

Apostle's Creed: Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Thanks, Vernon Cathy, for leading us in worship. Let's pray. Father God, thank you for this Pentecost Sunday. Thank you that it's a time in the church when we remember the gift of your Holy Spirit.

Remember that your Spirit came down, not only upon the early church, but came down to live in each of our lives, each of our hearts. That when we accept and recognize Jesus Christ as your Son and our Savior, your Spirit lives within us.

Your power is in us, Father, and it is available to us at any time and all the time. Father, it's through the power of your Spirit that we live, that we breathe, that we have meaning in our lives.

And so, Father, we thank you for that gift this morning. We thank you that your Spirit lives within us and lives within your church. And, Father, this morning we remember that your church is not a building.

Your church is not this building any more than it is the building down the street, the homes around the world where people proclaim your name. Father, the church lives in us.

[1 : 12] The church is your people, Father. And so as your church, as your people, I pray that we would be bold in declaring your name, that we would be bold in inviting people into your kingdom, into relationship with you and with us.

Father, help us not to be afraid, because what's the worst that someone can say to us? No thanks. That's pretty small risk to take, to share the truth of who you are with anyone who is important to us in our lives.

Father, we also recognize this morning that we have challenges and needs. But we ask that you would meet those needs according to your will, Father, for it's your will that we want to be done in the world and in our lives, not our own will.

But, Father, we know that you recognize us and that you care for us more than the lilies of the field or the birds of the air. We are your children. We are your created ones and we are your image bearers.

And, Father, we ask you to meet the needs that you know already that we have. Father, thank you so much for healing and answered prayer. We've seen that through our church, throughout so many people who are here this morning and not with us this morning.

[2 : 35] And, Father, I thank you for comfort, for the comfort again of your spirit in us as we struggle, Father, as we find challenges in our lives. But, Father, I also thank you for the power of your spirit filling us with joy, filling us with peace, filling us with confidence.

Because, Father, those are the gifts that you have for us through your spirit. So, Father, this morning, I pray that you would open our ears to hear what you have to say to us this morning. Open our eyes that we may see the truth. As Pastor Ahmad said a few weeks ago, Father, open the eyes of our hearts, open the eyes of our spirits, so that your truth may be revealed to us, in us, and through us.

And we ask all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, good morning, and Bramard Baptist. So, for anyone who may not know me, yes, this is the same thing I do every Sunday, but my name is Kent Dixon, and it is my privilege to be the lead pastor here.

I'll move this out of the way. There we go. And this morning, we'll be continuing our series on the Apostles' Creed. Last week, we recognized that the Apostles' Creed has somewhat of an X structure to it, the way it's composed, because Jesus Christ, appropriately, is at the center of the Creed.

[4 : 07] It's Jesus that we follow, Jesus whose example we seek to model our own lives after, Jesus who is our Savior and our Lord.

And last week, we looked closely at the phrase from the Creed, Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. focusing on who Jesus is, particularly as His identity as the Son of God.

And we also considered the idea of what it means for Jesus Christ to be our Lord, if you remember that. We considered that as we submit to His authority in our lives, that we consider the opportunity to follow Jesus and obey Him to be a privilege.

And before we continue this morning, I'd like to take a moment to recite the Apostles' Creed together. And as you read these words, I invite you to think of it not simply as stating truth or facts, but as a prayer.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's 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.

[5 : 38] He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again, He ascended into heaven. He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and 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. As we continue unpacking the Creed together this morning, we come to the phrase that begins, who was, meaning Jesus, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.

So as you may have noticed on the sign outside the church, welcome to Christmas in June.

Because essentially, that's what we're talking about together this morning.

Do you see that? The birth of a very special baby in a manger more than 2,000 years ago. The birth of a baby is miraculous, isn't it?

[6 : 50] You've likely been intimately involved in the miracle of birth, whether you're a parent, a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, a sibling.

As human beings in close relationship with others, the arrival of a baby has likely touched our lives in some close and meaningful way.

I was present and fully conscious, I might add, for the birth of both of our children. And it was without question one of the most amazing experiences I've ever had in my life.

And while there are moments in their early lives that I remember clearly, I see Kathy out in the foyer. I'm talking to you, Dr. Kathy, who delivers babies. While there's moments in their early years of our kids' lives that I remember really clearly, they stand out to me, in some ways, the things that are happening in their lives now are most top of mind for me.

