

Reflections

DECEMBER 2020

Science and Christmas

In January 1945, C.S. Lewis published an essay titled “Religion and Science,” in the form of a conversation with a friend. The discussion begins with the topic of miracles and the Virgin Birth:

‘Miracles,’ said my friend. ‘Oh come. Science has knocked the bottom out of all that. We know that Nature is governed by fixed laws.’

‘Didn’t people always know that?’ said I.

‘Good Lord, no,’ said he. ‘For instance, take a story like the Virgin Birth. We know now that such a thing couldn’t happen. We know there *must* be a male spermatozoon.’

‘But look here,’ said I, ‘St Joseph –’

‘Who’s he?’ asked my friend.

‘He was the husband of the Virgin Mary. If you’ll read the story in the Bible you’ll find that when he saw his fiancée was going to have a baby he decided to cry off the marriage. Why did he do that?’

‘Wouldn’t most men?’

‘Any man would’, said I, ‘provided he knew the laws of Nature – in other words, provided he knew that a girl doesn’t ordinarily have a baby unless she’s been sleeping with a man. But according to your theory people in the old days didn’t

know that Nature was governed by fixed laws. I’m pointing out that the story shows that St Joseph knew that *law* just as well as you do.’

‘But he came to believe in the Virgin Birth afterwards, didn’t he?’

‘Quite. But he didn’t do so because he was under any illusion as to where babies came from in the ordinary courses of Nature. He believed in the Virgin Birth as something supernatural. He knew Nature works in fixed, regular ways: but he also believed that there existed something beyond Nature which could interfere with her workings – from outside, so to speak.’

‘But modern science has shown there’s no such thing.’

‘Really,’ said I. ‘Which of the sciences?’

‘Oh, well, that’s a matter of detail,’ said my friend. ‘I can’t give you chapter and verse from memory.’

‘But, don’t you see’, said I, ‘that science never could show anything of the sort?’

‘Why on earth not?’

‘Because science studies Nature. And the question is whether anything *besides* Nature exists – anything “outside”. How could you find that out by studying simply Nature?’¹



The Bible records that, as Joseph was considering Mary’s pregnancy and what he should do, “... an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from 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 (ESV).

In his book *Miracles*, Lewis observed, “The grounds for belief and disbelief are the same today as they were two thousand – or ten thousand – years ago. If St Joseph had lacked faith to trust God or humility to perceive the holiness of his spouse, he could have disbelieved in the miraculous origin of her Son as easily as any modern man; and any modern man who believes in God can accept the miracle as easily as St Joseph did.”²

As you ponder the biblical account of the birth of Jesus, what do you believe?



“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

ISAIAH 7:14B (ESV)

¹C.S. Lewis, “Religion and Science” in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 66-67.

²C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), pp. 76-77.

