

I Believe in Jesus' Virgin Birth. Matthew 1:18-25, Philippians 2:5-11

Let's begin with a simple test. Don't raise your hand or do anything, Just silently make a mental note of whether or not you agree with these statements (yes or no)

I BELIEVE..

1. The Bible, is inspired and without error.
2. In the virgin birth of Jesus.
3. That Jesus actually performed miracles
4. Jesus' death on the cross paid for my sins.
5. That Jesus physically rose from the dead

Congratulations! Whether you answered "yes" or "no" to any or all of these 5 questions, after three-years of seminary and hopping through a few other denominational hoops you can now be ordained as a Presbyterian minister. **But** before 1927, if you answered "no" to any of these questions, you would not have been ordained as a Presbyterian Minister. Let me explain.

For most of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Presbyterian Church was known as a feisty theologically conservative and evangelical denomination, guided in its faith and practice only by the Bible, Jesus' great commission, and the Westminster Confession of Faith. So, late in the 19th century as liberal (progressive) theologies began to take over the seminaries, Presbyterian church leaders developed this 5-point subscription list to insure that new ordained ministers were at least Biblically orthodox. Apparently many ministers who subscribed to the more progressive theological ideas were less than honest on their original applications, because by 1927, there was a large enough contingent within the denomination declaring that the wide variety of beliefs accepted within the evangelical community should not be so narrowly restricted. Thus, with the battle cry that "*theology divides but polity unites*", they over-ruled the subscription list and worked to insure that no such list would ever again be required for a minister's ordination. So now, it is completely up to your local presbytery to decide, whatever you believe, whether you are qualified to be a PCUSA minister; there is no longer any theological standard.

How did all this come about?

Since the age of enlightenment, modern deistic thinkers, believing that God was uninvolved with His creation, have used the platform of "scientific theory" to claim that there can be no such thing as miracles. And if God is not performing any miracles, then there was no virgin birth, no walking on water, no rising of anyone from the dead.

Thus, following modern cultural thought, progressive theologians began stripping the supernatural out of all the Bible's stories; reducing the story of Jesus' miraculous conception along with his performance of miracles and his resurrection down to something more along the lines of romantic fiction than historical fact. And because of this, from the turn of the 20th century onward, fewer and fewer Presbyterian pastors, along with those from many other mainline denominations, believed such biblically based stories about Jesus Christ.

So, how many church leaders no longer believe in the miraculous events recorded in the Bible? Let's just take belief in the **virgin birth of Jesus** as our litmus test for how "progressive" some mainline pastors have now become. According to a 1998 poll of Protestant clergy in the U.S., here are the percentages of those who do not believe in Jesus' virgin birth (I am sure that this number has only grown in the last 20 years).

<u>Pastors who do not believe in Jesus' virgin birth</u>	
American Lutherans	19%
American Baptists	34%
Episcopalians	44%
Presbyterians	49%
Methodists	60%

Jeffrey Hadden, results of a survey of 7,441 Protestant ministers published in PrayerNet Newsletter, 1998-NOV-13, Page 1. Cited in Current Thoughts & Trends, 1999-MAR, Page 19.

Strangely, when the general population was asked the same question, 75% said they believed that Jesus was born to a virgin; including 53% of the unchurched, and 15% of Agnostics and Atheists as well. Even among those who describe themselves as mostly liberal on political and social issues, 60% believed in the virgin birth. (2007-DEC: The Barna Group sampled 1,005 adults)

While I cannot explain this wide disparity of belief between the general population and many of their pastors, **I can and will tell you why – whatever you believe – that belief in the virgin birth of Jesus is intellectually valid and is an important foundation to every other claim the Bible makes.**

Because, as in a domino effect, if Jesus' virgin birth was just made up,

- then so could have been all the stories of his miracles and also his disciples' miracles,
- and also his rising again from the dead.
- And if those events were made up stories, then how do you know if God has had any involvement in your life?

- Or if you have been forgiven?
- Or if the God of the Bible actually exists?
- And you certainly should no longer think of your Bible as being anything inspired by God or as a authoritative guide for your life.

As the Apostle Paul challenged the Corinthian Church about their doubting of the resurrection from the dead, the same holds true for the virgin birth of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15). **If you don't believe the Bibles' truthfulness in this area, you would be mighty foolish to believe anything else it says about God, or your salvation, or life after death.**

If the Bible's miraculous truth claims mere fabrications then we have wasted a historic amount of paper, time, and human life in printing and believing the ultimate pulp fiction and are, as Paul concluded, *of all people most to be pitied* (1 Corinthians 15:19).

