

## **Introduction**

I came across an article on *Parenting.com* titled "**10 Birth Stories You Won't Believe**". They include the following: (1) 23 year-old becomes world's youngest grandmother; (2) Woman gives birth several hours after running a marathon; (3) Woman who didn't know she was pregnant gives birth; and (4) Iowa woman births 14 pound 12 ounce baby. Those birth stories, by their nature, define what "**won't believe**" means. They're "**uncommon**" or "**rare.**" There's the possibility they could happen again but they probably won't.

There's a birth story though that's more than just uncommon or rare. It's singular instead – the only one of its kind. It had never happened before and will never happen again. I'm referring of course to the birth story of Jesus. Matthew 1:18-25 records it and reveals three aspects of it that make it singular. I'm going to explain each of those and then their profound implication to us.

## **How Jesus Was Conceived**

One aspect of Jesus' birth story that makes it singular is how He was conceived. Notice the flabbergasting detail in verses 23 and 25. Mary, His mother, was a virgin when she birthed Him.

I know how impossible that sounds, which is why so many, even professing Christians, deny it. Several years ago, Pew Forum conducted a survey about the Virgin Birth of Jesus. It found that 30% of church attenders in mainline denominations don't believe it.

But one can't get plainer than verses 23 and 25. Mary was a virgin when she conceived. She was still a virgin when she gave birth.

That implies the essential miracle of Christmas. It was how Jesus was conceived. Verse 20 explains it this way, "**for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.**" Every human is conceived in the same way. A microscopic particle of matter from a man's body and a microscopic particle of matter from a woman's body

meet. But Jesus was conceived far differently. It was by the Holy Spirit directly intervening in Mary's body, in one of three ways. In my view, that way was this. He created an embryo in her womb without using a spermatozoon and an ovum. I believe Jesus received nothing genetically from Mary and Joseph in other words. He had human DNA that the Holy Spirit created outside biological processes just as He did Adam's DNA.

That implies several things. One is that Jesus was uncontaminated by the sin that always passes from parents to child. He was born without the sinful nature with which all of us are born. That in turn enabled Him to live the perfect sinless life He lived.

Now, the miraculous conception and subsequent Virgin Birth of Jesus together is what we call a fundamental of the faith. Rob Bell though, the highly successful ex-pastor of the Mars Hill Church, claims in his book *Velvet Elvis* that it isn't. It wouldn't be faith-shattering, he asserts, if we discovered Jesus had a biological father. Why? It's because the Virgin Birth isn't foundational to the Christian faith. But he's wrong. It is. Carl F.H. Henry, who died in 2003, was the dean of evangelical theologians. He wrote concerning the Virgin Birth that it is **"the essential, historical indication of the Incarnation (God coming in the flesh), . . . . bringing out the nature, purpose, and bearing of this work of God to salvation."** No miraculous conception – then no Incarnation. Jesus wasn't God in the flesh. It's as simple as that.

## **What Jesus Was**

A second aspect of Jesus' birth story makes it singular. It's what He was. Every baby that has been born and that will be born is purely human and thus, the same in kind as all the rest. But Mary's baby wasn't. He was completely different in kind.

Verse 23 reveals how He was. He was Immanuel, which means **"God with us."** Jesus was God come in the flesh, what we call **"the Incarnation."** In 451 AD, the Chalcedon Council articulated five truths about the Incarnation that we need to understand and believe. Let me

quickly identify and explain each one.

First, Jesus had two natures. He was divine, the Second Person of God, and at the same time human, a man. Remaining what He was, God, he became what He was not, man. He had two natures.

Second, each nature of Jesus was full and complete. That He became human didn't mean He stopped being God and started being man. He didn't give up any of His divinity when He was born. Theologian J.I. Packer explains it well in his book *Knowing God*: "**He was not now God minus some elements of His deity, but God plus all that He had made His own by taking manhood to Himself.**" Simply put, He was fully God and fully man – 100% God and 100% man.

Third, each nature of Jesus was distinct. His divine and human natures were united. But the properties of each were preserved. His two natures didn't alter one another's essential properties. His divine nature was only divine and His human nature was only human. He said, for instance, that He didn't know the time of His Second Coming. How do we explain that if He was the all-knowing God? It's that His human nature didn't become knowing of everything through its union with His divine nature. And His divine nature didn't become ignorant of anything through its union with His human nature. Each nature was distinct.

Fourth, Jesus was only one person. Having two natures didn't make Him two persons. As the Chalcedonian Creed says it, He "**is to be acknowledged in two natures . . . . concurring in one Person . . . . not parted or divided into two persons.**" His two natures existed together in such a way that they constituted "**one thing**" in other words. He was, therefore, one person not two.

