

VI. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary"

Matthew 1, Luke 2, John 1, Hebrews 2

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We will be looking at a couple of texts to undergird and enhance our understanding of study from the Apostles' Creed. Matthew 1:18–25 says *[18] 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. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] 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. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

[23] "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). [24] When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We are studying affirmations and declarations that we believe in the Apostles' Creed. Creeds are Biblical and the Bible is full of them. In fact, in a moment I'll give you an early creed from the Bible. The early church took the form of creeds and knew it was a helpful tool for discipleship, for protecting true doctrine against false doctrine, for unity and a number of things so they wanted to make use of creeds. Most of them were developed to answer heresies but the first creed we have that made its presence formally into the church is the Apostles' Creed. The creed is only so good as it is faithful to Biblical truth if it's telling us to believe something. This is why as we study the Apostles' Creed I'm taking you back to the very text each affirmation in this creed is drawn from in the Bible.

Many times we talk about the Bible being the inspired and inerrant Word of God and rightly so, down to every word in it, even down to the order of words, the letters and the punctuation. Jesus said in Matthew 5:18, *[18] For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.* The Apostles' Creed kind of bears that in that it is very important to understand the punctuation. If the apostrophe is in front of the 's' it means that what you are confessing came from the Apostles and was authored by the Apostles, but that is not where it is. The apostrophe is after the 's' which means it wasn't authored by the Apostles but it is a compilation in the second century of what many of those who were discipled by disciples of the Apostles. So what they are saying is that what was put together in this creed is Apostolic. To find out if it is Apostolic you go to the Bible, specifically to the New Testament that give the exposition and declarations of Biblical Christianity.

So this creed has to be faithful to the Word of God and if faithful to the Word of God then what are these sayings we are confessing? We are at two points in this study—‘conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.’ Therefore we want to know the texts of Scripture they are drawn from. By the way, they are just simply quoted from these texts. I’d like to show you two more of these texts. The next being in Luke. Luke like Matthew takes you all the way to the beginning of Jesus’ humanity, His human life, which takes you back to the womb.

Luke 1:26–35 says [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.*

You can hear the affirmation we studied in our last study all over this text—I believe in Jesus, the Christ, the only Son of God, our Lord. Now He tells us how He comes to us, how He gets here in this passage. Let’s look at another text in John 1 which is John’s words concerning the Incarnation. Matthew and Luke take us into time, for the Incarnation clarity John takes you into eternity—the One who has come to be born in the flesh. Who is this Son of God? Remember ‘the Word’ is another title for Jesus.

John 1:1–5 says [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.*

The word ‘was’ in verse 1 is in a certain tense and means was and always is. We see in verse 3 that as the Father created He did so through this One called the Word. So how does this One from all eternity get here to save us—the Son of God?

John 1:14 says [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.* This Word is not created or made, but Son whose status is eternally begotten, was with the Father, came from the Father, through whom the Father made all things and now through Him is going to redeem His people, has become Man. He is still God but now has become Man and when you see Him you have seen the glory of the only Begotten from the Father full of grace and truth. You have a measure of grace and truth, I’ve got a measure of grace and truth. The Man that has come was full of grace, full of glory and full of truth and we have beheld the Father when we have beheld Him. Now let’s look at Hebrews 2 which makes a statement about our Savior’s birth.

Hebrews 2:11–13 says [11] *For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, [12] saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” [13] And again,*

“I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” So He is going to save the children the Father has given Him. These are the elect of God. Let’s continue in the passage.

Hebrews 2:14–15 says [14] *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, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.* In other words, the elect of God through his redeeming work live in a true body with a reasonable soul and so He will have a true body. He will partake of the same and that’s why He’ll get hungry, thirsty, etc. It is why He has a soul within Him. Jesus says in the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:38, [38] *Then he (Jesus) said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”* He had sorrow/agonies in His soul here.

So He has a true human soul and true human body yet without sin because He didn’t come from the seed of Adam. He came as the Seed through the Holy Spirit’s bringing of the Seed to the woman and the woman then conceiving in her womb that Child. So He was conceived of the Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary—as the Apostles’ Creed says. So I want to give you a couple of thoughts in this study.

