

## Thinking Christian Podcast

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### To Be Surprised Again at Jesus' Birth

00:00:08 Welcome to the Thinking Christian podcast, your weekly guide to solid Christian thinking on culture, science, faith, and Christian confidence hosted by Tom Gilson.

00:00:22 Hello, this is Tom Gilson, and I am going through the gospels and discovering ways in which we can still be surprised by the story and the character and the greatness of Jesus, and also discover more and more reasons to be confident in the truth of the story, even when people say it's just a legend, just a story.

And this is all in the same spirit of my new book, *Too Good to be False: How Jesus' Incomparable Character Reveals His Reality*. I hope you'll pick up a copy of that, if you haven't already.

Let's dive into it. In the first chapter of Luke verse 26, it's called the Annunciation, where the angel Gabriel tells Mary that something that's not just once in a lifetime, but once in all of human history. is about to happen to her. Verse 26: In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a Virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. And the Virgin's name was Mary.

00:01:23 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, do not be afraid. Mary, for you have found favor with God, and behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

And Mary said to the angel, how will this be, since I'm a virgin? And the angel answered her, the Holy Spirit will come upon you. And the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

00:02:06 Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God.

And we'll break it off there. So what's going on here is an interesting interplay here. Um, interesting? Boy, am I understating it! Mary is scared to death, obviously. For me to even try to articulate the surprise that she must have felt there is impossible, especially the part where she's going to have a child as a virgin.

Contrary to 21st century biasp, people did know then where babies come from. You'll actually hear skeptics atheists saying, "Well, yeah, they believed in miracles back then. They didn't have science." They knew that much. And they knew it was a miracle. Virgin birth was not something that happened then anymore than it does now. And they it, but look at how this starts. She's troubled by his saying that the Lord is with her and she's wondering what's going on.

00:03:08 So the angel tries to help.

Is it wrong for me to say poor angel? This is really, this is a really hard task that God sent him on, to try to calm her down. But he says, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." And from there, he goes on to tell, first of all, that she's going to bear this son as a virgin, but not just that. Gabriel moves into what the theologians call eschatology he's putting in terms of the entire flow of history, and the Jews hopes for the coming of the kingdom of God, which

her Son would reign over forever: “And of his kingdom there will be no end.” And the angel is telling Mary that this Son is going to be, way out of the ordinary. Now that's the main theme of the gospels.

That is, it's one of the main themes there.

00:04:03 Jesus is extraordinary. Jesus is way different. We, we lose track of how different he is. We lose track of how different he is. We think of Jesus as our friend, but we've, we've got him, I think as William Platcher put it in the title of, of a wonderful book, we've got him domesticated. We can't domesticate him. Yes. He's our friend; *of course* he's our friend. He's our friend — on his initiative, on his terms. He says in John that we can be his friends. If we do what he commands. It's not an ordinary friendship.

And from the very beginning, there's so much about Jesus that just isn't ordinary. And so starts off with this sense of surprise. And yet there's at the same time, I kind of matter-of-factness to it. I won't go into the, into the, how the legends would do this, but generally speaking in legend, you'd see things being embellished and amplified.

00:05:01 And “Gabriel is standing 50 feet high. And Mary is in shrouded with light,” and that kind of a thing.

But no, it's just a conversation, although a most unusual one. And even though Gabriel is waxing eschatological in this whole thing, she just wants to know how can this happen? I I'm a virgin. And again, his answer is actually stunning in its simplicity. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you. And the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”

There's no attempt to explain it further than that. How, how could you know? There certainly is in most of the legends. My goodness, imagine how different Christianity would be — but no, there's certainly no sense of physicality in there at all. It's unimaginable to us as believers, that anything that would have been part of the story, but it's actually unusual that it wouldn't be that way in light of the typical legend regarding gods and heroes and great men of the ancient days. There's a lot of them who supposedly were, you know, had, um, unusual beginnings or heroes or gods or whatever, and the legends.

This just doesn't feel like legend. Gabriel says the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. Holy meaning set apart. Holy meaning separate. Holy meaning extraordinary. Holy meaning different.

And we're on a continuing exploration of the extraordinary Jesus Christ. We'll continue next time. I'm Tom Gilson for the Thinking Christian podcast.

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