

## Jesus Was Born of a Virgin

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### **Matthew 1:18–25**

<sup>18</sup> *This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

<sup>20</sup> *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

<sup>22</sup> *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”*

<sup>24</sup> *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.<sup>1</sup>*

You know the story: in a quiet, unassuming, small town, an amazing event happens: a visitor from far away arrives in the form of a baby. He was sent by his father from a distant place on a mission. And though the world did not take notice of this baby, his human parents raised him, and he grew in strength and wisdom. One day, though, the world would know the identity of this incredible man. He would confront evil and protect the weak. He would stand for truth, justice, . . . and the American way. That’s right, I’m talking about Superman.

It’s interesting how many parallels there are between Superman and Jesus. Superman was sent by his father, Jor-El, to Earth from the planet Krypton, just as God the Father sent Jesus, his Son. Superman’s birth name is Kal-El, which is very close to what in Hebrew means “voice of God,” while Jesus is referred to as the Word of God (John 1:1). Kal-El, or Clark Kent, grows up in a small town in Kansas. Superman grew up in a small town in Galilee. The last Superman movie, *Man of Steel*, has many other allusions to the Jesus story, such as Superman being 33

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quoted herein is taken from the New International Version (1984).

when he starts his ministry—I mean, mission.<sup>2</sup> It’s interesting, but I don’t think it’s surprising, and perhaps it’s not a coincidence. I think there’s something in the human heart that realizes that things aren’t right. The world is not right. We’re not right. We need someone to help us. It’s no wonder superhero stories have been created. Superheroes are like us, but they’re much more. They’re more powerful, more heroic, more noble. We long for a hero like Superman who will come and make things right.

And we long for deliverance from the predicament that we’re in. A few weeks ago, we watched the movie, *Interstellar*. I don’t want to spoil the movie in case you plan on watching it, but it’s set in the not-too-distant future. Something bad is happening to the Earth: a blight is preventing crops from growing and the food supply is growing short. So a plan is hatched: a select group of astronauts and scientists will try to find another planet where humans can live. Without spoiling the plot, I’ll say this: the makers of the movie put their hope in science and humans. In this movie, there is no God; there are no superheroes. There are only humans, humans who have science, humans who are brave and risk everything for family, humans who evolve in ways that are impossible for any species to evolve. And it is this evolution that transcends the dimensions of time and space, helping humanity survive. We are our own saviors.

Granted, superheroes and sci-fi movies are fiction. But this hope for deliverance from the human condition and even death is found in the real world. Some people think that if only we get the right medicine or the right technology, or perhaps the right political leaders or public policies, we will make real progress. Consider the example of Ray Kurzweil. I first heard his name because he invented a high-end synthesizer, a musical keyboard. But he has also invented the flatbed scanner, among other things. He’s been likened to a modern-day Thomas Edison. He believes that immortality is possible, that by 2028, we will be able to add one year to our lives per year, effectively keeping death at arm’s length forever.<sup>3</sup> He also believes that by 2045, artificial intelligence and human intelligence will merge, so that we won’t be able to tell the

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<sup>2</sup> Jordan Hoffman, “‘Man of Steel’ No Longer Man of Shtetl?” *Times of Israel*, June 13, 2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/man-of-steel-no-longer-man-of-shtetl/> (accessed December 20, 2014). For other parallels between Superman and Jesus, see Austin Gentry, “Superman Parallels Jesus in 11 Ways,” *Gospel Focus* 289, <https://gospelfocus289.wordpress.com/2013/06/15/superman-parallels-jesus-in-11-ways/> (accessed December 20, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Holman W. Jenkins, Jr., “Will Google’s Ray Kurzweil Live Forever?” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324504704578412581386515510?mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424127887324504704578412581386515510.html> (accessed December 19, 2014).

difference between humans and computers. We'll have little robots—nanobots—in our bodies, fighting infections, and in our brains, connecting our minds to cloud computing. And some people think the concept of God is far-fetched!

All of this shows that we know we need help, and we all put our hope in something, whether it's a hero, or science, or God. I would say that this hope is religious, whether the object of faith is humanity, science, or a divine being. The makers of *Interstellar* and Ray Kurzweil cross the line from science to scientism, more of a philosophical position. We all put our trust in something. However, the human experience has been remarkably consistent for thousands of years: We live, we love, we fight, we die. In order to transcend our situation, we need something brand new—a brand new start, a brand new creation.

