

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

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[0 : 00] Then the angel left her. So far, the reading of God's Word. We're continuing in this series on the Apostles' Creed. We're now in that third article of the Creed where we confess that Jesus Christ, the only eternal, only begotten Son of God, the Father Almighty, our Lord, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

That phrase in the Creed is drawn directly from Luke 1, verse 35. And as we think about that phrase, that great statement of the incarnation, it's also, as we've been doing this series, good to remind ourselves of some of the benefits that the creeds bring to us. These ecumenical or universal creeds of the church are personal, but they're not private. I, as an individual, am confessing my faith, the faith that I believe, by means of the faith by which I believe. But I'm doing so with the church of all ages, of all times, of all places. And so the creeds are these corporate, common summaries of the faith that have been tried and tested by the church around the globe and even handed down through the centuries. And in an age of ours that is so rootless, this is a wonderful blessing for us to be rooted in an ancient faith. And so as we as individuals and together as the local church here confess our faith using these words of the Apostles' Creed, we should realize that this act involves the whole body of Christ in a very positive and lively role. We confess the creed, ex animo is the language we traditionally use, from the soul. As one of my former teachers liked to say, breathlessly, breathlessly.

And as we do so, we remind ourselves of the identity of our God, Father, Son, and Spirit, of His great works, and of the essence of our faith. And we affirm to our culture and to ourselves as we're constantly being shaped and even catechized by that culture into the reign of sin and death and evil in the world, rather than the gospel. As a gathered body right now, that we are explicitly publicly denying all other pretenders to the divine throne, apart from Jesus Christ. That there is no other pathway to God, but through Jesus Christ. God the Son come down to us from heaven to earth, the one who assumed our humanity in order to bring us redemption and justification and sanctification and adoption and glorification and salvation. God the Father acting for us in the Son by the Spirit.

And finally, by our use of the creeds, we are helped to remember that we are ascribing to God alone the glory and honor that's due to Him as our Creator, but also as our Redeemer.

The church has concluded here in the creed, but also maybe even more particularly, perhaps a little more decisively at the ecumenical council in Chalcedon in the year 451, that Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly man. One person with two natures, divine and human.

[3 : 59] United in that one person, yet those two natures are not confused, they don't change, they don't separate, they're not divided, and that's what we want to think about here this evening together.

Three things, first of all, that Jesus is fully God. Second, that Jesus is also fully human. And third, briefly, what that means for us concerning His present ministry.

So first of all, the deity of Christ. Jesus Christ is fully divine. B.B. Warfield is a name that doubtless many of you know here, and in one essay that he wrote on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, he made a very interesting statement.

He said, The New Testament evidence for the deity of the Lord Jesus is so abundant and persuasive, it can be difficult actually to state succinctly.

And his point is that our tendency to defend the deity of Jesus is to go to a handful of really big texts, really big passages.

[5 : 07] And that's good, that's right, because there are clear, explicit passages that teach that He is God. But Warfield's point is even more than that, because he's saying that the whole New Testament is predicated on, is written on the presupposition that the one about whom these books are written is Himself very God.

That it seeps through on each page, in each paragraph. You cannot miss it. But of course we know that some passages are epitomizing.

They summarize for us very clearly the personal identity of Jesus. That He is Himself God. We think of Hebrews chapter 1.

We think even more succinctly of the Gospel of John chapter 1. The opening words there. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God.

The text says the Word was face to face with God. And the Word was God. He has all the attributes of deity. The title of deity. And yet there's a personal differentiation between Father and Son.

[6 : 25] And of course, Spirit. Not in terms of divine being or divine essence. But in terms of personal character. And so wherever you look, as the church fathers knew and understood so well, it's not possible to speak about God the Father without implying that God the Father is Father because there is God the Son.

And it's not possible to speak about God the Son without implying that there is God the Father. And so too, if we extended this, it's not possible to speak about God the Spirit without speaking of God the Father and God the Son.