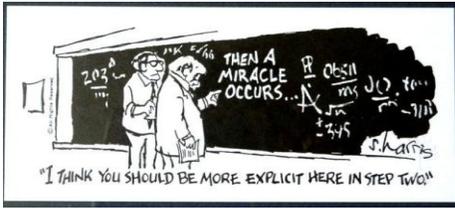
Now if you feel like you have just been theologically slapped in the face because you have questioned such miraculous Biblical claims, let me tell you why I believe in the virgin birth of Jesus and how you can be intellectually honest while believing the same.

First ask yourself a very basic FAITH question – Do you believe, because of personal experience, intuition, or witness testimonies, that God really exists and is involved in human lives on this planet?

Believing in God and God's involvement, can only be a faith statement because you can never prove the existence of God or the event of a miracle through use of the scientific method (by testing, measuring, or reproducing). By its very definition a "miracle" is a setting aside of the regular laws of nature by some cause that is outside of nature; in other words God. And the Bible also claims that God is a Spirit, which is another realm that is completely beyond the testability of science. (though there have been some very interesting medical experiments on the healing power of prayer : <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2802370/>)

So your personal belief in God has to go on beyond your ability to scientifically prove God's existence. Like it or not, you and every other genius, philosopher, or scientist who ever lived still have to take what the philosopher Kierkegaard labeled as a "leap of faith," and accept as real something you can never prove.

Interestingly, all scientists have to make the same leap of faith. Because in order for the scientific method to measure, test, and produce reproducible results it has to restrict itself to the normal events of the physical world. Thus in their experiments, scientists – by faith – must rule out interference from the spiritual world.



So while the scientific method must be atheistic, scientists themselves need not be; since they can mentally reason beyond provability that there is sufficient, even compelling, evidence for a guiding intelligence behind the universe as we see it. That why many scientists do believe in God.

And surprisingly the Bible does address this unscientific necessity of faith. In what is known as the "faith chapter" the author of the book of Hebrews writes that God is quite aware that faith in His existence often goes beyond the realm of provability.

Without faith it is impossible to please God,
for **whoever would approach him**
must believe that he exists
and that he rewards those who seek him.

Hebrews 11:6



In a similar way, as we have discovered and as the Bible teaches, that which can see as the physical world, is actually constructed out of unseen incredibly small pieces that are more space than matter. I like the way our Bible says it.

By faith we understand that the worlds
were prepared by the word of God,
so that what is seen was made
from things that are not visible.

Hebrews 11:3

So contrary to the rantings of Richard Dawkins, and the late Christopher Hitchens, who refuse to admit their own reliance on the faith of atheism, belief in God is actually quite rational because of the evidence of His existence that He has left both within us and for us to discover in our world even though such belief is beyond provability.

To conclude this first point. If you believe there is a God and that He created the world, then you should have no problem believing that God can, as He wishes, involve Himself

in our world by suspending the laws of nature to give us a miracle, such as Jesus' virgin birth or his resurrection from the dead and one-day ours as well.

The other day, Tom Foster told me just such a story from his naval days. Sitting on the fan deck of the ship, talking with another sailor about god things, his buddy remarked " *I just can't believe in the virgin birth of Jesus.*" After a moment's thought, Tom asked, " *Do you believe God created the world?*" The other guy said, " *yes.*" To which Tom replied, " *then what is so hard about believing in the virgin birth?*" ... " *Oh, I never thought of it that way,*" said the other sailor.

Secondly, though beyond provability, there is plenty of **anecdotal evidence** to reinforce Jesus' claims to being God-in-the flesh and thus that there is a God, and thus that miracles have happened, such as Jesus' virgin birth, or his feeding of thousands from a single sack lunch.

By anecdotal evidence, I mean all the people who testified that they saw Jesus performing actual miracles and also alive again – as he said he would be – after they witnessed him being put to death by Roman soldiers.

- Such as those disciples interviewed by the Greek Physician Luke for both his Gospel account and "the Acts of the Apostles." He wrote that Jesus *presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs* (Acts 1:3). Now Luke could have lied about them saying so, but as an investigative medical doctor why would he? (what did he have to gain).
- Then there were the over 500 witnesses referenced by the apostle Paul, who invited his unbelieving readers to go interview them (1 Corinthians 15:3-7).
- Then there were the personal testimonies of the other three Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, John, who had been Jesus' disciples and who dedicated both their lives and their deaths to telling his story.

Now the problem with such anecdotal evidence which is what a personal testimony is, that not having seen the event yourself, you can never prove what one individual witness said was verifiably true. But when you add together so many witnesses who say the same thing then you CAN come to a reasonable conclusion of the truth. One witness is not enough, but a multitude of witnesses give you a very solid basis for determining is most likely true. That is why the Bible mandates that the testimony of 2-3 witnesses is needed to convict any one of breaking any law.

But you say all this was recorded in one book – the Bible – so couldn't it all have been made up? NO. **Because the Bible is not one book.** It is a collection of multiple writings by multiple authors, gathered together literally over a span of thousands of

years. And all these authors described personal experiences of God performing miracles in their world. As the writer of Hebrews assures us.

