

# The Virgin Birth

**The Incarnation Series, December 4 & 5 | Luke 1:26-38**  
**Senior Pastor Rob O'Neal**

## WE ALL NEED A NEW BEGINNING

**Augustine of Hippo reminds us that we all need a new beginning.**

Augustine lived from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries during the waning days of the Roman Empire.

He became Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and wrote many influential theological works.

Augustine used the best of classical thought as a lens through which to view Christian theology, thus laying the groundwork for medieval and modern Christian thought.

Augustine was one of the most significant theologians in the history of the Church.

Both Augustine's life and writings remind us that we all need a new beginning.

**Augustine believed that we humans are created to know and enjoy God.**

Augustine wrote that we are by nature drawn to God and the good, "The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you." – Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

Sin may have damaged that innate desire, but God's image is still in us, leading us to desire God and to do and be good.<sup>1</sup>

**At the same time, Augustine knew that we were strongly pulled away from God.**

Augustine was raised by a Christian mother and a pagan father.

His mother tried to disciple him in the Christian faith.

As soon as he was old enough, Augustine went away to school where he moved in with a girl.

He rejected his Christian faith and joined a cult.

Eventually, he began to see the sense in the Bible and felt drawn back to the Christian faith. Still, his philosophy and his lifestyle kept pulling him away from God.

How many of us have had experiences like Augustine's? It's a common story!

**Augustine's experience reminds us that we can't just pick ourselves up and dust off our old ways.**

We can't decide at birth to follow God for a lifetime and make that decision stick because we've all given in to temptation and everything that pulls us away from God.

Nor can we just decide that we're going to stop sinning and repair everything we've broken.

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<sup>1</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, in *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 361-364.

We need a new beginning, which brings us back to the Incarnation.

### **This Christmas we are studying the doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus.**

The Incarnation is the doctrine that God the Son took on human flesh to become one fully human and fully divine person forever.

What does that mean to us?

Among other things, Jesus' Incarnation means that we get a new beginning in Jesus.

Like Augustine, we know that we need a new beginning.

Our new beginning hinges on Jesus' unique birth from a young woman named Mary.

## JESUS WAS BORN OF A VIRGIN

### **Luke 1:26-27 sets the stage for what happened:**

*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.*

This angel had already visited the priest, Zechariah, to announce that Elizabeth, Mary's elderly cousin, would have a child after being childless for a lifetime.

Six months later, the angel appeared to Mary in Nazareth, a small village in Galilee.

Mary was betrothed to a man named Joseph. Preparations were underway for the wedding.

### **In Luke 1:28-33, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary.**

*And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O 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." Let's note two things about these verses.*

First, God is the one taking the initiative. God sent his messenger, Gabriel. God is with Mary already. God will cause Mary to become pregnant. God is the one taking the initiative.

Second, the child to be born will be the Son of God who will rule over God's people forever.

### **God's messenger told Mary she would have a son, but in Luke 1:34, Mary points out a problem.**

*And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"*

Mary was likely a very young woman, probably 15 years old or less. She had not been sexually active, and she and Joseph were not living together.

Matthew's account of Jesus' birth confirms what Luke wrote.

**Matthew 1:18** affirms that Mary and Joseph were not sexually active and that the child was miraculously conceived:

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.*

An angel appeared to Joseph, Mary's betrothed, in a dream to confirm it. Mary's being a virgin is critically important to note.

**In Luke 1:35-37, Gabriel explains how Jesus' conception will happen.**

*And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."*

God himself with cause Mary's miraculous pregnancy.

This isn't an instance of God reproducing or engaging in sexual relations with a human being.

Here the Holy Spirit is active in miraculous ways. The power of God will cause this pregnancy.

Therefore, the child will be holy. He will be holy because he is the Son of God, because God himself will create him, and because this process of creating a baby is unique.

