

Questions for reflection, application, and discussion

1. Many liberal churches deny the miraculous story of Jesus' virgin birth. They argue that the idea of a virgin birth is not only impossible, but also that it is not essential to Jesus' story. However the early church saw it as essential, as evidenced by their inclusion of this truth in the Apostles Creed.
 - a. Why is the virgin birth of Jesus important, and even essential? How does the truth of Jesus' virgin birth impact the right understanding of who Jesus was and what he came to do?
 - b. How would you respond to someone who argued against the virgin birth based on its obvious biological impossibility?

2. Luke tells us that the angel begins by telling Mary *"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you,"* and then in verse 30, *"you have found favor with God."* Many believe that the angel is affirming Mary for her personal piety, and that God chose her because she had earned God's favor. But the word translated "favor" is the word usually translated as "grace," or God's unmerited favor.
 - a. How have you generally understood this passage? Have you thought that God chose Mary because she had earned his reward or because God chose her by His grace – or favor that was unearned? How important is this distinction?
 - b. How should it change our understanding of the story of Mary if we see that God chose her because of his grace, as opposed to believing that God chose her because of her personal piety and performance? How do these two views of the story fit with the Bible's teaching about our salvation and relationship with God?

3. When Mary asked the angel, *"how will this be, since I am a virgin,"* the angel answered one part of the question – how this could happen. But the angel didn't answer the other part of the question; how this would work out practically when she a betrothed virgin suddenly turned up pregnant, and how this would be explained to her parents and to Joseph.
 - a. To the degree that you could put yourself in Mary's shoes, how do you think she felt about this 'good news' of being chosen by God for this pregnancy, without also receiving any mention of how this unexpected pregnancy would be explained to her parents or to Joseph?
 - b. Why do you think that God didn't answer any of these questions for Mary at this time? What does teach about the way that God works in the lives of those whom he uses, including us? Can you relate to this part of Mary's story?

4. Philippians 1:6 promises, *"I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*
 - a. Should Mary have been confident that the story of her miraculous pregnancy which God started, God would also bring to completion? What reasons should we have to be as confident or less confident that God will bring our story to completion?
 - b. What story has God begun in your life? What does it look like to apply this promise to your life and your story?

5. Why did the angel tell Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy as part of his answer to her question, *"how will this be?"* What principle is God teaching about the way he works in the lives of his people, and what practical application can you learn from this principle?