That is what the virgin birth of Jesus is all about. The Christian claim is a bold one: the human condition is in such bad shape that nothing short of God becoming man to rescue us will work. So, in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), God the Father sent his Son, Jesus, to become man. He didn't cease being God, but he added a human nature, so he could identify with us in every way. Yet, unlike us, he remained morally perfect, never disobeying God. He lived life the way that we should. And here's the crazy thing: the only perfect person died on the cross, to bear the penalty for our disobedience. He did this so that everyone who is united to him by faith will be spared the penalty for sin: eternal death in hell. That's the Christian claim.

Recently, I read this wonderful quote from a theologian, Don Carson:

If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, he would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived that our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death; and he sent us a Savior.<sup>4</sup>

And that is exactly what we see in the passage that was just read. In Matthew 1:18, we see that the Holy Spirit—the third Person of the Trinity—causes Mary, a virgin, to become pregnant. Joseph, who was in the process of becoming her husband, assumed that she had an affair with another man. He was ready to divorce Mary. But an angel told him that what had happened: this

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<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1992), 109.

was no normal pregnancy, but a supernatural one. What was the purpose of this miraculous conception? That Jesus would save his people from sin. That's what his name means. In Hebrew, his name would be *Yeshua*, which means "Yahweh is salvation," or, "The Lord saves." Matthew also tells us (in verses 22-23) that this pregnancy fulfills something that was predicted roughly seven hundred years earlier (in Isaiah 7:14), that a virgin would conceive, and the child would be called "Immanuel," which means, "God is with us." In other words, Jesus is God in the flesh.

The other biblical account of Jesus' birth is found in Luke 1. In that passage, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will become the mother of Jesus, who "will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." He will be the Son of God (v. 32, also v. 35). Then Gabriel continues, "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (vv. 32-33). Jesus is God the Father's Son, which means he perfectly represents and obeys God. And he is the heir of David's throne. That means he is the promised King who will reign over his people forever. This was something God promised to David a thousand years earlier.

So Jesus is a new type of man, a man completely unlike any other. Because he is God, he can be perfect in every way, and he is eternal and consistent: there never was a time, nor will there ever be a time, when Jesus didn't or will not exist. And he will remain perfect and faithful in every way, for God does not change. But because he's man, he can be our substitute. In a sense, he's the one who comes in to the world and cleans up the mess that we've made. He fills in for us. Imagine you've committed a horrible crime and are going to go to jail for the rest of our life. Then picture the most successful person you can imagine—whoever that is for you—taking on that sentence for you, going to jail so you can remain free. But not only that, he gives you all his success: his money, his fame, his social standing, his family—everything. That's what Jesus does for his people, those who have a relationship with him marked by trust, love, and obedience.

We see in this episode with Mary that God takes the initiative. Just as God takes the initiative in creating the universe, he does the same in saving his people. Mary wasn't looking for this special role that God gave her. No one was expecting that God would become a man to save his people. But God did it all. This is how he works.

Now, there is quite a bit of confusion about the virgin birth and there are many objections. Let me deal with the confusion first. Let's clear up a couple of obvious things first.

The Gospel writers—Matthew and Luke—knew that this was not how people normally became pregnant. They knew this was a miracle. Luke was a doctor. He may not have known, with great specificity, how women became pregnant, but he knew that a human father was needed. The other obvious thing in this passage is that, as opposed various legends concerning mythical gods, God did not have sex with Mary. We don't know exactly, scientifically speaking, Mary became pregnant. The Bible doesn't speak in scientific language, because it was written roughly two thousand to thirty-five hundred years ago. But it's clear that any sexual intercourse was not involved.

There are other confusions, however. The Catholic Church has taught at least two errors regarding Mary that are related to the conception of Jesus. The Catholic Church teaches that Mary was sinless. Catholic theologians thought that because she was the “Mother of God,” she would need to be without sin, for how else could Jesus be sinless? So they taught that she was sinless and that her own conception was “immaculate.” But this is not a teaching found in the Bible or in the earliest years of the church. It only became official Catholic doctrine fairly recently, in 1854.<sup>5</sup> The clear teaching of the Bible is that every human being—everyone outside of Jesus—has sinned (Rom. 3:23). What makes Jesus so unique is that he alone is sinless (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Even Mary realized that she needed a Savior, as she says in her famous song:

“My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46-47).

