



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli † Deo † Gloria

BACK TO THE BASICS

A Study of the Essentials of the Christian Faith

Sermon Notes

The Virginal Conception and Miracle of the Incarnation

Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-35

January 2, 2011

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel’

(which means ‘God with us’).”

Matthew 1:18-23

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And 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 bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to 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.’ And Mary said to the angel, ‘How ill this be, since I am a virgin?’ 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.’”

Luke 1:26-35

- This week we continue in our study of the essentials of the Christian faith. Since we began on November 21, we have examined the doctrine of *Creatio ex nihilo*

(God's creation out of nothing) and we have studied the Bible as the Word of God.

- This week, we examine yet another central doctrine of the historic Christian faith: the Virginal Conception of Jesus Christ.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Doctrine of <i>Creatio Ex Nihilo</i>2. The Bible is the Word of God3. The Doctrine of the Trinity4. The Doctrine of Original Sin |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. The Virginal Conception / Birth6. The Two Natures of Christ |
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7. The Substitutionary / Vicarious Atonement of Jesus Christ
8. The Bodily Resurrection (and Ascension) of Jesus Christ
9. Salvation By Grace Alone Through Faith Alone in Christ Alone
10. Justification through Faith Alone in Christ Alone

- We are actually going somewhat out of order of what we normally would in the natural progression of biblical doctrines. However, given that we have just celebrated the birth of Christ and Dirk's sermon last week on the genealogy of Jesus, I felt it appropriate to examine this particular doctrine this week.
- As we look at the doctrine of the Virginal Conception this week, we will naturally examine the nature of not only the Incarnation, but the Two Natures of Christ as well.
- This week, we will examine three points regarding the Virginal Conception of Jesus Christ:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">I. The Nature of the Virginal ConceptionII. The Necessity of the Virginal ConceptionIII. The Outcome and Implications of the Virginal Conception |
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I. The Nature of the Virginal Conception

- As with nearly every biblical doctrine, we should go back to the Genesis account of Creation and the Fall to explore the origins of the **Virginal Conception**.
 - After God created and declared it, "Very good" we read that Adam and Eve fell.
 - Because of their willing disobedience, God's promise that "you will surely die" came to pass.

- However, in His infinite grace, God did not leave the human race in a state of sin and death. For He promised redemption.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15

- In this prophesy, God promises that the “seed of the woman” would crush the head of the serpent (i.e., destroy him).
- **Consequently, ever since the Fall, mankind has longed for the “seed of the woman” who would come and crush the head of the serpent of old.**

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- Throughout the Old Testament, we read of event after event that foreshadows the coming of the “seed of the woman” – the Messiah.
 - Perhaps the most explicit prophesy of this occurs in the 7th Chapter of the Book of Isaiah:

Isaiah 7:14: “...Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

- Yet, it would be another eight centuries until this prophesy would be fulfilled.

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- But, then we read in opening chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that an angel appeared to a young Jewish virgin named Mary and declared that she would miraculously conceive in her womb, bear a son, and name Him Jesus.
 - Matthew even states that “**This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet**, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”
 - And so, “...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.” Galatians 4:4-5
 - We affirm this truth of the Virginal Conception in the **Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689**:

“The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father’s glory, of one substance [essence] and equal with Him who made the world, who upholds and governs all things He has made, did, when the fullness

of time was complete, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities of it, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man."

Yet, the question remains, "Was the Virginal Conception of Christ absolutely necessary for the redemption of God's people?"

II. The Necessity of the Virginal Conception

- The answer to the above-question is most certainly, "Yes!"
- Although the Virginal Conception did not **effectively cause** the two natures of Christ, it was, indeed, God's plan for preserving and ensuring them. And as we will see in just a moment, the two natures of Christ were most certainly necessary in order for Christ to save His people.
- Yet, consider the **truth that the VIRGINAL CONCEPTION WAS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE TWO NATURES OF JESUS CHRIST.**

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

- In order to accomplish redemption, Christ had to be fully God and fully man.
- By being born by the "seed of the woman," Christ's full humanity was preserved.
- Again, "...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." **Galatians 4:4-5**
- From the biblical account, we learn that Jesus was a real, historical figure, living during a specific historical time – during the reign of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee, and Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests in Jerusalem.
- The human Jesus could be seen and touched, for He was fully human (1 John 1:1-3).

- Jesus was Mary’s biological son. That is, by sharing in her DNA, so to speak, He was made in our likeness and shared fully in our humanity (yet, was without sin).