And probably some of you as parents can relate to that. For example, I look like I've been abandoned this morning. And you're not wrong. 75% of our family is at the Citadel Theatre this morning because Connor has been nominated for an acting award for a play he was in.

[8 : 10] So the rehearsal for the awards is now and then the awards themselves are tonight. So pretty cool. But that awareness of what's happening now in my kids' lives, to me, that's also somehow the relationship I have with my understanding of Jesus' birth as well.

I often think of, I don't know about for you, but for me, I think of the adult Jesus. I think of the reality of his ministry and the legacy that he has left and that he continues to, the impact that he continues to make in our lives, in my life, in the world.

And so his birth is usually something that impacts me more during the Christmas season. I don't know if you can relate to that. But I was thinking about that this week and I challenged myself that, all right, does the birth of Jesus then become less miraculous somehow when we're not surrounded by multicolored lights and cards and carols and Christmas trees?

I hope not. Why does our wonder over Jesus' birth seem to be somewhat confined to one season, one particular time of year?

So I think we can all agree that we probably have a pretty good understanding of the basic biology of conception, pregnancy, and birth. So how is it that we can do anything but focus on the miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

[9 : 54] No earthly father. Right away, that breaks our understanding, doesn't it? That lands this event squarely in the realm of the miraculous.

Last week, we talked about the angels' visit to both Joseph and Mary to let them in on the news. A baby was to be born, but not with all the traditional steps in place as we would expect them to be.

Let's take a look at this through the lens of Luke 1, 26-38. In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you.

Mary was greatly troubled at his words, can you blame her, and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary.

[11:17] You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the son of the most high.

The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever.

His kingdom will never end. How will this be? Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin. The angel answered, The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who is said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month, for no word from God will ever fail.

Catch this. I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled.

[12:41] Then the angel left her. Mary clearly understood that certain things had to happen for her to become pregnant and have a baby.

And she was also clear, at least from her perspective, that as she was still a virgin, that seemed to be a fairly obvious obstacle in the equation.

to be as scripture suggests to us, Mary didn't take days to think this over. She didn't seem to stress and worry about what people would think about her.

She saw herself as chosen by God, with the opportunity to recognize his authority in her life and simply obey.

Have you ever stopped to recognize the depth of commitment, faith, and trust that Mary demonstrated here? She didn't ask for specifics.

[13:55] She didn't ask all of the questions some of us might have thought to ask. She didn't say, okay, God, I'm probably on board with this plan.

But just FYI, I need a lot more detail about how it's all going to play out. She didn't say that. Mary submitted to the rule of God in her life and humbly accepted the proclamation of the angel and the will of God.

So to be fair, many of us may never have had an angel appear to us and declare God's will and miraculous intent for our lives as happened to Mary.

But I want to challenge you this morning. When God asks you to step out in faith, is your first response, response, oh boy God, oh, this really makes me uncomfortable.

Can I think about it for a while and I'll maybe get back to you at some point? Is that all right? Or is your response, Lord, my life is yours.

[15:17] I may not understand what you're asking me to do, but I do recognize that it is you who are asking, and I will trust and obey.

Have you ever stopped to consider why it was so significant that Mary was a virgin? I mean, really consider that?

Aside from the obvious fact that our understanding of conception and birth requires a man, there's more to it.

Mary being a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception very clearly fulfilled Old Testament prophecy regarding the circumstances of the Messiah's birth.

The Bible says in Isaiah 7 14, therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[16:38] God there are also several other places in Matthew where Old Testament prophecies are quoted specifically and indicated as being revealed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The virgin birth is also important because it makes it very clear that Jesus had a divine nature from the very beginning.

He was never just a human being who at some point was adopted into or took on a divine nature.

Jesus didn't somehow become God later. This was not a baby born under completely average circumstances who only later took on a divine nature at some point as he got older.

This is where the creed is clearer in Christ's divinity and humanity. It can be challenging for us though to hold those two realities of Jesus his humanity and divinity in equal balance can't it? [17 : 52] And yet we must hold both equally as because only in that even balance do we realize the complete nature of Jesus Christ.

We recognize that he was fully human. A human baby just as vulnerable and dependent as all human babies are.

Jesus would have needed to be changed and dressed as heretical as that may sound to you. He would have learned to walk and talk and read and write. Mary and Joseph would have taught Jesus the things that every Jewish boy should know.