Put quite simply, the Bible does not teach that Mary was sinless. Rather, it teaches that all humans are sinful and in need of a Savior. If Mary was sinless, she wouldn't need salvation and she wouldn't call God her Savior.

The Catholic Church also teaches that Mary remained a virgin for the rest of her life.<sup>6</sup> Yet this claim is also unbiblical. First, Matthew 1:25 says, “But he [Joseph] had no union with her

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Pius IX taught this doctrine in his encyclical, *Ineffabilis Deus*, dated December 8, 1854. In part, it says, “The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.” The entire encyclical can be read at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ineff.htm> (accessed December 18, 2014). See also Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Ed., §491-93 (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 123–124.

<sup>6</sup> This doctrine can be found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §499-500, 126. Even stranger, they claim that the birth of Jesus was supernatural. So Ludwig Ott, a Catholic theologian, claims, “Mary gave birth in miraculous

until she gave birth to a son.” That means they had normal sexual relations after Jesus was born. That’s important because the Bible does not teach that sex, within the context of marriage, is sinful. Sex is a good gift to be enjoyed. Second, the Bible refers to Jesus’ brothers (Matt. 6:3; 13:55; John 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 9:5; Gal. 1:19). The Catholic Church tries to say that the term “brothers” can mean something besides literal, biological brothers.<sup>7</sup> That’s really a stretch, and against the clear meaning of the text. Furthermore, Luke 2:7 says Jesus was Mary’s “firstborn” son, not “only” son.

Nothing in the Bible elevates Mary to a status above the rest of humanity. She is special because God chose her for a special, unique role. And she is a great example of faith and submission to God’s will. But if we elevate Mary to a higher status, we take away from Jesus’ unique standing as the only sinless human being.

Those are the confusions. Next, let’s consider the objections. Some people say that the accounts of Jesus’ conception and birth in Matthew and Luke can’t be trusted. They say there are contradictions or inconsistencies between these accounts. I have written about some of these issues, and you can find those articles on our website. (If you missed last week’s sermon, I would encourage you to go back and listen to that message, too.) The two accounts are not contradictory. Rather, they’re complementary: together, they give us a fuller picture of what happened at Jesus’ birth.<sup>8</sup>

Some people think that because the rest of the New Testament is silent about Jesus’ conception and birth, these accounts must have been made up. Well, the only two birth narratives of Jesus are in Matthew and Luke, and nothing in the rest of the New Testament contradicts these

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fashion without opening of the womb and injury to her hymen, and consequently without pain” (Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, ed. James Canon Bastible, trans. Patrick Lynch [Rockford, IL: Tan, 1960], 205, quoted in Gregg R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014], 133 n. 52).

<sup>7</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §500, 126.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the historical reliability of Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth, many biblical scholars have noted the Semitic character of Luke 1:5-2:52. Luke was a Gentile who wrote elegant Greek. After beginning his Gospel account, the language reflects a Hebraic background. Many scholars think that this reflects Luke’s sources. According to I. Howard Marshall (*The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978], 46), “the narratives [of Luke 1-2] betray a Semitic background to a degree unparalleled elsewhere in Lk.-Acts. The whole atmosphere of the story is Palestinian. The language too is strongly Semitic.” Regarding the poems, or songs, he writes, “the case for postulating Hebrew originals for the canticles is very strong” (47). He concludes, “It appears most probable that Luke had sources at his disposal, and that these came from Palestinian Jewish Christian circles which had links with the family of Jesus” (48-49). Therefore, it would appear that Luke used early, original, eyewitness sources in constructing his history of Jesus’ birth.

accounts. Mark doesn't deal with Jesus' birth at all, and John starts off with something greater: Jesus is the preexistent "Word" of God who is God (John 1:1). So, this is a very weak objection.

