

## WAS MARY A LITERAL VIRGIN?

It seems obvious when the Matthew gospel says that Joseph never had sex with Mary and she was pregnant by the holy spirit that she was a virgin. Matthew uses a text from Isaiah to refer to her and it looks like he thus calls her a virgin.

Some wonder in the light of God's rule given to Moses that a virgin who does not cry out when raped must marry her attacker if that is what happened here. That would lead to a shotgun wedding and that is exactly what Mary and Joseph had. She married before she would normally have so she was really only a child. That would make Joseph the rapist.

Matthew says she conceived by the holy spirit. As the spirit does not have sperm and sperm is used in conception we have to admit that this is not as clear as it seems. Mary could have been raped and still classed as a virgin though not a biological one.

The Gospel of Matthew alone seems to tell us that Jesus was conceived of a virgin, parthenos in the Septuagint which he used, by his quote from Isaiah. In the original Hebrew- and it is only the original that counts, the word translated virgin was almah which meant a young woman. But even the term virgin usually meant a sexually inexperienced female but not always (page 29, The Womb and the Tomb). In the NABs Biblical Dictionary and Concordance under VIRGIN it is admitted that every unmarried girl was called a virgin for brevity and out of habit (page 239). In Jewish Rabbinic tradition, a virgin could mean a girl who had had sex but was not fertile. Perverted marriages with minors were allowed in those days.

The Rabbis actually held that if a child was born before a girl started to menstruate that the birth could be called a virgin birth and, obviously, the conception would be a virginal conception (page 27).

It is nonsense to deny that Matthew could have meant that Mary was this kind of virgin. Some say there is no evidence that he did but then there is no evidence that he meant a literal virgin either. Toss a coin!

Those who believe that it would not be as likely for Joseph to have married a minor who was therefore unlikely to be a literal virgin if he was a widower are also talking rubbish. A virgin who is raped is psychologically a virgin though not one physically. Was Mary raped? Some argue that God would not let the mother of his son be raped by her husband or anybody else when she was only a child herself. That is also an absurd argument. Look what God let the people do to Jesus.

Remember that Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, was considered a virgin even after Shechem had raped her (Genesis 34:2,3).

When Matthew used the Isaiah text though the original Hebrew did not have a virgin birth in mind it is a hint that he did not teach what Christians say he taught. It is the clue that shows that Jesus had a strange and godly origin but not a miraculous one.

You can say that a virgin shall conceive and give birth meaning the normal way. The woman is a virgin now but later she won't be and will give birth.

We are told that Joseph had no sex with Mary until she had her firstborn son. The Protestants argue that this until means that Joseph slept with her after she became a mother to Jesus. The Catholics claim that "Mary was a life-long virgin, until in the Bible does not necessarily mean what it means to us so the verse does not refute the Catholic position." But even so it would be a strange word to use if the Matthew author wanted to declare the virgin birth for what is the point of doing it ambiguously? It means Joseph had sex with her after she had Jesus. Also we see the Matthew author means until by until for he wrote that the Holy Family stayed in Egypt until Herod died. Mary and Joseph being husband and wife and not having sex would conflict with the early Christian doctrine that a couple didn't have the right to refrain from sex unless for a little while as a form of self-control (1 Corinthians 7). If Joseph and Mary didn't have sex then they didn't reflect this tradition. It is safe to assume that the early Church would not have created the tradition if Mary and Joseph had a celibate "marriage".

Matthew says that Joseph did not have sex with Mary until she gave birth to Jesus. The angel appears in a dream. Matthew doesn't actually state that he was sure the dream was a real vision. He only reports it. It follows that we are not obligated then to believe what the angel said. This observation is fatal to the silly tradition that Matthew taught the virgin birth.

Matthew only says that it all fulfilled the words of Isaiah but these words say nothing about a virgin giving birth while still being a virgin. As a result of the dream, Joseph might have groomed Jesus to be a saviour. But still it could just have been a dream. He also said that in obedience to the angel of the Lord, Joseph took Mary as his wife. Does this mean the dream was

real? Does it mean he saw a real angel? You would speak of a revelation from an angel of the Lord even if the angel was not really an existing being but just something you saw in a dream.

Joseph didn't touch her. Matthew said that after the dream of the angelic visitation Joseph took Mary as his wife but didn't touch her until she gave birth to her firstborn son. It doesn't say he hadn't been having sex with her before the visitation. The idea that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth is not in the Bible but is just a Roman Catholic invention.

Mary must have told Joseph about the pregnancy but as Matthew says he noticed she was pregnant and decided to get rid of her so it must have been a surprise to her as well. She didn't tell him until after he noticed. He trusted a dream more than her when he was going to reject her. Her word wasn't good enough.

Joseph didn't touch her after learning of the pregnancy. We must not read anything into this for there are countless reasons why he might not have touched her. Yet it is supposed that it was because she gave birth in a holy and miraculous way making it wrong to touch her. But God commands sex for having children though he says the body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. If it was bad for Joseph to love Mary physically then all sex is evil and sinful and dirty.

The miracle of the virginal conception by God and not man would be unnecessary. Even by the standard of the Law of Moses which required two reliable witnesses we cannot believe in it for there is only Matthew's word for it as we shall soon see. Jesus accepted the Law fully implying that he was not virginally conceived for if he knew that Matthew alone would say it or if Mary alone would say it – for only she would know the truth – then it would be unacceptable. The miracle certainly does imply that sex is disgusting and unfit for bringing the saviour into the world though Matthew may not have meant it like that and stupidly thought that the miracle was needed for other reasons.

Some scholars feel that Matthew distorted Isaiah to create a literal virginal birth story. Did he make a prediction about a baby, Immanuel, born from a young woman not necessarily a virgin centuries before into something it wasn't? If so then he mined Isaiah to be able to get his new invention accepted as history. All we are sure of is that Matthew did not teach a conception without male seed. It is possible he did not teach the virgin birth as in literal virgin birth.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit is best understood as saying, "We don't know. It was not normal that's all." In those days a girl getting pregnant by molestation rather than rape could have been described that way. The main idea is that the conception was arranged by God which does not necessarily imply there was no sperm. Conceived means sperm - period. Assume it was a rape. There was something odd about the rape when it was linked with God. Was it assumed that an angel like one of the Nephilim from Genesis raped her when in fact it was some man?