The following is the Apostles’ Creed;
*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,**
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting.*

After the first affirmation of God the Father, comes this lengthy application on God the Son and it becomes this Apostolic doctrine that gives us our salvation statements. It starts off ‘I believe in Jesus Christ...’ He is Jesus of Nazareth, the historical Jesus, a real person and in real time. Christ is not His last name, for it’s His title. He is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Prophet, the Priest and the King. He is the One greater than Moses as the Prophet, who is the Word and brings the final Word. He is the One greater than Melchizedek and Levi as the High Priest, the Priest of God who brings the sacrifice and is the Sacrifice. He is the One greater than David, the King, the Shepherd King who will bring us into a new heavens and a new earth by His grace and for His glory. He is God the Father’s only Son. He is the only way because He is the only Son. If He doesn’t make a way then you have no way, but He is the Way, the Truth and

the Life. Then who is blessed by Him? It is those who are able together to say ‘our Lord’ because personally they have said ‘my Lord.’ It is just like Thomas who said in John 20:28, [28] *Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”*

Now we move to what I call in the creed rapid fire;
*who was conceived by the Holy Spirit (1),
born of the Virgin Mary (2),
suffered under Pontius Pilate (3),
was crucified (4), died (5), and was buried (6);
he descended into hell (7).
On the third day he rose again (8);
he ascended into heaven (9),
is seated at the right hand of the Father (10),
and will come again (11) to judge the living (12) and the dead (13).*
Here are 13 declarations of this One whom we confess.

In this more expanded statement of the second Person, nothing about what He taught is quoted from the Bible. There are six sermons from Jesus recorded in the Gospels but nothing from those sermons are in this creed. Why would that be? This is telling us the Apostolic message of the Gospel news which is how those who are wrong with God can be right with God and God be right within them—how we are saved from our sins—by giving us the essentials. It is only reminding us that we are not saved by what Jesus taught or you know that He taught or what you do with what He taught. You are saved by who He is and what He did.

We don’t contribute to salvation. You might be thinking ‘but I had to believe.’ But you received that too. Ephesians 2:8–9 says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* In the last study we looked at the affirmation of who He is—*I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.* Now we start with what He did and there are 13 of them. They have a certain flow to them. We are saved through Christ’s humiliation and exaltation. He humbled Himself for our salvation and He is exalted as our Savior. Those 13 take you through this.

First is His humiliation which we see in the following statements of the creed—*who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell.* Then comes His exaltation which we see in the following statements of the creed—*On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

We not only have the flow from humiliation to exaltation, which by the way is our life according I Peter 5:6 which says [6] *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* We also get ten statements of what He did to save you and then we get three statements of what He will do to complete you and bring you to glory. The first ten statements are what He has already done and the last three are what He will do but it starts with the conception and the birth. None of these statements are the Gospel but every one of them is necessary for there to be a Gospel—who He is and what He has done. He can’t suffer, die, go to a grave and be raised savingly, unless He has been conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Here are three thoughts around this and then I’ll close with the takeaway.

The first thought is ‘conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary’ is here because it affirms and explains specific Scripture passages. In Matthew 1 we see how Joseph is

in a quandary because his wife to be is with child and being a righteous man he can't go through with this. In the dream the angel basically knows he is working through this and tells him not to fear because what Joseph thinks is true is not really true, then the angel tells him what the truth is about the Child Mary is carrying. Joseph finds out from the angel that this Child is none other than the Son of God, Immanuel and He will be called Yeshua because God has come to save. He is called Immanuel because God has come to save by being one of us and with us. The angel then reminds Joseph of Isaiah 7:14 which says *[14] Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* This affirms and explains the Scripture.

It also affirms and explains Genesis 3:14. What seems to be nonsense all of sudden makes sense because as the curse of sin falls upon humanity and God says He will put enmity between Eve's Seed and the seed of the serpent but her Seed shall crush the head of the serpent though His heel is bruised. Which is the lethal blow—the head or the heel? It is the head but it will cost, the bruising of the heel. The reason this doesn't make sense is that women don't have seed but now it's affirmed and explained in the woman Mary for she has Seed, not from Joseph and the line of Adam, but the Seed implanted in her by the Holy Spirit. He is the Son of God, Son of Man in her womb, fastened to the umbilical cord, nourished from her body, bearing the DNA of her body and He will be born with flesh, blood and all the weaknesses of that flesh and blood that we have. He will be born without sin because He has no sin nature from Adam's seed but with all the weaknesses we face with a human body and a reasonable soul. He will be tempted unto every point likened to us. He will go through every point of life likened to us.

