

"I Believe The Miracles of Christmas"

I remember talking to a friend once, during Christmas season, about faith in Christ. And he said, *I just can't believe in the virgin birth*. His tone suggested that it is crazy for anyone to believe something like that, and I get it. It would take a *miracle* for a virgin to conceive and give birth. On the other hand, to say you can't believe in the Christian faith because of its claim to miracles is simply to say you cannot believe the Christian faith unless the Christian faith becomes something different than what it is. The Christian faith is not just a set of wise sayings to treasure or moral guidance to adhere to. It's the story of God's intervention in human history to save us from our sins. It is not a list of things we are to do for God, but the story of what God has done for us in Jesus. You just cannot take the miraculous out of it. ***The miracles of Christmas bear witness to the unparalleled uniqueness of the gift of Jesus. The proper response to these miracles for us - is to be filled with humble, grateful wonder.***

Let's be clear...

I. THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS IS UNDENIABLY MIRACULOUS.

Our reading began with an *angel sent from God*. Mary is a virgin, but the angel tells her she's going to have a child. Mary is not naïve. She knows how babies are born! What the angel is saying seems humanly impossible. And look at the explanation given in response to her question. **Verse 35** says, *And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.* You could go through and circle all the words that speak of the supernatural otherworldly nature of the Christmas story and you would unavoidably be confronted with an angel, a virgin birth, phrases like, *"the power of the most high"* and the holy child being called - *the son of God!* God in Scripture isn't tiptoeing around the miraculous as if it's awkward or embarrassing; he's leaning into it, leading with it!

A. God doesn't hesitate to challenge you and your faith with divine interventions into our world that transcend our understanding of natural law.

That's what a miracle is. And I think that's pretty close to the definition that Barry gave in a recent sermon.

We sometimes use the word miracle loosely for anything that's weird, wonderful or wildly unexpected but good. In the Bible, a miracle is an act of God. It's God directly intervening in the ordinary course of things in a unique and special way that transcends our understanding of natural law. Christians who rightly understand the biblical teaching don't go around expecting a miracle a minute. That isn't how God most often works. But what we have in the Christmas story is unique and undeniably miraculous. To the convinced believer, these miracles are wonderful demonstrations of the power and presence of God acting in love to redeem us. To the skeptic, miracles can be a stumbling block.

Some people wrongly assume that science rules out the miraculous. Christians believe in and are thankful for science, but we recognize...

B. The miracles of the Christmas story transcend the limits of the scientific method.

If you do a Google search some time on the limitations of science, you will find that scientists will speak very clearly about what science is helpful for and what it isn't useful for.

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Due to the need to have completely controlled experiments to test a hypothesis, science cannot prove everything. For example, ideas about God and other supernatural beings can never be confirmed or denied, as no experiment exists that could test their presence. 1

Dr. Vannevar Bush, honorary board chairman of M.I.T says,

That those "who follow science blindly come to a barrier beyond which they cannot see.... Science, when understood properly, makes man humble in his ignorance and smallness. Man will follow science where it leads, but not where it cannot lead. 2

I like to remember that when explorers first came to Australia, they encountered a semiaquatic, egg-laying mammal with a broad, flat tail, webbed feet, and a snout resembling a duck's bill. They named this animal the platypus. When they told the world about this new animal they had discovered. People didn't believe it! They said it was impossible. Everyone knows that mammals don't have bills. Everyone knows, or so that thought, that reptiles and insects and birds lay eggs, but mammals give birth to live young. Well, people *knew*, or so they thought, that a platypus was impossible. Everything that's wonderful is not a miracle, but on the other hand, everything fantastic isn't fake or false.

The story of Christmas, the incarnation, by definition, does not fit our everyday experience. It did not fit into Mary's or Joseph's either. They were not naïve or uneducated. They were amazed a miracle was occurring. Mary was filled with wonder, and we should be, too.

C. What we have in the birth of Jesus, the incarnation of God in Jesus, is arguably the greatest miracle in all of human history.