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors
in many and various ways by the prophets,
but in these last days he has spoken to us
by a Son Hebrews 1:1

Take the testimony of the 10 authors of our New Testament, who claimed to have heard Jesus declaring that he was God and then proving that he was so by performing miracles and rising from the dead. All these testimonies should lead you to the very reasonable conclusion that such miracles did occur and that Jesus was who he said he was – God having come to earth.

The only thing better than such witnesses to take your faith in God beyond reasonability to actual fact, would be to experience a miracle for yourself. But since, by definition, miracles don't happen regularly and don't happen the same way every time, if one happened to you it would prove to you beyond any reasonable doubt the existence of God ... but of course everyone else would just have to take your word for it; welcome to the cloud of witnesses.

So now we get to the **virgin birth, as a specific miracle, as it was recorded in Matthew and Luke's Gospel.** Realize that neither of these writers actually witnessed the events surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood. For their gospel account, they had to rely

- on the stories told Mary the Mother of Jesus,
- possibly Elizabeth her aunt,
- maybe some other relatives these women relating stories that they had heard,
- and upon Jesus' own self awareness.

Certainly by the time of the Gospel writers only these two women could testify to the actual events surrounding Jesus' conception.

You may ask, "*but doesn't Matthew's Gospel tell us of **Joseph's** angst and angelic verifications?*" Yes, but since Joseph was apparently no longer living by Jesus' adulthood, even his story could only have been told by Mary. So we have the testimony of two women. First there was Elizabeth, Mary's older aunt, whose husband Zechariah informed her of an angelic visitor declaring that they would in their old age miraculously conceive and bear a son named John (the Baptist), who would be a herald for the coming Messiah.

Then in Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, upon receiving a surprise visit from her niece Mary, the baby inside her leaped for joy, and Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit exclaimed, *blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?* (Luke 1:42-43). Thus Elizabeth had her own personal verification that the story Mary was going to tell of her own angelically announced conception was the truth.

And while Joseph wasn't around to tell his own story, certainly Joseph's actions following the discovery of Mary's pregnancy, such as his going ahead with the marriage after having considered a divorce, and then fleeing to Egypt with the baby, all give credible witness to some event (events) which helped Joseph realize that that Mary's pregnancy was indeed through the miraculous intervention of God and that he was now chosen to help raise God's promised messiah. That is why, as angelically instructed, Joseph named this child Jesus, "the salvation of God."



Finally, in addition to the witness of his parents and relatives, there is Jesus' own recognition of his who he was and his miraculous birth. Very little is known of Jesus' childhood. Luke only records just one event where the 12-year-old Jesus stayed behind at the Temple in Jerusalem, talking to the rabbis for several days after his parents had left for home.

After three days of panicked searching, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor (Luke 2:46-52)

When Jesus responded to his mother's admonition that he had caused her and his "father" Joseph anxiety, his reply, *Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*" indicates that even at this age Jesus knew who he was and the difference between his adoptive father Joseph, and God his Father.

Later as an adult, when his opponents challenged his legitimacy as a spokesman for God. Jesus chided them saying, *Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.'* Then the Jews said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, before

Abraham was, I am. (John 8:56-58). And as he later told his disciples, *if you have seen me you have seen my father* (John 14:9).



Then of course there were the heavenly confirmations, again heard by witnesses, both at his baptism and on the mount of transfiguration, where a heavenly voice declared "*This is my son, my beloved*" (Matthew 3:16-17, Luke 3:21-22).

So to summarize and give you something to take home.

1. There is no intellectual shame in believing in God or miracles, because while such cannot be scientifically verified, any intelligent open minded person can reason beyond the level of absolute provability that there is overwhelming evidence for the existence of God and His involvement in our world.
2. There are countless numbers of witnesses, from Biblical times right up to our day, who have given testimony to miraculous events happening in their lives. The sheer number of these witnesses, again can assure a reasonable person of the reality of those miracles.
3. There are the hundreds of Biblical witnesses whose testimonies verify that Jesus both performed miracles, and returned to life after his death at the hands of Roman soldiers. And if all this is true of Jesus, then the stories told of his miraculous conception by God into the womb of a virgin also become quite believable.
4. And since Jesus' miraculous birth, life, and return to life, which was verified, by witnesses beyond a reasonable doubt, proves his claim to be God,
 - then the teachings of Jesus
 - and his endorsement of this Bible
 - which tells his story along with many of God's other interventions in our world, and its instructions for our lives ... had better be heeded !!



For this book is as it claims to be: the inspired word of God.

And as for you and me, as Jesus told Thomas when he invited him to personally *'put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.* ***Do not doubt but believe.***
John 20:27