

## God Himself Storms In

“... the gospel of God- the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power **to be the Son of God** by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” So reads the reading from this week out of Romans.

God had already tried many things to ‘get through’ to Israel. He defeated Egypt for them. He sent judges. He gave them their requested King. He sent them prophets. Nothing was working. Though no one expected it, perhaps they should have: If you want something done, you’ve got to do it yourself (Matt 21:33-46). Now, God comes in person. Such an extravagance cannot be limited to benefiting Israel. As he promised in the Old Testament, his coming, death, and victory over death would bring benefit to all.

### Biblical Language Insight:

Matt. 1:23, Isaiah 7:14: ‘virgin’  
*παρθενος (par-then-os)*

Many Jewish critics argue today that the Jews of Jesus’ day would never have expected the Messiah to be born of a virgin. Leaving aside the obvious point that apparently they *did*, we can address the obvious main argument, which is that in Isaiah 7:14 the word translated as ‘virgin’ is the Hebrew word, ‘Almah.’ It is argued that though the word refers to a young woman, it does not necessarily mean that she was a virgin.

That point is itself debatable, but there is stronger evidence available. Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah, but not out of the Hebrew text, but out of the Septuagint (known also as the LXX), which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament. The LXX translates ‘almah’ as ‘parthenos’ and ‘parthenos’ does not have any ambiguity. It *definitely* refers to a girl that is a virgin.

So, who translated the LXX? The Jewish people themselves did, long before Jesus was born! This helps us see that Jewish translators themselves thought the passage referred to a ‘virgin.’ The view makes sense: why else would it be considered a sign that a girl was pregnant? Pregnant women aren’t exactly rare.

Selected readings  
this week:

#### Old Testament:

Isaiah 7:10-16,

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

**Epistle:** Romans 1:1-7

**Gospel:** Matthew 1:18-25

### The Church Fathers Said...

**Irenaeus** c. 115-190 AD  
Against Heretics

But again, those who assert that He was simply a mere man, begotten by Joseph, remaining in the bondage of the old disobedience, are in a state of death having been not as yet joined to the Word of God the Father, nor receiving liberty through the Son, as He does Himself declare: "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

But, being ignorant of Him who from the Virgin is Emmanuel, they are deprived of His gift, which is eternal life; and not receiving the incorruptible Word, they remain in mortal flesh, and are debtors to death, not obtaining the antidote of life....

But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility...?

## Is Christmas Just a Borrowed Pagan Holiday?

It is fashionable in some circles to try to surprise unwary Christians with the argument that various Christian beliefs are just borrowed from paganism. The Christmas holiday provides a case in point.

It is argued that December 25<sup>th</sup> is actually the date of celebration of the winter solstice and also the ancient ‘birth’ date of Mithra, a cultic mystery that thrived in the Roman military in the second and third centuries. Well, that it is. But that doesn’t mean that Christians borrowed anything. The truth is that we don’t know what Jesus’ birthday was and the Christian church did not celebrate it for centuries, focusing instead on Jesus’s death and resurrection. It was Constantine the Great, c. 330 AD, who first designated December 25<sup>th</sup> as a celebration of Christmas, but this was 300 years after the birth of Jesus!

It is nonsense to think that the idea of God having a ‘birthday’ was an invention borrowed from pagans. However, it is true that many aspects of the pagan celebration were incorporated into the holiday: some of the colors, the gift giving, etc. This does not mean that Christmas is a pagan holiday, it means that Christianity has the capacity to sanctify the baser things. Why should Christians not have celebrations? Because pagans have them? Pagans also eat- should Christians not eat because pagans do, too?

It is still possible to wonder if all the things surrounding the holiday are God pleasing. The commercialization springs to mind. Pagan origins that most don’t know about and we don’t act on is *probably* not an issue. (Romans 14)

### The Sennacherib Prism: Dated to 689 BC.

Isaiah offers a ‘virgin with child’ as a sign but goes on a few verses later to argue to Ahaz that his prophecy should be taken seriously, insinuating that if one can correctly predict the coming Assyrians, a trifle thing like a ‘virgin with child’ should be considered credible. 2 Chronicles tells us that they came.

For centuries, and even to this current day, the Old Testament has been ridiculed by skeptics. Why believe anything in it? But things keep popping up to corroborate it. In 1830, the ‘Sennacherib Prism,’ a large tablet written on in the Assyrian language was discovered, documenting from the Assyrian perspective their king’s military conquests in Israel and Judah.

This shows that the Bible was right in saying such a man existed and even that he interacted with the Israelites, just as Isaiah predicted, and as 2 Chronicles declared.

Advent- Year A – Week 4.

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