Another objection, one that is far more common, is the claim that the story of Jesus is based on myths. This claim is becoming more popular, particularly on the Internet, but it's been around for a while. Consider what Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1823 about Jesus' birth:

The truth is that the greatest enemies to the doctrines of Jesus are those calling themselves the expositors of them, who have perverted them for the structure of a system of fancy absolutely incomprehensible, and without any foundation in his genuine words. And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter. But we may hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away with all this artificial scaffolding, and restore to us the primitive and genuine doctrines of this the most venerated reformer of human errors.<sup>9</sup>

Minerva is the Roman goddess of wisdom who was born out of her father Jupiter's head. So, Jefferson considered the virgin birth of Jesus just as mythical. By the way, Jefferson, when he was president, created his own version of the Gospels. He stripped away all the supernatural elements of the Jesus story, so there were no miracles and no resurrection. That's the kind of Jesus he wanted: a moral reformer, not God.

Bertrand Russell, an atheist, wrote this: "I do not think the evidence for the Virgin Birth is such as would convince any impartial inquirer if it were presented outside the circle of theological beliefs he was accustomed to. There are innumerable such stories in pagan mythology, but no one dreams of taking them seriously."<sup>10</sup> More recently, the argument that the story of Jesus' birth is based on myths was advanced in a 2007 "documentary" that has been popular on Netflix, called *Zeitgeist: The Movie*. This film has includes a lot of false information.<sup>11</sup> Just to give you an idea of what I mean: one part of the film states that 9/11 was

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Jefferson, letter to John Adams, April 11, 1823, [http://www.beliefnet.com/resourcelib/docs/53/Letter\\_from\\_Thomas\\_Jefferson\\_to\\_John\\_Adams\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/resourcelib/docs/53/Letter_from_Thomas_Jefferson_to_John_Adams_1.html) (accessed December 18, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Bertrand Russell, "Can Religion Cure Our Troubles?" in *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (New York: Touchstone, 1957), 200.

<sup>11</sup> For a thorough refutation of the claims of *Zeitgeist*, see Mark W. Foreman, "Challenging the *Zeitgeist* Movie: Parallelomania on Steroids," in *Come Let Us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics*, edited by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012). By presenting false information about Horus, an Egyptian god, and other mythological gods such as Mithra(s), the movie tries to show that Jesus is but a myth. Here's an example of the poor reasoning of the film: other gods were son gods. They were associated with the son. Jesus is known as the Son of God. Now, that sun/son wordplay works nicely in English, but in Greek, the language

an “inside job,” orchestrated by the U.S. government. But this is the kind of stuff that circulates in the world.

It’s true that there are many stories of gods and goddesses who were conceived in odd ways. But these stories don’t really parallel the story of Jesus being conceived by a virgin through the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. These other stories are very different. Consider Mithra, a Persian god. (The Greek name is Mithras.) He was supposedly born out of a rock. That’s hardly like the story of Jesus. If you actually look at the stories of gods and their births, you see that usually, a god (often Zeus) impregnates a woman who had been, up to that point, a virgin. But this is not the story of Jesus. I already said that the Bible does not depict God as having sex with Mary. That’s what Zeus does, but it’s not what God does.<sup>12</sup>

These stories are also clearly myths, not rooted in history the way the Gospels are. This part of one of those stories, found in Hesiod’s *Theogony*:

Now Zeus, king of the gods, made Metis his wife first, and she was wisest among gods and mortal men. But when she was about to bring forth the goddess bright-eyed Athene, Zeus craftily deceived her with cunning words and put her in his own belly, as Earth and starry Heaven advised. For they advised him so, to the end that no other should hold royal sway over the eternal gods in place of Zeus; for very wise children were destined to be born of her, first the maiden bright-eyed Tritogeneia, equal to her father in strength and in wise understanding; but afterwards she was to bear a son of overbearing spirit, king of gods and men. But Zeus put her into his own belly first, that the goddess might devise for him both good and evil.<sup>13</sup>

This is clearly not an historical account. Mary Jo Sharp observes, “In Hesiod’s story, there are no clues as to whether these events took place in a physical location that could be found on a map, or somewhere otherworldly. There aren’t any recognizable landmarks or historical names that

