

8/21/2020

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary...

John 3:16 (NLT)

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Luke 1:26-38 (NLT)

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail."

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

I Believe in Jesus Christ

Alright, so for the last two weeks we learned about one of the 3 persons of the Triune God – and who was that? God the Father Almighty. And as we are going through our study of the Apostles' Creed, many of us are hopefully memorizing it. So I'd like to have us all remind ourselves of the first sentence of the creed by saying it together: "I believe in the God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Great! Ok, today we are moving on to learning about the second person of the Trinity - Jesus. On the front of your bulletin I have the next

line printed under the picture - let's all say it together: "I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary..."

As we begin now look at the second section of the Creed, it's important to know that this section is the beginning of the statements that truly, specifically differentiate Christianity from every other religion. If you'll remember, last week we learned about how believing God as the *one and only God* (as opposed to a pantheon of gods) and believing that God is *almighty* (instead of other religions that have gods with limited power). Last week we learned how those two beliefs make us different from other religions with our first statement of "I believe in God the Father Almighty."

However, there are other religions like Judaism and Islam that believe in one Almighty God. BUT, while they *do* believe in one God like we do, these religions do not believe in the divinity of Jesus – that Jesus is Lord. They might believe that Jesus was a good and righteous man, that Jesus was maybe even a prophet or a very important person to change history, but they *do not* believe that Jesus was both man and God. And so, the belief that Jesus was conceived by God's Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary is blasphemous, untrue, or foolishness to religions that would probably affirm that first statement of the creed about God Almighty *because* saying that Jesus is God's Son who had a miraculous conception are statements that affirm and proclaim the *divinity* of Jesus – that he was not only human, but that he is Lord, too.

These statements in our creed, while they are only a few phrases that seem like common sense or feel like old news to us, were (2000 years ago) and are (today) absolutely ground-breaking and world altering statements of belief. These statements are so ground-breaking and radical that many people have been and still are being persecuted and even killed because they proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. And so we must remember to acknowledge that it is a great privilege that you and I have the freedom to say those words together today. Speaking of which, let's say those words together again, one more time – from the very beginning of the Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary..." Alright! Great job.

Let's dive into those statements about Jesus a little more. First, let's look at the first half: "I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord." Immediately when we think of those words, the most well-known verse of the Bible probably comes to our minds. The first scripture reading from earlier - John 3:16 – "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." We know that verse well, but do you remember where this verse comes from? Does anyone remember what story in the Gospel of John this verse is in? The story about Jesus talking with the Pharisee named Nicodemus – a man who was a Jewish religious leader who knew there was something special and different about this man named Jesus – something that was not like other men. So one night Nicodemus went to him

under the cover of darkness to ask Jesus some questions about who he was. Nicodemus says this to Jesus in John 3:2: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus replied with some interesting and perplexing words to Nicodemus about how anyone wanting to enter the kingdom of God must be *born again* and then said this in verse 6: “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit...” and finishes with another time saying, “you must be born again.” With these words, Jesus introduced Nicodemus to the key to eternal life – being born again – being born of the Spirit. Nicodemus (like you and me) was born the birth of the flesh, as all human beings. And as Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” From the time Adam and Eve chose to eat the fruit from the tree that God told them not to eat, we have all fallen short. Our human nature – the nature of the flesh – inherently makes us fall short of the glory of God. It’s like we humans are on one side of a large chasm with God on the other.

[Draw picture]

Naturally we are separated from God. We are unholy and God is holy. We are human and God is God. Our nature is a nature bent toward sinning and God’s nature is a nature of righteousness.

As we see in the Bible, the Old Testament is filled with stories and examples of how people try and try again and again to be righteous, but continue to fail, continue to get themselves right back where they used to be – living apart

from God, following the ways of the world instead of following God's commandments – his instructions for living a holy life. The Old Testament is full shows us over and over again how humanity continued to live on the other side of that chasm, never quite able to cross it to live in the kingdom of God.

But then... God introduced the way.

This way is the only way for you and I and every person to finally cross that chasm. And that way begins with a story that we usually only hear about in December during Advent. Our second scripture reading from Luke 1 tells the origin story of God's way to save us and is the scriptural basis for the second part of our phrase from the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ God's only son our Lord, *conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary.*" We needed a way for that chasm to be crossed, to be able to live in connection to God and be a part of the kingdom of Heaven, like we were intended to live.

Jesus is the way.

Like Jesus said in the conversation with Nicodemus, flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit and in Luke 1 we read of how this baby Jesus is going to be *both* flesh and spirit. An angel visited a young girl named Mary and told her that she is going to give birth to a son and is to name him Jesus (which means to deliver or to rescue). This son will not be conceived in the normal way, though – the angel tells her that Mary will become pregnant by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Mary agrees to this plan and, of course, does indeed become pregnant with God's one and only son.

Did you ever wonder why Jesus didn't just appear on earth, though? Like why did Jesus have to be conceived, grow in his mother's womb, be born the normal way like all of us, and grow up like the rest of us? Why didn't God send our savior in like a *poof* cloud of smoke – fully grown and ready to save the world?

Because even though Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross and his resurrection was the ultimate way God saves and redeems humanity to Himself, the very beginning of Jesus' earthly life – from the moment he was conceived in Mary's womb and birthed into the world – God's work of redemption had begun. By being *born* a natural birth like you and me, we know that Jesus is indeed *fully human*. But his very existence was begun through the power of the Holy Spirit, not by man but by God, making Jesus fully divine – fully God, too. Jesus was both fully God and fully human, and through his very life God and humanity no longer have the chasm of separation. We now have a way of being connected to God. In Jesus we are made holy like God is holy. In Christ our sinful nature is redeemed and made righteous. While we are human and God is God – Jesus is *both* God and human – making him the bridge – the way – for us to belong to God and belong to the Kingdom of heaven. To no longer perish but have eternal life.

In Jesus Christ God's only Son our Lord who was conceived by the holy spirit and born of the virgin Mary – in Jesus we find God's mercy. Are there things that you do that you know belong on the old side of the chasm? Do you

say things to other people that you know are words that don't belong in the kingdom of heaven? Is there a sin in your life that you just can't seem to let go of? During this final song, I pray that you take some time with Jesus to lay those things down so that you no longer feel pulled to the old side of the chasm, but that you continue to walk the way of Christ to the other side. Jesus was sent for you to live in freedom from sin. In Jesus you are made righteous. In these next minutes, ask for God's mercy to reign in your heart and in your life.

Benediction:

As death entered through one man's disobedience,
So life is restored through one man's obedience;

As sin came through the temptation of a woman,
So salvation came through one born of woman;

As the enemy conquered humanity by tasting of a tree,
So Christ conquered the enemy by bearing suffering on a tree.