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Question: If Jesus is God what does that mean for us and the world?

Over the last sermons on **Knowing Your Faith** we have talked about Jesus the man and His essential and pivotal claim to be God and the promised Messiah. Last week we looked at the Scriptures and a wide selection of prophecies that pointed to the Messiah. Today we look at Jesus claim to divinity, in the light of the prophecies, to consider the question of whether or not Jesus was who and what He claimed to be and what that should mean to us. Along the way we will also consider some other critical claims about Jesus and His life that the church has espoused and holds to, and why that is so. Amongst these is the claim that Jesus' mother Mary was a virgin and that Jesus lived a sinless life. Again, as we did before, we are not looking at the theological implications as much as the evidence of these claims. We will also consider Jesus' miracles and their implications. This done we will then consider how one responds.

One of the great Christian assertions is that Jesus was the Son of God, or put more bluntly, that God was the physical father of Jesus and that Mary was a virgin. This assumes of course that God exists and is the Creator. As Creator of the Universe and everything that can be known, it is obvious that such as God is more than able to have a child be born of a human woman without the sexual contact of a man. Parthenogenesis, that is a-sexual reproduction, is impossible for humans as it is for any mammals. In the Biblical narrative, Joseph's response to finding out that Mary was pregnant reflects this reality. In his world view, as it has been for many men before and since, there was no way his fiancé could be pregnant without the sexual involvement of another male ... and he knew he wasn't the father. A virgin birth was unthinkable because it was simply against the course of nature and all reason. That God chose to bring about Messiah's birth in such a way speaks of God's intent to break into human expectations and consciousness in new, decisive and unique manner.

From a Biblical perspective the virgin manner of Jesus' birth was recorded by both Matthew and Luke very early on in the historical record somewhere between 50 and 80AD. It wasn't something developed by the early church at a later time to tick boxes. We note that Matthew and Luke approach the subject very differently but with similar aspects. Matthew lists Jesus' genealogy from Abraham to Joseph then tells us the Mary was found to be found with child conceived of the Holy Spirit and Joseph wanted to divorce her until told otherwise by an angel of the Lord in a dream. In contrast Luke's account is much more detailed. Here we find that after being informed of what will happen by an angel Mary disappears off to stay with her aunt Elizabeth for the first six months and then returns home. No wonder Joseph's response was what it was! The stories are so different yet when interwoven a complete picture emerges. Scholars point to the historical reliability of such accounts when they work in such a manner as collusion is highly improbable as the accounts weren't written together or brought together until later.

The key aspect is the divine nature of the birth, in instigation, advice from angelic beings and how it transpired. It is further affirmed by Joseph's complete turn-around in approach.

We might also note that the accounts cannot be construed to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 ... that a virgin will give birth. The Hebrew word '*alma*' refers to a young woman. Generally, this would be a woman considered not yet of a marriageable age, which was young by modern standards, around fourteen years. The assumption, of course, is that such a woman would be a virgin. Where the word is used elsewhere that is also the case. In an interesting twist, when the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek in the Septuagint, the word for *virgin* rather than '*young woman*' was used. I sort of wonder if this is God's sense of humour. That the early writers recognised Jesus' virgin birth so explicitly was not something anyone was really looking for or thinking about. The reason for it though becomes clear, for important theological purposes, but we will come to that later.

What is more unusual assertion by the gospel writers is that Jesus lived a sinless life. To be God, incarnate as a human being, one would have to live such a life. Now that really is a challenge! Commentators are agreed that the record of Jesus life depicts Him as living a sinless life. Given that many of Jesus' disciples were from his own family and from close associates this is quite incredible. Think about your family, your close friends – how well do they know you? How hard would it be for them to find some fault with you? Some flaw in your character? Not long, seconds probably. Yet with Jesus we don't find this. In fact, we find something surprising. Normally moral teachers of the day, in both the Hebrew and pagan worlds, used themselves and their own flaws as teaching points. You know what that's like. How often have you advised someone against something and used your own mistake or mistakes in the past as a warning, an object lesson, to make point? We all do this. Yet Jesus never did although He taught on forgiving others frequently.

One can go wider and see what Jesus' contemporaries thought of Him. A frequent title used for Jesus, by people coming to Him, is unusual; he is called "**the Holy One of God**". (John 6:68-69, Mark 1:23-24, Luke 4:33-34) From Peter, to the demonic possessed, to the ordinary people, they all perceived a sinlessness in Jesus.

But best yet we can look to Jesus' enemies, those who sought to discredit Him and His message. How long would it take an enemy to find one of your flaws? Jesus' critics were unable to fault His character. Have you ever considered the fact that Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, the centurion in charge of Jesus' execution all declared Jesus to be innocent of any wrong doing. Ironic that they still executed Him. Look at the charges they brought against Jesus:

- Breaking the Sabbath (Matt 12:-14, Mark 2:24, 3:1-6....)
- A friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:10-11, Luke 7:34,39, Mark 2:16)
- He deceived and misled people (Matt 27:63, Luke 23:2)
- Claimed to be a king in rebellion (Matt 27:11, Mark 15:2, John 19:12,19-21)
- Taught not to pay taxes to Caesar (Luke 23:2)
- Threatened to destroy the Temple (Matt 26:61, Mark 14:58, 15:29)
- In league with the devil (Matt 9:34, 12:24, Mark 3:22, Luke 11:15)
- Committed blaspheme by forgiving sins (Matt 9:3, Mark 2:7, Luke 5:21, 7:49)

- Committed blaspheme by claiming to be the Son of God (Matt 26:63-66, Mark 14:61-64, John 5:18, 10:31-33; 19:7)

The first thing we can note is that they are not charges against His character. In fact, they reflect well on Him in many cases and poorly on His accusers. To welcome sinners in the desire to bring them to a better place in relationship with God is the very opposite of sinful, it is doing the work of God. To interpret God's Law rightly and not add burdens to it, if anything to lift man-made impositions on the Law, is not only righteous it is again, doing the work of God. Some, such as a threat to the physical Temple, or an injunction not to pay taxes, were simply lies or missed the point of what Jesus was saying entirely. The worst and final charges, the ones that led to Jesus' death, were the charges of blasphemy. Of course, if Jesus is who He claimed to be, then such charges become problematic for the accusers don't they? Yet, in all of this, none of Jesus actions point at a sinful life, or even a single sin. His opponents could not point out any character failing or sin in Jesus' life. They were desperate to do so but completely failed.

