

The Apostles' Creed: The Father Almighty, Creator... (7)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord

Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell

The third day He rose again from the dead

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty

He will come again to judge the living and the dead

I believe in the Holy Spirit

The holy catholic Church; the communion of saints

The forgiveness of sins

The resurrection of the body

And the life everlasting

- In this study we come to the important subject of the virgin birth, and therefore, the incarnation (or “enfleshment”) of Jesus Christ. Thomas Aquinas begins his comments on this line of the Creed saying: “It is necessary for a Christian not only to believe in the Son of God, as shown in the preceding, but also one must believe in his incarnation.” (p. 57) With this statement, we get the hint that there are some—who should not be considered Christians—who do not believe in the incarnation of the Son of God. Indeed, this is one of the most hotly contested sections of the Creed, because in it we confess the virgin birth of Christ.
- This phrase (like the previous one) is also connected to the first section concerning *God the Father... Creator of heaven and earth*. And in actuality, if you confess that first phrase of the Creed—if you believe that God is the Creator of heaven and earth—then you should have no problem (at least philosophically), with the virgin birth. In other words, if you believe in special creation *ex nihilo*, you should have no problem believing in a virgin conception of the Son of God as He became incarnate.
- As the saying goes: “All roads lead to Rome”, and in Christian theology we can say, that all errors can be traced back to a mistaken view of the person and work of Christ. Therefore the very nature of Christ has been a subject of controversy throughout the history of the Church.
- The Bible always associates the birth and incarnation of the Son of God with salvation. In other words, it is not a subject for speculation, but a necessity for our salvation:

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Lk. 2:11)

...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:4-5)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, “Sacrifices and offerings You have not desired, but a body have You prepared for Me; (Heb. 10:5)

...if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15)

- Thomas Aquinas deals with the errors surrounding the person of Christ in a very helpful and succinct fashion in his commentary. In his comments he notes how the Nicene Creed added specific words to the Apostles' Creed to reject the various Christological errors. Following his general outline we will briefly consider many of the errors that have arisen over the years.
- **Origin** said that Christ was born to save even demons, “But this is opposed to sacred Scripture, for Matthew says (25:41): *‘Depart from me, you wicked ones, into eternal fire, which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’*.
- **Photinus** said that Christ was indeed born of the Virgin, but he added that he was merely a man; nonetheless, by living well and doing the will of God, he merited to become a son of God just as other holy men. “But this position is opposed to the authority of the Lord in John (6:38): *‘I came*

down from heaven not that I might do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.’ It is a fact that He would not have come down from heaven unless He would have been there. If he was merely a man, he would not have been in heaven.” And so the Nicene counsel added “He came down from heaven.”

- **Manicheus** said that although the Son of God always was and came down from heaven, nevertheless he did not have real flesh, but only apparent flesh. “But this is false, for it is unseemly for the teacher of the truth to have any falsity. Therefore he had real flesh just as he appeared to have.” Thus Jesus said to His disciples in Luke (24:39): “Touch and see for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” Thus the Nicene counsel added the words, “And was enfleshed”
- **Ebion** said Christ was born of Mary, but by male seed from the intercourse of a man. But this is false, because the angel said in Matthew (1:20), “*For what is born in her is by the Holy Spirit.*”
- **Valentinus** confessed that Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, nonetheless maintained that the Spirit transported a heavenly body and placed it in the Virgin Mary, and that became the body of Christ. Thus it is said that the body of Christ passed through her as if she was a conduit. “But this is in error, for the angel said: “*From you will be born the holy one*”. (Lk. 1:35) and in Galatians (4:4) ...*God sent His own Son, born of a woman.*
- **Arius and Appolinarius** “both said that although Christ is the Word of God and born of the Virgin Mary, nonetheless he did not have a human soul, but the divinity was there in the place of the soul, but this is opposed to Scripture, because Christ said: ‘My soul is troubled’ (Jn. 12:27), and, ‘My soul is sad even to death’ (Matt. 26:38)”
- **Nestorius** “said the Son of God was joined to the human through indwelling alone. But this is wrong because then he would not be a human being, but in a human being. That he [Christ] is human is evident: ‘*made in the likeness of humankind*’ (Phil. 2:7); ‘*Why do you see to kill me, a human being, who spoke the truth to you...?*’ (John 8:40)”
- As can be seen, what it at stake in each of these heresies is the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Word of God, and that is very significant when thinking of the Virgin Birth and Incarnation of Christ. Jesus is the Word of God **enfleshed**, and the Bible is the Word of God **in print**. Just as God used sinful men to write His Word, but guaranteed the holiness of His Word through the attendance of the Holy Spirit, so too with using a sinful woman to incarnate His Word, but guaranteed the holiness of His Word through the attendance of the Holy Spirit.

And the angel answered her, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.*” (Lk. 1:35)

- Thus, the Virgin Birth is essential to the sinlessness of Jesus, which also brings up the importance of bypassing a man in the process of His birth. As the Westminster Confession says concerning the propagation of the sin nature, “Our first parents...sinned...They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed...to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.” (WCF 6.1, 3) Thus, Jesus, not having Adam as His father, did not inherit a sinful nature, and is therefore able to save us, not having to make atonement for Himself:

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted... For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15)

- The Virgin Birth also speaks of the grace of God. This is something that God did entirely by His sovereign power. He initiated it and accomplished it. Mary was an amazing and willing vessel: “*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your Word.*” (Lk. 1:38). Thus she is worthy of the name, the Blessed Virgin Mary, for she bore the Son of God and indeed, echoing the Spirit inspired utterance of Elizabeth who said (Lk. 1:42), “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”, prophesied as we read in Luke 1:46-48,

And Mary said, “*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;*

- The Son of God became man, by way of His Spirit wrought conception within, and birth to, the Virgin Mary, to be our Mediator, and to bear the wrath of God against sin in our place.