

I have to admit, I like some of those old classic movies that are on this time of the year. Take for example the comedies like *Christmas Vacation* with the Griswolds or *A Christmas Story* about Ralphie and his Red Rider BB gun. I love the classics. I rented a DVD of *It's A Wonderful Life* because my boys haven't seen it yet. They enjoyed seeing it for the first time. I enjoyed seeing it for the 20th time. But an old time favorite is *Miracle on 34th Street*. This is the story of a man hired to be the Santa Claus at Macy's Department Store in New York City. But this one man had a great effect on so many other people. He got all the big name department stores to be less competitive with one another and to promote each other's products. He brought joy to a little girl raised in a one parent home. He even introduced her mother to a kind gentleman, provided a home for them, and made them into a family.

But I wonder why they called it, *A Miracle on 34th Street*. I mean, the movie writers made sure that everything had a plausible explanation. This man obviously wasn't Santa Claus. He came from a nursing home. The psychologist there explained how he actually had a non-violent delusion of being Kris Kringle. He was declared to be Santa Claus only because a couple postal workers decided to deliver all those Dear Santa letters to him. The house he gave to the new family? Well, that can be explained, too. He did receive some cash for his work. You could easily retitile the movie, *Plausible Explanations on 34th Street*.

There are those who try to approach the birth of Jesus in the same way. They attempt to come up with plausible explanations. But the truth is, there is no plausible, scientific, logical or medical explanation for what went on that first Christmas. There is only one explanation for it all. God performed miracles. So, let's turn our attention to the Christmas story as found in Matthew 1 and let's marvel at the miracles of Christmas.

It is a miracle that Jesus is Born of a Virgin.

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. 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.

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. (Matthew 1:18-20)

The first miracle is that Jesus was born of a virgin. Let's establish a fact here. Virgins do not have babies! Everyone knows that. Mary wasn't naïve. She knew that, too. Yet, when Gabriel came to her some nine months earlier and told her that she will give birth to a son, she accepted that. That is faith. But she was curious how it can happen because she was a virgin. The angel explained it. ***"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you, so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God."***

There is no logical or medical explanation for it. God performed a miracle. And it had to happen this way. This is no ordinary birth. If it were, then Christ would be a sinner like you and me and his death would mean nothing to us. No, our Savior needed a miraculous birth. He is God. He has a mission, to be our Savior and to die in our place. So God performed a miracle.

The choir will now announce this miraculous birth with their song, "Christ Is Come."

It's a Miracle God Saves Us

The second miracle we see in this chapter is the miracle that God becomes human. ***"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."*** (Matthew 1:21) I wonder if Mary and Joseph got into a fight over the name of Jesus. When the angel visited Mary, he told her that this child will be called, "Son of the Most High." I can see Mary saying, "That has to be his name." But Joseph could argue, "Yea, but the angel told me his name will be "Jesus." And if you want to stir it up even more, Joseph could also say, "... and Isaiah says his name is Immanuel."

No, they didn't argue over this. Most of us have three names, and probably a nickname or two. All of these names apply to Jesus because each name describes something unique about Jesus. He is God with US because he is God. He is the Son of God because he is the second person of the Trinity. But the name we know him best is, "Jesus." Jesus is simply Greek for Joshua and both mean, "God saves us." That is exactly what Jesus does for us. He saves us.

Jesus saves us in a very special way. You can't forgive anyone in a vacuum. If I owed you money, but you forgave my debt, someone has to pay. That someone is you. God wants to forgive us of our sins. He doesn't want us to pay for our sins. He wants to. But how? The miracle of God becoming human. It has to be a miracle. It would be like cramming the sun into a single Christmas tree light bulb. It won't work. It will melt the bulb, the tree, the world. But God did just that.

So the Lord, the King of the universe, God himself became human so he could save us by doing something only humans can do, die. And because he is God, his death pays for all our sins. And he is still human. We will see him as both God and man when he comes to take us home to heaven.

So all those names apply: God with Us, Son of God, God saves us. He does this by the miracle of God becoming human. Let's respond with hymn 65, O Little Town of Bethlehem.

It is a Miracle that Isaiah Predicted this 700 Years Before.

Our third Christmas miracle is that Isaiah predicted this 700 years before. ***“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”*** (Matthew 1:22-23) People love to make predictions. Last summer, people predicted that the Cleveland Browns may go deep into the playoffs. Around 1900, with the advancement of technology, they predicted there would be no poverty or hunger by the year 2000. How accurate were these predictions? The Browns will not make the playoffs. We still see pictures of starving children on the news every day. Usually predictions do not come true.

But we should make a distinction between a “prediction” and a “prophecy.” Predictions are guesses and usually don’t come close. Prophecies are different. Isaiah predicted 700 years before the fact that a virgin will give birth to a son and his name will be Immanuel. But he didn’t make an educated guess. He was told this by someone who would actually be there. God told him this because God not only knows the future, he creates it. So a prophecy is in reality a promise.

Isaiah’s prophecy is not the only one. Micah prophesied that he would be born in Bethlehem. Jeremiah prophesied that mothers in Bethlehem would weep for children who are no more, something that happened when Herod killed all the boys in Bethlehem. Hosea said Jesus’ family would flee to Egypt. If we counted up all such prophecies, the number would be about 300 and each one came true.

If God keeps promises like those, what about all his other promises? He promises angels are watching over you. He promises to hear your prayers and answer them. He promises he will never leave you. He promises you daily bread. He promises to forgive your sins. He promises he will take you to heaven, raising you from the dead if he has to.

Only God can make predictions that come true 100% of the time. And because he does, you can count on them. Let’s respond now to this miracle with hymn 59, Christ the Lord to Us Is Born.

It is a Miracle we Believe This

Our final Christmas miracle is that we believe this. Mary gave us a very good definition of what faith is. When told she would give birth to a son who will also be God, how did she respond? She accepted it and said, “May it be to me as you have said.” Now let’s turn to Joseph. The angel assured him that Mary didn’t commit adultery. Rather, she will be the virgin who will give birth to the Messiah and Savior. What did Joseph do? ***“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”*** (Matthew 1:24-25) He believed the angels’ explanation for Mary’s pregnancy. He accepted the virgin birth. He accepted his role in all of this. That is faith.

It is a miracle that Joseph believed this. It is a miracle that we believe anything the Lord tells us. No angel told you this is true. The sky wasn’t filled with the heavenly host when you first heard this. There was no star from the east that led you here. But we are here today because we believe this.

Why? For the same reason the Old Testament believers believed, the same reason the shepherds left their flocks out in the field, the same reason wise men traveled so far, the same reason Mary and Joseph believed. It is because of the Holy Spirit. We are dead spiritually before God and we can’t make ourselves spiritually alive. But God makes us alive. The Holy Spirit sparks, spawns and nourishes saving faith in our hearts and turns us 180 degrees around. We believe, not because we figured it out. We believe because of a miracle.

Let’s respond to this miracle as we summarize the miracle of Christ’s birth and purpose with an excerpt from Martin Luther’s explanation to the second article. Please rise.