

A Year of the Supernatural

So the Christmas season is finally over. Nearly a month has passed and the festive ornaments are all packed up and put away. Even the Christmas story is tucked away at the back of our minds and we will wait another eleven months before preachers dust off their old Christmas sermons and preach another Christmas series while we sing our carols again to remind us of the Christmas message.

The reality is most Christians will be quite happy to leave the story of Christmas behind and move on to more refined thoughts and ways of living that reflect the twenty first century we live in. If we are honest with ourselves the Christmas story is an unbelievable story. It is so far fetched to any educated reader that we have cleverly wrapped the gist of the story in lovely wrappers and glittering tinsels and leave it to our children to reenact the story. So I thought, since the Christmas season is all over, I want to revisit the Christmas story now that we are all sober again.

The evangelists who gave us the Christmas story unashamedly told us the raw truth. They didn't soften the blow. They told the story as is – no redaction, no editing – just raw unadulterated truth about the birth of Jesus the Christ. The Christmas story demands that we believe in the supernatural. In order to accept the birth of Jesus the gospel writers expect us to receive it at face value. The reader must be able to believe that something miraculous occurred. Hear these words again. Let them sink in and see how it doesn't make any logical sense.

Matthew 1:18 (NLT) This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Stop! Take a moment. Look at these words again – “before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit”.

Say my daughter when she was a teenager came to me and said to me “Dad, I'm pregnant and it is through the Holy Spirit”, my response to that would be – “my darling whoever that young man is he definitely is not the Holy Spirit”.

So pause again and hear these words – “before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit”. Have you considered that? Do you believe that? You are required to. If you don't, the whole Christian message will make no sense to you. The entire Christian faith rests on this bedrock. Christ was born apart from the usual process of procreation. Mary was conceived through supernatural means by the Holy Spirit. It doesn't make logical sense. If you do not believe in the supernatural. If you cannot find it in you to believe there is One who possesses the power to do such a thing – then the virgin birth will be an entertaining thought just like Santa and his reindeers.

Put yourself in Mary's shoes. In Luke chapter 1 we are told of Mary's experience. She is visited by an angel who tells us she is with child. She of all people knows it could not be true.

"How can this be since I'm a virgin?" (Luke 1:34).

For Mary it also didn't make any logical sense. "It cannot be so. I know I haven't been with a man." The angel responds to her.

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35).

The amazing thing about Mary was that these words spoken by a supernatural messenger of God was sufficient for her. "Oh, ok, I see – you are talking about the supernatural. You are talking about God activity." That's why her immediate response was:

"I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." (Luke 1:38)

Mary had a default setting that believed in the supernatural. She believed God can do anything. When the angel of the Lord reminded her, "For with God nothing will be impossible" - That was sufficient for Mary. "That's fine Lord. I'll let you work it out".

Matthew on the other hand focused on Joseph's experience. When Joseph finds out about Mary's pregnancy he goes straight to the logic.

Matthew 1:18-19 (NKJV) Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

Try and put yourself in Joseph's position. You've heard Mary's explanation but it is so far fetched. "An angel visited me. Told me I am pregnant and it is the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit". As "just" as Joseph may be, he isn't a fool. Being an ardent follower of God doesn't mean you have to be naive. He makes a decision to divorce her quietly without a public humiliation. But God intervenes.

Matthew 1:20 But while he thought about these things...

Nice way the English translators have put it – "thought about these things". The Greek word used by Matthew is "enthymeomai". It's root word is "thymos" which means passion as in breathing hard, with fierceness, indignation, wrath. You know those nights when you lay in bed, filled with persistent thoughts that create all kinds of emotions like a blazing fire out of control. Joseph laid in bed and had those thoughts spinning around him.

Matthew 1:20-25 (NKJV) But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.” Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Please don't miss this. Joseph in deep crisis, with thoughts that were probably spiraling his emotions downwards to the abyss. Has a Divine encounter in his sleep and obeys every word spoken to him by the angel of the Lord. Two things you must not miss. Joseph recognised it was a Divine message from God. Secondly, he obeyed God unreservedly.

The birth of Christ was a supernatural miraculous event

The Christmas story is not just a good way to bring the year to an end. How ever great or awful the year was the Christmas season allows us to be merry, deck the halls and say words we would never say in everyday life – like “Fa, la, la, la, la, la, la, la”. The story of the birth of Christ requires you, no it actually demands that you believe in the miraculous. Christmas is an annual reminder that the Divine plans of God will happen irrespective of whether we believe it or not. But to those who do believe in God activity. Those who accept that His ways are higher than ours. These ones position themselves to hear from God. And when they do hear from God, they act decisively in obedience to Him. The story of Christmas must be the starting posture of every one who seeks to be a follower of Christ. Like Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the Maggi from the East – we too must be ready to hear from God. Recognise the Divine in the mundane everyday life we live in. And when we do hear or see or dream the Divine activity – we respond with complete obedience. That's the only road to the miraculous.

Our Latin church Fathers called the Christmas season Advent (*the Latin word adventus meaning “coming”*). It is the season where we remind each other of the advent (the coming) of Christ. He has come and He is coming again. His first coming – miraculous and supernatural. And His second coming - will be equally miraculous and supernatural. Many missed the first coming of Christ because He came in the most illogical way. If you don't want to miss His second coming then I challenge you to go beyond the logical mind in your everyday living. Make room for the miraculous to occur in your life. When faced with whatever the year may bring to you – act logically but go beyond that. Trust God for the miraculous. That's the only way to experience the Kingdom life.

Let 2023 be a year of the supernatural.