verse for today states: “The birth of Jesus the Christ.” The Greek word for birth, and even the word for genealogy is *egeneto*. What does that sound like to you? That’s right, the term Genesis comes from the same word so what we find in this Matthew account is not only the genealogy, the birth, but the very beginning of Jesus the Messiah as recorded here on earth.

Usually we do not need to explain how a person comes to be to adults, and certainly not in church, but we find from the very beginning that this is not a usual case. Mary and Joseph are engaged to be married. Now the text specifies that they were not living together. In that day and age a young girl and boy would be engaged, considered married, but the marriage wasn’t official until they actually moved in together. Today it seems the opposite to be true. A couple lives together, then wants to get married in the church. Amazingly, or not so amazingly for those of us who have believed very strongly in celibacy before marriage, those couples who live together to try it out before they marry have a much higher divorce rate.

But that is not the case here with Mary and Joseph. They were good kids. They had never known each other in the biblical sense. I love the way this Scripture introduces the miracle of the virgin conception and birth. It states very calmly and plainly that Mary was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Mary is an amazing young woman. Luke lifts her up like no other woman in Scripture. She is understandably afraid, but then she offers herself as the handmaiden of God. Here Joseph is the focus and we see his strength of character as well. He was willing to send her home quietly, divorcing her but without bringing her before the tribal leaders to have her stoned to death. Then he was willing to stay with her after the angel spoke to him. And finally, Scripture states in the last verses here that he had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son.

The statistics show that the most common time of infidelity is when the couple is pregnant. What we find here is an example of a couple who did not give up on each other no matter what the circumstances because they were able to hear God’s voice in the confusion of their lives. I hope some of you take heart as we are a few days away from Valentine’s Day. But this passage isn’t about marriage relationships, it is about the birth, the virgin birth, the genesis, the beginning of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Jesus begins his life with a mother. Jesus begins his life as we all began our lives, in the womb of our mothers. Tony Campolo is convinced that each one of us is a winner. Why does he say that, aside from the fact that Christ died for each of us individually. We all started out in our biological lives in a race, and our odds were a million to one of winning that race. It was a swimming race and we were all swimming upstream, trying desperately to get to the prize before anyone else. Guess what, just by the fact that you are here today listening to this sermon, you are a winner. You beat the million to one odds, each one of us can be proud of that. I told it was going to be a pg-13 rated sermon.

In the early 1900's there was a time in the mainstream churches when the belief in the virgin birth was considered a test of who was orthodox and who was not. Today, we consider and believe in the virgin birth and we have no problem describing Mary as the mother of God, even though it may sound contradictory. Mary was the true blood mother of Jesus Christ the Lord who was, and is and ever shall be God. But beware of making Mary anything more than a sinful human being like you and me.

Jesus also had a father, the Holy Spirit who is described as the agent of conception. This is where I started to scratch my head. The only way I was able to figure this out is to remember that what we are not trying to make a biological point, but rather a theological one. Biologically it is illogical, but theologically it is the only thing that makes sense. As we read in Scripture, especially in the Isaiah passage that we read earlier, we see that the reason Jesus is sent to us is because as humans we are powerless to save ourselves.

We need the direct intervention of God for any redemption and salvation to take place. Only by God intervening could something completely new be introduced to the human race in order to save it from destruction. We couldn't do it on our own so the presence of the Holy Spirit brought about a redeeming Savior born of, as Isaiah states, a young girl or as Matthew states, a virgin. Now for some people it is a problem that the prophecy of Isaiah says a young girl and Matthew states a virgin. But in the first century the term young girl and virgin was synonymous, unfortunately today that is no longer the case.

What difference does the conception of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary make in our lives? It ought to clarify why we believe that Jesus was both and fully 100% God and 100% human. It reinforces the fact that as this Matthew and the Isaiah

Scripture states that Emmanuel, God is with us, God was one of us, God experienced a real, not a make believe, but a real painful birth, a life and a death. The difference that it makes is that we recognize that this our God became one of us and was raised from the dead to show us that one day we too will share in that promise. Jesus went through the stages of life that we do. Naomi when she was little liked to pretend that she was reading and would call us together as a family to read a story to us. One day she called us together and she was looking at my Bible and she said: "Okay, today we are going to read the story of when Jesus dies." I looked at her and said, that is a sad story. She gave me one of those looks that I know I am going to see again when she is a teenager, like, dad don't you know anything. She looked at me that way and said, It's not a sad story, because he rises up again afterward.

Our God did not have to go through all that we went through. Jesus did not have to have his genesis the way we all did. In no way does the virgin birth prove that Jesus was God, just as none of Jesus' miracles prove that he is God. No, his virgin birth gives us another sign which allows us to understand that our Savior was one of us and began as one of us. The miracle of Christmas does not make Jesus either God or human. Rather, because Jesus was fully God and fully human, the miracle of Christmas was able to occur.

This week as we remember those whose humanity was fully realized in the resurrection, don't ever feel isolated, as if you are on your own. I am telling you today that you have a Savior who loves you and wants to be your Lord by directing and guiding your life. He has the experience to do it, and he has the power to make a difference in your life.

Allow yourselves to be assured of Jesus' understanding of your life because he has been there and done that. His deity never got in the way of his humanity, in fact as Scripture states, it allows us to know that Emmanuel, God is with us. Accept him and live in his presence. Amen.