There is a place in **2 Corinthians 9:15** where Paul says: *Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!* The word translated *inexpressible* is not found in classical Greek, or the papyri or anywhere else in Scripture. It may have been made up by Paul to identify something that is beyond expression. *Jesus Christ is an inexpressible gift in many ways.* We use the word "incarnation" to describe the truth that, in Jesus, God became one of us.

To use the words of **John 1**, *"The word became flesh and dwelt among us."* The shepherds come to the manger in which there lies a tiny newborn. What do they see? God's inexpressible gift. As Augustine said: *"He, unutterably wise, in his wisdom a babe without words; filling the world, lying in a manger."* He had not ceased to be God; He was

no less God than before; He was not now God minus some element of Deity, but God plus true humanity. He would experience everything that you and I experience, from tiredness to temptation. Except He would not sin. He would be our Savior. No one can adequately express all that is involved in the gift of Christ, first to become a man without ceasing to be God, then to live among us, to grow and develop, to live a sinlessly perfect life, and then to die as a substitute for us paying the penalty for our sin.

CS. Lewis called the incarnation the greatest miracle and the miracle on which, to paraphrase him, everything else depended. If God became human in the birth of Jesus, it's not surprising that throughout his life, he performed miracles as part of his ministry, and when he laid down his life as a sacrifice for our sins, he rose again from the dead. Of all the many things we have to be thankful for, none is greater than the gift of Jesus, and none gives us greater reason for wonder.

What the story of Christmas in Scripture tells us is that

II. THE BIRTH OF JESUS CAN BE WONDERFULLY MIRACULOUS BECAUSE GOD EXISTS CAN INTERVENE IN OUR WORLD.

Look again at **verse 35** *For nothing will be impossible with God.*” This is really the heart of the issue. Does an all-powerful God who created the universe exist? The very first verse of the Bible decides the issue. **Genesis 1:1** says, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* If we believe that there is a God who created the universe, then it is not irrational to believe that he could make a baby without a human father. It would be foolish to think otherwise. If you meet an Olympic gymnast with multiple gold medals, Would you seriously question whether or not she could do a cartwheel?

Dr. Francis Collins is one of the world's leading scientists. He was the head of the National Human Genome Project. He writes this about miracles: *If, like me, you admit there might exist someone or something outside of nature, then there is no logical reason why that force could not, on rare occasions, stage an invasion.* Christmas is the invasion of a loving God into our lost world in a unique way. It is beyond rare. It is a once in history - uniquely miraculous moment.

We should be clear that according to the Bible.

A. Miracles are *unusual* demonstrations of the power of God.

Many people think the Bible is just full of miracles, which are happening all the time, as if they were normal experiences. But that's not the case. The Bible covers thousands of years of history, and while miracles occur occasionally throughout that history, miracles only happen in clusters, primarily at four significant seasons of history.

1. First, at the **Exodus**. When God delivers the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt and leads them to the Promised Land.
2. The second season is found in the stories of **Elijah and Elisha**. It was a crucial time in the history of the Bible, and there was a corresponding outpouring of miracles.
3. The third season of miracles takes place in the life of Jesus and the apostles. It begins with the events that lead up to the first Christmas. The life of **Christ** and the birth of the Christian church was accompanied by a unique outpouring of miracles.
4. The fourth season will be the period of history leading up to and culminating in **the second coming** of Christ.

In the Bible itself, there are extended periods of time during which God is very active in the lives of people, but the more dramatic miracles are *not* common or expected occurrences. The language of **Luke 1** is really making this point. *The power of the Most High is going to overshadow you. Nothing is impossible with God.* The birth of Jesus is out of the ordinary!

Miracles are unusual demonstrations of God's power, but remember...