He likely would have even learned to work with his hands as his earthly father Joseph did. Have you ever imagined that? I've talked to you before about consecrated imagination where it's okay to think about things that are beyond the scope of scripture as long as we keep scripture in mind.

[19 : 12] Jesus may have worked alongside his father making furniture and other things for people who he knew personally. Well the Bible doesn't go into detail about that part of his life.

Jesus may very well have struggled as a teenager as he tried to wrap himself around the understanding of separating from earthly parents.

He was human. He got hungry and thirsty. He experienced anger and frustration, doubt and disappointment.

Jesus was fully human. but his divinity is also clearly expressed in the words conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' conception didn't happen the way we understand it, but by supernatural means. We may perceive miracles to be healing, feeding multitudes, bringing the dead back to life, but Jesus' birth was perhaps one of the greatest miracles of all.

[20 : 31] From the very beginning, Jesus was the Son of God in every way we can possibly understand that. The Son, one of the three persons of the Trinity, God himself became human.

I love the words in the message translation when it puts it so beautifully in John 1.14, the word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.

So powerful. But why is it so important to us that Jesus retained his divinity? Because I hope, as a Christian, that's what you believe, because it's critical.

if Jesus was just a man, he would have been just like the rest of us. Flawed, broken, prideful, arrogant, and potentially all those other less than desirable qualities we possess as human beings that are defined as sin.

If Jesus Christ was just a man, he would have had the same need for a savior that the rest of humanity has.

[21 : 54] Have you ever thought of that? He could not have been the perfect sacrifice that we all needed. We are tempted and we cave in.

We are tested and we fail. Simply put, we needed a savior. We need a savior. Someone who in his humanity could relate to everything we experience as humans, our joys and our sorrow.

And yet someone who could also offer a way out. Someone who knew the nature of sin and had been tempted, but had never sinned himself.

Someone who could bridge that gap of broken relationship between us and God that we could not cross ourselves. we needed and we still need a mediator between us and God.

Someone in whom God finds no fault, no sin, to represent us before his father and ours.

[23 : 21] that mediator is the son of God, the word made flesh, the man Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the sins of the world.

And that same Jesus is not someone we read about only in history books. That same Jesus born so long ago in Bethlehem stands as our mediator our sacrifice, our advocate this very day.

As the Bible says in Hebrews 4, 13 to 16, nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

I love how scripture often says therefore. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who is ascended into heaven, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold firmly, my friends, to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses. But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin.

[24 : 58] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

I want you to remember that when you pray, you don't have to explain your temptation to God. Through Jesus' first-hand human experience, God understands. He knows and understands our weaknesses and he empathizes with us.

Because through Jesus, he can directly relate to what it means to be human. And remember, my friends, God created you as human, including all that that means.

You were not created by accident, but with loving care, intention, and a purpose. God to God to take her life in a completely different direction.

[26 : 27] Many of you have heard my story, or at least parts of it, and you've heard how I seemingly had everything under control. I had plans, I had a direction I was following, and it was a direction that in some ways was fulfilling the desires of my heart.

But I also had a sense, my friends, that God had something else in mind. I allowed my God, who wants only the best for me, wants to use me as his agent in the world, to change my path, to change my story.

My friends, it has been and continues to be quite a ride. My prayer for you this morning is that you allow Jesus Christ to rule in your life.

Allow the God who knows you better than you know yourself to direct your steps. And in that, you will experience an amazing depth of relationship with God, and likely the greatest sense of peace and fulfillment you have ever known.

If you're struggling with understanding how to follow Jesus this morning, or in understanding what he is asking of you, I invite you to just raise your hand while we pray, because I will pray for you.

[28 : 12] Raise your hand as a sign of both recognition and submission, that you want your own desires for your life to be transformed into the desires that God has for you.

Let's pray. Father God, your will for us is good. Your understanding of us, of our struggles, of our challenges, is far more than we can possibly understand.

understand. So, Father, this morning we ask for your grace. We ask for your wisdom and understanding when you are asking us to do something.

We ask for your courage to step in faith, out in faith, to do that. And, Father, we trust that your will for us is always good, and always far better than our own will for ourselves.

And so, Father, may you bless each one of us as we seek to follow you, as we seek to let go of our own desires, and accept the ones that you so graciously give us.

[29 : 27] Thank you that you love us. Thank you that you willingly accept us as your children, covered by the grace and forgiveness made possible through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen.