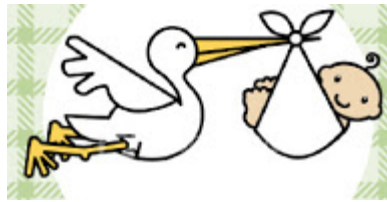


I am the oldest of seven children so babies arrived at our house at regular intervals. After one such occasion I asked Dad where babies came from and his reply was, "From under a gooseberry bush." By the way he then walked away chuckling I had the feeling that he was not quite telling me the truth, and anyway, his answer did not tally with the fact that we did not have a gooseberry bush in our garden.



I had seen pictures of storks arriving with babies, but, even at my young age, that seemed rather far-fetched as I knew that birds lay eggs not babies.

After a while I then asked Mam the same question. On looking back I would say that she was quite taken aback and unprepared for such a question. Her answer was, "The nurse brings them in

her big black bag." Each time that a new sibling was due to appear the nurse always arrived with a big black bag. There was no baby there before her arrival but there was one there after she had left, so Mam's answer seemed quite logical and satisfied me for the next few years. (Obviously Dad had nothing to do with it since he was always at work when the babies arrived.)



At that time sex was a taboo subject and I was never informed further about things so I was rather shocked to learn the truth from a girl at school. Mam had brought us up to always tell the truth so even more of a shock was that she had told me such a whopper!

So, what about Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus; how had He been conceived? This is what the Bible says



about it. 'An angel said to Mary, "You have found favour with God. You shall conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus."'

(Luke 1:30) Mary was scared, surprised and puzzled by what the angel told her as she was not yet married. She was then further told, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." No wonder the young woman was surprised! The angel assured her that with God nothing is impossible.

Despite the seeming impossibility of what she had heard Mary's answer to the angel is absolutely amazing, "Let it be to me according to your word." What tremendous faith she must have had to accept what the angel had announced to her.

What was Joseph's reaction? Had Mary been seeing another man to become pregnant? Even though he must have been extremely upset by the thought of her unfaithfulness we are told, 'Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.' (ie. Break off the engagement.) What a forgiving man! Joseph too is then visited by an angel in a dream and told, "Do not fear to take Mary for your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus; for he will save his people from their sins.' (Matthew 1: 20 – 21)



Both Joseph and Mary were faced with something that had never even been heard of before. Impossible? Ridiculous? Scary? True? Overwhelming? As it became obvious that Mary was pregnant there would be the shame of sex before their marriage. How did they explain things? How did they cope with that as well as the awesomeness of what was going to happen? I wonder how we would feel if we were told that we were going to be parents of God's Son? Probably most unworthy, yet very humbled to think that we were being used by God in such a miraculous way.

Jesus was born a long time ago. Does it really matter how He was conceived? Had Jesus been conceived in the normal way then He would have been no different from you and I. The fact of Jesus being born to a virgin as God's Son forms the basis of what is believed by all Christian denominations. If we take away the virgin birth we take away the very foundation of our Christian beliefs. We are unable to fully understand how this happened. The Holy Spirit is not an 'it' or 'a force'; He is God Himself who is unlimited in His capabilities.

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Does the birth of Jesus make any difference to us over two thousand years later? The main purpose of the coming of Jesus to earth as a human being was, as the angel told Joseph, ".....to save people from their sins." How sad that Jesus was born solely for the sake of dying for us – and not just for us, but for the whole of mankind. His death gives us forgiveness and enables us to go into God's presence after our deaths. Had Jesus been conceived in the normal way and was not God's Son then we would not be able to receive forgiveness and would never be good enough to go to Heaven. It was God's plan from the beginning of time and will be God's plan to the end of time.



When you look at the manger scenes on your Christmas cards, remember that Jesus was not just a cuddly baby lying in the hay but was someone born in a very special way because he is a very special person.

Bible Readings:

Luke 1: 26 – 35 Angel visits Mary

Matthew 1: 18 – 25 Angel visits Joseph