

Good morning. Good to be with you. **Luke 1.**

We are moving further into our series studying together what is known as the *Apostles Creed*. This almost 2,000 year old summary statement of the core beliefs and doctrines of our faith. Christians across time, geography, cultures, languages and denominations have looked to the creed to help form their doctrine and fuel their discipleship. And we're doing the same over the course of this summer.

**So let's stand and let's read the creed together as we start this morning...**

### **THE APOSTLES CREED**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come 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. Amen.**

**Pray.**

### **Incarnation**

Now the Creed, and you may have noticed this as we've been reading it over the past few weeks, is broken up into three sections, each one starting with the statement "I believe."

- Section 1 is about God the Father.
- Section 2 is about God the Son, Jesus Christ.
- Section 3 is about God the Holy Spirit and the Church.

And last week Dan kicked us off into section 2 as we confessed together – ***"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord."***

**Now historically, when Christians have talked about Jesus they've done so with 2 parts** – the *person* of Jesus and the *work* of Jesus. The Person of Jesus – who is God the Son? What are His attributes and characteristics and identity? That's what we handled last week. The *Work* of Jesus – what has God the Son done on our behalf?

And this is where the Creed turns its attention next – the work of Jesus. A work, and this is really important if you just want a framework for how to think about what Christ has done, the creed breaks it down into 5 key movements:

- 1. Incarnation** – Come back to that in a moment.
- 2. Substitution** – Jesus stands in for sinners. He takes our punishment we deserved. Dies our death.
- 3. Resurrection** – Does not stay dead. 3 days later he gets up from the grave defeating satan/sin/death.

**4. Ascension** – He goes up to where He is today, seated at the right hand of God ruling/reigning/interceding.

**5. Return** – What is still to come when Christ returns to (a) judge and (b) usher in the new heavens + new earth.

So that's where the Creed will take us over the next 5 weeks. Today we want to talk about the first movement of that – **the incarnation**.

Jesus coming to earth and taking on flesh, entering into humanity. What I've been jokingly calling all week – "Christmas in July". (I asked the worship team to play Christmas songs, they wisely said no). **But that's where we're headed today we're talking about the birth of Jesus.**

Here's how the Creed says it → **who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.**

Jesus, God the Son, takes on flesh. The disembodied, limitless God, the one who cannot be contained in space and time, takes on a body, enters into the limitations, frailty of flesh and bones.

But He does not do so through normal human reproductive means. He is conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin.

**GOAL FOR TODAY** – I want to show you why "conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary" is so crucial to our faith. Why this line makes it into the creed, why this is not some fringe belief you can take or leave. Why this matters so much to us as followers of Jesus.

**In other words, I want to turn the virgin birth from a cute Christmas story to a declaration and invitation of worship.**

But before we do that, let's first take a look at what exactly happened some 2,000 odd years ago as God entered into humanity.

**Look at how Luke 1 tells the story:**

**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.**

- Betrothed – Her and Joseph were legally married, but they haven't made the next step of consummating the marriage.
- Very clearly doubling down – Virgin. Virgin. Virgin. Mary is a virgin.

**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.**

Angel shows up to Mary, and she's like – woah. Why is this angel here?

**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.”**

This is a loaded prophecy from the angel. Jesus will sit on the throne of his father David, His kingdom will have no end.

If you were a first century Jewish man or woman hearing Luke 1 for the first time, these words from the angel would have just exploded in your mind. It's riddled with all of this backstory about who the Messiah would be, that He would come through the line of David, His kingdom would be forever. You would've perked up – this is the guy.

But you would've also had the same question Mary had...but wait a minute, Luke just told us twice that Mary is a virgin.

**34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”**

We talked a few weeks ago about chronological snobbery. How we can read the Scriptures almost as if people were just foolish or ignorant back then. And so I love Mary's response because she's like – ummm...angel, sir, sir Angel – that's not how it works. Like I know how babies are made, so there's some complications here.

**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.**

Important: The fact that the virgin Mary conceives, not through human means, but by the power of God means this child to be born is divine. Jesus does not become divine later, but this child is God entering into humanity through this means. This is vital to our doctrine. Jesus isn't just like a divine hybrid ya know? Half God, Half man.