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of the New Testament, the term for sun is *helios* and the term for son is *huios*. These don’t sound the same. Jesus is referred to as light in the Bible (most prominently in John 8:12), but his being Son has nothing to do with the sun. His sonship represents the perfect relationship he has with the Father: he perfectly represents God, and obeys him. The fact that Jesus is light metaphorically refers to the way he exposes and drives away darkness. It has to do with the revelation of truth and righteousness. These are not mutually exclusive ideas, but they are not identical either.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Jo Sharp, “Is the Story of Jesus Borrowed from Pagan Myths?” in *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture*, edited by Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013) 193-94: “Here are the so-called virgin births of five of the gods who are frequently compared to Christ: Mithras is born out of a rock on the banks of a river under a sacred fig tree. Adonis is born out of a myrrh tree. Dionysius is produced from an incestuous relationship between the god Zeus and his daughter Persephone. Osiris is the product of an affair between an earth god and a sky goddess. And while Osiris and Isis are fetuses within the womb of the sky goddess, they have intercourse and produce Horus.”

<sup>13</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm> (accessed December 17, 2014).



might be cross-referenced with historical records of the time period.”<sup>14</sup> But Matthew and Luke do provide physical locations, as well as the names of political rulers and events, so that we have some knowledge of where and when Jesus was born.

So, the argument that the Jesus story is based on myths is false. There are no true parallels to Jesus’ miraculous conception in Mary’s womb. And the Gospels are historical documents, corroborated by other historians and archaeology.

Perhaps the biggest objection to this story is simply that it’s so miraculous. Anyone who believes that God doesn’t exist, or that miracles are impossible, simply can’t believe this story, regardless of the evidence. But what if there’s good reason to believe that God exists, and that he can do amazing things? Then what?

There are several arguments for the existence of God. One of them is called the cosmological argument. You can read all about it online at the church website: [wbcommunity.org](http://wbcommunity.org). Go to the “Media” tab and then click on “Articles” and you can read it there. The cosmological argument is about the universe, the cosmos. The basic argument is this:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The first point is simple. You and I came into existence at one point, and we had causes: our parents. And they had causes: their parents. And so on. In other words, nothing comes from nothing. If something had a beginning, another person or thing caused that something to come into being.

The second point has been proven by science. The universe, at one point in time, came into existence. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many scientists assumed that the universe was eternal, that it had no beginning. But a few discoveries quickly challenged that assumption. In 1916, Albert Einstein published his theory of general relativity. This theory was mostly concerned with gravity. Einstein was actually trying to prove that the universe was static, not expanding or contracting, but his equations actually showed that the universe was expanding. He didn’t like that finding, because it suggested that at some point, the universe had a beginning,

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<sup>14</sup> Sharp, “Is the Story of Jesus Borrowed,” 188.

so he fudged the numbers. (A few years later, a Russian mathematician, Alexander Friedmann, and a Belgian astronomer, George Lemaitre, both recognized that Einstein had made a mistake.)

Meanwhile, another astronomer, Edwin Hubble, was using the most powerful telescope of his day, and he noticed that galaxies were receding farther away. The farther away the galaxy, the faster it moved. All of this suggested that the universe was expanding. From this knowledge, scientists were able to create a model of the expansion of the universe. They suggested that at one point, long ago, the universe was extremely dense, and that a cosmic explosion resulted in the universe that is expanding today. In fact, at one point in time, all the mass, energy, and space of the universe came into existence.

Some physicists suggested that if this cosmic explosion actually happened, we would find some cosmic radiation on the edge of the universe. In 1965, a couple of physicists named Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson discovered this cosmic background radiation. They later won the Nobel Prize for their discovery. Penzias said, “The best data we have concerning the big bang are exactly what I would have predicted, had I nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole.”<sup>15</sup>

This is what Robert Jastrow, an astronomer and an agnostic, writes about this theory of the origin of the world:

It is not a matter of another year, another decade of work, another measurement, or another theory; at this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.<sup>16</sup>

So, the universe came into existence at some point. Therefore, it had a cause. Yet some scientists believe the universe created itself. But that’s not a scientific position. It’s a faith position. Personally, I think it takes a lot more faith to believe the universe created itself than to believe that God created.

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<sup>15</sup> This was reported in *The New York Times*, March 12, 1978; quoted in Edgar Andrews, *Who Made God?* (Carlisle, PA: EP Books, 2009), 94.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Norton & Company, 1992), 106-107.

