

The Apostles' Creed: Week 4

...Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...

In the Scriptures:

1. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

(Isaiah 7:14)

2. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. *(Luke 1:26-38)*

3. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. *(Hebrews 1:14-18)*

...Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...

As described by Christian writers:

4. The Lord, coming into his own creation in visible form, was sustained by his own creation which he himself sustains in being. His obedience on the tree of the cross reversed the disobedience at the tree in Eden; the good news of the truth announced by an angel to Mary, a virgin subject to a husband, undid the evil lie that seduced Eve, a virgin espoused to a husband.

As Eve was seduced by the word of an angel and so fled from God after disobeying his word, Mary in her turn was given the good news by the word of an angel, and bore God in obedience to his word. As Eve was seduced into disobedience to God, so Mary was persuaded into obedience to God; thus the Virgin Mary became the advocate of the virgin Eve.

Christ gathered all things into one, by gathering them into himself. He declared war against our enemy, crushed him who at the beginning had taken us captive in Adam, and trampled on his head, in accordance with God's words to the serpent in Genesis: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall lie in wait for your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel.*

-Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*

5. We, with our modern democratic and arithmetical presuppositions would so have liked and expected all men to start equal in their search for God. One has the picture of great centripetal roads coming from all directions, with well-disposed people, all meaning the same thing, and getting closer and closer together. How shockingly opposite to that is the Christian story!

One people picked out of the whole earth; that people purged and proved again and again. Some are lost in the desert before they reach Palestine; some stay in Babylon; some becoming indifferent. The whole thing narrows and narrows, until at last it comes down to a little point, small as the point of a spear—a Jewish girl at her prayers. That is what the whole of human nature has narrowed down to before the Incarnation takes place. Very unlike what we expected, but, of course, not in the least unlike what seems, in general, as shown by Nature, to be God's way of working.

-C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*

6. The virgin birth has never been a major stumbling block in my struggle with Christianity; it's far less mind boggling than the Power of all Creation stooping so low as to become one of us.

-Madeline L'Engle, *A Servant's Heart*

Why we believe in the Virgin Birth:

* Historically, we know about the Virgin Birth because it is described by two different witnesses: the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. These infancy narratives don't have much overlap (one is from Joseph's perspective, one from Mary's), so they don't seem to have been copied from the same source. Yet they agree on the fact of the Virgin Birth. Since we believe the Holy Spirit has the power to do miracles, this is not unbelievable! It makes far more sense than saying that God would choose the Savior of the world to be born illegitimately.

* Since Christ was completely unique in his miracles and relationship to the Father, it makes sense that he would also have an unusual origin story. The Virgin Birth shows that Jesus did not originate by human power, but comes from God. Yet he still inherits our humanity from his mother, and was made like us in every way, except for our sinfulness. So this doctrine points to both the divinity and humanity of our Lord.