One God drives us to think about the three persons. The three persons drive us to think about one God. You know, that's the mystery of the incarnation. But we read then in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 2 that it's particularly Jesus Christ.

He is the one for whom God created the world. The writer there is reflecting on Genesis 1 just as John did in verse 1 of chapter 1 of the Gospel of John, but doing so from a slightly different angle because what the writer in Hebrews there is saying to us when you read about God speaking in Genesis, understand this, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is the creator of all that there is.

He is also the one who governs providence. Yes, He does so through the work of His Spirit. You know, the Spirit is the perfecter of God's purposes.

[8 : 09] Every act proceeds from the Father in the Son and is brought to completion, perfection, by the Spirit. But particularly it's through the Son that the very universe is upheld.

And were He to withdraw His hand, it would collapse entirely. In Him all things hold together. Colossians 1, verse 16 and 17.

By Him, Jesus Christ, all things were created in heaven and earth, both visible and invisible, created through Him and created for Him. So that not only in redemption, but in creation and providence, the Son is the way, the truth, and the life.

I mean, this is a remarkable picture of Jesus Christ. And when we start to understand this, perhaps we should not be so surprised when we read a little further in Hebrews 1, verse 6, where God the Father pronounces, commands, let all my angels worship Him, God the Son.

You know, we often think about and sing about the ascension of Jesus Christ, the angelic response in that great psalm, Psalm 24.

[9 : 32] One of the absolute just marvels of our tradition is our singing of Psalm 24. And you can't sing it and not have your heart moved. And the angels there, as it were, are looking over the battlements of heaven, asking, who is it that's coming back in triumph?

And the call goes out, you ancient gates, lift up your heads, you doors be open wide, because it's the King of glory coming in. He's the King of glory forever to abide.

And it's an extraordinary picture of Jesus. But do you also think about that moment when Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary and was utterly dependent on His mother there in every way, for every aspect of His life, in the darkness of her womb?

And the same command is then ringing through the heavens. Let all my angels worship Him, cherubim, seraphim, gathered around the throne in awe and wonder, because the Son of God was taking human flesh.

And all things are to be His, created for Him and through Him, appointed heir of all things. All things are Jesus Christ.

[10 : 57] And this is why I think in John's Gospel as well, he tells us in chapter 12 there, he references that wonderful vision of the prophet Isaiah from Isaiah 6.

This incredible vision of the glory of God. And John says, that was a vision of Jesus Christ. And think about that vision, the angelic host there, marvelous, glorious.

Yet they cover their faces, they cover their feet. You know, they are themselves without sin, but they're created. And so as creatures, they must veil themselves, they must tremble in the presence of the infinite holiness and majesty and glory of God the Son.

Again, as John puts it in that prologue to his Gospel, he was in the beginning, face to face with God, because he was God.

And all things were made through him and for him. And without him was not made anything that was made. And in him we beheld the glory of God.

[12 : 10] And God is jealous for his glory. God does not share his glory with any other. But in Jesus Christ, we see the glory of God. And when you start to put all these pieces together, you see how the Gospel comes to grip you when you learn who it is.

Who it is who has come for you. When that finally gets preached into our hearts, when it penetrates our very being. Because the incarnation does not mean that Jesus was a little baby.

it's not a nativity set. But it means that the creator and sustainer of all things, first in majesty and glory, worshipped by the angels, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his wisdom, his being, his power, his holiness, his justice, his goodness, his truth, who at a single word could dissolve this world, which has sinned against him.

Descended to the depths of this world to assume our flesh, to become our Savior. Is that not overwhelming? You see, the Gospel's never done overwhelming us.

And that's why we need to hear it again and again. That's why it always needs to be put in our ear, because it's always new. It's always startling. It's always bringing forth in us wave upon wave of adoration.

[13 : 44] That God the Son should come. But not only that, loved ones, that God the Son should come for me. For me.

It's very particular. We see then that God comes for us in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully God, but also, secondly, he is fully man.