And finally, fifth, what was true of only one nature was nonetheless also true of the whole person Jesus was. So, if there was something only His divine nature did, such as change the molecular structure of water to wine, He could have said, "**I did it.**" Or if there was something only His human nature did, such as eating dinner, He could have said, "**I did it.**" What each nature did, Jesus the whole person did.

Those then are five mind-boggling truths about Mary's baby. And the word "**mind-boggling**" isn't an exaggeration. What He was, God in the flesh, was stunning, the grandest of all miracles.

### **Why Jesus Was Born**

There's a third and, for our purposes, final aspect of Jesus' birth story that makes it singular. It's why He was born.

This year, as always, Christian leaders and Christians themselves will lament the commercialization of Christmas and there's no doubt that it has been commercialized. But there's a bigger problem than that - the trivialization of Christmas. We talk about the reason for the season but most people in our culture don't have any idea what that is. They think it's people loving each other, giving to each other, or being at peace with each other, and so on. Those themes are commonplace in books, movies, ads, and conversations about Christmas, and they're good things. But we trivialize Christmas when we make any of them the reason for the season.

So what is the reason for the season? The word "**sins**" in verse 21 tells us. There's an irrational quality in our nature that compels us to do evil things. We're sinners and sin because we are.

Robert Lifton wrote a book titled *The Nazi Doctors*. He interviewed many of those highly-educated and culturally sophisticated physicians who experimented on and killed thousands of people. His most chilling discovery was the normalcy of their lives outside the concentration camps. They weren't monsters. They were ordinary people like we are who enjoyed music, picnicked, read, and loved their families.

His point was this. Under the right conditions, we're all capable of doing what they did. One writer describes it well. It's the "**banality of evil**" – the triteness or commonness of evil. In our natural state, we're at the ready to act selfishly or wickedly to meet our needs, satisfy our desires, or get respect. We're sinners who sin.

That's the overriding problem in the world and the reason Jesus was born was to solve it. Notice how the angel said it to Joseph in verse 21,

**“He will save His people from their sins.”** His virgin birth led to His perfect life, substitutionary death, historical resurrection, and climactic ascension. Those works of His enable Him to save us.

To save us means two things. First, He forgives the sins we’ve already committed. Second, He transforms us inwardly so that we don’t routinely commit more sins. We become decreasingly sinful people and increasingly righteous people until the day we die. Sin, as a result, eventually becomes exceptional and goodness and rightness normal in our inner and outer lives.

A customer service clerk in a retail store was horribly rude to a disciple of Jesus I know. 20 years ago, he told me, he would have gotten mad and been rude right back. But he didn’t. He felt compassion for the clerk and treated her with patience and kindness instead.

His response illustrates, vividly, why Jesus was born. It’s that He might save us from our sins – that He might forgive and transform us.

### **The Singular Response**

Those then are three aspects of Jesus’ birth story. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was God and man, and was born to save us from our sins. Those three aspects make it the singular birth story, the only one of its kind.

They also reveal something about Jesus. He Himself is singular. I mean by that He was and is a separate and special kind of reality, utterly unique. That’s a fact and it demands from us a response that is the same – separate, special, utterly unique. It demands from us, in other words, a singular response.

Consider how we respond, in practical terms, to the people and things in our lives? We think about them, feel about them, talk about them, take them into account in what we decide and do, perceive and interpret things in relation to them, and act upon and interact with them. Those are the practical ways we respond to people and things.

They’re also the ways we respond to Jesus. But our response to

Him is different. Since He Himself is singular, so is our response to Him. We think most routinely about Him. We feel most deeply about Him. We talk most fervently about Him. We take Him primarily into account in what we decide and do. We perceive and interpret everything primarily in relation to Him. And we act upon and interact with Him most naturally. We respond to Him, in other words, as we don't to anyone or anything else. Our response to Him is singular.

Let me flesh this out with a personal testimony. I love my wife more than myself and anyone or anything else on earth. But I think about Jesus more than I do her. I feel more deeply about Jesus than I do her. I talk more fervently about Jesus than I do her. I take Jesus not her primarily into account in what I decide and do. I perceive and interpret everything primarily in relation to Jesus, not her. And I act upon and interact with Jesus more than I do her. But it isn't just her. It's everyone else and everything else as well. I respond to Jesus in a way that I don't to anyone or anything else. My response to Him is singular.

And I'm not alone. That's what almost everyone does who understands and believes what I've preached today. Jesus is singular, which demands that our response to Him be singular as well.

## **Conclusion**

So there you have it, the birth story of Jesus, and as you can plainly see, those **"Ten Birth Stories You Won't Believe"** that I mentioned earlier pale in comparison to it. They aren't even in the same league. J.I. Packer explains why and I quote him in closing, **"Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation."** He isn't overstating the case. Nothing in fact or fiction is as fantastic as the birth story of Jesus. It truly is singular.