The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth

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The Christian doctrine of the virgin birth teaches that Mary gave birth to the humanity of Jesus Christ by conceiving the Child apart from the seed of a man. This is an essential doctrine of the faith.

Scriptures Covered, General Outline:

1. Genesis 3:15
2. Isaiah 7:14
3. Jeremiah 31:22
4. Matthew 1:18-25
5. Luke 1:34-35
6. Luke 2:4-7
7. Galatians 4:4

Exposition of the texts as they relate to the virgin birth:

1. Genesis 3:15
    a. God would make divine provision to deal with the consequences of the fall. The sin nature would spread to all people (Romans 5:12).
    b. "Her seed" is unusual in that the genealogy of the Child would be reckoned through the woman (Luke 3:23)
2. Isaiah 7:14
    a. Spoken to Ahaz for the benefit of all Israel and ultimately all people (Isaiah 7:10,13, 60:1-3)
    b. "you" is in the plural (collective) form in the Hebrew
    c. "the virgin", Hebrew construction requires the definite article, should not be translated "a virgin" as some translations do
    d. No virgin is mentioned in context of Isaiah 7, meaning that the identity of "the virgin" was universally known without explanation needed (as she who was prophesied in Genesis 3:15)
    e. Virgin in Hebrew is "almah", from the root "to lie hid", young woman (a virgin) of marriageable age, found 7x in Scripture (Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Song of Solomon 1:3, 6:8; Proverbs 30:18-19; Isaiah 7:14)
    f. Some argue that the Hebrew word "betulah" can also mean virgin and should have been used, but this is not always true, such as in Genesis 24:16 (where an explanation to clarify is added) and Joel 1:8 (where it is used for a widow).
3. Jeremiah 31:22
    a. Disputed, but held by many of the early church fathers to refer to the virgin birth, for the following reasons, as summarized in the JFB Commentary on this verse:

        i. Gives a reason for Israel to return to her land, since the Christ would be born there

        ii. "created" implies a specially divine work

        iii. "a new thing" implies something unprecedented and miraculous

        iv. "in the earth" can also be translated "in the land" (depending on context, and perhaps should be translated such here)

        v. "a woman…a man" should be taken as individual people

        vi. Restoration of Israel is covenanted by God, and fulfilled by Christ, such restoration is found in the context

        vii. Proximity in context to Jeremiah 31:15 (this seems to many to be quite a circumstantial suggestion, however)

        viii. Hebrew word for "man" also used of Christ (Cf. Zechariah 13:7)

4. Matthew 1:18-25
   a. Verse 18, after betrothal, before relations, found with child, of the Holy Spirit (not Joseph, or another man)
   b. Verse 20, conception, effected by the Spirit
   c. Verse 23, quotes Isaiah 7:14, direct fulfillment
   d. Verse 25, Joseph and Mary had no relations until after Jesus' birth

5. Luke 1:34-35
   a. Wondrous curiousity inherent in Mary's question
   b. God the Holy Spirit not only effected the conception, but completely overshadowed Mary, lest the Christ Child be in any way tainted by her sin nature
   c. Qualification of sinlessness required to be the Savior met (Luke 1:47; Hebrews 7:26-27)
   d. Jesus the "Son of God", compare with "God with us", both divine titles

6. Luke 2:4-7
   a. Verse 4, Cf. Micah 5:2
   b. Verses 6-7, supernatural conception resulted in natural birth
   c. Thus Jesus in His Incarnation was both fully God and fully Man

7. Galatians 4:4
   a. God's Son sent forth from heaven
   b. "born of a woman", unique nature of His birth
   c. Mary therefore not the "mother of God", rather she is the "mother of our Lord's humanity"
   d. Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45-47

References Consulted for this Study: "Practical Christian Theology", by Floyd H. Barackman; "Messianic Christology", by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum; "Commentary on the Whole Bible", by Jameison, Fausset, and Brown.