



## Born of the Virgin Mary

This article of the Apostles Creed teaches us how the eternal Son of God became a man — how *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:14). The first thing we need to understand is that the Son of God became a man without ceasing to be the Son of God. He did not *change* into a man so that He was no longer God. God cannot change. *“I am the Lord, I do not change”* (Malachi 3:6). Rather, He added a human nature to His unchanging divine nature — He took upon Himself the very nature of man and at the same time He continued to be true and eternal God. The Son of God became a man without losing any of His divine attributes. He continued to *“know all things”* (John 21:17) even though in His humanity He *“increased in wisdom”* (Luke 2:51). After He became a man, He continued to be everywhere present, even though His human body could only be at one place at a time. This explains how Jesus, while standing on earth, could say that He was also in heaven:

*“He who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven.”*

(John 3:13)

The babe lying in the manger also had an invisible divine nature that was everywhere present.

### The very nature of man

The fact that the Son of God took upon Himself the very nature of man does *not* mean He simply inhabited another human being — like He does when He comes to live inside of us. The *man* Christ Jesus was not an independent person who simply bonded with the eternal Son of God. The human nature of Christ (His body and soul) could not exist by itself apart from the person of the Son of God. If it could, then Christ in reality would be two persons. But Christ is not two persons. He is one person with two different natures. According to His divine nature He could say, *“Before Abraham was I AM”* (John 8:58), and according to His human nature He could say, *“I thirst”* (John 19:28). It was one and the same person who spoke. In like manner, one and the same human being could eat food (according to his body), and get angry (according to his soul). Soul and body are different natures (someone can cut the body but not the soul), yet they form one human being. The divine nature and the human nature are different, but there is only one Christ. As it says in the creed of Athanasius, *“as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ.”*

In this connection we must be careful to avoid the ancient heresy of Appollinaris, who maintained that the divine nature of the Son of God took the place of Jesus’ human soul, so that Jesus was simply God in a body with no human soul. This heresy is easily refuted by the words of Christ Himself,

*“Father, into Your hands I commit My **spirit**. Having said this, He breathed His last.”*

(Luke 23:46)

The spirit here refers to the soul, and not the divine nature, because the divine nature never departed from the human nature. When the Son of God died, it was not His divine nature that died, but rather it was His human soul that was separated from His human body. Also, it is said in Hebrews 2:17: *“in all things He had to be made like His brethren.”* But without a soul He would not have been like His brethren in all things, for He would not have been a true man. Therefore, it was necessary that Christ had a human soul. It was necessary because the whole man — body and soul — needed to be saved. The justice of God requires that the *same* human nature that has sinned should make satisfaction for sin. *“The **soul** who sins shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:20). If Jesus did not have the same human nature we have (body *and* soul) then He could not have died in our place.

## Conceived by the Holy Spirit

Christ's human nature was conceived by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. The Son of God did not take upon Himself a human nature created out of nothing, or one brought with Him from heaven. Rather, the human nature of Christ was taken from the very substance of Mary — of her flesh and blood, in much the same way that our human nature is received from our mother: *"as children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same"* (Hebrews 2:14). He was *"made of a woman"* (Galatians 4:4).

He is called *"the seed of the woman"* (Genesis 3:15), as well as *"the Son of David, the Son of Abraham"* (Matthew 1:1). He *"was born of the seed of David according to the flesh"* (Romans 1:3), just as God had promised David, *"I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body"* (Psalm 132:11). Just as Joseph and Mary descended from David, so did Christ. The difference in Christ's case is that the Holy Spirit miraculously caused Christ's flesh to be conceived without the seed and substance of a man, so that His human nature was formed from His mother alone, contrary to the order of things which God has established in nature, as the angel Gabriel told Mary, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you"* (Luke 1:35). Mary was a pregnant virgin, just as the prophet had foretold:

*"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son."*

(Matthew 1:23)

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Why was the virgin birth necessary? The first reason is that the birth of Jesus was not the birth of a new person. Ordinary births are births of new persons, persons that have not existed before. But the birth of Jesus would be the birth of a pre-existing person, a birth that would require a different method of conception. An extraordinary person demanded an extraordinary birth. The virgin birth was necessary to show that Jesus was an extraordinary person. Though He was a real man, yet He did not have an earthly father. God was His Father! *"That Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God"* (Luke 1:35).

The second reason why the virgin birth was necessary was to show that Jesus was without sin. He was the sinless Son of God. Ordinary babies are conceived and born in sin. To show that Jesus was without sin He had to be born in an extraordinary manner. Jesus was like us in every respect except for sin. *"He was tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). If Jesus had been conceived in the ordinary manner then He could not have been our Savior. For one who is Himself a sinner cannot save other sinners. *"The soul who sins shall die."*

## Our Mediator

The fact that Jesus was born without sin and lived a sinless life means that our sins can be forgiven and covered in the sight of God, as it says in Psalm 32:1:

*"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are **forgiven**, and whose sins are **covered**."*

If you owed the bank a million dollars and someone else paid your debt, the bank would no longer require you to pay the debt. It is forgiven, *covered*, not charged to your account. Instead of being charged to our account, our sins were charged to Christ's account. He paid for them — all of them. Our sins were charged to His account so that His innocence and perfect holiness could be charged to our account. God *"made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus was credited with being the sinner even though He was perfectly righteous, so that we could be credited with being perfectly righteousness even though we are sinners! I know that I am a sinner and that even as a believer I will always struggle against my sin, but what is in my account? Not my sins, but the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ! That is sufficient to cover all my debts. I need nothing else. This is why it says our sins are covered — covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness. As Charles Hodge put it:

*The righteousness of Christ is a perpetual donation. It is a robe which covers and hides our sins from the eye of justice. They are sins; they deserve the wrath and curse of God, but the necessity for inflicting that curse no longer exists. The believer feels the constant necessity for confession and prayer for pardon, but the righteousness of Christ is ever present for him to offer and plead.*

Hallelujah!

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