

Virgin Birth
UUF

Rev. Walter LeFlore
December 21, 2014

There are a number of things about the Christmas Story that have captured the American culture for a long time now. Not only the American culture but the entire Christian world. It has also been the basis for much of atheistic thought and intellectual ridicule.

For those who believe scripture is inerrant, for those who may question the accuracy of what's written in the Great Book, AND for those who outright reject the bible, the story of the birth of Jesus the Christ child, is one that can warm the heart. It's a story that's been told and retold for centuries.

Even the most ardent non-believers must admit—even if only in the secret recesses of our minds...this is a good story line. A conception that stretches the imagination; a birth that is wonderfully quaint; wise men from all over, receiving a Morse Code like message from a star, a king and lowly shepherds knowing something special had occurred. And all of this, foretelling the storied life of a Jew, like none other before or since.

This is how the story begins, in the Book of Luke, chapter 1:26-38, slightly edited.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. [a pick-up line? Certainly a line she no doubt had ever heard before]

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor in God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom, there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 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 holy; he will be called the Son of God. Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." [how do you argue with the personal messenger from God?? Besides, I suspect she was smart enough to know, there was no place to hide---maybe others, even today might do well to take heed—ultimately, there aint no hiding!] With that, the angel Gabriel had done his job, so he departed.

In a way, it seems a shame, so much of popular culture places such emphasis on this part of the story that they fail to pay attention to the richness in the message, the teachings of the one who is being born. Because so many deny the veracity of a virgin birth, we leave the movie theatre and miss the powerful, moral teachings of a carpenter, the man Jesus, the son of God, separate but together in the same body.

For very many people, it's critically important that this baby born to Mary is or is not, the son of the Trinity. So very many are absolutely convinced Jesus is divine, and many are equally convinced he is not. It really doesn't matter a great deal to me. Maybe it should. Maybe on my deathbed, like many who've gone before, it may matter a great deal.

But at this point in my life, and for many long years, it's the message that is attributed to Jesus that resonates with my soul. It's the courageous, moral, loving life that he led that matters. The life of Jesus, real or not, divine or not, is a life that we all would do well to try to emulate. The world would be better served if we only partially succeeded.

What's not to like, to honor, in a person who refuses to stone to death an adulterer? Who seeks to heal a leper? Who tries to feed the multitude? Who not only believes in, but lives a life based on the power of love and redemption? Who is a defender of the weak and out-casted?

Not long ago, I was with a collection of my peers, a group of my colleagues. Two of them, both women, one recently pregnant, the other seeking to become so. Neither had nor intended to become pregnant in the typical way, the way I learned about in biology class...at the age of 17 or so.

I was fascinated by these two women comparing notes on their experiences. They were saying how hard it had been/was, to find the right sperm donor. They apparently searched through gobs and gobs of lists of various traits. I don't know the intimate process of how this whole thing works, but they must have been given a coded list of information about each of the possible donors.

Height, weight, race, hair color, education, intelligence, likes and dislikes—volleyball or reading?, maybe tendencies as well; had they been used as donors before...I really don't know all the characteristics that were provided to potential mothers. There were obviously many configurations of traits and characteristics. There was also the issue of negotiating between the mothers which combination of characteristics would be selected.

The decision making process weighed heavily on them, consuming not only hours of time and effort but emotional angst.

Is race the most important, or is height or weight? If the first and second considerations are easiest, what's 3rd, 4th, and 7th on the list of importance? What is completely un-important? And how do you decide?? How does your partner decide? And for any couple, how do you resolve the differences?

I was tremendously struck by how difficult it must be to make such decisions. One of the women isn't in a relationship and is doing this on her own, for the second time...this time, twins. I marvel at how people can make such decisions, at the courage, at the commitment. These are not people who for whatever reason found themselves pregnant one day.

This is a very intentional, time consuming and I understand expensive process. Maybe even risky as well.

At some point after hearing portions of this conversation---yes I was eavesdropping, but it certainly wasn't a private conversation; more to the point, I was sitting right next to them. Some time later, I began to think about this whole process....The net outcome is a virgin birth! I don't expect to see a star in the sky, but there is something miraculous about this.

Maybe much like the shamans and medicine men of old, who knew about the medicinal use of bark and plants—and modern science only recently caught up. Maybe, God knew how to do this long ago, and we're just figuring it out.

I then began to think about cloning and genetic engineering. Growing cells and tissue in the laboratory, the possibility of creating new creatures or biological capabilities; the possibility of biologically engineering designer babies, the perfect human being. For some it would have blue eyes---others might define perfect differently!!!

But we are now at a point in our so-called development, we human beings can do what only God and mother nature were thought to do years ago. We have the ability to select, to design the person we want as our child—or soon will.

What traits will we value? What will we be attempting to create? Is there a gene for courage? What about honesty? Maybe money management will be high on someone's list? What about the ability to love and forgive? Is there a gene for that? Will any of us or the future us—choose such things? Or will we only go for aesthetics and utilitarian qualities?

These are real questions. These are serious things to ponder. Just what would you choose for your progeny, your legacy? What do we truly hold dear? Is it good health and longevity, above the ability to make money? Is it empathy over athleticism? Intelligence over a love of the earth and nature?

All too soon, I fear, for those who follow, these may well become everyday decisions they will have to address. All too soon, we'll have people calibrating the answers. What will we choose? !!!

Is there, or will we discover a gene or way of ensuring a soul-filled personality? How will we grow or hatch, self-fulfilled human beings. Will these creatures we create even be Human or the beginnings of a new species?

Perhaps this notion of virgin birth is not as strange as we may have thought. Perhaps, that saying: “there's nothing new under the sun” has validity. Perhaps the bible has given us a template for how to address these issues even though we've never fully understood the question or the issue.

Maybe we have been blind all these years to the true significance of the story line of what goes into being a good human being, a godly presence on this earth, and the importance of acceptance, forgiveness and redemption; even the notion of paradise and heaven, right here on earth.

Just maybe, if we read the bible with more of a poetic eye than the eye of a scientist; with a greater sense of curiosity than the fixed laws of physics; with more a religious inclination than a capitalist one; Maybe if we were more like Joseph Campbell and could better discern the power of myth. Then maybe. Who knows?

But alas, we are who we are, in the here and now. We are caught somewhere between who we are and who we want to be. What will I choose? What will you choose? What are the traits and behaviors we want to manifest? Is it worth the effort?

All valid questions for the here and now,
as we celebrate the birth of quite an example.

Amen