

The Apostle's Creed

Part 4 – God With Us

Matthew 1:18-25

* Luke 1:26-38; John 1:14

*Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the virgin Mary*

A Tale of Two Seeds

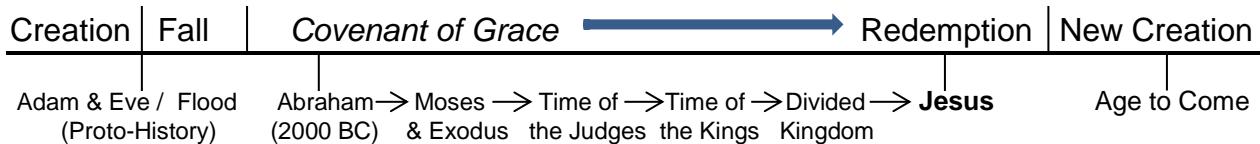
The incarnation is the chief miracle of the Bible. In the womb of a virgin God became a zygote. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). In the person of Jesus, a fully human nature and a fully divine nature were held in perfect union. The eternal Son of God took on flesh and became a man with all of the

frailties common to mankind. The Creator of the world (Col. 1:16) became subject to hunger, pain, and temptation. The King took on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7).

All of this was promised as early as Genesis 3 when God cursed the serpent and promised that the “seed of the woman” would one day crush the “seed” of the serpent (vs. 15). From that point on the Bible tells the story of the titanic battle between the two seeds. In each generation the enemy employed all of his malice and cunning to crush or corrupt the Messianic line. It began as early as the first couple’s two sons when wicked Cain murdered righteous Abel. But God kept his promise. And in the place of Abel he provided Seth which means “elect one.” It was through the line of Seth that “people began to call upon the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26).

The battle carried on through the days of Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the Exodus, the times of the Judges, and the reign of the kings. There were good kings like David who nevertheless fell into grievous sin. There were many more wicked kings like Ahab who led the people away from worshiping God into the most grotesque expressions of idolatry. Repeatedly, throughout the generations, it appeared that the seed of the woman would be stamped out and God’s gracious promise would come to nothing. Even the voice of prophets became silent for 400 years.

But then one day in a backwater town called Bethlehem or “house of bread” the promised Manna from heaven fell. A virgin gave birth to the One who was conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit. Joseph and Mary named the boy **Jesus** just as they had been instructed by God’s messenger. Appropriately Jesus means *the Lord saves*. The long awaited salvation of God’s people, the seed of the woman had come in the only way that could purchase salvation for sinners. God became a man who fulfilled perfectly all that the law demanded. He died in the place of sinners and was raised up in victory. God did what he had done so many generations earlier for Abraham and Isaac: He provided the Lamb.



Jesus: The God-Man

- The virgin birth of Jesus ensured that He would be at once fully God and fully man. Nothing less would do for the salvation of sinners. A denial of the virgin birth of Jesus obliterates the hope of salvation for it removes the divine means by which God came near to save his people from their sin.

1. Conceived by the Holy Spirit

Vs. 20 – "...that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

- The church has always held the virgin birth to be essential Christian doctrine. The virgin birth is theological shorthand for what is described in Matthew 1:18-25 and in Luke 1:26-38. The whole complex of divine intervention, of miraculous conception, of the unique birth of Jesus Christ in which the God of heaven and earth intersected space-time reality, took on flesh and dwelt among us in our human nature.
- The birth of Jesus was unique precisely because his conception was miraculous. Jesus was conceived apart from any physical contact. Pagan religions had tales of the gods coming to earth and consorting with their human subjects. But the conception of Jesus was miraculous. That is, Jesus was conceived apart from any physical contact but by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit.

2. Born of the Virgin Mary

Vs. 21 – "She will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sin."

Vs. 25 – "[Joseph] knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

- It is not at all surprising that God would enter the world through miraculous means. Indeed it is not only fitting but necessary for the salvation of sinners that Jesus was born of virgin. Sinners need the God-Man to save them. A good man could not accomplish the task. What was required was One who bore all the rights and power of God and simultaneously bore all the frailty of humanity. The Savior had to be both the Judge and the judged. He had to be at once an entirely just man and the Justifying God.

Theology Applied

a) Jesus did not come to save us from the physical.

- Contra certain heresies, Jesus was an actual man. In Jesus, God did not simply disguise himself in human flesh. He became a man. He required a functioning heart, a nervous system, food and water, white blood cells to fight infection, etc. The Christian hope is that Jesus ultimately redeems us body and spirit. We anticipate a physical new heaven and earth in the age to come. Just as Jesus was raised so too will we be raised incorruptible (1 Cor. 15). By becoming a man, God restored the original splendor and dignity of humanity.

b) God always takes the initiative to save.

- In Jesus, God came near to us. Our salvation depends upon such initiative. Sinners could never be saved if that salvation depended upon their initiative to move toward God. Left to ourselves, like Adam and Eve, we would only hide from God. But God seeks out the sinner. He pursues the lost. The Puritans were fond of calling God "The Hound of Heaven," doggedly pursuing sinners.

c) Trust and obey.

- Joseph and Mary were both ordinary in the sense that they, like all of us, were sinners. Mary was not, as the Roman Catholic church teaches, born without original sin. Nor is she the "co-Redeemer" with Jesus or the "Queen of Heaven." In Luke's account, Mary rejoiced in "God my Savior." Mary, like all sinners, needed a Savior. But these two ordinary sinners are also models of faithful obedience. They knew that the task of bearing and raising the Messiah would be costly. They knew their reputations were going to be hit hard and that great heart-break was in store for them. But they trusted God's goodness more than they craved their comfort.

d) Jesus is our sympathizing High Priest.

- The only characteristic of our humanity which Jesus did not share is our sinfulness. Certainly, that is a significant difference. For the sake of our salvation it is a necessary difference for we needed a sinless Savior. Nevertheless Jesus took on all the frailties of humanity. He knows what it is to suffer the pangs of loneliness, the desolation of abandonment, the fires of temptation, and the humiliation of an ignominious death by execution. There is no pain that we suffer that Jesus has not already born for our sake.