

I've got three questions for you. Questions #1: How many things have only happened once in the history of the world? Can you think of anything? I'm not saying there's none, but the list is pretty short. Generally speaking, Solomon was right, "**There's nothing new under the sun**" (Ecc. 1:9).

Question #2: Have you ever thought or done something that seemed to make sense at the time, but it was based on a misconception. Your concept of what seems to be happening and what actually happened ended up being totally different. For example, when we look at the moon, we have every reason to believe that the moon shines, that it gives off its own light just like the sun or the stars. Even though it makes perfect sense, that's a total misconception, because the moon only reflects the sun's light.

Question #3: Have you had this happen where there's a clever phrase or pun or a picture that you've heard or seen a bunch of times and never realized what it meant until you finally had a Eureka moment! You realized something was there the whole time that you never understood before—like the Milwaukee Brewer's classic logo. On first glance, it's clearly a ball and glove, which makes perfect sense for a baseball team. But little did you know the true wonder of this logo, the fingers of the glove form the letter "m" and the palm makes the letter "b". Milwaukee Brewers!

Why ask these three questions? Our section today from the Gospel of Matthew contains each of these three things. #1: something that's only happened once ever, **a miraculous conception**, #2: a **misconception**. #3: a **concept you might miss** if it has never been explained to you.

So let's unravel this riddle. What is one thing that for sure has only happened once in the history of the world? "**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**" (Matt. 1:18). What does that even mean, "with child through the Holy Spirit"? Later the angel explains, "**What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit**" (Matt 1:20). This special child does not have an earthly father the way that any other child ever born has a biological father.

This is the only time ever that a child has come into existence not from two parents, but from a miracle of the Holy Spirit, **a miraculous conception**. An Angel tells Mary, "**The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God**" (Luke 1:35). God has placed this baby inside her, but the angel Gabriel didn't send a memo to everyone in town to clear the record about what was really going on. He only announced this miracle to Mary.

Now put yourself in Joseph's sandals. Mary has already been pledged to be married to you. In those days, an engagement agreement had more weight to it than our modern concept of the word engagement. Today, a couple might break off their engagement after a fight or give back their rings. But the custom of their time was that breaking an engagement required an actual certificate of divorce. Did you notice in the text, Joseph is already called her husband as soon as they are pledged to be married, before they ever began to live with each other as husband and wife?

Now Joseph is hit with news that is sure to cause a **misconception**. His bride-to-be is pregnant, but he knows for obvious reasons, it can't be his child. So what is he to think? Never before in the history of the world has the conception of a child come about in any other way, so he's only got one possible conclusion to come to. His dear bride has been unfaithful, even before their marriage has officially begun. Now he's left with an unhappy choice.

Matthew's Gospel tells us, "**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**" (Matt. 1:19). God's law was clear about adultery and the punishment was severe—the adulterer was to be stoned to death.

Because the Jews were under Roman rule, they didn't have the authority to put anyone to death, just like later on the Jews had to bring Jesus before Pontius Pilate to have him put to death.

So even if Mary wouldn't necessarily have been put to death, she still would have carried the disgrace of being an adulteress. We are told Joseph was a righteous man, but also merciful because he didn't want to expose her and have her publicly declared an adulteress. He planned to divorce her quietly, a divorce that would have been in keeping with the law of Moses, since from all appearances, she had committed adultery and was with child. Everything Joseph was going to do was fitting and logical for his concept of what had happened, and yet it was all totally incorrect, based on a **misconception!**

So an angel of the Lord comes now to Joseph in a dream to clear up this misconception and tell him what actually happened. **“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” (Matt. 1:20).** Imagine the relief but also the sheer confusion. Mary has not been unfaithful, this has come about through a one-of-a-kind, never before heard of, miracle of the Holy Spirit—a **miraculous conception that was sure to cause some misconceptions.**

But God intervenes to make sure that everything goes according to plan. **“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son” (Matt. 1:24).**

Why did God conceive of such a strange way to bring his Son into the world? Matthew tells us, **“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet [Isaiah]. ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, ‘God with us.’” (Matt. 1:22).** This is a **concept you might have missed** if you were the average Israelite or anyone of us listening as the scroll of Isaiah was read. You heard it before! It was kind of a complicated story with a bunch unfamiliar names and places at somewhat of a random point in time. There wasn't much heads-up that this was going to be a sign of the birth of the Messiah.

So Matthew, the inspired Gospel writer, points it out so you don't **miss the whole concept.** ‘Look this is the sign fulfilled! The virgin gave birth!’ This is what was prophesied. This is the birth of Immanuel, the birth of God. So we can partially answer the question of why God did it this way by saying: it was to fulfill his prophecies and promises. But why promise a virgin birth in the first place?

God gives us some clues to answer that question in the words the angel spoke to Joseph telling him what that child was going to do. **“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” (Matt. 1:21).**

The Savior's birth from a virgin was a vital part of his mission. Every person ever born before or after this comes from two sinful parents. Therefore, every child ever born inherits a sinful nature from their parents. The psalm of David tells us, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).** From the moment everyone one of us was conceived and first came into existence, we were already sinful. Parents, that's why you don't need to teach your child how to be naughty, they figure that out all on their own, it's in their nature. Then they grow up into toddlers and teenagers and adults and parents and grandparents all of whom cannot figure out how to stop sinning. Try as they might, they cannot be rid of the sinful nature they're born with? Do you know any of those people? You're looking at them!

This is why the baby had to be born in such a miraculous way, not born of two sinful parents. Instead the sinless Son of God was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, as we will soon confess in the Apostles Creed. Jesus had to be born in this one-of-a-kind way, **without sin,** first of all because he's the perfect God, he can't have sin, and secondly because you and I were born **with sin.** Jesus had to become like us, but without sin, to save us and save our entire life, including even our birth, from

sin by going through it himself as our substitute. This is the way God came to be with us— through a miraculous conception—to be our Savior right from the start.

This is why Mary and Joseph were instructed to give the boy the name “Jesus,” because he would save his people from their sins. Here’s another **concept you might miss**. The names we have in English don’t usually have a special meaning within themselves, but names in Hebrew often had a meaning right in the name. We might compare it to the Native American custom of naming, like the man who came to be known as “Dances with wolves”. Why did he get that name? Because in the movie, “he dances with wolves!”

So what does the name Jesus mean? Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua. What does the name Joshua mean? It’s two words put together, the abbreviation for the name of the Lord, “Ya” (like Hallelujah- Praise the LORD) and the Hebrew “Yasha,” which means “he saves.” So the name Joshua and the name Jesus mean “The LORD saves.” Whenever there was a passage in the Old Testament like this one from Isaiah 25:9, **“Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us,”** the people saw that word for “he saves” appear. Then when they heard the name Joshua or Jesus, they would have known exactly what it meant. For them it would have been obvious, unmissable, but it **might be a concept we would miss**.

The angel is saying this, **“You are to give him the name Jesus, (the LORD saves)** because this boy is the Son of God who will **“save his people from their sins.” That’s a concept you can’t afford to miss. So “Joseph gave him the name Jesus,”** (Matt. 1:25) because he saves. **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).** Jesus— this is the name—the name of the Savior you need, and the Savior you have. God has sent this long promised Son into the world to save you from your sins.

Jesus! Name of priceless worth, To the fallen here on earth.
For the promise that it gave, “Jesus shall his people save.” Amen.
(CW 76: Jesus! Name of Wondrous Love)