

# BORN OF A WOMAN

## Part 1

All Scripture references are to the NIV-UK, unless otherwise noted.

*When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.*

– Galatians 4: 4 –

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**THE MAN, JESUS**, was the ransom or ‘corresponding price’ – the *antilutron* – for Adam. As Adam had plunged the human family into sin, corruption and death, so Jesus would buy back the race from these consequences by his sacrifice at the cross (Rom. 5: 19). For the purposes of this ‘transaction’ – for so it was – divine justice required that Jesus be a perfect man and sinless – equivalent to Adam at his creation (1 Cor. 15: 22).

### Mary

We are introduced to her in Luke 1: 35, with the declaration by the angel Gabriel:

“The holy spirit will come on 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*. . .”.

The term ‘overshadow’ (*episkiasei*) does not have the meaning here of ‘beget’. The word is translated ‘overshadow’ in the following instances, where it seems to mean sanctification or holiness, not unlike the symbol of the cloudy fiery pillar that hovered over God’s holy tabernacle (*see e.g.*, Exodus 40: 34, *inter alia*):

**Matt. 17: 5:** While he was still speaking, a *bright cloud covered* them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’

**Mark 9: 7:** Then a *cloud appeared and covered* them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’

**Luke 9: 34:** While [Jesus] was speaking, a *cloud appeared and covered* them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.’

### A Godly Woman

Mary was not ‘immaculate’ – that is, free from original sin; she was a child of Adam, like all of us (Rom. 3: 22b, 23). Nor was she the ‘mother of God’. To her, a Jew, a monotheist, there was only one God: ‘Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one’ (Deut. 6: 4). Her *Magnificat* (song of praise) in Luke 1: 46-55 reflects her orthodoxy, and ends, fittingly, with a reference to ‘Abraham and his descendants’, from which line she came. Indeed, it was *this faith* which had commended her to God and that would support her in the singular task with which she was now to be entrusted (Matt. 1: 1-16).

Mary was the *ethnic* link to the ancestry of Israel. Jesus is ascribed Jewish lineage, traced

back to Abraham through the men and women of faith, but he was not descended from Adam. Mary's principal contribution would be to carry the child in the normal way, supplying the environment (womb) in which he would develop, and to care for him after birth – the highest of privileges.

Plainly, the conception of Jesus was a miracle. Mary acknowledged this was so (Luke 1: 34, '... I am a virgin'). Christians have no need to apologise for believing in the miracles of the Bible. It is impossible to explain a miracle, or it would cease to be one. As with Jesus' birth, so with the miracle of his resurrection after being three days dead. (The universe itself is an inexplicable phenomenon; only the remoteness of time since its beginning – inaccessible to a human-scale history – gives sceptics an excuse to pooh-pooh any notion of an intelligent creation.)

### **An Imperfect Woman**

In the ordinary course of pregnancy, the health of the mother has a profound effect on the growing foetus. And given that Mary herself was under the Adamic curse of death, might Jesus have inherited her defective DNA at conception? The placenta forms a selective barrier, but permits the transfer of nutrients from the maternal side to the foetus, and the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in both directions. However, a breakdown in placental function could allow the transfer of some infectious diseases or toxins. For example, at that point in history there was the risk of lead contamination from the drinking water conveyed by the Roman aqueducts.

### **No Ordinary Man**

For the purposes of his redeeming the human family, it was necessary that Jesus be (a) perfect and (b) sinless. These two factors were not contingent on Mary; he could not have inherited her genes, or her physical and mental characteristics. His essential life came from Jehovah, the Source of all life, in whom there is no imperfection or sin. Jesus' *human-ness* was conferred by divine power, the *same* creative power that gave Adam his humanity, without the intervention of a mother. In short, Jesus was from conception destined to be in the earthly 'image' of God (Heb. 2: 9, 'crowned with glory and honour', like Adam [Psa. 8: 4, 5, *KJV*]).

In the same way that God's power stands guard over His people (Rom. 8: 28), the Heavenly Father would have protected His son while in Mary's womb from internal and external hazards. Jesus was born fully capable to become the unblemished, perfect Saviour. A rough analogy to this is the promise Jehovah gave to him in Psa. 91: 11, 12: '... he will command his angels *concerning you* to guard you *in all your ways*; they will lift you up in their hands, *so that you will not strike your foot against a stone*' (*comp. with* Matt. 4: 5, 6). In the book of Acts (13: 35) St. Paul draws attention to the prophecy of Psalm 16:

God raised [Jesus] from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said, "I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David." So it is also stated elsewhere: "You will not let your holy one see decay [*corruption*]."

Christians can be confident that God would not permit His only-begotten Son to come under the deleterious effects of Adamic sin as he was being formed in Mary's womb.

### ***The Roles of Mary and Joseph***

In the Scriptures Mary is called Jesus' mother and Joseph is called his father. For instance, on the occasion of presenting Jesus the infant before Simeon for the rites of purification at the temple:

*Luke 2: 33:* 'The child's *father and mother* marvelled at what was said about him.'

In *Luke 2: 41* Joseph and Mary are referred to as his parents: 'Every year Jesus' *parents* went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover.' And after losing Jesus in the caravan, following their visit to Jerusalem for the Passover, then later finding him in debate with the doctors of the Law, we read (vs. 48, 49): "When *his parents* saw him, they were astonished. His *mother* said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? *Your father* and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in *my Father's* house?'" This passage shows clearly the intricacies of the family relationship.

From the cross, Jesus commended his mother to the care of John (John 19: 25-27):

Near the cross of Jesus stood his *mother*, his *mother's* sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his *mother* there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, '*Here is your mother.*' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. He and his wife were *in loco parentis*, as the day-to-day carers for the boy. Later on, Jesus had (non-sanguine) brothers and sisters, the natural offspring of Joseph and Mary (Matt. 13: 54-56).

### ***Rumblings from the Opposition***

The Jews who hated Jesus vilified him – and, by implication, Mary – claiming he was a bastard offspring (John 8: 40, 41):

“‘[Jesus says] as it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father.’ ‘*We* are not illegitimate children,’\* they protested. ‘The only Father we have is God himself.’” [\* ‘born of sexual immorality’, *ESV*]

By thus turning around Jesus' accusation that *they* were 'doing the works of *your own father*', the devil (v. 44), they simultaneously subverted his claim to be carrying out *his* Father's will and appropriated that noble endeavour for themselves.

### **What If?**

It is useful to ponder how events might otherwise have transpired under different circumstances. Alternative histories offer helpful insights on the relevant actions and their consequences. The passage at the head of this article tells us Jesus was 'born of a woman'. But *why* was he? Why did God take this particular approach? Genesis states that the perfect man Adam was created from the various elements of the ground, fully formed, fully human (Gen. 2: 7). Why couldn't the perfect man Jesus have been made this way? If the divine end in view was that Jesus offer himself as a substitute for Adam, couldn't the transaction have been managed in some other, less horrific manner than death on a cross? We will examine this supposition in our next instalment.

*To be continued*

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