

The Apostles' Creed Part 4

“He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary”

As we come to the fourth part of the Apostles Creed we move into what is now called the “historical” section. In rapid fire the Creed recounts the most significant historical events of the life of Christ that are tied to our redemption. It is no coincidence that each of the phrases are tied to a significant day on the church calendar. Christmas, Passion Week, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension Day are all represented. We’ll look at the phrase tied to our celebration of Christmas.

When we confess that Jesus *“was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary,”* we confess three essential Gospel truths that we must understand and hold to: (1) the *divinity* of Jesus, (2) the *purity* of Jesus, and (3) the *humanity* of Jesus.

(1) The *Divinity* of Jesus

One of the things that Jesus’s miraculous birth testifies to, like all the other miracles, is that he is no mere man. It shows that in many ways Jesus is utterly unlike us. This is the dividing point of Christianity from all other religions and spin-offs: We believe in the full deity of Jesus. Many have respect for Jesus and want to say that though they don’t agree with his claim to be God they are quite comfortable acknowledging that he is an extraordinary human being. But as C.S. Lewis pointed out that is not an option that Jesus left open for us:

*A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great moral teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)*

(2) The *Purity* of Jesus

Another essential component to the Gospel is that Jesus must be sinless. Only a perfect, unblemished sacrifice can make atonement for our sin. If Christ is not sinless, he cannot substitute for our sin because he has to pay for his own. And if Christ is not sinless, he is not perfectly righteous, and if he is not perfectly righteous, he cannot provide the perfect righteousness that we need. The Virgin Birth of Christ ensures that Christ does not inherit the sin nature of his human father. Listen as Kevin DeYoung explains the significance of this:

Every human father begets a son or daughter with his sin nature. We may not understand completely how this works, but this is the way of the world after the fall. Sinners beget sinners (Psalm 51:5). Always. So if Joseph was the real father of Jesus, or Mary had been sleeping around with Larry, Jesus is not spotless, not innocent, and not perfectly holy. And as result, we have no mediator, no imputation of Christ’s righteousness (because he has no righteousness to impute to us), and no salvation.¹

(3) The *Humanity* of Jesus

¹ <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2016/12/08/is-the-virgin-birth-essential/>

Finally, the last essential component to the Gospel that we confess in this phrase in the Apostles' Creed is the humanity of Jesus. This is the great mystery of the Christian faith, Jesus was no mere man but he was a man. In this way he was certainly like us. The Gospels show that he got hungry, he slept, he cried, he became weak, he bleed, and he died.

The Early Church Father Augustine wonderfully weaves the significance of these truths together in the following poem:

**The Maker of man became Man that He, Ruler of the stars, might be nourished at His mother's breast;
that He, the Bread, might hunger;
that He, the Fountain, might thirst;
that He, the Light, might sleep;
that He, the Way, might be wearied by the journey;
that He, the Truth, might be accused by false witnesses;
that He, the Judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge;
that He, Justice, might be condemned by the unjust;
that He, Discipline, might be scourged with whips;
that He, the Foundation, might be suspended upon a cross;
that Courage might be weakened;
that Healer might be wounded;
that Life might die.**

To endure these and similar indignities for us, to free us, unworthy creatures, He who existed as the Son of God before all ages, without a beginning, deigned to become the Son of Man in these recent years. He submitted to such great evils for our sake yet he had done no evil so that we could be the recipients of so much good from His hands, though we had done nothing to merit these benefits.