

2. His Birth

Each year in December (and for some, in January), nearly all the churches in the world observe the holiday called Christmas to honor the birth of Jesus Christ. In the churches of Christ, we do not do this for the simple reason that nowhere in the Word of God are we instructed to do so.

This does not mean that we do not speak of the event that other people celebrate at Christmas, that is, the birth of Jesus. The Bible speaks of it, the Qur'an speaks of it, and we are happy to speak of it also. After all, the entrance of the Messiah into the world is one of the most important events in all of history.

So let us recall some facts regarding his conception and his birth. As we have seen, Jesus existed before his birth. He said to the Jews that he had known Abraham the patriarch, who had lived 2,000 years before him. He said in a prayer that he had been with God in glory before the world existed.

HOW JESUS WAS BORN

When Jesus was to be born, his mother, according to the Bible, became pregnant by virtue of the Holy Spirit, without having sexual relations with a man. Here is what we read in the gospel of Luke:

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary... Then 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 bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus’... And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’” (Luke 1:26-67, 30-31, 35)

So Jesus was born miraculously; but he was also born poor and in humble conditions, not to say humiliating. In the providence of God, the time to deliver the child came while Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem in order to be counted in the census, according to the order of the emperor. Due to the

great crowds who had come there because of the census, they could not find lodging at a hotel. So Jesus was born in a stable where animals were kept, and he was laid in a manger, the place where food was placed for the animals. And although he was the greatest king who ever came into the world, simple shepherds were the ones whom God invited to the celebration.

Forty days later, his parents presented him in the temple in accordance with Jewish law. They did not even have the means to purchase a lamb for the sacrifice as was prescribed by the law of Moses, the Torah. Rather, they offered two young pigeons, which was authorized by the law for those who were too poor. It is obvious that this child was not going to grow up in luxury.

WHAT THE WAY HE WAS BORN DOES NOT PROVE

Jesus was born a little human child, a very poor child. He had taken the form of a creature, a mere man. What does all this prove? And what does it not prove?

Let us begin with what we must not say from this story: We must not think that God committed adultery or that He took Mary as His wife.

In the time of Muhammad, the heathen believed that God had daughters. And some Christians said that the virgin Mary was the mother of God. They also believed that Jesus was physically the Son of God, as if God had sexual intercourse with Mary, who was someone's fiancée. This is probably the reason we find these verses in the Qur'an: “The Creator of the heavens and the earth! How can he have a child, if there does not exist for him a spouse? ... And we believe that He—exalted is the glory of our Lord—took neither a spouse or a son.”

The Bible says in Luke 1:34-35, 37: Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God... For with God nothing will be impos-

sible.” This passage does not describe sexual relations. It describes a miracle brought about by the power of God.

If doctors of our day are able, with their limited knowledge, to implant an embryo into the uterus of a woman and make her pregnant without her having sexual relations; how much mores so could God make Mary pregnant without having sexual relations with her.

Something else that we must not say on the basis of this Bible story is that Mary is more than a woman, that she is a mediator or the source of every grace. People base this idea on a paraphrase of the words of the angel Gabriel and of Elizabeth, the mother of John the baptizer: “Hail, Mary, full of grace (or overflowing with grace)! The Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.” They believe that if Mary is full of or overflowing with grace, she must have a surplus. She can share some of it with us if we ask her to think about us, poor sinners that we are.

But scripture does not teach that Mary was a source of this grace; she was an object of the favor of God. Most translations of the Bible translate Gabriel's words as “favored one” rather than “full of grace.” Certainly Mary was a good woman who feared God. But no woman can deserve to become the mother of Christ. A grace is a favor that one has not deserved. In choosing Mary, God gave her a favor of which she was not worthy. It was a grace.

WHAT THE WAY HE WAS BORN PROVES

These are some things people sometimes say in regard to the birth of Jesus that are not true, things which Bible story does not prove. But what does it prove? Jesus left the glory of paradise to be born as a small child—and a poor child at that. What does this teach me?

First, it teaches me that he loves me, more than I could ever comprehend.

If we understand that before his birth as the child of Mary, Jesus had always existed with God, that he knew the glory and majesty of heaven, then we can better grasp the greatness of his sacrifice for us. His sacrifice was not only made in dying on the cross. It was also the fact that he left paradise and that he

was born into poverty. He not only deprived himself of the comforts and glory of his heavenly home, but he deprived himself of the comforts, luxuries and glory that this world offers. He left it all for us because we were rebellious and he wanted to bring us near to God.

Secondly, the manner in which Jesus was born teaches me that Jesus is able to sympathize with all my problems, even the troubles of the most miserable person. Not only can he sympathize, he can help us.

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil... Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:14,17-18)

The same author goes further to say: “He can sympathize with all our weaknesses; he was tempted as we are in all things, without committing sin” (Hebrew 4:15).

Jesus did not come down from Heaven to go directly to the cross. He did not come only for the three years of his teaching ministry. He was born an infant and grew as we do. For 33 years, he felt all the things we can feel. He was tired. His feet hurt. He could feel attracted to a woman. He probably felt ill. He experienced mockery. He sweated. Jesus knew what it was like to be hungry. He knows what it's like when an intimate friend turns his back on us. He was a big brother. He cried before the tomb of a friend. He led the life of a man from the cradle to the grave like one of us. He understands us. We can confide in him without fear.

Thirdly, the fact that Jesus left Heaven to become a man like us, teaches us that Jesus was not only given the teachings and the law, he was himself the model that we must follow.

“Love your neighbor” was said by the man whose neighbors tried to kill him. The exhortation to leave one's family for the sake of the Gospel was given by

one who had left his own mother for the sake of the same cause.

“Pray for those who persecute you” was taught by the one who would soon be asking forgiveness for those who put nails in his hands and feet. As I Peter 2:21 says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps...”

CONCLUSION

In the birth of Jesus, God himself gave the most precious gift that could exist. It can seem almost

absurd to give someone so holy, so good and so pure in order for him to suffer in the place of unworthy sinners like us. Who can understand so such an amazing love?

But one thing would be even more absurd, more difficult to comprehend: to refuse such a magnificent gift. To say to God, “No, thank you. I don't need Jesus. He can stay in heaven. I don't need your forgiveness.” When men choose to stay in their sins instead of accepting the Gospel, when they prefer to continue to offend God who loves them so, this is what is absurd and incomprehensible.