“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.” **Hebrews 2:17**

- Consequently, Christ knew and experienced everything that it means to be **HUMAN**:
 - He grew (Luke 2:40, 52)
 - He became hungry (Matthew 4:2)
 - He thirst (John 19:28)
 - He became tired (John 4:6)
 - He died (Luke 23:46)
 - He was limited by time and space (in His physical body).
 - He would have learned how to crawl and walk, how to speak, read and write, and also how to obey His parents (Hebrews 5:8). This underscores Christ’s real humanity.
 - He also had a human soul. “Now is my soul troubled” (John 12:27). We also read, “When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit” (John 13:21).
 - We also see that He had human emotions. He wept at that death of Lazarus (John 11:35). He “marveled” at the faith of the centurion (Matthew 8:10).
 - He was also tempted – but was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Luke 2:40,52: “And the child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him...And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”

- Consequently, **in His HUMANITY**, Jesus changed – He grew and He matured.
- **NOTE: This should not concern us, since the truth is that when Christ became Man, His divine nature, His deity, remained untouched. He simply assumed, or took on a second, human nature.**

<i>SINLESS HUMANITY</i>

- But, even though Christ took on a HUMAN NATURE in every respect, **His human nature remained sinless**.
- We affirm this, because **Jesus did not have an earthly father, for He was “conceived by the Holy Spirit.”**
 - In other words, the seed of Mary was mysteriously and miraculously sanctified by the Holy Spirit in order that the sin and guilt of Adam would not be transmitted to human Jesus.

- Consequently, the genealogical line to Adam was partially broken.

Wayne Grudem rightly notes, "...the fact that Jesus did not have a human father means that the line of descent from Adam is partially interrupted. Jesus did not descend from Adam in exactly the same way in which every other human being has descended from Adam. And this helps us to understand why the legal guilt and moral corruption that belongs to all other human beings did not belong to Christ."

John Calvin writes, "We make Christ free of all stain not just because he was begotten of his mother without copulation with man, but because he was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation might be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam's fall."

THE DEITY OF CHRIST

- Next, because Christ was "**conceived by the Holy Spirit**" His eternal nature as the divine, Second Person of the Trinity was preserved.

Philippians 2:5-11:

"Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 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. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

- NOTE, here that Paul explicitly states that Christ Jesus was "**in the form of God.**"
 - The word here for "form" in the original Greek is *morphe* [μορφή]. According to author and theologian James White, in *The Forgotten Trinity*, this word refers to the "outward display of the inner reality or substance. Here it refers to the outward display of the divine substance, i.e., the divinity of the preexistent Christ in the display of his glory as being in the image of the Father."
 - That is, Christ has always been, and will always be the eternal **Son of God**. The Incarnation – when Christ become man – did **NOTHING to change this**.
 - Interestingly, when Christ walked this earth, He was still **fully God, possessing all of the divine attributes of His divinity**.

- This may sound strange or even impossible, but the reality is that Christ voluntarily gave up the free exercise of His divine attributes in accordance with: (a) the will of the Father; and (b) His human nature.
- In other words, when Christ walked this earth, He was fully human, but He still **possessed the divine attributes of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, etc.** He simply chose not to exercise them, as the exercise of such attributes would violate His human nature.
- Consider for a moment the world’s fastest runner, the Jamaican athlete Usain Bolt. In 2009, he ran 100 meters in 9.58 seconds. **He is rightfully the fastest man in the world.** Regardless of how he performs in future races – as long as no one beats his time – he will maintain this title.
- Yet, consider as well a situation where he enters a race, and for a greater purpose – say charity event for disabled athletes. – he voluntarily sits in a wheelchair before the race begins. **He does so voluntarily and for a greater purpose** – yet, he still possesses the ability to run faster than anyone in the race – he simply chooses not to exercise that ability for a greater purpose.
- So it was with Christ. He was omnipresent; yet, He chose not to exercise His omnipresence, for to do so would violate His human nature, and He would not longer be 100% God **and** 100% man.

III. The Outcome and Implications of the Virginal Conception

- Finally, we conclude by exploring the implications of Christ’s Virginal Conception.

1. Jesus Christ had to be fully human in order to be our representative.

- Christ assumed fully humanity in order to be our substitute and representative on the cross of Calvary.
- **If Christ were anything MORE or anything LESS than 100%, fully human, then His sacrifice on our behalf would not have been sufficient.**

Romans 5:18-19: “Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s

disobediences many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."

- In the fourth century, a particular heresy emerged within the Church which denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ. A man named Apollinaris, a bishop in Laodicea in about A.D. 361, asserted that all humans had physical bodies, animal souls, and rational spirits. However, according to Apollinarius, the divine *logos* of Jesus Christ took the place of the rational spirit in His human nature. In other words, Christ was not **fully human**; rather, he was, essentially 2/3 human. The Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nazianzus successfully opposed Apollinarius, stating, "**that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.**" In other words, Jesus had to be fully human in order to save humans.
- Christ came to "reverse the curse" caused by Adam's sin. Therefore, Christ had to be just like Adam. Yet, unlike Adam, Christ succeeded in obeying God to the fullest, therefore, living a righteous and obedient life.
- Christ was tempted in life and in His crucifixion; yet, He remained sinless.

"In these temptations in the wilderness and the various temptations that faced him through the thirty-three years of his life, Christ obeyed God in our place and as our representative, thus succeeding where Adam had failed, where the people of Israel in the wilderness had failed, and where we had failed (Romans 5:18-19)."

