

How can a person believe the unprovable virgin birth of Jesus as described in the Bible?

I am not Roman Catholic. Many denominations believe the “born of a virgin” doctrine. Those who follow the historical-critical method of interpretation (including materialists and scientism adherents) treat it as a metaphor (but not literally true) and treated by conservatives as a faith litmus test (literally true but with a significant suspension of disbelief by many adherents).

Those who follow the historical-critical method of interpretation, materialists, and scientism adherents, much like the Soviet Socialist Khrushchev years, try to stamp out superstitious beliefs by ridiculing pastors and parents who were so gullible to believe the virgin birth. While acting on scientific knowledge, such arguments paint ancient peoples with a broad brush of credulity.

Rome and Greece abounded with gods, goddesses, and demi-gods. Their pantheon grew with each city conquered. Both empires handled the annual appeasement of those deities with passionate belief. Their superstitions does not prove the Greeks were unscientific or that the Romans were illiterate knuckle draggers. They were not as gullible or unintelligent as implied.

All ancient peoples knew where babies came from. Even ancient urban city dwellers were not that far removed from their agrarian dependence upon livestock breeding. The most uneducated and illiterate slave knew where babies came from, both human and animal.

When it came to the Virgin Birth narrative, the text makes it plain that Mary immediately said it was impossible. A virgin birth made no sense to her. Joseph, her engaged husband-to-be, knew beyond doubt that the kid was not his. The townspeople had two other likely conclusions; either Mary had a fling with a village boy in the fields or a Roman soldier had raped her. In all scenarios, she faced social shame. Mary left town to stay with her older cousin during their joint pregnancies. Joseph’s cover story about an angel did not hold water as it made it seem after all that he was the father. The science of babies, even in rural backwater Palestine was that a virgin birth was impossible. To most people back then, some man had to be involved.

The idea of a virgin birth pre-dates Jesus with the intellectual Jews in Alexandria under the several Ptolemy reigns (post Greek empire but pre-Roman). They translated the Hebrew Scriptures and Apocrypha books into Greek (jointly called the Septuagint). They turned Isaiah’s prophesy of a young woman of marriageable age (Hebrew: *almah*) into conceiving as a virgin (Greek: *parthenos*). The Parthenon in Athens gets its name from the virgin goddess Athena. The Koine’ Greek text has Matthew quoting Isaiah 7:14 as virgin. While the Septuagint might have influenced Matthew’s word choice in Greek, his narrative clearly treats Mary as a virgin.

Modern rabbis decry that *almah* ever meant virgin. However, these highly regarded Jewish translators in Alexandria (seventy is the tradition) agreed that the word should be *parthenos*. Instead of picking other Greek words for young woman or teenage girl, they purposefully chose virgin. Since natural child bearing could never qualify as the supernatural sign implied by Isaiah, they wanted the educated Greeks to know that this prophesy was equivalent to “**when pigs fly**”. It would be so scientifically impossible, that it would qualify as a supernatural sign.

Muslims more strongly believe the Virgin Birth than do most conservative Christians. The Quran specified Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born (as a prophet, but not as the Son of God).

*The Quran narrates the virgin birth numerous times. Divine grace surrounded Mary from birth. She received a message from God through the archangel Gabriel that God had chosen her, purified her, and had preferred her above all "the women of the worlds." This same narrative was followed by the annunciation of a child to be miraculously conceived through the intervention of the divine spirit **while she was still virgin**, whose name would be Jesus and who would be the "anointed one," the Promised Messiah.*

Orthodox Islamic belief "has upheld the tenet of the virgin birth of Jesus, and is generally agreed in traditional Islam that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life, with the Quran's mention of Mary's purification "from the touch of men" implying perpetual virginity to most of the prominent Islamic fathers". – Wikipedia: Mary in Islam

For Muslims, while God breathed "His Spirit" over Mary, the child was not Gods' son (except as a metaphor). A literal sense of "begotten" would be blasphemy. They codified the doctrine that God has no need to father children. It is exceedingly offensive to them to infer that God had intimate relations with Mary. Such an image is deeply offensive to me as well.

The common argument remains that a virgin birth is impossible, as if claiming the naturally obvious is a valid argument against a miracle that qualifies as a "when pigs fly" sign.

The birth narrative, in the gospel accounts (Matthew and Luke), have the ring of truth for rural Israel. The rural communities tended to follow Pharisee chaste morality versus the looser morals of cosmopolitan Jews and Roman overlords. Joseph in particular planned to break off the honor-bound Jewish engagement for good cause. This leaves us with their unverifiable individual stories about angels, which radically changed their minds (Joseph in particular).

The two accounts include unexplainable nativity activities that neither Joseph nor Mary could pre-arrange. The whole narrative needs wider collusion for these disputable birth credentials. Matthew and Luke wrote within the lifetime of people alive when Jesus was born, thus whom could easily challenge the text, many of whom with sufficient motive to denounce the text.

Conservative people of the Book (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) value the historical narratives when miracles occur. A god who cannot upset the natural order would not be much of a god, and certainly not be supernatural. While all three monotheistic religions dispute the veracity of their respective scriptures, they all agree in a singular supernatural God who overrules natural laws.

Critics assume God cannot override nature. While we cannot prove past miracles, and no secular sources of that era comment at all upon the birth, we can only examine the text for consistency and other period writings to see how the early church understood the matter.

The narratives together deny collusion, myth, and fabrication. I echo Holly Ordway, "*If it is a legend to justify the church's existence, then that begs how the church even formed at all.*"

A Catholic link: <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/was-the-virgin-birth-of-jesus-grounded-in-paganism> . For further defense about the supernatural, see the C.S. Lewis book "**Miracles**" and the Holly Ordway book "**Not God's Type: an Atheist Academic Lays Down Her Arms**". (Word of thanks: David Hipple made important suggestions during peer review.)