B. Miracles are unusual demonstrations of the same power with which God is actively working in our world *all the time*.

It is not that God on rare occasions, breaks into our world to perform a dramatic magic trick and leave us surprised but most of the time he remains a distant, disconnected deity. On the one hand God, is free and able, for his own divine purposes, to work in this natural world that he has created in ways that we do not fully understand. God wants us

to know that he is able to do the miraculous. On the other hand he also wants us to know that he is present and at work in our world even when there isn't anything demonstrably miraculous happening. Every time a person comes to truly trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior and experiences a new birth spiritually, God is at work. In fact, Scripture compares it to creation. **2 Corinthians 4:6** says, *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* It's beyond the scope of our message to list all of the ways God is at work today. In **Acts 17:38**, the Scripture says that *in Him, God, we live and move and have our being!* The spiritual realm intersects and influences the visible and the physical world that we live in all the time. Why is it that **Psalms 23** says even in the valley of the shadow of death, the believer can say, I shall not fear? Why? Because you can speak to God and say, *Thou art with me!* In that often-quoted poem, Elizabeth Barrett Browning says *earth is crammed with heaven and every common Bush a fire with God, but only he who sees takes off his shoes.* God is at work in Providence and in provision for our needs. By His Holy Spirit, he encourages, assures, guides, and convicts us. He fills us with joy and worship and sometimes leads us to humble, heartfelt repentance and forgiveness.

The angel told Mary *nothing is impossible with God.* In **Ephesians 3:20**, the apostle Paul uses the same truth to strengthen us in our prayers. He says God is able to do *far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.* Whatever issues you're facing that seem bigger than your capacity, God has demonstrated his love in the gift of Jesus, and he's demonstrated his power as well! He's proven that he's able to keep his promises. He has done so in the past. He's doing it in the present, and he will continue into eternity. He can bring good out of the most difficult situations. He can provide for your needs as you trust in him. He is able to strengthen and sustain you through your darkest, deepest trials. In Christ, he forgives all our sins. In the end, he will make all things new.

The story of Christmas is undeniably miraculous. It can be wonderfully miraculous because God exists, and he intervenes in our world! He's always at work in our world, and sometimes, like in the story of the

birth of Jesus, God works in dramatic ways that transcend any normal understanding of natural laws.

Conclusion

The miracles of Christmas bear compelling witness to the uniqueness of the gift of Jesus. The proper response to these miracles for us is to be filled with humble, grateful wonder. Look again at **verse 35**. Will you agree that these words have an overtone of humble, grateful wonder? *And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.*

The virgin birth is not just a weird aberration in the normal dance of cause and effect, conception, and birth. It is part of a larger story. It's about the fulfillment of the most ancient promise in Scripture that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent - that a virgin would conceive and bear a child. Christians see the virgin birth not only in light of the ancient Scriptures and the story of God that led up to it but also in light of all that followed - the uniquely powerful life of Jesus. The old argument holds true - he is either a lunatic, or a liar, or the one he claimed to be - the Lord. There is no one like Jesus, who left behind an empty tomb and hundreds of eye-witnesses willing to suffer and lose life itself, not just because they loved him but because they knew he had risen from the dead and conquered death.

The miracles of Christmas are a crucial part of the larger story of the love of God that offers what Scripture calls the inexpressible grace of God for people like us. Do you know you've received this gift? Listen to how **John 1:9-13** describes the gift - the incarnation of Jesus and calls you to respond to this gift with faith. *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* How do you receive Jesus?

What do you do to receive him? **Verse 12** tells you: *believe in him*. You don't have to first change yourself or make yourself ready. You can't earn it. When the belief is authentic, there will be changes that will reveal it. But you don't begin by performing. You begin by believing. ***The miracles of Christmas are a compelling witness to the uniqueness and the supremacy of Jesus. Believe in him and be filled with humble, grateful wonder.***

Amen

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Lord, As the angel told Mary, you are the Most High God, and nothing is impossible with you. I thank you that in Christ, you came in humility to save us from our sins. I freely admit my need for your saving grace. I turn to you and trust in Jesus Christ. I believe he died on the cross for my sins and rose again as Lord. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Grant me the new and eternal life promised to all who come to him in faith. I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Almighty God, my Father in Heaven, may your Holy Spirit strengthen my faith and, with faith, grant also humility and wonder. Help me, Lord, to savor the unparalleled supremacy of Jesus and the awesome greatness of the grace I find in him. Grant me the faith to deeply believe, not only in the awesome miracle of the incarnation but also in the daily gift of your powerful presence, sustaining, guiding, and protecting me every day. In Jesus' name Amen

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2 <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,898761,00.html>