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Text: Luke 1:26 – 38

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Title: The surprises of Christmas 1. A pregnant virgin?

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An oxymoron is a funny thing. It literally means 'sharp blunt' so it's a great way to describe two words or ideas put together that shouldn't be. Like the Great Depression. Or Ten Kilometre fun run. The military are good at them: Partial cease-fire. Friendly fire. Civil War. Samuel Goldwyn, the old movie producer was famous for them. He once said, 'I paid too much for it, but it was worth it.' And when he was told there were too many old clichés in a script he said 'Well let's have some new clichés!'

An oxymoron makes us groan, makes us laugh.

But there is one oxymoron that should take our breath away.

There are many surprises in the Christmas story. We're going to look at them coming up to Christmas. Today's surprise is a doozy: a pregnant virgin!

Now normally you can't put those words alongside each other and still make sense.

A pregnant virgin?

It's caused a lot of pondering.

Many have rejected it as an oxymoron – it simply doesn't make sense so it can't be true. A survey was carried out in the United States of over seven thousand Protestant ministers. Depending on the denomination up to half, even sixty per cent did not believe in the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus. For many it is simply embarrassing – a logical impossibility. Critics mock Christianity, dismissing this as a fable. And even believers struggle. Mary herself asks in **Luke 1:34 How will this be, since I am a virgin?**

Much work has been done to try and explain away what the Bible has to say on this. Because the Bible is very clear that the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son. The great creeds of the early church include the virgin birth as a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. It is an essential part of the gospel.

So how do we make sense of it?

In a little while we're going to look at why it is a crucial doctrine of the faith.

But before we do we have to enter the right frame of mind.

Why do such a high percentage of Protestant ministers balk at the virgin birth? Why can they read the Bible, get to Gabriel's announcement to Mary, and say, 'No. I can't accept that.' I don't want to presume to read their minds but I can only guess that it's because it is outside logic. It's outside the realms of natural explanation. It's too much to ask that we believe that.

But a Christian songwriter called Michael Card pondered the virgin birth and wrote

That is the mystery! More than you can see.

Give up on your pondering

And fall down on your knees.

There is a touch of arrogance about saying, 'Because I can't explain it, it cannot be true!'

Thinking about the virgin birth does not mean we leave our intelligence at the front door. Some of the greatest minds in history have grappled with this doctrine and were satisfied. That's because when we come to the stable and see the Christ child, we don't leave our intelligence, but rather our pride at the door. Worship, falling down on our knees is the right first response.

Our salvation is not on our terms. It is on God's. He starts it, not us.

We are not in the position where we determine what can or cannot happen. God has done it.

I think it was Billy Graham who said this: God said it. I believe it. That settles it.
You can take one of those steps out: God said it. That settles it.

Without humility we cannot accept the truth of the gospel. It is a mystery as Michael Card said. But not a mystery to be nussed out and solved. When the Bible uses the word 'mystery' it means something that cannot be worked out by human intellect unless God reveals it.

It seems that a young teenager in Nazareth had more humility than a lot of well-educated American clergy. She heard the announcement of the virgin birth and said in **Luke 1:38 I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.**

And when she breaks into song later in **Luke 1** there is a lot in it about humility and pride. Let's have a look at it, in **Luke 1:46 – 55**. The first part of her song rejoices in what God has done for her. The second part is a song of praise to God for his character.

Let's have a look at the first part, in **verses 46 - 49**.

This is not a song of a worried woman, plagued with doubts or second thoughts. Instead, she is overwhelmed by God's unique goodness to her. But she remains humble. All nations will call her blessed, but not because she is great or special in herself. It is because God has done great things for her. She doesn't get a big head – she still recognises that God is her Saviour. Unlike some sections of the church who have wanted to make her almost equal with God, she recognises her need to be saved. The child she would bear is just as much her Saviour as everyone else's.

However the bulk of her song is not about her, but about God himself. It is a song of praise to him, and she praises three aspects of his character that we need to look closely at.

Why is Mary with child?
Why is God sending his Son into the world through her?
What reasons does she give?

It's because of God's holiness.
Because of his mercy.
Because of his faithfulness.

At the very end of **verse 49** Mary sings **Holy is his name**. God is perfectly pure. Mary recognises she needs a Saviour because when she sees God's holiness, she cannot measure up. And that is the same for you and I. God's standard is perfection. There is no sin in him, and he hates sin because it is an offence against his rule and his character.