**Then, in Luke 1:38, Mary responds in a bold way that sets everything in motion:**

*And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.*

## JESUS' BEING BORN OF A VIRGIN MAKES HIM THE NEW ADAM

**Romans 5:12-14 sets up the problem with the first Adam:**

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

Adam was the first human being created.

God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden with everything he needed. God simply told Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

However, Adam did eat of that tree.

**Adam's action is what we call "original sin."**

The term "original sin" sounds innocuous at first. He ate a piece of fruit. Big deal.

However, by that act he disobeyed God. It was an act of rebellion and an act of idolatry as he put his own will in the place that belonged to God alone. Beyond that, he brought sin into the world. The outcome of or penalty for sin is death, so Adam caused the death of everyone who has followed him. Adam's sin was heinous.

Adam was our representative. When he sinned, we all sinned. We're all now guilty. We all inherit his guilt.

Worse, when he sinned, he became corrupted. Instead of tending naturally to obey God, from that point forward, Adam tended to disobey God and to sin. Since then, we have all inherited his tendency to sin and to keep sinning.

Now we're all guilty and corrupted. That's original sin.

### **Augustine thought that Adam's sin nature was passed on biologically.**

Augustine noted that Adam's sin nature was passed on to everyone.

As he thought about it, he concluded that it must be through the act of reproduction.

He didn't know about genetics, but it's not too big of a stretch to say that he wondered if Adam's sin nature wasn't passed in the father's genes.

Augustine's thoughts about reproduction set off some surprising currents in theology and monasticism that are still part of some streams of the Christian tradition today.

Whether Augustine was right about the details or not, this idea is important because it illustrates that something comes to us from Adam which leaves humans guilty and corrupted.

### **The Virgin Birth of Jesus interrupts the transmission of original sin to Jesus.**

Jesus' virgin birth highlights the fact that we didn't save ourselves. God stepped in to save us.

Jesus' virgin birth also makes it possible to bring together a fully human nature and a fully divine nature in one person.

Most importantly for us today, though, Jesus' virgin birth highlights the fact that something happened to disrupt transmitting Adam's sin nature to Jesus. Adam isn't Jesus' father in the same way that he is the father of every other human being. Jesus is something new.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus being born of a virgin makes him a new Adam.

## JESUS BEING THE NEW ADAM CREATES A NEW BEGINNING

### **Without Jesus, human nature is hung up like a needle on a scratched vinyl record.**

Vinyl records are making a big comeback now.

It's surprising given the fact that digital music is so convenient and of such high-quality.

However, when you own a vinyl record, it's yours.

Plus, even the best digital recordings struggle to capture "everything" the way vinyl can.

I owned a ton of vinyl records when I was growing up. However, vinyl records have a problem—they get scratches. It's awful to listen to a record with a scratch. The song plays normally, then it hits a scratch, and it gets hung up. The needle is stuck in a loop. You just keep hearing the same note or word or phrase over and over\*and over\*and over\*and over...

### **Without Jesus, human nature is hung up like a needle on a scratched vinyl record.**

The Gospel is the Good News that God is saving his people through Jesus.

Creation to Conclusion is a way to look at the Gospel in five chapters.

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<sup>2</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000), 529-532.

Chapter 1: Creation tells us that God made the world. Including Adam. And us.

In Chapter 2: Brokenness, Adam sinned. When Adam sinned, we all sinned. Plus, when Adam sinned, he broke everything. He broke our relationship with God, he broke our relationships with each other, and he brought death and suffering into the world.

Chapter 2 also reminds us that we do everything we can to repair that brokenness. Sometimes we try to relate to God, but we usually relate to God on our own terms, trying to earn his favor or force him to accept us on our terms instead of his. Most of the time we try to live good lives, hoping that we can stop brokenness or reverse its consequences ourselves. Or we try to act as if none of it matters and we're fine as we are without God.

But Chapter 2 also reminds us that we can't ever fix our brokenness on our own. We can never force our way back to God. We can never repair broken creation. The more we try, the more we fail, and the more tragic our failure is.

