

Luke 1:26-38 “The Pregnancy Test”

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A pregnancy test can determine whether a woman is pregnant by checking for a particular hormone in her urine. The hormone is called human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG). HCG is produced in the woman’s placenta after a fertilized egg implants in the uterus. It is normally made only during pregnancy making the test 97-99% accurate. In our text today, we find a woman in no need for such pregnancy test. For she is a virgin, and according to science, it is impossible for virgin to conceive. Yet she does. When we examine the text, we learn that *because the virgin birth identifies the Child as the divine Son of God, then you should believe in Him for eternal life.*

Context

Luke writes this gospel in the early 60’s of the first century. He begins with an account of Jesus’ birth. Mark does not. John doesn’t. Why Luke? Notice to whom it is addressed. End Verse 3, *...most excellent Theophilus*. Theophilus is a high-ranking official in the Roman Empire, arguably a governor. He knows Luke and other believers in the early Christian community who have told him about Jesus. But he has heard other reports about Jesus. Contradictory reports. So Luke writes to him. Why? Verse 4, *that you many have certainty concerning the things you have been taught*. Theophilus is uncertain with respect to what the Christians have taught him about Jesus. He doubts, lacks assurance, because their facts conflict with those of their enemies. Someone has false facts about Jesus. When it comes to competing worldviews, “a brute fact is a mute fact.” There is no such thing as a brute fact, an uninterpreted fact that speaks for itself. It’s mute, silent. Every fact must be interpreted. That is the issue. Whose interpretation of Jesus’ should Theophilus believe? The Christian interpretation or in their enemy’s? So Luke writes in order to advocate the Christian interpretation. In other words, Luke’s gospel is an apologetic, by which he questions those who question Jesus’ credibility, to begin with, Jesus’ birth.

Theophilus has heard the reports of Jesus’ birth: The Jews assert that Jesus was an illegitimate child which then calls into question Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God. Three decades prior, at the height of Jesus’ early ministry, His enemies must decide what to do about Him. Either accept Him as Messiah or reject Him. So the religious leaders willingly defy Him and begin a propaganda campaign to discredit Him. They spin a narrative and call the reporters who then posts the “false facts.” The story line is that Mary was very hospitable to the Roman soldiers, indeed, promiscuous, and discovered to be pregnant by, whomever. We can detect such a rumor in the other gospels. John records it. Pharisees are in a dispute with Jesus about Abraham. They claim to be Abraham’s children. Jesus says, *No, you are of your father the devil*. They respond, *We were not born of sexual immorality* (Jn. 8:41). That is the rumor. Jesus’ birth is a product of sexual sin which then contradicts His claim to be the Son of God.

God-Man

So Luke relates the true facts, real story. Matthew writes from Joseph's perspective. Luke from Mary's. Which means that Luke has clearly interviewed Mary. Remarkable. Luke wasn't one of the twelve. He is a Gentile convert to Christianity who joined Paul's mission team in Troas. Luke is whom Theophilus sends to Israel for research. Luke's report is first-hand testimony of an eyewitness, Mary. This shows the historical reliability of the Bible. Mary tells him about the angel Gabriel who God sends to the town of Nazareth in order to disclose urgent news. *Verse 31, And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.* Mary shall become pregnant. Obviously, Mary is human. So, naturally, that which is conceived in her womb shall be fully human. Yet the angel reveals more about the child's nature. *Verse 32, He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.* The *Most High* is a title used of God in the Old Testament. In case the information is in any way ambiguous, the angel repeats it. *Verse 35, And the angel said to 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.* Mary shall be with child—but not by a Roman soldier, nor Joseph, nor any other man for that matter. Instead by the Holy Spirit. So notice the parents of the Child. His mother is Mary, a human. His Father is God. Through the mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit, the child is conceived by God. The eternal Logos, the second person of the Trinity enters the womb of a woman and joins Himself to human cells, human organs, the human soul of a developing unborn infant. Deity is joined to humanity and what is brought from her womb is not just another cute cuddly baby, but the Logos made man, God in the flesh. Which means, the Child possesses two natures; a human nature from His mother, divine nature from God. Jesus is the *theanthropos*, the God-Man.

