

Theme: The Five Miracles of Christmas

1. Jesus was born of a Virgin—Matthew 1:18

What exactly is a miracle? As the Bible defines it, a miracle is something that happens outside of the laws of nature. It is something that's impossible according to the very laws of nature that God set up—it cannot happen. By its very definition miracles are something only God can do. For only God has the power to go against the laws of nature. Sure people like Elijah and Paul performed miracles—but it is clear that they only had the power to do so from the Lord. People use this term a lot, don't they. They use the term miracle to describe some amazing occurrence or something that was difficult and nearly impossible for most people to do in most circumstances. People talk about a miraculous finish in a race, or perhaps you watched the "Miracle on 34th Street" this season. People often use the term miracle when talking about the birth of a child. Sure, it's amazing and wonderful. But is it a miracle? Not according to the way the Bible defines the term. That is how God designed it to happen.

But there was birth that truly was a miracle. Jesus was born of a virgin. That's not possible, our reason tells us. Our sinful nature wants to fight back at every mention of a miracle. It can't possibly happen—they must be made up stories. They defy logic; they are offensive to our reason. So the natural tendency is to deny them—playing them off as nothing more than elaborate fables.

And we must admit, it's being born of a virgin is impossible—for us. This didn't happen through in vitro fertilization. Joseph couldn't do this. The Bible makes it clear that she was completely passive—**she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.** This was the work of God—the Holy Spirit specifically.

There are numerous examples of miracles on the pages of Scripture. The parting of the Red Sea, fire from heaven during Elijah's time, Jesus walking on water—we could go on and on. They are all amazing and wonderful—and truly miracles. This miracle, however, was a necessary miracle. In order for God to fulfill his promises this miracle had to be done. And we shouldn't really be all that surprised. God is the one who created the world through just his Word. He is the one who set the laws of nature in place. He has the power to do whatever he wants, when he wants. The first Christmas Miracle:

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.

2. God became Man—Matthew 1:19-21

In the first chapter of his Gospel, John says it perfectly. **In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

The Word is God. The Word became flesh and lived among us for awhile. Jesus then is the Word. Jesus then is both God and man.

God became man. The almighty, all powerful, eternal God, gave up the glories and riches of heaven to live on this earth. God became a helpless baby—unable to walk, talk, feed himself, or keep his head up. The almighty became helpless.

Some people knew who Jesus was when they saw him. Mary and Joseph certainly knew that this child was the Son of God. The shepherds understood it was well. The disciples too. But no one really understood the full ramifications of Jesus' deity. He looked like a man. So doubt creeps up in our minds. Jesus would give them glimpses of his divine glory. For instance at the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus showed just a small amount of his splendor. It was too much for them to handle—they couldn't even look at him.

That is how much Jesus gave up to live on this earth. But why would he do this? Paul explains it in 2 Corinthians, **you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**

Jesus gave up the glories and riches of heaven and became a poor lowly human being so that you might share in his glory. He made himself a poor and lowly human being so he could serve as our substitute—suffering and dying for us. So that, through faith in him, you would join him in heavenly glory.

He did this out of his grace. This miracle came about only by the undeserved love God has for us. And for that we praise and thank him. The second Christmas Miracle:

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.

²⁰ **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. ²¹ 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.”**

3. Isaiah prophesied about it 700 before Jesus was born—Matthew 1:22-23

What was happening 700 years ago? Just over 700 years ago, Sir William Wallace was executed for treason because he was leading Scotland in their war of Independence from England. About 700 years ago the canon was first used in war, The Renaissance had not yet begun, English as we know it today wasn't even around—they spoke what we know call Middle English. It would be about 200 years until Columbus accidentally discovered America—and even longer before anyone ever heard of Martin Luther

A lot can happen in 700 years. Just think of all the ways the world has changed in these last 700 years. It would be impossible to make any detailed prediction or prophecy and have it come true 700 years later. Sure there are some people who are famous for making prophecies. For example, Nostradamus made a name for himself almost 500 years ago by making, “so-called prophecies.” But many of his prophecies were so general they could be fulfilled in any number of different ways. And some of his other prophecies, such as the one in which he says that in 1999 Genghis Kahn would come back to life. Obviously that prophecy didn't come true and Nostradamus proves himself to be nothing other than a false prophet.