Jesus is fully God and fully man.

The theological term for this is the **hypostatic union – Jesus has two complete natures: one fully human and one fully divine.**

So was Jesus fully God? Yes. Was Jesus fully a man? Yes. More on that in a bit, let's finish the passage.

**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.**

And if you track through the rest of the narrative, this happens exactly as the angel said. Mary the Virgin gets pregnant, goes to Bethlehem, gives birth to a son, they name Him Jesus. God the Son has entered into humanity, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a Virgin.

### **So now the question – why does this matter?**

Do you wonder that? I get why the creed includes crucifixion, or forgiveness of sins, or the Holy Spirit or God the Father almighty. But this? Why do I have to believe a virgin got pregnant and had a baby in order for me to have orthodox Christian belief? Why is this one of the central beliefs Christians wrote down and then defended for the past 2,000 years?

There's a ton of reasons why this matters. I want to spend the rest of our time thinking about 5. 5 truths we see in "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary."

### **The virgin birth means...**

#### **1. God can perform miracles.**

Every birth is miraculous. Every single human birth is a miracle. The virgin birth of God the Son is not simply miraculous, it's impossible. This does not happen. Virgins do not get pregnant. Mary knows this. Ancient readers of Luke and of Matthew in his telling, would have known this.

I mean just imagine this scene – "Oh you're pregnant! That's wonderful, how far along?" "8 months." "Fantastic. Boy or girl?" "Boy." "Who's the father?" "Oh it's the Holy Spirit."

This is weird. This does not happen, except by the power and might of our all-powerful God.

**CS Lewis Story.** There's a famous story about the author CS Lewis during his years as a professor at Cambridge. CS Lewis, as many of you know, is the author of the Chronicles of Narnia and many other fantastic works. As the story goes, a colleague stopped by his office during Christmas time one year, and Lewis had his window open and was listening to Christmas carolers outside who just so happened to be singing a song about the virgin birth.

This colleague shook his head and said to Lewis, "Aren't you glad that we know better than they?" And C.S. Lewis said, "Pardon me? I'm not sure what you're speaking of." He said, "Well, aren't you glad that we know that virgins don't have babies?" And as the story goes Lewis paused for a moment and replied, "***Don't you think they knew that too? Isn't that the whole point?***"

Yes, that's the whole point. It's not that people were running around having virgin births all the time. A huge lesson we can learn from the virgin birth is that God can break into the natural world with supernatural acts of wonder.

Our world, we talk about this ad nauseam, trains us to think there is nothing outside of what we can experience with our senses - taste, touch, smell, etc. And over time what that does is it slowly forms us to not expect God can and does still work miraculously in the world today.

- So we'll pray for healing, but really our trust is in the medical professionals.
- We'll pray for holiness and freedom from addiction, but really our trust is in more self-awareness of our past and father wounds.
- We'll pray for God to save our friends and reconcile them to himself, but really our trust is in our ability to share the gospel or be winsome and cool but not overbearing.

And so one of the ways the virgin birth is helpful is by showing us that central to this whole story, the whole redemption narrative of God is a miracle. God taking on flesh.

And listen, if the virgin birth is too impossible to believe, too miraculous to accept – what do you do when Jesus gets up from the grave? If you reject the virgin birth, why not just reject the resurrection? Both are impossible...

Yes a virgin birth is impossible, but we worship a God who does the impossible. Why else do you think the angel has to remind Mary in Luke 1:37 – **37 For nothing will be impossible with God.**

Mary's like – no way, I know how biology works. And the angel says – but remember you worship a limitless God.

And so there's something for our souls to be encouraged by here as we remember our God does the miraculous because central to the whole story is a miraculous birth. So we approach God with faith.

**We ask Him to show up in our lives even in what seems impossible.**

## **2. God keeps His promises.**

Much of the Old Testament is a waiting game for God's people. Through hardship, suffering, slavery, persecution, and exile they are waiting for the one promised to them who will come through the line of David to usher in God's forever kingdom.

And one of the things that is so fascinating, and Ben Myers talks about this if you're reading along in his book on the Apostles Creed we gave away a few weeks ago, is that the storyline of the Bible is one in which miraculous births play a pivotal role.