The text teaches what theologians call the "hypostatic union." That is, the union of the two natures, the human and divine in the one person of Jesus of Nazareth. The union occurs in such a deeply mysterious way that there is no confusion between the two natures. No blending, no mingling of the natures. The two natures are distinct. Yet you can't tell where one ends and the other begins. Children, the case of Jesus' two natures is not like that of a centaur in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. A centaur is half-human, half-horse. The torso of a man united to the body of a horse. The human nature ending exactly where the horse nature begins. That is not like the union of Jesus' two natures. There is no clear line between the human nature and the divine. He is not half-man and half-God, He is both fully human and fully divine at the same time.

One doesn't have to be a theologian to think about this. It is basic Bible teaching summarized in our Confession of Faith taken from the *Shorter Catechism*, 21: "Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?—The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, one person, forever." One person. Not two people. Not two personalities, as if He is a schizophrenic, with alternating personalities. As if He's really an obscure carpenter from Nazareth who is working away and hits his head with a hammer, causing some kind of brain trauma and mental confusion by which he is convinced that He is the Son of God. The Child to whom Mary gives birth is one person who possesses one personality, but He has two natures; human nature, because He is born of a woman, but a divine nature, because that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. One person, two natures.

Why?

This raises an ancient question: *Cur deus homo?* Why the God-Man? Why does this matter that He possesses two natures? Because our salvation utterly depends upon it. For salvation to be accomplished, there must be a Savior with two natures. For atonement to be made and God's wrath to be satisfied, it takes someone with two natures. Human nature, because man is the one who sinned in Paradise and brought the world to ruin. For justice to be served, sin must be punished in the same nature in which it was committed. A man must pay the penalty for sin. But a mere man can't pay the penalty, the price is beyond astronomical. For the infinite God is infinitely just. Infinite justice requires an infinite ransom (Turretin, 2:302). For the ransom to be paid, it takes Someone Who is infinite in His being, infinite in His attributes. Infinite in power to sustain infinite wrath. For salvation to be accomplished, there must be a Savior with two natures, someone who is both God and man at the same time. For redemption to be purchased, there must be a God-Man; by necessity.

So the idea that there are other roads to heaven outside of Christ is utterly irrational. This is one difference between Christianity and Buddhism. In Christianity, if there is no virgin birth there is no God-Man, no salvation. But in Buddhism, had the original Buddha never lived, then Buddhism could still arise on the scene of world history. For the Buddha's role is to teach others the way to enlightenment. Had the original never lived, so long as someone else becomes enlightened and teaches the way to enlightenment, then it wouldn't matter. But in Christianity, there is only one way for sin to be atoned; through the infinite sacrifice of someone who is both God and Man in one person. And the good news of great joy is that it happened. The historical event known as the incarnation. God becomes carnal; flesh. He clothes Himself in human flesh so that His glory is veiled. Just as we sing: "Veiled in flesh the God-head see, hail the incarnate deity. Pleased as man with men to dwell."

Notice how the angel Gabriel begins to describe Him. Verse 32, *He will be great*. The word great is overused. Great pizza, great beer. Frosted Flakes cereal, Tony the Tiger roars, "They're great!" Perhaps this simple description of *great* doesn't arrest our attention. Must remember the angel comes as a messenger. He is on a mission from God with urgent news. He doesn't have time to linger in order to provide more details to satisfy Mary's curiosity. In time, she will learn exactly how *great* the child will be. Soon wise men from the east will come and bow down to the Child. She'll witness Him turn water into wine. He shall walk on water and raise the dead. Mary shall learn about His greatness. And it is not as if the angel doesn't say anymore because he doesn't know any more about the Child. The Child to be born is the angel's Creator. The one before whom this very angel falls down to worship. So Gabriel simply states, Verse 32, *He will be great*.

Louis XIV wanted to be remembered as the greatest of French kings. His funeral was in the famous cathedral in Paris which recently burned, Notre Dame. He gave prior instruction that his funeral was to be at night, the cathedral darkened, expect for one candle burning on his casket up front so that everyone would be reminded of his greatness. When the time came for the funeral message, the court preacher, Jean Massilon, rose walked over and snuffed out the candle. Then began to preach, "Only God is great. Only God is great."

Massilon's sermon gives an indication of who this Child's greatness, *God in the flesh*. Outside of the incarnation, we can never understand the true meaning of Christmas. This is where the world remains so confused about Jesus' identity. Just as it has since Luke's time. The Jews claim that Jesus was an illegitimate child.