Think about this question—could Joseph and Mary come home one day with a basket left on their doorstep with a baby inside and a note that said 'My name is Gabriel and I have left this baby whose name is Jesus'? Sure that could have been done miraculously and been pulled off. Jesus had appearances as a Man called Christophanies in the Old Testament even though He wasn't a Man, so could Jesus have showed up at age 30 at the door of Mary and Joseph telling them they were His adoptive parents? Sure, but then that would have not fulfilled the Scripture.

Number one, Jesus had to be of David's line, of the tribe of Judah, of Abraham and of Adam's race because the Scripture said so. So we get two genealogies to affirm that the Old Testament Messiah promises are fulfilled. I Corinthians 15:21 says *[21] For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.*

Practically Jesus can now minister to these young people and every one by saying 'I know you're going through a tough time but I have said, *[13] No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*' (I Corinthians 10:13) He didn't show up at age 30 for He came as a zygote. He was birthed, He had a childhood, and grew in wisdom, stature, favor with God and favor with man (Luke 2:52). Can you imagine Jesus saying 'Mom, I got My catechism.' 'Good job, Jesus.' 'Hey dad, I'm old enough to carry those beams now, can I carry them?' Guess what beams He'll carry one day, those of the cross He'll die on for you. Jesus took obedient step after obedient step for in Him His Father was well pleased. When His mom told Him not to do something He obeyed. When His brothers and sisters wanted an argument He said 'no, only that which is good for edification according to the need of the moment. Mary and Joseph are probably praised for their parenting when other see Jesus act the way He does to his own family and His neighbor. He was a real Man, through a real zygote through development with a real birth down a birth canal yet it was a supernatural conception.

With all due respect to the hymn ‘Away in a Manger’ when it says ‘no crying He made’ it is probably not accurate. He did what every other baby does in yelping for that first breath but that is not when His life began. The Bible is clear on this. The One who can redeem life begins life where life begins—conceived in the womb. The reason it has to be a virgin is not because the marriage bed has to be holy or that there is something sinful about the intimacy of the marriage bed. When David says ‘in sin my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5)’ he is not speaking of the marital act. He is saying the sin record we get from Adam begins at conception because we begin at conception. There’s life, right there. So Jesus is a Man to save men and women from their sins and He comes when men and women begin their life. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

You can go to Him for He was a teenager. He was a child. I’m sure He graduated from synagogue school. I’m sure He went through all of that. You can call upon Him and everywhere you go in life there is no virgin territory for His footsteps are there. You can speak to Him. This is the One who has come to save us from our sins.

Secondly, He affirms and explains the preceding affirmation. In other words, now we see how this historical Jesus can be the Christ, because He is the Son of God. This is the One who is eternal. Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 8:58, [58] *“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”* This is the One who in the beginning was with God, was God and always will be God (John 1:1). He has now come in the flesh. This One who is Immanuel—God with us—has come to save us from our sins. He has humbled Himself and is now exalted.

It’s the only case of humiliation by addition not subtraction. Most of the time we think of humiliation as something we give up. It is but it’s more than that with Jesus. Philippians 2:5–7 says [5] *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* [6] *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* [7] ***but emptied himself*** (not of Godhead but of its privileges), *by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.* ‘Emptied Himself’ is subtraction but ‘taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men’ is addition and that was humiliation, as Deity became Humanity as maintaining Deity. So away with all the heresies and the cults for Jesus is not a man who lived a great life so that God made Him God. No, Jesus is God becoming a Man so that He could save us from our sins, because by a Man came death and by a Man came the resurrection of the dead (I Corinthians 15:21).