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

- This is precisely why the Apostle Paul refers to Christ as the "last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45); and Adam the "first man" and Christ the "second man" (1 Corinthians 15:47).
- Again, Christ had to be just like us – and Adam – in order to represent us in His life, death, burial, and resurrection.

Hebrews 2:14-18: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 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."

- Because Christ was **CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, He experienced every phase of life we do.**
 - Consequently, he sanctified every aspect of human life – conception, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. This demonstrated the need for a savior at every point in a man or woman’s life – and as Christ lived it, He sanctified it.

NOTE: Throughout the history of the Church, many have suggested that the Virginal Conception makes Christ in some way *less human*. The reason for this is because He only had an earthly mother – not a mother and father.

- One such individual was theologian William Barclay who said, “The great difficulty [in the virginal conception] is its impact upon the belief in the incarnation. If the virgin birth is a literal fact, then the conclusion is quite inescapable that Jesus came into the world in a way that is different from that in which every other man comes into the world, and that...we can no longer hold to his full manhood and his fully humanity...The supreme problem of the doctrine of the virgin birth is that...it leaves us with a Jesus who is half-and-between, neither fully divine nor yet fully human.”
- Barclay’s (and others like him) premise is that unless you have an earthly father and earthly mother, then you are not fully human.
- Yet, Sam Storms points out that there are three ways of coming into being:
 - (1) born of a man and woman (us)
 - (2) born of man but not woman (Eve)
 - (3) born of neither man nor woman (Adam)
- Interestingly, no one questions the full humanity of Adam and Eve. So, why would we question the full humanity of Christ, who came into being the fourth way:
 - (4) born of woman but not man (Christ Jesus)

2. Jesus Christ had to be fully human in order to be our high priest.
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- As the long-awaited **Messiah** (from the Hebrew *meshiach*, or “anointed”), Jesus Christ had to fulfill all three “anointed” offices of the Old Testament – **Prophet, Priest, and King**.

- Yet, in order to do so, he had to be fully man – for just as a prophet represents God to His people, so a **priest represents man before God.**

“There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”
1 Timothy 2:5

3. Jesus Christ had to be fully human in order to be able to sympathize with us and sinless in order to be able to help us.

“For we have not 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. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
Hebrews 4:15-16

4. Jesus Christ had to be fully God in order to fully exhaust the wrath of an infinitely holy God.

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”
Colossians 1:19-20

- Since God is infinite in His eternal nature, and infinite in all His attributes, so is His wrath infinite towards the sin of man.
- Consequently, Christ had to be fully God – infinite in His divine nature – in order to fully satisfy the penalty due toward our sin.

5. The Virginal Conception reveals that just like our individual salvation, the plan of redemption was determined and initiated by God alone, not through human plans or efforts.

- The Virginal Conception originated with God not man. Consider Mary’s reaction upon hearing the news that she would bear a Son through conception by the Holy Spirit.

6. The Virginal Conception – and two natures of Christ – reveals the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as our Savior.

- One of the most common challenges to modern Christianity is the question, “How do you know that out of all the religions in the world, that Christianity is the ONLY true religion?”
- My immediate response to this question is always this: because only Christ is unique!

- John 3:16 states that Jesus Christ is the *monogenes* (μονογενες) Son of God. This is often translated, “only-begotten”; however, the word is made up of two roots: “mono”, meaning “one” and “genes,” meaning, “genus or type.”
- Consequently, a proper translation would be “**unique**” or “**of one type**.”
- ONLY Jesus Christ is the Son of God AND Son of Man. We read in Luke 3:38 that Seth was “The son of Adam, the son of God.” (Dirk preached on this last week). The reason was that Adam had no earthly parents. Yet, only Christ is Son of God and Son of Man.

7. Finally, the Virginal Conception and two natures of Christ demonstrate the lengths that God will go (condescend) in order to save us. By taking on human flesh, Christ led us to the Father.

- Jesus Christ became Son of Man – in a physical form that every human could apprehend with his physical senses (see, touch, feel) – in order to lead us to Christ the Son of God – in a spiritual form that could not be apprehended except through the eyes of faith (for God is Spirit and cannot be seen [John 1:18; 4:24]).

“[Before the birth of Christ] men had turned from the contemplation of God above, and were looking for Him in two opposite directions, down among created things, and things of sense. The Savior of us all, the Word of God, in His great love took to Himself a body and moved as Man among men, meeting their senses, so to speak, half-way. He became Himself an object for the senses, so that those who were seeking God in sensible things might apprehend the Father through the works which He, the Word of God, did in the body... The Son of God became man so that men might become sons of God.”

4th Century Eastern Church Father, Athanasius

- Read **Ezekiel 37**

John 1:1-18:

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes

after me ranks before me, because he was before me."") ¹⁶And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Fairest Lord Jesus

Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature,
O Thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
Thou, my soul's glory, joy and crown.

Beautiful Savior! Lord of all the nations!
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, praise, adoration,
Now and forever more be Thine.