The Bible says **the wages of sin is death**. The consequence of living in a way that basically says to God 'I don't want anything to do with you' is death.

The amazing thing about Mary's song is that that's not the end of the story. And it could have been! God could have said, 'All right, you've had your chance, you've chosen the way of sin, so now reap what you have sown.'

But he hasn't.

The very fact of the baby forming in her womb is proof that God hasn't left us to our just desserts.

That's why in **verse 50** Mary sings of God's mercy. God himself has provided a way out. He has given us the Saviour, Jesus Christ, his Son. And his salvation is available for all who fear him, Mary says.

But the trouble is many people think they don't need his mercy.

Journalist Phillip Yancey wrote a book called, **The Jesus I never knew**. As he researched the book by reading through the gospels he saw a pattern emerging. What he noticed was that as Jesus went about his ministry he attracted people who other people called 'sinners.' Prostitutes, publicans. The demon possessed and lepers. Jesus' message was uncompromising about sin, and yet many sinners were still drawn to him.

In fact, Yancey realised that it was the upright, the religious, the pious, the wealthy and powerful who to large extent rejected Jesus and his message.

Jesus explained this phenomenon through a parable, a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector. When the Pharisee prayed, he said, **'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector.'**

But the Tax Collector prayed, **'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'**

Jesus concluded, **'This man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.'**

Luke writes that Jesus told this story, **to some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else**. Mary was able to recognise this in her song.

Let's look at **verses 51 - 53**. People who are proud and think they are on top of the heap are brought low while the humble are lifted up. Some people think they have got it all together and they can do fine without God. Maybe they are rich, or powerful, or think they are better than others. The trouble is they will be brought low if they trust in their things or themselves. If they have rejected God, he will reject them. And that is too scary to think about.

To have to stand before God and be told to go off to eternal judgement without a second chance is something I hope and pray none of us here will ever go through. But I have to be honest and tell you that you will if you continue to reject God. Please don't take these things lightly.

But Mary finishes her song on a high note in **verses 54 & 55**. She praises God for his faithfulness.

The boy she will give birth to is the answer to a promise made thousands of years ago to Abraham. God has remembered to be merciful, by sending his Son as the way to heaven. How you and I respond to him will be the most crucial decision of our lives. Mary realises, and the Bible teaches, that you must humbly accept Jesus as your Saviour.

The virgin birth confronts us with God's wisdom.

Accepting or rejecting this truth has little to do with intelligence or logic and much more to do with humility or pride.

Why was it necessary though for the virgin to conceive?
It's been hinted at already.

The virgin had to conceive because the world needed a Saviour.

Sometimes it's frustrating to go into Woollies or Myer in October and see the Christmas decorations already up! You're not even thinking about Christmas yet and the carols are playing and the specials are on.

But how long was God preparing for the first Christmas? More than a couple of months. Even longer than a whole year.

In fact, seven hundred years before Jesus was born God instructed the prophet Isaiah to say in **Isaiah 7:14 The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**

Matthew 1:23 translates Immanuel for us: **God with us.**

That's why the virgin birth is crucial to the gospel. Jesus is not only a human like us. His birth was unique because he is unique. Someone born of two human parents is simply human like everyone else. And under the curse of sin from **Genesis 3**. Jesus is God with us: fully human; fully God.

The virgin birth was necessary because of who Jesus is.
He is God incarnate, God taking on flesh. God with us.

If he was anything less than that he could not be our Saviour. Because he is God he is the sinless Saviour who can offer himself as the once-for-all sacrifice.

Disbelieving the virgin birth essentially denies Jesus' deity, that he is God.

It is a mystery that we are called to believe.
It is only by believing that we truly 'know.'

Far from being a doctrine to be embarrassed of it is a truth to be embraced, clung to and rejoiced over.
Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, God with us.

Do you believe it?

If you don't know Jesus as your Saviour, will you humble yourself today? Are your questions and doubts honest, or do they mask a refusal to believe?

Do you realise that you and I are sinners in need of saving? Do you realise that without Jesus being God in human form we are helpless, hopeless, under judgement?

Praise God that his wisdom is far greater than ours. He planned Christmas from the very beginning. He promised to Adam and Eve a rescuer. And in the manger there he is: God with us. God acting for us and on our behalf. God stepping in where we are helpless.

God our Saviour.