- God promises to Abraham and Sarah that even in their old age, God will make their descendants outnumber the stars in heaven. A foreshadowing that one day all who trust in Christ will be counted among descendants of Abraham. And the fulfillment of this will come, even though Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90, through the miraculous birth of a son.
- Or Moses. A miraculous protection of a newborn infant. Though Pharaoh, in the opening chapters of Exodus, has ordered the murder of all Israelite newborn sons, Moses is hidden and protected by God, so that one day He will be raised up as the one who will lead God's people out of slavery.

- Judges 13, the Israelites are enslaved under the Philistines. In captivity, desperate for deliverance. And God shows up to the barren wife of Manoah and promises a son. That son is Samson, the greatest of the Israelite judges who rises up against the Philistines to deliver God's people.
- Or Hannah in 1 Samuel 1, who prays for years and years for a child, who God hears her prayer and she becomes pregnant and gives birth to Samuel, the prophet who will anoint the first kings of Israel including King David.
- Or Elizabeth in Luke 1, Mary's cousin, who though she herself is in old age, God promises to send a son, John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for Jesus, the Savior of the world.

As Ben Myers writes, **“At the great turning points of history, we find a woman, pregnant, and an infant child brought into the world by the powerful promise of God. Israel's story is a story of miraculous births.”**

Then you come to the most improbable promise of all. Isaiah 7. God once again shows up to his people caught in exile. Under oppression, taken out of their homeland, desperate for a redeemer. And He promises:

**Isaiah 7:14 – 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.**

The virgin birth is evidence that God keeps His promises. Though not on His people's timeline. They wait for generation after generation, for centuries – looking and longing and hoping for the Messiah to come. God does not fail. He sees His promise through.

And so we look back at how God has been faithful to His promises then, and it spurs us on towards faith that He will be true now and in the future.

If God promised a Messiah born to a virgin, and then here comes a Messiah born to a virgin, we can trust that when God promises – one day that same Messiah is coming again to judge and to bring in a new heavens and a new earth with no more crying, pain, tears, heartache, sadness – that it too will come to pass!

**The virgin birth means God keeps His promises.**

### **3. Jesus is fully man.**

We said week 1 that creeds were often written not only to solidify what the Church *did* believe, but also to clarify what it *did not* believe. And one of the earliest heresies (false teachings) that many creeds, including the apostles' creeds, was concerned with is what was known as **docetism**.

Docetism comes from the Greek word **δοκέω** which means **to appear, or to seem**. And the argument of those who held to this false teaching was that Jesus did not actually take on flesh.

Remember – many believed that flesh/the material world was evil and the spiritual world was good. So God, the divine, could not corrupt himself in such a way by taking on flesh, so rather than actually being human, Jesus just appeared human. He looked human. Like some divine magic trick.

And so the emphasis from the creed helped rebut this false teaching and form the Church's doctrine around the reality that God the Son did not *appear as a human*, but actually became human. Took on flesh.

Was born into humanity. Took on a body. Grew up and matured from a baby, to a toddler, to a child, to a teenager, to an adult. Ate, slept, bathroom, felt pain.

So why is that good news for us? Why does that matter? Because the great God we've been in awe of over the past two weeks – the one who is limitless, all-powerful, eternal, Son of God, Lord of lords, King of kings – knows and lives what it means to be human.

**Empathy.** I mean we all crave this kind of "I've been there" connection right. Like there's something unique about those who have walked the same journey we've walked. Friends who have not can still love us, encourage us, help us (probably more than we think or give them credit for). But there's something unique about someone who can look at us and say "I've been there. I've walked this journey. I've stood in your shoes. I've faced this too."

**Jesus' humanity means He can do that, more than we know.**

SO:

- When the Bible says Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, it means it.
- When the Bible says Jesus is able to hurt with us in our pain, it means it.
- When the Bible says Jesus was tempted in every way that we are yet was without sin, it means it.

Docetists thought it was beneath the divine to come to earth. It was too lowly. Too normal. It was not god-like for God to enter into humanity.

**But that's one of the greatest parts of the good news of the God we worship.** That though He is mighty, He stoops low. Though He is limitless, He takes on limits. Though He is above and ruling and reigning, He comes down to be with us.