He is fully divine, but also fully human. You know, that is just as important for us. And sometimes we focus so much of our energy on defending the deity of Christ that we don't pay enough attention, in fact, to the humanity of Jesus.

Or as again, Warfield concluded, he said, if there are no two natures, divine and human, in one person, there's no incarnation. And if there's no incarnation, there's no Christianity at all.

There are plenty of people who make the mistake of thinking that the humanity of Jesus is transfused with deity so that actually the life and experience of Jesus is somehow radically different from us.

[15 : 01] But that's not true. Of course, he has the full measure of the Spirit. But what the Scriptures tell us from beginning to end, what is the great emphasis over and over and over again, is that if he's not really, truly, fully man, sharing our world, sharing our frailty, knowing each of our weaknesses, getting thirsty, getting hungry, not a child prodigy, but growing in knowledge and understanding, going to a funeral and shedding tears of sorrow at the death of his friend, becoming exhausted in his body, without these things he would not at all be fit to be our Savior.

And that brings us, then, to these opening chapters of Genesis. And we only read from Genesis 3, but I'm sure we're familiar with Genesis 1 and 2 as well. I thought, there's a limit to how much I can read this evening.

But when God created Adam, we know, he gave him the great privilege of sharing communion and fellowship with him. And Eden was there created as a sanctuary.

It was a garden temple. And God, the great king, set Adam there to be a gardener, to be a priest king under him, to rule in his name.

And the world was created good, but it was not in its final condition. And Adam was then given a task. He had the task to subdue it, to guard it, to tend it, to extend that glorious reign.

[16 : 46] And he was provided by God with everything necessary for that task. And he was called to follow the pattern of his creator because he was made an analogy of God in the very image and likeness of God.

And God himself there in creation led this wonderful procession of six days of labor, transforming the *tohu abohu*, the darkness and void, into creation.

No longer lifeless and void and this confused mass, but God molded it and shaped it and ordered it. And he separated the waters in the night from the day and through all of his ordering and separating and naming, he called Adam to follow him, to lead all of creation in another procession, a parade, as it were, behind the Lord himself in royal procession from his holy hill in Eden, doing what God commanded him to do to the very ends of the earth.

There's one writer here who has marvelously put it summing this up. Whether plant, tree, sun, moon, star, bird, or fish, everything performs its duly ordained office in the first two chapters of Genesis, just like the priests and Levites of the sanctuary in their appointed work.

And finally, Adam as the archpriest and crown of the whole created order, God's very vice-regent along with Eve, exercising dominion under God in this vast cosmic empire in which everything that happens is meant to redound to the glory of God.

[18 : 32] Now, that was the commission. That was the task. Adam was created there in covenant, in a covenant of works. He had a job to do. He was on probation.

There was a trial. Would he do that job? Would he follow his creator? And of course, we know what happened. Adam forfeited his role.

He listened to the false witness, the blasphemy of the serpent, that agent of Satan. The very one who he is supposed to drive out of the garden.

That's the one from whom he takes counsel. Not only takes counsel, but takes counsel against the Lord, his creator. As though Adam might instead be God.

As we read from Genesis 3, verse 8, they heard, that is Adam and Eve, the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. The cool of the day.

[19 : 36] The scene there could not be any more different from that old hymn. Perhaps you have the unfortunate privilege, like I do, of not being able to excise it from your mind.

You know, I come to the garden alone. The dew is still on the roses, and the joy we share while we tarry there. None other has ever known.

But that is not it at all. That is not at all the picture. This is the arrival of God as judge. God is on a mission of judgment here. The cool of the day is in fact the spirit of the day.

This is the day of the Lord. The one who's come to execute judgment upon Adam in his sin. His image bearer who becomes the covenant breaker.

And when that call comes to Adam from his covenant Lord, Adam, where are you? It's not that God doesn't know where Adam is. You think of that question that perhaps maybe a wife can ask a husband.

