



## The Case for Christmas: 5 Critical Claims and the Evidence

To begin... Read these scriptures:

- Luke 2:1-21 (p1306)
- Matthew 1:18-24 and 2:1-11 (p1232)

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### The Historical Core

🤔 Criticism 1: Jesus Never Existed—The Christmas Story is a Myth Copied from Pagan Gods

Skeptical Claim: Details like the virgin birth and the date of December 25th were stolen from older "dying-and-rising" pagan religions (like Horus or Mithras).

Apologetic Response: The Evidence is Solid

- The History Check: Almost all serious historians today (even those who aren't Christians) agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person who was crucified around AD 30. The idea that Jesus is a myth is rejected by scholars.
- Pagan Parallels are Fake: When you check the original sources:
  - Mithras was born from a rock, not a virgin.
  - Horus was not born of a virgin.
  - Crucially, none of these claimed pagan birth stories existed in their religions *before* the Gospels were written.
- The Gospels are Eyewitness Reports: The New Testament accounts were written in the first century, based on eyewitness testimony. Read Luke 1:3-4 (p1301). Luke says he "carefully investigated everything" to ensure certainty.
- The Ultimate Proof: If the apostles knew the story was plagiarized or made up, why did they willingly suffer and die rather than just admit it was a known lie?

🗣 Discuss:

Historical Confidence: Which piece of historical evidence (consensus of historians, the lack of pagan parallels, or the early date of the Gospels) do you find most helpful in answering a skeptic?

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## The Virgin Birth

🤔 Criticism 2: The Virgin Birth is Scientifically Impossible and a Late Legend

Skeptical Claim: Virgins cannot give birth; this miracle idea was added much later to make Jesus look special.

### Apologetic Response: A Necessary Miracle

- It was an early claim: The Virgin Birth is recorded independently in both Matthew 1:18–25 (p1232) and Luke 1:26–38 (p1304), written while eyewitnesses were still alive.
- The Possibility of God: If we believe in a powerful God who created the universe, then miracles—events outside the normal laws of science—are possible.
- The Theological Reason: The Virgin Birth was the necessary sign of the Incarnation (God becoming human). Read Luke 1:35 (p1304). It proves Jesus was not just a great man, but God Himself entering the world.
- The Embarrassing Story: In that culture, having a child without a human father was socially scandalous. The early church would never have invented a story that caused such problems unless it was the actual, known truth.

🗣 Discuss:

Theological Necessity: Point 2 argues that the Virgin Birth was necessary to show Jesus was the Son of God. How does this miracle protect Jesus's identity from simply being a great man who was later adopted by God?

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🤔 Criticism 3: The Gospels Contradict Each Other on the Christmas Details

Skeptical Claim: Matthew and Luke disagree on the family tree, the census, and whether shepherds or wise men visited, meaning the whole Nativity must be fake.

### Apologetic Response: Two Independent Views

- Genealogies (Matthew 1 (p1231) vs. Luke 3 (p1308): Two Purposes
  - Matthew gives Joseph's family tree to track the legal, royal right to the throne through King David's son, Solomon.
  - Luke gives the family tree through Mary's side to track Jesus's biological, blood connection to David.
  - Both are needed: Jesus has the legal right (through Joseph) and the bloodline (through Mary) to fulfill the prophecy of being the Messiah.
- The Census (Luke 2:1–5, p1306): The Historical Fit
  - Luke mentions a census under Quirinius. While critics cite a later date, research suggests Quirinius may have governed Syria twice or held an

earlier military post. The biblical account fits with known Roman practices of the time.

- The Visitors (Magi vs. Shepherds): Different Times
  - The accounts are complementary, not contradictory. The Shepherds visited immediately at the stable.
  - The Magi (Wise Men) arrived later (could have been up to two years later) at a house (Matthew 2:11, p1232).
  - Herod's command to kill all boys up to two years old (Matthew 2:16, p1232) confirms the Magi's visit did not happen on the night Jesus was born.
- The Takeaway: Minor differences in details are exactly what you expect from two honest, independent eyewitnesses describing the same event, not from a forged, perfectly identical cover-up story.

### Discuss:

Witness Accounts: Point 3 explains the differences in the Gospels' genealogies. How does knowing that Matthew and Luke had different goals (legal vs. biological line) help you trust the Bible more?

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### Criticism 4: Old Testament Prophecies Were Taken Out of Context

Skeptical Claim: Prophecies like Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2 were never originally meant to be about the Messiah. The Hebrew word for "virgin" (*almah*) just means "young woman."

Apologetic Response: Fulfillment by Design

- "Virgin" Was the Standard View: The Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint, or LXX), which was created by Jewish scholars approx 200 BC (long before Jesus), already translated *almah* as *parthenos* ("virgin"). Matthew was following the established Jewish understanding.
- Prophecy Has Layers of Meaning: Many prophecies have a near meaning (a small fulfillment in the prophet's own time) and a far meaning (the ultimate, true fulfillment in Christ).
- The Weight of Evidence: The total number of specific predictions fulfilled by Jesus is statistically overwhelming, including:
  - Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, p1190)
  - Descendant of David
  - Called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1)
  - The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53)
- The sheer number of specific details fulfilled by one person makes chance fulfillment effectively impossible (see Peter Stoner's calculations in *Science Speaks*).

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## 🤔 Criticism 5: The Incarnation is Philosophically Incoherent—God Cannot Become Man

Skeptical Claim: An infinite, unchanging God cannot logically shrink down and take on a limited human body.

### Apologetic Response: The Two Natures of Jesus

- The Definition: The Incarnation is not "God stopping being God." The historic Christian teaching is the Hypostatic Union: Jesus is one Person who has two complete natures (fully Divine and fully Human).
- The Rule: The ancient church defined the rule (in approx AD 451): the two natures exist without changing, confusing, or dividing either one. He remained fully God while becoming truly man.
- The Humbling Choice (*Kenosis*): This wasn't a logical limitation on God; it was a choice. God chose to willingly enter His creation. Read Philippians 2:5–7 (p1487). Paul explains that Christ "made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant."
- Scripture Affirms Both Natures:
  - Fully God: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" (John 1:1, NIV)
  - Fully Man: "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*" (John 1:14, NIV)
  - The Union: "*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form*" (Colossians 2:9, NIV).

Read Galatians 4:4 p1477.

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