We get hung up at the end of Chapter 2 in salvation history like a needle skipping on a scratch on a vinyl record. We keep skipping and skipping and skipping...

### **Jesus being the new Adam creates a new beginning.**

But Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit makes Jesus somehow fresh, the way God the Father spoke the Word of God by the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit when creation was new.

Because Jesus is conceived in a virgin by the power of God, he is something new.

### **Jesus' being born of a virgin is the new beginning that gets salvation history moving again.**

Because of the new beginning in Jesus, in Chapter 3: Jesus we become **new people**. Jesus took the weight of the world's sin onto his shoulders and died in our place to pay the price for our sin. He rose again so that we might be forgiven and adopted as children of God.

Because of the new beginning in Jesus, in Chapter 4: The Church we get **new life**. God pours out his Holy Spirit on us, we are made part of the Church, and we get a new purpose.

Because of the new beginning in Jesus, in Chapter 5: Return we get a **new future**. Jesus is coming again to make the world as it is into the world as it should be. We will live with him forever.

Salvation history gets a new beginning in Jesus. Plus,

## **WE GET A NEW BEGINNING IN JESUS**

### **Augustine got a new beginning in Jesus.**

Augustine lived a dark life for a long time.

Then he met a Christian preacher who helped him to see the Bible and faith differently.

He began to look at the upside-down world around him differently as well.

Something stirred in his heart and in his life, and he wanted God badly.

Pleasure and ambition kept a hold on him that would not let him go.

He became increasingly convicted about how empty his life was and about where it was going.

Then, in a garden one day, he got his new beginning. He heard a child chanting, "Take and read, take and read..." He couldn't locate the voice, but he knew what it meant. He went straight to a copy of Paul's letter to the church in Rome that a friend had been studying. He continued reading, it confronted his immorality, and he was convicted deeply and instantly.

He repented of his old life and put his faith in Jesus.  
Jesus changed his heart, and he got a new beginning in life.

### **Augustine argued that we all get a new beginning.**

Years later, when Augustine was bishop of the city of Hippo in North Africa, he came up against a group of Christians who argued that there were some things that could never be undone, some sins that could never be forgiven.

They stayed faithful during a time of persecution, while some Christians renounced their faith and other stayed in the shadows.

After the persecution, there were those who said that anyone who had renounced their faith or stayed in the shadows had failed. They could not lead in the Church. They were not true Christians. Their sin was unforgiveable, and repentance didn't matter.

Augustine argued that we are all sinners. We have all failed. We continue to fail. We never get to a point in life where we stop failing and stop sinning.

We always need grace. We always need forgiveness. We always need a new beginning.

And Jesus—born of a virgin, the new Adam—is always there to provide us with a new beginning.

### **Do you need a new beginning in Jesus?**

You may have lived Augustine's early life. You may have walked away, gotten proud of your accomplishments, become convinced of your superiority, and felt comfortable with your stuff. But now that's not working for you. You're stuck like a needle on a scratched vinyl record. You keep playing the same three notes over and over again. You need a new beginning.

Maybe you've been a follower of Jesus for years, but you've allowed sin to take over.

You're stuck in anger. You're stuck in addiction. You're stuck in selfishness. You're stuck in sexual sin. You're stuck in trying to prove yourself by your career. You're stuck in your quest for money.

You're stuck, the needle keeps playing the same three notes in your life.

You need a new beginning, and a new beginning is available to you in Jesus!

### **To get your new beginning, repent and believe.**

Stop fighting God who is calling to you.

Admit that you've sinned, that you've been pulled away from God, and that it's not working!

Put your faith in Jesus, accept forgiveness, and give your future to Jesus!

That's what Augustine did, and that's what you must do.

### **We all can have a new beginning in Jesus.**

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin.

He is a new Adam, a new humanity, and a new beginning.

### **That's what Jesus' incarnation means to us.**