The Arians says that He is not eternal, but the first created being. Others say that he was a regular man, fully human, but that he had such close fellowship with God that God adopted him as His Son; but that means He remains only human. Progressive theologians state that he is a great teacher of morality, a moral example for humanity. That is, His sacrificial death on the cross shows that we too should live self-sacrificial lives. But Luke claims that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit—which indicates that in the person of a human child, God was in the manger.

How?

This begs but one question. “How?” Mary asks, Verse 34, *How will this be, since I am a virgin?* How can a virgin conceive? Mary knows all about the birds and the bees. Before modern in vitro fertilization, it is naturally impossible for a woman to conceive without sexual relations. Since the Enlightenment, critics have grown skeptical of the virgin birth. People have become increasingly convinced that science can explain all reality. So the virgin birth has been rejected as unbelievable since it is scientifically impossible. Critics assert that the primitive people of ancient world are superstitious. “They could believe in a virgin birth since they didn’t know the laws of nature. But for us moderns, we know science, so the virgin birth is unbelievable.” To quote C.S. Lewis, that argument is a “red herring.” Mary completely understands that it is scientifically impossible for a virgin to conceive. Therefore her question: *How will this be, since I am a virgin?* Mary understands the laws of nature. She may not know as much as a modern gynecologist, but she knows just the same that in the ordinary course of nature it would be impossible for her to conceive unless she had lain with a man! Joseph understands that as well. Exactly why he wanted to break off the engagement. They both understood the basic laws of science. It is impossible for a virgin to conceive.

So Mary asks the very logical question: How? The angel explains. Verse 35, *And the angel said to 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.* These two clauses parallel each other. The *Holy Spirit* in parallel with *Most High*. *Will come upon you* parallels *overshadow you*. Which implies no hint of sexual activity, rather divine agency. The virgin conceives by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit alone. The description of the Holy Spirit’s work as *coming upon*, *overshadowing* reminds us of the very first reference to the work of the Holy Spirit recorded in Genesis 1. *The earth was without form and void; and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was **hovering** over the face of the waters* (Gen.1:2). The Holy Spirit was *hovering*. Result? A creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Before the Holy Spirit hovers, nothing is in the nothingness. But by the Spirit’s work of hovering, atmosphere is created, then ocean. Likewise, here, the Holy Spirit *hovers* over the womb of the virgin, overshadows the womb. Conceiving in the uterus of Mary that which was not there. There is Mary’s answer. *How will this be, since I am a virgin?* Not naturally, but supernaturally! By the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Miracle.

Science and Impossibility

That is why the biblical account of origins is so vital. If God created everything out of nothing, then what can He not do? If He can do what is thought impossible: bringing into being that which does not exist, then anything is possible. That is the answer. Verse 37, *For nothing*

will be impossible with God. Mary asks, *How will this be?* Angel answers, *Nothing is impossible with God.* If He does the impossible of bringing into being that which did not exist, then it is easy to do the impossible with the human body, even causing a virgin to conceive. Progressive theologians argue, “Sure, it is not impossible for God. Sure He could perform the miracle. But He wouldn’t,” they say. “For He wouldn’t violate the laws of nature. He created the laws. He wouldn’t break them. That would be a self-contradiction.” How would the miracle violate the laws of nature? If God creates a miraculous sperm in the uterus of the virgin, the sperm does not proceed to break any laws (Lewis, *Miracles*, 94). Rather the laws of nature immediately take over it over. Nature is ready. Pregnancy follows, according to all the normal laws, and nine months later a child is born. How are the laws of nature violated? A new factor is inserted into the equation. A new event is fed into the system. The result follows according to the laws of nature. The miracle doesn’t violate the laws of nature. It confirms the laws.

