

The First Great Truth About Jesus

His Immaculate Conception

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In the seventies during a tour with the Embassy in Tel Aviv I served three successive ambassadors. The first, a Churchillian figure, was in the last three months of his term; the second a gentle very bright man who had been at Oxford with many of the Israeli leaders and intellectuals and who was drowned off Caesarea shortly after taking up his post; the third was a thrusting high-flying career diplomat who went on to be the High Commissioner in Australia. They were entirely distinct but they had one prime characteristic in common—each was meticulous in mastering his brief. When they were charged with a message to be conveyed from the British Crown to the Israeli leadership to which they had been accredited they spent many careful hours making certain that they had the facts and the nuances absolutely right; they also watched purposefully for the right opportunity to convey that message. This was especially true when it was a message that the Israelis didn't want to hear.

Paul tells us that we should be like that; we too are ambassadors with a message. Paul says it is “as though God were making His appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20). How meticulous are you and I in preparing for the opportunity to convey the message of reconciliation from the King of Kings to the people around us?

When they had the opportunity to be ambassadors Paul and Silas were ready. We read in Acts 16:30 that the jailer in Antioch asked them “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered simply but profoundly in just fourteen words “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. There is the test. When you and I are given the opportunity to witness are we ready to speak the words of the Lord?

I propose that there are six great truths that we are required to believe about Jesus. The “world” isn't very keen to hear them, and will instinctively be inclined not to believe what we say. They will never believe without the work of the Holy Spirit; but our part, our responsibility, will be to master our brief and look for the opportunity to pass it on.

The first of the several great truths which we must be ready to explain is that Jesus was not the son of Joseph. He was not the product of a handsome young engaged couple allowing their love for each other to get out of hand. That is what most people, then and now, would choose to believe; but it is not true. What is the evidence?

- a. The clearest of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus' immaculate conception is that of Isaiah: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). Micah prophesied that the child would be born in Bethlehem and Jeremiah prophesied that all the children of Jesus' age would be slaughtered by Herod.

- b. The Gospels insist that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. Luke 1:26-38 spells it out. Matthew in his gospel also makes it unmistakably clear. “Before they came together, [Mary] was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18).
- c. The Anglican prayer book sums up the evidence in the words “He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, was made man.”
- d. Some of those to whom we might speak are more inclined to believe historical records other than the Bible. In this context it is interesting to note that the Koran insists that Jesus was born of a virgin without a human father. No such claim is made for Mohammed.
- e. We should note finally and crucially that Jesus Himself was in no doubt that His conception was not only immaculate but timeless. In disputing with the Jews in the temple precincts Jesus said, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58). See also John 1:1.

This is the first unique truth about Jesus—unique because no other man was ever born without a human father. The evidence is clear in prophecy, in Jesus’ own testimony, and in the deliberate choice of Christ’s champions down the ages to die rather than deny His immaculate conception. Modern men and women won’t easily accept it. We must earn the right to tell them by our prayerful mastery of our brief, and trust by our prayers that the Holy Spirit will bring conviction.

As we shall see in the next study, the second great truth about Jesus follows from and relies directly upon the first. Both were essential if Jesus was to die in our place.