[20 : 43] Where are you in this relationship? There's something in between here. Where are you right now? You're not here. The true servant of the Lord that Adam was meant to be should have called back, Here I am.

Let it be done to me according to your word. But he disobeyed the voice of his father. And in his transgression he plunged all in his stead, all of humanity into sin and death and alienation from God.

But you know there's another promise as we read. This is why we read Genesis 3. Genesis 3.15 that first announcement of the gospel. There will be another son born of the woman who will undo all that Adam did.

Who will do all that Adam failed to do. Who will provide not only a sacrifice of atonement but also an obedient life. Because ultimately it's not sacrifice but it's obedience that God delights in.

And that's the task given to and taken up gladly by our Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal son of God who becomes incarnate to give his life for his people.

[22 : 00] And this is particularly the focus of that promise to Mary that we read in Luke 1. Adam became a living being by the breath of the spirit.

Genesis 2.7. Here in Luke the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary to overshadow her as the power of the Most High so that she'll become pregnant.

This is part of the basic vocabulary of the spirit's work throughout the Bible. We think of Genesis 1.2. The spirit there hovering over the waters of creation.

It's the exact same language we find from Moses singing to the assembly of the Lord. Israel there in Deuteronomy 32.

He compares the Lord in verse 11 to an eagle that stirs up its nest, flutters over its young, that spreads out its wings. And by the way, you notice that the same spirit who's at work in the womb of Mary has already been at work in her heart.

[23 : 08] That is why she answers amen to that promise. That's why all generations shall call her blessed. So the spirit prepares a body for the son.

The son who is the exact image and imprint of God. It's not at all actually the virgin birth. You try to change the language but you can only get so far.

It's the virgin conception. Because the conception of Jesus Christ is ex nihilo creation out of nothing. The exact parallel to the very beginning let there be light divine fiat and there was light.

So that his humanity would be untainted by sin. And like Adam before the fall not yet confirmed in righteousness and glory. But his gestation his delivery are all all too normal.

100% normal. Still dependent on the word and spirit but following that other kind of creation you find in Genesis. Let the earth bring forth and the earth brought forth.

[24 : 26] And there was pain. Mary was in labor giving birth to a child. No obstetrics care. There was a placenta.

It was bloody. A real human with a real soul was born to her. A particular Jewish male Jesus of Nazareth. You see the word became flesh.

Yes but the word became flesh. Only God can save. Only God incarnate in our humanity can save fully. Because the great gift of Jesus Christ is that he is second man.

Second Adam. The last Adam. Paul belabors that point for us in Romans chapter 5 and 1 Corinthians chapter 15. That he is the one who's come in our flesh to undergo the curse of the first man that first Adam and to fulfill the covenant of works for our sake.

winning the right to unlock that gate of heaven and lead his people in procession into glory. So he is the God man. He's the mediator of the covenant of grace for our sake.

[25 : 43] That's the promise to Mary. That the Lord shall become the servant. The servant who is the Lord. And every moment of the life of Jesus Christ then we see him on trial, on probation, recapitulating, restoring all that was lost in Adam, fulfilling all that was promised throughout every stage of redemptive history.

And all of God's covenant promises converge in him. He is the true Israel. He is the messianic savior, the son of David, the one whose kingdom shall have no end.

So that finally you see a proper relationship has come into view. There's actually now a proper conversation between covenant Lord and covenant servant.

The Lord speaks, Adam, where are you? The true servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ, answers back, here I am in obedience to God's glory.

And for the first time the world has an Adam, Israel has a king who only does all that the Father commands him. That's what we read in John 8.

[26 : 56] I always do, Jesus says, what is pleasing to my Father. Because he is our answer. He is our proper response to God in his perfect life and obedience.

But you see, he's also God's answer in flesh and blood to sinners, to me, to you. And when he died to bear God's judgment for our sake, he was then also raised as the first fruits of a new world altogether.

So the day shall come, it's guaranteed for us that out of the graves even, God's people will be resurrected. And in Christ, even the last enemy will be subdued and all things will be made subject to him.

because of his true humanity, you see, we can even be sure of those last lines of the creed, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting.

And his last act of salvation is then to lead that procession, that parade that Adam was supposed to have done. At last, the faithful son, you see, the son of God who's become a son and who broke the neck of the tempter, that false witness, and who leads all of creation back to God, the head of a new people, bringing them with him in his train.

[28 : 25] This is why Jesus says in Hebrews chapter 2, presenting himself to the Father, he says, here I am. And you see who I've brought with me?

Brothers and sisters, now made children of God, the very ones that you have given to me. That's why we need Jesus to be fully man as well.

Finally, briefly, Jesus did not take our humanity only for a season. There wasn't a clock that was running out here.

He didn't ascend to heaven like a SpaceX rocket from Elon Musk, flying, flying to the moon, leaving the scaffolding, all of the things necessary to get him there.

Christ, who stands victorious at the right hand of God the Father, is still the God-man, and he'll be so forever. He descended from heaven.

[29 : 32] This is the wonder in such a way that without even leaving heaven from his divinity, he willed to be born in the virgin's womb, to be found in that cradle, to do the work of his Father on earth, to be upheld by the Spirit, to hang on the cross, and yet he continuously filled the world, even as he had done from the beginning.

The mystery of the incarnation is one person and two natures, divine and human, but the divine does not absorb the human, does not mix with it, nor is it separated from it, but from eternity he has pledged himself that for eternity he will be enfleshed, the God-man, that he might in his earthly life and throughout all of his royal session be perfectly fitted to us, men and women, for our salvation.

He continues to have a body, he will always be circumscribed by time and space. And reflecting on this again, the writer to the Hebrews writes in chapter 2 verses 17 and 18, he, Jesus, was made like his brothers in every respect so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in God's service to make propitiation for the sins of the people and because he himself suffered when tempted, he is, not he was, he is, even now, he is able to help all those who are being tempted.

Time permits us to say only one thing briefly about temptation. Jesus faced temptation in the wilderness. He faced temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane where he agonized over the most bitter temptation.

temptation. What is his prayer there? My Father, he says, let this cup pass from me.

[31 : 41] That is what I desire. Let this cup pass from me. That is what I desire. We ought not to move so quickly past those words.

You know, this was a perfectly holy desire because any other desire would have been unholy. The fully human Son, Jesus Christ, could never desire to cry out that cry of dereliction.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? what he desired was not that tree. Not the cross.

Is there no other way? And when Adam and Eve ate from that tree in the midst of the garden and they saw, you know, it delights the eyes, they doubted the words of their Father.

But Jesus Christ was faced with another tree. And he pled with his Father, not that tree. Is there no other way? And then he said, nevertheless, your will be done.

[32 : 52] Because you see, Father, Son, and Spirit had from all eternity determined to create, to redeem, to gather a church for everlasting fellowship.

born out of the love of God. The love of God. And so the incarnate Son becomes obedient to death, even death on the cross.

And have you ever wondered why there in Luke 22? We're told an angel is sent to him from heaven to strengthen him. Just imagine that.

Let all my angels worship him. at his birth. Let one of you now go minister to him in his need. Go strengthen him in his hour of temptation to take the cup, to drink it to its bitter dregs so that we might enjoy the cup of blessing, the cup of glory, the cup of salvation.

Knowing all this, you see, how can we not know that Jesus Christ, loved ones, will care for you? That he will strengthen you in your temptation when you call on him.

[34 : 12] Because he is the one who's earned our trust. Do you ever think about that? That he has actually earned your trust. It's not, as we heard this morning, there's an object of faith. It's not faith in wood fairies.

He's earned our faith. He's earned our trust. He's earned our trust. And so, what can we do then but put our trust in him? Whether for the first time or for the thousandth time.

Because there is no other mediator between man and God. There is no other faithful son. There is no other champion of his brothers and sisters than our Lord Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Amen.