The only cause that could create a universe like ours is God: an omnipotent, omniscient, intelligent being who is eternal.<sup>17</sup> God never came into existence. He has always been. That's part of what makes him so unique. And if God can create a universe out of nothing—no matter or energy or anything else—why can't he create a baby out of a virgin's womb? The creation of the universe out of nothing, and the creation of a baby out of a virgin are unique acts, done for special purposes: to create the world, and to save the world.

I think the connection between the creation of the universe and the creation of baby Jesus is very important. In Matthew and Luke, there is a strong suggestion that when Jesus came into the world, he was a new creation. In the Genesis account of creation, the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters of the earth. The Holy Spirit "hovered" over Mary, coming upon her to create a baby. And when the baby grew up, he was baptized, to identify with sinful humans even though he never sinned. When he was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon him, too, and God called him good, just as he called the universe he made good.<sup>18</sup>

The reason why Jesus became a baby was because that initial creation became spoiled through sin. Sin is disobedience, lawlessness. It's a rejection of God. But it's not just breaking individual laws and commands. Sin is a power. It's a force. It's what twists our desires and perverts our thoughts. And part of God's punishment for sin is death and disease and everything else that's wrong with the world.

So when Jesus became a baby, it was the start of a new creation. God was starting something brand new. Salvation couldn't come from us. Fixing the world couldn't happen just by improving our education, or our government, or our technology, or anything else. The solution had to come from God. He had to create something brand new. He had to create a man completely unlike any other man—or woman—who had ever been born. That's who Jesus is—the new man, the perfect man.

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<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that many atheistic scientists and philosophers deny that God exists. They try to find other ways of explaining the universe. The Oxford-educated atheistic philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett writes, "What does need its origin explained is the concrete Universe itself. . . . It . . . does perform a version of the ultimate bootstrapping trick; it creates itself *ex nihilo* [out of nothing]. Or at any rate out of something that is well-nigh indistinguishable from nothing at all." (Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* [New York: Viking, 2006], 244, quoted in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008], 151.) This claim is not scientific, and it expresses a faith position, one that excludes the existence of God.

<sup>18</sup> There are also connections between Jesus and Adam, who was formed out of dust through the "breath of life" (most likely the Holy Spirit). See Genesis 2:7. It is no accident that Jesus is called the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45).

When he entered into the universe, the creator entered into his own creation. That's like William Shakespeare entering into one of his own plays so that he could die in place of, say, Hamlet. It's an amazing thought. That shows the extent that God will go to rescue his people.

There's much more to say about all of this. If you want to learn more about who Jesus is, keep coming. Keep listening to these sermons and reading some of the resources I've put on our website.

But I want you to think about this: If God can create the universe out of nothing, and if he can create a baby out of a virgin's womb, he can do anything. There is nothing he can't fix, and there's no one he can't save. That's why the Bible uses the language of creation when it talks about salvation. Consider 2 Corinthians 4:6: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." The God who can make the universe out of nothing can take spiritually dead people—which is how all of us start out—and make them into new creations. He can do that with anyone.

No matter what issue you are facing today, it is not too big for God. No problem is too big for him to solve. That doesn't mean that he will solve everything in this life. Unless Jesus returns, we will all die. But that's not the end of the story. The Bible ends with a recreation of the universe. The new creation won't have death, disease, decay, pain, hunger, thirst, or any other bad thing. It will just be God and his people in a perfect world.

This universe is broken. Sometimes, it feels cracked, distorted, without hope and without sense. But God didn't give up on his creation. God came down to us. He came into filth of this world, in the midst of animals. He lowered himself in order to lift us up. With such a God, there is always hope. That's what Christmas is about: the promised hope of rescue came to earth in the form of a special baby.

If you don't know God, call on him today. Ask him to make you into something new, a new creation. Ask him to transform your life. Ask him to give you faith so you can trust him.

If you're already a Christian, what are some of the impossible issues you're facing today? Bring them to God. Ask him to solve your problems. Ask him for strength. Ask him for wisdom. Ask him to create something new in your life.

Consider what the angel Gabriel said to Mary: "For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).