

Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes*Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)*

Hark, the glad sound! The Savior comes,
 the Savior promised long!
 Let ev'ry heart prepare a throne,
 and ev'ry voice a song.

He comes the pris'ners to release,
 in Satan's bondage held;
 the gates of brass before Him burst,
 the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,
 the bleeding soul to cure,
 and with the treasures of His grace,
 t'enrich the humbled poor.

Our glad Hosannas, Prince of Peace,
 Thy welcome shall proclaim;
 and heav'n's eternal arches ring,
 with Thy beloved Name.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Why the Virgin Birth? The Necessity of the Incarnation***Kevin T. Bauder*

God made humans to rule the earth (Gen 1:28–29). Conversely, He made the earth to be ruled by humans (Psalm 8:6–7). When humans flourish the earth will flourish, and because humans have sinned the earth suffers (Rom 8:19–22). Human rule has been partly thwarted by sin (Heb 2:8). God's purpose, however, has been to restore humanity to its rightful station of dominion over the created order.

To restore humans, God first had to deal with the problem of sin. The fall into sin brought humanity under the penalty of death (Gen 2:17). The word *death* stands as a synecdoche for the whole of God's judgment. It includes physical death, present obtuseness toward God (in which people are dead in trespasses and sins, Eph 2:1), and judicial condemnation to a second, eternal death (glimpsed in Rev 20:11–15).

Because of human sin, the devil exercises a kind of dominion within the sphere of death (Heb 2:14). This dominion does not mean that the devil directly causes every human to die. Rather, it means that the presence of death in the human race (and in the created order) is directly traceable to the sin that Adam committed at the devil's instigation. The devil's lordship over death has made humans slaves to the fear of death. Only when they are freed from this slavery can they resume their rightful station as rulers of the earth.

Death is a just penalty for sin. Because God is just—indeed, because God is Justice—He cannot cancel a just condemnation. He cannot overlook sin, so He will by no means clear the guilty (Exod 34:7). Consequently, humans were enslaved to the fear of death and could only be freed if the penalty of death was paid first.

That is why Jesus came into the world: to save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). He came as the lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). To speak of Him as the lamb of God is sacrificial language. In the Jewish sacrificial system, the lamb died in the place of the sinner who offered it. It is also language that evokes the imagery of Isaiah 53, where the Messiah is brought “as a lamb to the slaughter” (v 7) because “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the



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www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
 900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v 6). In other words, Jesus "was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death . . . that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb 2:9). In this way He was able "through death . . . [to] destroy him that had the power of death, the devil" (Heb 2:14).

Jesus did not come into the world simply to communicate religious teaching or to set a moral example, but to redeem humanity from sin and death. He would work this redemption by bearing human guilt and offering himself as a sacrifice for sins. Only He could perform this task because only He was qualified.

What qualifications did He have to meet? The first was the qualification of personal sinlessness. All sinners must bear their own guilt; they cannot bear the burden of someone else's sins. Jesus met this qualification as one who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners (Heb 7:26).

Second, Jesus had to be able to bear the guilt of many (Heb 9:28). The guilt of even one human sin is infinite because it is an attack upon an infinitely pure and perfect God. That is why hell lasts forever: the guilt of sin cannot be expunged by any passage of time. Yet each sinner is guilty of many sins, and those many sins are multiplied among many sinners. Such crushing guilt, such staggering, colossal, infinite blame, could be borne by no finite being. Not even a mighty angel could have paid the price of human sin. To bear an infinite guilt, the Lord Jesus had to be an infinite person. To become our savior, Jesus Christ first had to be our great God (Titus 2:13). The deity of Christ is essential to our salvation.

Third, to pay for human sins Jesus had to die a human death. That is why, for a little while, He was made lower than the angels: so that He could taste death (Heb 2:9). It was by dying that He was able to destroy the power of the devil and to liberate those who were enslaved by the fear of death (Heb 2:14–15). To die this death, however, He had to be fully human.

In sum, to save humans from the consequences of sin, Jesus had to be both divine and human. How could such a person be possible? To be human is to be a descendant of Adam. How could God—Adam's maker—be born as one of Adam's children?

This is the very question that occurred to Mary at the Annunciation. Gabriel announced to Mary that she would give birth to a son who would be called the Son of the Highest. Astonished, Mary asked, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34).

Mary's question has two parts. One has to do with the facts of biology: no other woman has ever borne a child without male involvement. The other has to do with the nature of generation. Like gives birth to like. Cows bear

cows. Sheep bear sheep. Humans bear humans. How could any human being give birth to the Son of the Highest?

Gabriel's answer to both questions is the same: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Mary would bear a son, and He would be the Son of God, by virtue of a virgin conception and birth.

Without a human birth, Jesus would not have been truly human. Without a virgin birth, Jesus would not have been God. If He had failed to meet either of those qualifications, He could not have become the sacrifice who would redeem humans from the penalty of sin. All the redeemed of all ages owe their salvation to the virgin birth of Christ.

The virgin birth is not a tangential doctrine located on the periphery of the Christian faith. It is a theological nexus that holds many important doctrines together. Without a virgin birth there could have been no God-man. Without a God-man there could have been no sacrifice for human sin. Without a sacrifice there could have been no human salvation. Without human salvation God's plan for creation would have failed. The virgin birth of Christ is one of the core doctrines of the Christian faith.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