This then brings us to the miracles. What do they say to us about Jesus' divinity? In dealing with His religious opponents, who were furious with Jesus for forgiving sins and healing on the Sabbath, Jesus said, '**Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.**' So, he said to the paralysed man, "**I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.**" (Matthew 9:1-8). Only God can forgive sin. Only God, as Nicodemus the Teacher of Israel in John 3:2 acknowledged, can do the type of miracles that Jesus carried out. Work it out for yourself. This is not sinful action but the very opposite. If Jesus accusers had thought it through, they would have realized that the words Gamaliel would later say in Acts 5 when the apostles were on trial before the High Priest had already come true. Gamaliel said, "**For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.**" Rather than Jesus being sinful the actions of His opponents were becoming increasingly sinful.

The apostle Paul, writing after Jesus' death and resurrection, points out what had become obvious to the church, "**For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God**". It was God's intent that a sinless Jesus would become the vessel to receive all of the world's sin, our sin, so that it could be dealt with.

Jesus' miracles were conceded by everyone and even by modern skeptical scholars. Scholar Barry Blackburn sums it up well, "*That Jesus acted as an exorcist and healer can be described as the consensus of the modern period ... the success of which led to both a devoted following and opponents who charged him with sorcery.*" Joachim Jeremias, scholar of Near Eastern Studies and university professor states, '*Even when strict critical standards have been applied to the miracles stories, a demonstrably historical nucleus remains. Jesus performed healings which astonished his contemporaries.*' There were just too many miracles, they were too well attested in the ancient records, acknowledged by friend and foe, at the time and since, to ignore.

The key issue for the religious leaders of Jesus' time was well summed up by New Zealand theologian, Rev Dr Graham Stanton, when he was lecturing at Kings College in London. Stanton states, "*What was in dispute was on whose authority and with whose*

power Jesus performed unusual deeds." If Jesus is who He claims to be then the import behind Gamaliel's words remains: if the miracles are true and point to God amongst us, then who are we fighting with if we don't respond positively to Jesus?

The truth is the miracles reveal Jesus to be far more than any prophet, teacher or simple moral leader. To try to minimise Jesus in such a way ignores the reality of His life, the mature of His miracles and what they reveal. Theologians have done us a disservice when they have tried to make Jesus seem reasonable and rational in a Western or post-Enlightenment sense. Jesus was confronting. The miracles were specific, purposeful and done unequally through His term of ministry for a reason. They point to who He is; the one with authority over nature, over the spiritual realm, over all sickness and disease, and even over death itself. McDowell sums this up beautifully when he states, "*Jesus' miracles revealed the kingdom of God because Jesus was the King Himself.*"

Of course, we would be remiss if we didn't comment on the greatest miracle of all: Jesus' resurrection. With His demonstrated power Jesus could have avoided crucifixion. Many times, Jesus calmly walked away from crowds and people who wanted to do Him harm or kill Him but not the final trial, tortures and crucifixion. Why? Jesus answers this Himself in Matthew 26:53-54, "**Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?**" The gospel writer Mark observes (10:45), "**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**" At all points Jesus was in control and knew what He was doing and why it was necessary. John 10:17-18 records Jesus words, "**The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.**"

The import of this last great miracle, Jesus' resurrection, is summed up renown theologian N.T. Wright, "*Jesus' resurrection was the divine vindication of him as Messiah, ... the representative of Israel and thence the world ... demonstrat(ing) that the cross ... was the saving act of God.*'

Jesus' virgin birth was unexpected but documented by the early church. Jesus' miracles and exorcisms are well documented, researched, reviewed and validated. Few doubt their reality. Jesus was a man of honour, integrity and without sin. His most vehement opponents could not fault Him. As philosopher Kenneth Samples puts it ... "*Jesus credentials as the divine Messiah are indeed formidable – matchless personal character, incalculable influence on history, fulfilment of prophecy, power to perform miracles, extraordinary wisdom, bodily resurrection and so forth. Alternatives that deny his true deity offer no adequate explanation for these credentials.*"

So, if Jesus was God amongst us, His resurrection says He still lives, and the prophecies say He will return, then what is our response? What is your response? For starters it must be learn more about what He wants of us, what He expects of us and what He has in store for us. Our personal and communal life with Jesus starts with a simple prayer asking for forgiveness, for not walking through life His way, for sinning. We pray to ask the Lord into our lives to show us how to live and be His community. We learn to walk in Jesus' footsteps, discovering the plan He has for our lives and our role in His

community. This is not the arriving place, this is the start. The walk of faith is a journey with Jesus and with our brothers and sisters together, until Jesus returns or we are called to Him. You can pray by yourself, or better with a Christian you trust – simply ask someone to pray with you, but getting on the path is the best thing you can do in life and with your life. And if you've back-slip off the path somewhere along the line do the same – ask someone to pray with you – getting back on track is all that matters, the Lord wants that for you.

God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good!

Amen

Next week we continue in **Knowing Your Faith** by going to go back to the start of the Bible and look at some key things in the Book of Genesis.