



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 3 AUGUST 2020 – 9 AUGUST 2020

Dear church family,

There is a phrase within the Apostles' Creed we confess: "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary." Every time we confess it, we are saying that we believe in Jesus Christ who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin Mary. Do you cringe when you recite this bit of the Creed? Do you feel embarrassed? Or do you do some mental gymnastics to avoid actually affirming what the Christian church all over the world has believed for 2000 years?

There are a number of reasons why we must affirm the truth that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. I will just briefly mention three, from three angles: historical, theological, and biblical.

- 1) Historical reason: It is a simple fact in church history that since the earliest days, Christians believed that Jesus was conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin, Mary. That's why it's part of the Apostles' Creed, first place. It is true that Christians have held to various mistaken beliefs throughout history, and it is possible that the virgin birth of Jesus is one of those mistakes. However, unlike other mistaken beliefs that Christians held and divided over in the past, the virgin birth of Jesus is one of those truths that was virtually believed by all Christians since the beginning wherever Christianity has spread. Therefore, it is very unlikely and should give us a pause (a long one at that) before we dismiss it as a mistaken belief.
- 2) Theological reason: The virgin birth secures both the Person of Jesus and the Work of Jesus. Jesus is fully God and fully man. We have been learning about this truth earlier in the catechism. Jesus's virgin birth is one of the theological components that gives us confidence in the Person of Jesus as both divine and human. As Kevin DeYoung explains, "if His birth were like any other human birth—through the union of a human father and mother—we would question His full divinity."¹ Christ's God-ness and human-ness in one Person is supported by the doctrine of the virgin birth. In addition, Christ's Work as our atoning sacrifice is also connected to his virgin conception (and birth). As the Catechism says in Q36, we were sinners since conception (Psalm 51:5). But Christ's atoning work began from his conception and so is sufficient to cover my sin since my conception.
- 3) Biblical reason: The above historical and theological reasons may not finally bind our conscience to affirm the virgin birth of Jesus. But the biblical reason must. Some scholars argue that the word used in the prophecy of a virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14 in the original language doesn't necessarily mean a virgin but it could mean a young woman. However, even if everything is conceded on that regard (which I believe we shouldn't), the gospel of Luke makes it clear that Mary was a virgin when Christ was conceived in her womb. At the angel's announcement about Christ's conception and birth, Mary herself says, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel replies, "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 1:34–35) Even if we do not completely understand how exactly it all happened, the bible leaves us no other option than to believe the virgin birth of Jesus.

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot* (Moody Publishers, 2010), p78.

This week, I invite you to meditate on truths related to that phrase in the Apostles' Creed, "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary." May it strengthen you in your faith in Christ, our only Mediator.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

<https://www.upperhunterpc.com>

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM²

Lord's Day 14

Q35) What does it mean that he "was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary"?

A) That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took to Himself, through the working of the Holy Spirit, from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, a truly human nature so that He might become David's true descendant, like His brothers in every way except for sin.

Q36) How does the holy conception and birth of Christ benefit you?

A) He is our mediator, and with His innocence and perfect holiness He removes from God's sight my sin—mine since I was conceived.

LUKE 1:26–38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 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. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

The virgin birth (and conception) of Jesus challenges us because we all know how babies are made. But notice this knowledge of where babies come from is not a modern scientific discovery. Ancients knew it too. So Mary herself was greatly surprised at the news even when it was coming from an angel, a supernatural being. Ultimately, the virgin birth is unacceptable to those who reject the supernatural God. It is the folly of a human (sinful) mind that cannot imagine or accept God, who can do miracles. As noted, Mary was also surprised even though she was a believer in the supernatural God. It is okay, in a sense, to be surprised or even struggle to believe what God's Word tells us. However, Mary's humble acceptance of the news leaves a great example for us. May we also confess that we are God's servants and we trust that everything has been, is, and will be according to God's word.

² The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.