**But there's a tension, because the other is true as well...**

#### **4. Jesus is fully God.**

While the ancient church dealt with docetism. We deal much more readily with the opposite. For us, the functional false teaching in our society today is that Jesus is *just a human*.

And so while the creed recentered the early church in one direction, I think in our cultural moment, it reinforces our doctrine the other way.

**The virgin birth means Jesus is fully human, but not just human, Jesus is also fully God.**

Jesus does not have a human father. He has a heavenly father. He is born of the virgin Mary, earthly mother, but conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Look back with me at **Luke 1:35 – 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.**

To the ancient reader, when they heard this line “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” they would have remembered and thought back to Genesis 1:2. We looked at this a few weeks ago:

**Gen 1:1-2 – 1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.**

It’s the exact same idea in the ancient text – The Spirit of God in creation was hovering over the waters, and now the Spirit of God will hover over the womb of Mary.

**What Luke is showing us is that this is not simply the birth of a child, but the beginning of a new creation, a new humanity.**

This is a re-doing of Genesis 1. Sin has entered in and broken the original design of God, and so when Luke 1 says the Spirit is once again hovering, this points to the reality that God is recreating in the person of Jesus a new world and new kingdom.

**God is entering back into humanity to finish what He started.**

Which means Jesus, though fully human, is still fully God. That 6 lb, 8 oz newborn baby Jesus is still the one who holds the universe together. Is still the one who reigns and rules over kings and kingdoms. He is Lord.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit – fully God. Worthy of our worship.

#### **5. Jesus is the perfect, sinless, and spotless sacrifice.**

The virgin birth is essential to Jesus being sinless, and being sinless is essential to Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross on our behalf.

If Jesus is not sinless, He cannot be the spotless perfect sacrificial lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And if Jesus is not born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, He is not sinless.

And here’s why: All of humanity is born as what the Bible calls “sons of Adam”. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God in Genesis 3.



Everyone who has now been born into the world has been “of Adam.” His sin now mars and corrupts our nature. We are born, not just neutral people who do sin, but sinful in our very nature.

This is all of Romans 5.

- Romans 5:12 – **12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.**
- Romans 5:15 – **“Many died through one man’s trespass.”**
- Rom 5:17 – **“Because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man.”**

Everyone born of Adam is born sinful and sinning. Who is the only human never born of Adam? The one conceived by the Holy Spirit. The one born by supernatural means without an earthly father. The one therefore untouched by sin.

And because he’s untouched by sin, he can be exactly what we and our sin as those born under Adam need – the perfect, spotless sacrifice. The one who though He has no sin, on the cross takes our sin upon Himself.

Because here’s the other good news of Romans 5. Look at the other parts of those verses:

- Romans 5:15 – **“Many died through one man’s trespass...much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.”**
- Rom 5:17 – **“Because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man...much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”**
- Rom 5:18 – **“One trespass led to condemnation for all men...so one act of righteousness[g] leads to justification and life for all men.”**

Jesus, the one not marred by sin, not born under Adam, born from the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin – is the 2nd Adam.

The first Adam caused us all to be born under sin through one act.

But the 2nd Adam offers us all to be born again into righteousness through one act.

**The virgin birth points to the cross.**

**The virgin birth means Jesus can die for our sins.** Jesus can save us. Jesus can wash us clean. Jesus can have the perfect record of righteousness and holiness. He can be the one who never sinned, whose nature is not corrupted by sin, that dies and takes our sin and rises again so we can be reconciled to God.

**The virgin birth means we can be saved!**

Would you trust Him? Would you put your faith in Him? Will you believe that the one who performs miracles, the one who keeps His promises, the one who enters into humanity and though fully God also becomes fully man is the same one who dies a sinner’s death on a cross, offering salvation to all who would believe?

**Will you believe in Jesus? Will you trust Him? If you know Him, will you rest in Him?**

Do you see now, the virgin birth is not some random miracle that we're asked to hold onto afor nothing.

**It is the culmination of God's great promises of redemption across time.**

It holds within itself the good news of the gospel. It points us to the cross, it grounds us in saving faith, it reminds us of our miracle working, always faithful and true to His promises God, the one who can save His people from their sins.

**Pray.**