Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Three of the world’s great religions. Three religions confessing belief in one God. Three religions deeply divided over the Christian claim that, during the reign of the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus, the God of the universe became a man.

This is the land of the Bible. The modern State of Israel. One of the smallest nations on earth. Sacred ground for the world’s three great monotheistic religions.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Sharing common roots going back to the faith of Abraham. Sharing a common conviction that God is one God. But agreeing to disagree about the identity of a carpenter’s son who grew up in small village called Nazareth nestled in the hills of lower Galilee.

Mart De Haan (in Nazareth near a Bedouin homestead): Jimmy, I wish we had a translator. I’d love to be able to talk to him. I’d like to know what they’re thinking. A couple of ugly guys like us walking along the fence.

Jimmy De Young: I do believe that some of them are saying, “I wish they’d bring us some more dinner. I’m starving to death.” A couple of little lambs though have their mamas to take care of that.

Mart De Haan: OK, I’d also like to know...I’d like to be able to talk to this little guy. Now he speaks Arabic, I think, but this would be a little Nazarene, wouldn’t it?

Jimmy De Young: He certainly would, because he lives right here on the hillside surrounding the modern-day city of Nazareth, which by the way is preparing for the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. It’s going to be a very festive time here in the land of Israel. This particular setting, though, takes us
back through the centuries to about two thousand years ago when the little village of Nazareth was maybe twenty or thirty families, probably around three hundred inhabitants, two of those would have been Mary and Joseph. According to the gospel narrative it was in Nazareth that Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Mart De Haan: But, you know, Jimmy, I think it’s at that point in the gospel narrative that, I could imagine, someone says, I can understand a little boy like this, a little Nazarene running around the mountainside as Jesus did. But this idea of a virgin conceiving of the Holy Spirit, that’s hard to believe, that’s hard to accept.

Jimmy De Young (answering phone): Excuse me just a second. Hello? Yes, this is Jimmy De Young. At seven? OK, that’ll be just fine, just perfect. Thank you very much. See you then.

Mart De Haan: Must be important business.

Jimmy De Young: The reservations at the restaurant are for seven tonight. You see my important calls here.

Mart De Haan: I thought you were concerned about the sheep eating…and you’re concerned about yourself.

Jimmy De Young: That’s exactly right.

Mart De Haan: Let’s move along here. But, you know, the phone, I think, kind of helps to make our point, because, think about it: Fifty years ago who would have imagined that somebody would stand on the hillside outside of Nazareth and get a phone call through the air and talk to someone at the other end? And when you think about it, who could imagine, who could dream that God…phone call through the air to talk to someone at the other end…and then could become a man, be born of a virgin? Well, there’s a lot of things we don’t understand. And yet we’ve seen in our own day that they’re within the realm of possibility, if you understand more. And that’s why we’d like today to consider with you not merely the one argument that a virgin conceived of the Holy Spirit, but the wealth of evidence, the different lines of reasoning that would combine with that and lead us to the conclusion that we have reasonable evidence to believe that God did in fact become a man.

The gospel narrative reads:
Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18).

If Mary is telling the truth, her baby was the Son of God. If she was lying, the night of Jesus’ birth wasn’t holy, and all that was silent was the truth. But how can we know? How can we take seriously the kind of story that usually gets laughs and disbelief?

J. P. Moreland: One of the reasons why people are inclined to think that the virgin birth is a myth, and other events in Jesus’ life are mythological, is that they already ruled out the possibility of the supernatural before they even come to considering the stories. Now of course, if there isn’t a God, the story of God having Jesus be born by a virgin would be a myth. And a myth, I mean something that’s not true. But if there is a God, there is no reason to think it’s a myth, if there’s evidence that it really happened. And in the virgin birth account is an account, in the same documents, that can be shown to be good historical sources on other grounds.

Matthew 1:20–21 (NKJV)

According to the historical account of the Gospel of Matthew, when Joseph found that Mary, his wife to be, was pregnant, the Scriptures say he wanted to break the engagement. But while he thought about these things, the Scriptures say,

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

Michael Wilkins: See, that was the means that God ordained to be used for the eternal Son, the Logos, to become a Man. And to deny that that could happen, then, says essentially all that Jesus was, a human being, who had a fuller spirit than other persons did, but not truly the union of two natures, God and Man, in one Person.

J. P. Moreland: Well, if people have a problem with the concept of the virgin birth, I really think their problem is with God, and not with the virgin birth. Trying to figure out how the virgin birth could happen is kind of silly if you believe there’s a God
who created the world. What’s the problem? I mean if there is a God who made life, I don’t know why He couldn’t create a sperm or create a zygote anytime He wants to. After all, if He created original life, why does He have to use natural processes from then on to do what He wants to do? The problem is that those who have difficulties with the virgin birth...the problem is with them believing in God, not with the virgin birth per se.

If there was no other evidence for a virgin birth, what the Bible says about Mary could be taken lightly. If the circumstances of Jesus’ life were the same as any other life, her claim of a virgin birth would be the easiest of all claims to dismiss.