Thirdly, He affirms and explains the Gospel provisions and assurances. When I was in Charlotte, North Carolina I was sent there from Briarwood Presbyterian to be a church planter in Charlotte. While I was there in Charlotte, there was an Episcopalian priest who actually used to be a Baptist and chose the wrong seminary for he not only left being a Baptist but left Christian theology for theological liberalism which is not a subset of Christianity for it is anti-Christian. His name was John Shelby Spong. He wrote a book and in the book this is what he said; ‘Evangelical Christianity is nothing more than what the first century followers of Christ wanted to be true and that is, pagan myths, thus the Bible has a pagan myth of God’s entrance into humanity and it’s called the Incarnation—conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. Then you have to have a pagan myth for the exit and it’s called the resurrection and the ascension.’

What we say, is the conception and birth of Jesus was a Gospel blessing that brings Gospel assurances that Jesus can save because He is truly Man and He is the new Adam because He is God having come in the flesh to save us from our sins. The miracle, I repeat, is not the virgin birth. The miracle is a virgin gave birth because of the miraculous conception of the Holy

Spirit. The Bible doesn't give us a lot of details on this but I love the phrase that is used. Mary hears what is going to happen about her having a Child and says 'How can this be? I'm still a virgin.' Luke 1:35 says [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."* I love that phrase in bold.

We don't know a thing about Mary before this happens, until Gabriel comes and identifies her as the favored one. She doesn't merit this or had an immaculate conception for her birth. She has given birth to her Savior. There is no doubt that she is a godly woman. She has been faithful to the Word of God to maintain her sexual purity until marriage, but this is one we know nothing about until the Spirit of God sends the angel of God and the angel of God comes before her to tell her that the Spirit of God will overshadow her. Then she says not 'I'll do it' but 'let it be done to me according to Your word (Luke 1:38).' Just as Joseph doesn't contribute neither does Mary. It is the work of the Spirit of God in the conception and then the virgin maintains her virginity and then gives birth to the glory of God. As we work our way through the rest of these 13 declarations in the coming studies we will build on them but here is the takeaway.

The takeaway is God has come to us not only to seek us but to save us from our sins and our only contribution are the sins from which God by His grace saves us through Jesus the Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. If you have ever thought there is something you have to do to make this thing work, at least you would go to His adoptive father and His appointed mother, but then when you go there you find out they are passive just like we are passive in our salvation. I'm not saying Christians who are saved are passive. No, for we love what Jesus teaches, we're hungry for His Word and we want to obey Him but our obedience is never more but gloriously is the evidence of our salvation, not a contribution to our salvation. It's true of Joseph and Mary just as it is true of us—that He came to seek us and to save us because He has loved us to save us from our sins and when He has come for us then we can be saved by His grace and for His glory.

I love the Advent Season and I think it's a great opportunity for outreach but it's not binding on the conscience and it never should be, but we didn't have Christmas in December or Christmas in June but we had the Apostles' Creed—Christmas in the Gospel. That is what we have. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit—who—Jesus the Christ, our Lord, our Savior and He was born of the Virgin Mary. He has come to save us to be one of us and among us and to be with us so we can be with Him. But I will tell you that every Christmas season I see people busily buying Christmas gifts, going to Christmas parties and Christmas events, and they have no intention of worshipping the Christ of Christmas. We have every intention to seek them that may know the One who came to save them. That is our intention, because that was the intention that brought us to Christ as God came to save us through His Son.

I know you know His Name is Jesus—Yeshua—God saves. I know you know what His Name means but I don't know what you know, not what His Name means but do you know Him as your Savior? He was conceived by the Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary and what is the next declaration? It is to suffer for you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much that You have loved us to give Your only Son and Your Son has come. Not only is He the Way, the Truth and the Life but He came in the only way that this could have happened and He came by the power of the Holy Spirit, through two instruments who

were willing and their willingness was because of Your grace for they were the favored ones. We, too, by Your grace would receive Him. If there is anyone reading this today who has not yet received this Jesus would You help them know You? Seeing what great things You have done to save us through this great Savior, what a terrible thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God neglecting and rejecting His salvation, but what a glorious thing it is to receive this Savior and Lord. Father, for those who have received Your salvation, would You just take them up another whole level in the joy of their salvation that their God found a way to bring His Son who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

- I. Affirms and Explains the Scripture
- II. Affirms and Explains the preceding Affirmations
- III. Affirms and Explains Gospel Provisions and Assurances

LIFE TAKEAWAY

God has come to not only seek us, but to save us from our sins. Our only contribution to salvation are the sins from which God by His Grace saves us through Jesus—the Christ—conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.