The Virgin Birth.

The denial of the Virgin Birth of Christ, together with the acceptance of an Incarnation, is a system heading straight for Gnosticism. It is a growing denial. "The giving up of the Virgin Birth at last," says one who has abandoned it, "gave some of us a considerable shock. But it would be the height of folly and unchristian charity for any of us to affirm that a non-belief in the Virgin Birth is incompatible with the strongest and most reverent faith in the Incarnation of our Saviour Christ Jesus." Then the Incarnation must have been wrought through some other means than in the Conception. This is Gnosticism. The first known Christian teacher to deny the Virgin Birth was Cerinthus, the great Gnostic of Ephesus. Our Lord, Cerinthus taught, was born Son of Joseph; the Christ, a Divine Being, descended upon Him in the waters of Jordan; on the cross the Christ abandoned Jesus, who cried after Him, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Gnosticism is perhaps the deadliest internal foe the Faith of Christ ever confronted, and it is foretold as the basis of the approaching Apostasy. 1 Tim. iv. 1-3.
The positive truth of which Gnosticism is a denial is surpassingly lovely. All requirements of Messiahship mingled, as only God could blend them, in our Lord. MESSIAH HAD TO BE THE LEGAL HEIR OF JOSEPH. Both Joseph and Mary were in unbroken descent from David, Joseph through Solomon, Mary through Nathan; but Joseph was heir of the elder branch; no Jew, therefore, could accept Jesus as Messiah, unless, in the eyes of the Law, he was son of Joseph. Betrothal, under the Law, involved the legal status of wedlock (Deut. xxii. 23-24); so, after the espousal, and before the marriage, took place the conception by the Holy Ghost. So also God's angel said: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife" (Matt. i. 20); and Gabriel could say, with the Law on his side, "the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David" (Luke i. 32). For Jesus was the legal Heir of the Head of the eldest branch of the Royal House.

Another requirement had to be met. MESSIAH HAD TO BE THE SON OF A VIRGIN. The seed of the woman was the first promise of God. Gen. iii. 15. Isaiah is more explicit. "The Lord Himself shall give you a sign—an unmiraculous conception would be no sign—" behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Is. vii. 14). "How?" asked Mary. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee..."
When our Lord as Universal Prophet utters the

Ghost, Immanuel: in Joseph, the Son of David; in Mary, the Son of Man; in the Holy Ghost, the Son of God: in Joseph, Heir of Israel (Matt. xxi. 38); in Mary, Heir of the world (Rom. iv. 13); in the Holy Ghost, Heir of all things (Heb. i. 2). The Branch of God was grafted into human stock from without: so, in the manner of all grafts, it bore its own fruit, not the fruit of the stock. "That which is to be born shall be called holy." But where lay the supreme reason of the Virgin Birth? Messiah's body had to be the sole burnt offering. The reason for Bethlehem is in Calvary. "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body didst Thou prepare for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast no pleasure: then said I, Lo I!"—with a Body prepared, not so much for the birth, as for the bruising (Gen. iii. 15)—"am come... to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. x. 4). God could not be bruised for sin: God incarnate could be, and was. Is. lxxii. 5. It was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin: it is impossible for the blood of the Son of God not to take away sin. What remains? That we identify ourselves with the Sacrifice. "And he"—the sinner—"shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev. i. 4).

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