



## Christ's conception

I believe that the question of origins is an important question. For example, from where did the world come? Did it just happen? Most rational people believe that the world had to have had a beginning, but how did that come about? Was there nothing and then there was something?

### **The creative power of God**

The Bible says that God created the world. It says that he spoke the world into existence by His Word. He spoke the sky and the seas, the land and the trees, the birds and the bees into existence by his mighty word. Now, for you or me, this would be an impossibility. No man can simply speak a fish into existence, for example. (Although I know of some fishermen that sure wish they could!) But God can, because God is not subject to natural laws like we are. God is all-powerful. Therefore, God can speak the entire cosmos into existence.

I believe this is an important thing to remember when it comes to the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. How did the Lord Jesus come into this world? It was a miracle, just like the creation of the world was a miracle.

The Bible says that Jesus was born to a virgin named Mary. In Luke's account we read of an encounter between Mary and the angel Gabriel:

*"Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.' Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.'"*

(Luke 1:30-35)

### **A miracle of God**

This passage clearly states that the birth of Jesus would not be of the conventional type. When the angel tells Mary that she is going to have a baby, Mary asks how this can be since she was a virgin. Some liberal critics at this point say that the term "virgin" simply means "young woman." And it does mean that. But it also implies a young woman who has not had marital relations. This is clearly the way Mary is using this term. She knows who she is and what she's been doing. And because she knows what she's been doing, she knows that she should not be included in the category of expectant mothers. This is why the angel's words were so shocking to her and why she asked for an explanation. The angel answers that it will be a work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, a miracle! Before Mary and Joseph would consummate their marriage, Mary would have a baby growing in her womb. And not just any child, but the very Son of God.

The conception of the Lord Jesus in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit is not a bit of Bible trivia. It is of vital importance to who Jesus is and what Jesus did. This is why the Apostle's Creed has this critical theological concept in its reading.

One of the finest expositions of the Apostle's Creed ever written is contained in the Heidelberg Catechism. What does the Catechism say in regard to this article of the Apostle's Creed? Questions 35 and 36 address this important concept.

Question 35 of the Catechism asks, *“What is the meaning of ‘conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary’?”*

The answer is, *“That the eternal Son of God, who is and continues true and eternal God, took upon Himself the very nature of man, of the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, by the operation of the Holy Spirit; so that He might also be the true seed of David, like unto His brethren in all things, except sin.”*

Let’s look at the answer to question 35.

First of all, note that it is the *eternal* (emphasis mine) Son of God who is conceived in the virgin’s womb. This means that the Son of God did not come into existence at this time. He already existed. In fact, He has always existed, co-eternally, with the Father and the Spirit. The Bible teaches that God is one in His essence but three in person. The three persons of the Holy Trinity are known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God has always been Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and always will be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three members of the God-head exist eternally in perfect union and communion. So when the Holy Spirit caused Mary to conceive, the Spirit was not creating the Son of God.

### **The significance of the virgin birth**

But why did Jesus come into the world in this fashion? If He already existed as the Son of God from all eternity, why not just appear? God has been known to show up on the earth from time to time and manifest Himself in physical form. Recall the story of Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32. In that passage, Jacob is on his way to meet his brother Esau. But before their meeting, Jacob was accosted by a “Man” who wrestled with him until daybreak. The “Man” touched Jacob’s hip, putting it out of joint. Without going into the details of this story, we see at its conclusion that Jacob deduced, *“I have seen God face to face”* (v. 30). So, if God can be manifested in such a way that He could actually wrestle with a man for several hours, why not come that way instead of through the virgin’s womb?

The issue here is not of Christ’s deity. Rather, it is an issue of humanity. The reason Jesus came was to *“save his people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21). God did not sin. Neither did the animals. It was humanity that sinned. And for humanity to be redeemed, humanity needed a human redeemer. This is why the Catechism says that he *“took upon himself the very nature of man.”*

When God created the world, He created a man in His very own image and after His own likeness. This man was called Adam. Adam was a literal, historical figure. He was as real and as historical as Moses, David, Paul, Peter, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, John Kennedy, or George W. Bush. As the first man created, Adam was the federal head of the human race. As such, the actions of Adam would affect all of humanity. According to the Bible, God placed a forbidden tree in the Garden in which Adam lived. He also gave the law that Adam was not to eat of the forbidden tree. It’s not as though there was anything physically or chemically wrong with the fruit of the forbidden tree; it wasn’t poisonous. Rather, the law was a test of fidelity to God and to God’s Word. By refraining from eating of the forbidden tree, Adam would be demonstrating belief in and subjection to God’s Word. By eating, he would be rebelling against God, becoming a law unto himself.

As the story goes, Adam disobeyed God and ate. This evil act plunged not only himself but all of humanity into a sinful rebellion against God. God had warned Adam that if he sinned, death would be the penalty. Adam sinned, and humanity died that day. This death is both physical and spiritual. We see all around us manifestations of this death — war, disease, suffering, pain, even natural disasters and, yes, physical death. Death, hell, and the grave gained power over humanity on that dreadful day.

We have no one to blame for all of this sin and misery but ourselves. We, as a race of people, rebelled against God and have been reaping the consequences of that rebellion. God is innocent in

all of this. He is only being just by allowing the product of our rebellion to bear fruit. And if we left it at that, we would have a just and holy God.

But God is not only just. He is not only holy. God is also abounding in grace and mercy. And because He is so full of love, He has acted in history to bring about so great a redemption that not only will He save and deliver a people in such a way as to bring joy and happiness to them, but He would also do it in a way that brings glory and honor to His name. This great redemption all began in the womb of a virgin named Mary.

## **The Second Adam**

Just as Adam went to a tree and rebelled against God, a Second Adam, Jesus, would go to a tree (the cross) and redeem a people for God. But there are certain requirements for this Second Adam. He must be true God, so that he can contain the full wrath of God against sin. But he must also be a true and righteous man so that he can be a true substitute for man. A sheep can't be a right substitute for a man. We need a man to be a substitute for a man. This is why Jesus came through the virgin's womb — to take upon himself a human nature, *"like unto his brethren in all things, except sin."* Jesus, the sinless Son of God, free from any taint of human sin, came into the world with a human nature to save us from our sin.

Question 36 of the Catechism asks, *"What benefit do you receive from the holy conception and birth of Christ?"*

The answer is, *"That He is our Mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness covers, in the sight of God, my sin, wherein I was conceived."*

That's a classic gospel statement in a nutshell.

The Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. And this Son was given, conceived by the Holy Spirit, to take on a human nature in the womb of the virgin Mary. In so doing, the God-Man redeemed a people for the glory of God. And for this, all of God's people should rejoice!

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