

Wednesday Reflection

Title: A Rationale for a Virgin Birth?

Date: December 21, 2025

ID: Fourth Sunday of Advent (A cycle)

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-24

I use the New American Bible revised edition (NABre), the translation used in Catholic liturgy. I cite W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, The Gospel According to Matthew, vol. 1, T & T Clark Ltd., 1988.

Text: Upon Jesus's birth, the messianic promise of justice and harmony seemed remote. After centuries of foreign occupation, Israel created rigid social boundaries. It isolated itself from Others called Gentiles. St. Paul's mission (beginning in 46 AD) attempted to break down the boundaries. In Matthew's time (around 85 AD), Christian communities still had work to do. Jewish Christians had to accept Gentile Christians; Gentile Christians had to be grafted onto the faith-tradition.

Matthew's genealogy (1:1-18) traced Jesus to David and Abraham. Baptism and Eucharist unite Christians in Christ. United in Him, Gentiles could claim a place in the faith-tradition. W. E. Davis and Dale C. Allison wrote, "Despite its belonging to the rootless Hellenistic world of the first century, the church, by virtue of its union with Jesus, had a secure link with the remote past" (p. 188). Through Christ, Gentile Christians could share Paul's pride in Judaism (see Romans 9:4/5).

Judaism advanced an argument for a universally oriented community. The three prophets recorded in the book of Isaiah share a vision of a new creation. Isaiah Chapter 11 predicts a new creation brought by the messiah. Justice governs humankind; harmony permeates creation. In Chapter 43, Isaiah asserted that the saving God is also the creating God. God was doing something new (43:19). He prophesied, "Let all the nations gather together, let the peoples assemble" (49:9). And in chapter 65, God is "creating new heavens and a new earth" (65:17). Harmony reigns. The wolf and the lamb pasture together, and the lion eats hay like the ox (65:25).

To introduce the genealogy, Matthew used the word *genesis*. The NABre translates it *genealogy* (1:1). At the beginning of this Sunday's Gospel, Matthew used *genesis* again. It's translated *birth* (1:18). The translation lacks poetry. *Genesis* may signify the prophetic theme of a new creation and a new type of human (see Davis and Allison, pp. 150 and 159). The theme weaves itself throughout the New Testament. St. John began his Gospel by borrowing the first words of Genesis, "In the beginning." Paul used the idea often. "Whoever is in Christ," he wrote, "is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). God commissions a new humanity with the ministry of reconciliation. God appeals through us to unite God's family (2 Cor 5: 18ff). Paul compared the first Adam, who frustrated God's harmony, to Christ, the second Adam, who restored it (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49). John used the idea in Revelation to announce a new heaven and a new earth (see chapters 21 and 22). Note well, God is not a God of one nation. God dwells with the human race (Rev. 21:3).

This may be what the dogma of the Virgin Birth does to, in, and for us. An all-powerful God needs to break down social boundaries that imagine one people to be superior to another. The Spirit of God intervenes in Jesus's bloodline. Through the divine, all humankind can unite, Jew and Gentile alike. All become "children of God," born not by natural generation...but of God (John 1:12/13).