But then there is God and the prophecies he makes through his prophets. All of his prophecies come true. And unlike others, God's prophecies are specific. Just think of the prophecy he made

through Isaiah—it is anything but generic. 700 years before Christ was born Isaiah described his mother—she would be a virgin. 700 years before Christ was born Isaiah told us who Jesus would be—God. And 700 years before Christ was born Isaiah told us what Christ would be—our king. It is the details and the fulfillment of those details that make this prophecy a miracle. For it is only God who could fulfill his words spoken 700 years before. The third miracle of Christmas.

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

4. Joseph believed it—Matthew 1:24-25

You had been with this girl for awhile. Things are starting to get serious. In fact you got engaged. You were looking forward to spending the rest of your life together. But then she started gaining some weight—her belly started protruding out a little bit. She was pregnant. You didn't know how it happened, but it wasn't you, that much is sure. Just imagine all the feelings, thoughts, and emotions going through your mind. Just think of all the choice words you would have had for her.

While Mary and Joseph's relationship was most likely an arraigned marriage, Joseph still had the same feelings and emotions. Anger was probably on top of the list. How could she do such a thing—how could she cheat on him and sleep with someone else? Not only would he have been angry at Mary, but also the guy who got her pregnant. Who was it and where is he. Betrayal, shame, embarrassment, jealousy—they all describe what Joseph was going through. But he was a righteous man, who strived to do what was good and noble. And he must have still cared for her somewhat—so he decided to break off the relationship. But in private, because he didn't want her to be disgraced.

So an angel appeared to him. And told him not to worry. Mary didn't cheat on him. She wasn't who he thought she was. The baby she had wasn't conceived by any man, but by God himself—the Holy Spirit to be more specific. How would you react? If we were in Joseph's shoes we might have doubted the angel and mistreated Mary.

It just / v//s/z/doesn't make sense. It can't happen like that. It's impossible. Why would anyone believe it? Well, an angel was telling him that it was. And it wasn't every day that an angel appeared to him in a vision. So Joseph believed the angel's message. And he did what was told of him. He didn't divorce Mary, but he took her home as his wife.

There was no reason for Joseph to believe—but he did. That is the work of God. That is the fourth Christmas miracle.

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

5. We believe it—Titus 2:11-14

Ok, I'll have to admit, we are kinda cheating a little bit here. Or fifth miracle isn't explicitly stated in Matthew's account. In fact, for the fifth miracle of these five Christmas miracles of

Matthew, we aren't even looking at Matthew's gospel. But we turn to a letter Paul wrote to Titus.

This final miracle may not be explicitly stated in Matthew's gospel, but it's understood. It's the only reason why we are here today. If it wasn't for this miracle we wouldn't be even talking about Matthew's gospel.

We believe what Matthew wrote. Why? It doesn't make sense. It's contrary to our reason. It's not possible. Our hearts are naturally closed to this message. By ourselves there is no way we would believe something so foolish. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians, **The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.** And yet, we believe it actually happened. Why? A miracle. It is completely a work of God. The Holy Spirit is the one who brought us to faith. As Luther says in his explanation to the third article: "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

The very thing that is so foolish and contrary to the reason is what the Holy Spirit uses us to bring us to faith and convince of us it's truth. We couldn't do this on our own. We wouldn't believe that Isaiah correctly prophesied that a virgin gave birth to God 700 years before it happened. The whole idea seems ludicrous. And yet we believe that Jesus is God who redeemed us and made us holy. It is through his word that the Holy Spirit leads us to reject the ways of the world and follow him.

That's all the work of the Holy Spirit. He works a miracle in us through the gospel. The fifth miracle of Christmas from Titus 2:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.