My favorite atheist, Richard Dawkins, states that he would believe in the virgin birth only if provided DNA evidence to show that Jesus did not have a human father. But that is just rhetoric, and rather naïve rhetoric which shows that he does not understand the nature of his own unbelief. Evidence doesn’t convert. It is ineffectual. In Jesus’ earthly ministry, there are people who see His miracles, eyewitnesses, who refuse to believe. They have the evidence, but refuse to believe. Why? They interpret the evidence according to their own preconception of reality. They see the exorcism with their own eyes. How do they explain it? “He casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul.” The evidence does not convert them, but hardens them in their unbelief. Unbelief is unbelief and the same through the ages. Unbelief never arises due to the lack of evidence. For there is all the evidence in the world, literally. Nature; the mountains, oceans, sun, moon, stars. But what does the defiant human race do with the evidence? *They suppress the truth in unrighteousness...and exchange the truth for a lie and worship the creature instead of the Creator.* There is a truth exchange. True facts exchanged for false facts. The creation is caused by Baal, Marduk, Thor, space aliens.

So DNA evidence of the virgin birth would not cause Dawkins to believe. People interpret, that is, misinterpret the evidence according to their own assumptions of reality. Their assumptions are grounded in their state of existence, either in a state of spiritual death or a state of spiritual life. Those in a state of spiritual death are spiritually blind and shall remain blind to the evidence unless they are given the eyes of faith to see the evidence as new creatures which occurs because of new birth. The evidence does not cause conversion. After conversion, the evidence is helpful to the believer. The miracle, the work of God illustrates the Word. The Word illumines the Work, the Work illustrates the Word. They work together. The miracle, the work, is never more than the Word. *Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word.* That is why Luke the medical doctor does not offer more evidence for the miracle. Instead he stresses the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Luke stresses the miraculous. For it is the miracle that illustrates the word about the deity of the child.

Virgin Birth Illustrates the Child’s Deity

Notice the Word of God reported by the angel. Verse 35, *And the angel said to 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.* Remember the grammar rule, “whenever we see the word ‘therefore’ we should ask what it is there *for*.” Here it inseparably connects miracle of virgin birth to the deity of Christ. Notice the order. The Holy Spirit will

overshadow you, *therefore* the child will be called *the Son of God*. The virgin birth illustrates the Word about Christ's deity. Exactly what the prophet, Isaiah, predicted. *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel* (Isa. 7:14). Seven hundred years before Jesus is born, the prophet Isaiah foretells that the virgin will conceive. The prophet calls the miracle a *sign*. A sign is that which *signifies*. The virgin birth *signifies* His divinity. The virgin birth illustrates His divinity. Identifies him as Son of God.

This is why the Mary's virginity is critical component of the Christmas narrative. If there is no virgin birth, then there is no God-Man. Were the child to be conceived through sexual relation of a man and woman, then the child would not be divine. He simply would be fully human, like anyone else in the human race. For the sake of argument, even if a virgin today were to undergo modern invitro-fertilization with the assistance of a sperm donor so that child is born outside a sexual union, then the child would still be fully human. No divine nature. Therefore unable to atone for my sin because a mere mortal cannot pay the penalty. A finite human cannot sustain infinite wrath. On the flip side, He could not earn the righteousness which I so desperately need to be acceptable to an infinitely holy God. Because if He is conceived by a human father then His human nature would be fallen, morally twisted; corrupted by the hereditary guilt of Adam's original sin which pollutes the gene pool of the entire human race.

Do you see what the text shows us about the dependence of our salvation upon the virgin birth? It is all or nothing. If there is no Virgin birth then there is no Redeemer, no redemption; no Christmas. No joy to the world because there is no salvation. Which would mean that the message of the Bible is entirely wrong. For from the very beginning, the message of the Bible is about salvation. The message of the Bible is not moralism, multiculturalism, environmentalism. The message of the Bible is redemption from the first promise of the gospel given in Genesis 3:15. Thru the seed of the woman who comes to crush the head of the serpent. The male-child redeemer who comes to destroy Satan and thereby rescue a people for Himself. But if the Bible is wrong, then the atheists are right. We live in a godless universe. Existence is accidental, unplanned, unintended; the end product of a long chain of spontaneous combustion, gravity, and evolution. And here we are. The human race, a freak accident of random natural forces. We live, we die, then there is nothing after that. We simply cease to exist. That is the message: "Bah-humbug, bah-humbug, everything is bah-humbug-ness." We live, we die, then nothingness. *Absurdly* distinct from good news of great joy because the virgin conceives.

When we examine all worldviews then we are left with two existential options. Either a life of ultimate meaninglessness to end in the abyss of nothingness or Christmas. You choose. Amen.