

## COLLEGE CHAPEL TALK

---

# THE VIRGIN BIRTH

by the Rev. Ormond Odhner

The Virgin Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is the very corner-stone of New Church theology. This is more the case with us than with any other church, for no other church has the teaching *in its revelation* that the soul of every living thing is from its father and creates a being of the same order and nature as the father. That, many times, is the teaching of the Writings; and it follows that without the Virgin Birth, Christ was not, is not, and cannot be God.

The Virgin Birth was, perhaps, the greatest of all miracles; and as a miracle it remains, even for us, a mystery, a thing beyond full understanding. In the Writings, however, we are told certain things about it—enough to see its absolute necessity, and a few things more that are within the comprehension of finite minds.

Mary was betrothed or engaged to Joseph, but they had not yet come together. Woman signifies affection, the affection of truth; a virgin woman, such affection not yet conjoined with any truth: a pure, virginal affection of truth; and a betrothed virgin, this affection longing for, ready for, conjunction with truth.

In the Heavenly Doctrines it is said, without further explanation, “It was necessary for [the Lord] to be born of a virgin in legitimate marriage with Joseph.” (*God the Savior* 38) With the ancient Jews, betrothal was the legal marriage, terminable only by divorce. But why this necessity? Was it simply that the Child needed the protection of a father, or, more important, the environment of a loving home? By betrothal, we are taught, each party is prepared for conjugal love (*Conjugal Love* 382). In the strictly spiritual sense, it is clear that the Lord can be born in us only in that which is signified by the virgin betrothed—a pure, untouched affection of truth, not yet conjoined with any truth, but longing for, ready for, such conjunction.

Mary, we know, is now in heaven. She was not regenerated by the miracle of the Virgin Birth, for no one is ever regenerated by a miracle. Regeneration takes place in freedom, and it was in freedom that Mary, following her doubts that a virgin could bear a son, acquiesced to the message of the angel, saying, “Let it be to me according to your word.”

Mary was a good woman, yes; and yet the *only* reason the Lord assumed the human by birth (rather than continuing to appear to people through the human forms of angels) was that He might take on the hereditary evil of the whole human race, in order to meet and conquer the hells on the same plane on which they had conquered people.

“The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the Power of the Highest shall overshadow you,” the angel had said to Mary. Every living thing receives its soul from its father, and that soul forms the offspring into the same order of being as the father. Yet a person’s soul is not life. There is

one life only, the Lord's; and it can be neither created nor divided. Hence we read, "The conception of a man from his father is not a conception of life, but only a conception of the first and purest form capable of receiving life." (W 6) The soul of a person, then, though immortal and though fashioned of spiritual substances from above even the heavens themselves, is still a finite, limited thing. Not so with the Lord. His soul was not a created, finite vessel receptive of life, but was the Divine life itself, infinite and eternal. But the soul of a person not only is a finite thing. In its final formation in the father it also receives the taint and twist of the father's hereditary and actual evils. Hereditary evil from the father is thus, as it were, a part of the soul itself, (albeit only its clothing) and the soul is forever above a person's consciousness, whether he be living here on earth or in the highest of the heavens. The paternal heredity, therefore, is ineradicable.

The Lord had no hereditary evil from a mortal father. All the hereditary evil, which He took on, was from the mother; and, even with us, this heredity can be eradicated. With him, it was completely extirpated, even as all other mortal, finite limitations received through her were also extirpated, until He was no longer in any respect her son.

But it is not simply the inmost soul that a person has from his father. We read, "All the spiritual (everything spiritual) that man has is from the father." (T 92) Loves are spiritual. All the Lord's loves, therefore, were also from the Father, Divine. Indeed, the Divine love of saving the human race was the one, only love that actuated any moment of His life, though His maternal human was, of course, affected by this love in merely human, finite ways. Hence it was necessary that He cast even these human affections out of Himself by Glorification, until He in His Human became nought but the Divine Love itself in a human form.

And this He could do because, though born of a Virgin, His Soul was Divine, the Divine itself, even as we read, "The Holy Spirit which came upon Mary signifies the Divine Truth, and the Power of the Highest which overshadowed her, the Divine Good." (Can., Redeemer, iv) The infinite Divine, this was His Soul, and hence it was that that holy Thing, which was born of Mary in Bethlehem, could become the Son of God.