

PM Luke 1:26-38 The Holy Spirit and the Incarnation of Jesus

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[0:00] I remember hearing the story of a number of Father Christmases being lined up and the question was asked, 'How can you tell which Father Christmas is the Irish Father Christmas?'

! And the answer was, it's the one who has Easter eggs in his sack. Well, I feel a wee bit like that this evening. But the reason why we're looking at this passage is because our theme tonight and I'll be back towards the end of September and again I think towards the end of November.

And if you should ask me back again after that, I would like to do a little series on looking at the Holy Spirit in the life of the Lord Jesus.

Now we were talking to the children this morning about the names of the Lord Jesus. He's Lord, he's Jesus, He's Christ, and Christ of course means the Anointed One.

And we can't think of Jesus without thinking of the Holy Spirit, the One who anointed Him. And we will discover from our passage this evening that the Holy Spirit was very much involved, He was indispensably involved in the creation of the humanity of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1:32] And that's what I want to focus our attention on this evening. So we're going to read from Luke chapter 1 and from verse 26. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favoured one. The Lord is with you.

But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus. 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 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end.

[3:03] And Mary said to the angel, How will this be since I am a virgin? 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. 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. for nothing will be impossible with God.

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.

Amen. May God bless this reading of his word. Before we say that Mary would never forget its ordinary routine was suddenly interrupted by the visit of an angel from God.

[4:27] Luke tells the story in the first chapter of his gospel and he begins by dating it. He says, it happened in the sixth month of the pregnancy of Mary's relative Elizabeth.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to the city of Nazareth in Galilee where Mary lived. And what was his task this angel Gabriel?

It was to tell Mary that she was going to give birth to a special son. Verses 31 and 32 You will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the son of the most high. Before this visit took place the same angel Gabriel had appeared to a priest called Zechariah who at the time was on duty in the temple at Jerusalem.

Zechariah's elderly wife Elizabeth though past the age of having children was also told that she would give birth to a son.

[5:56] And her son would also be special. In fact Gabriel uses the very same word of Elizabeth's son that he would later use of Mary's son.

He will be great. Many will rejoice at his birth he says in chapter 1 verses 14 and 15. Many will rejoice at his birth for he will be great before the Lord.

But Jesus Mary's son would be greater by far because he would be called the son of the most high. John would be the son of Zechariah and Elizabeth and nothing more. Mary's son would at one and the same time be her son and God's son.

And more than that he would be his people's eternal king. Look at what he says in verses 32 and 33.

[7:08] The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.

So Mary is going to give birth to a special son. But Gabriel isn't finished there.

He has something else to tell her. This special son is going to be conceived in a unique way.

Verse 35. The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you.

The same truth is taught in the opening chapter of Matthew's gospel.

There time has moved on a few months. Joseph the man to whom Mary is betrothed has discovered that she is pregnant and since he is not the father he naturally but mistakenly supposes she has been unfaithful to him.

[8:22] Matthew affirms that Mary was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit and relates how an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to assure him that it was so.

That which is conceived in her the angel tells Joseph is from the Holy Spirit. The birth of Mary's special son then is going to come about in a unique way through a very special work of the Holy Spirit.

And it is to that very special work that I want us to turn our thoughts this evening. And I want us to begin by thinking about the necessity of the Spirit's work.

If Mary was going to have the son whom Gabriel had promised her the Holy Spirit needed to make that happen.

His supernatural intervention was utterly indispensable to Jesus' birth. And there are three reasons for that.

[9:49] In the first place, the Spirit's work was necessary if Mary was to give birth to any son. She was a virgin.

Verses 26 and 27, in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David and the virgin's name was Mary.

And this prompted an entirely reasonable question. Having learned that she was to give birth to a son, Mary asked the angel, how can this be since I am a virgin?

Verse 34. She is assuming that it would not be through her and Joseph coming together as husband and wife.

And she was absolutely right. A man was to have no involvement in this birth. The birth of Jesus would happen through a miraculous conception by the power of the Holy Spirit alone.

[11:07] Now we need to pause here and think a little bit more widely because it is a fact that a miraculous conception was not a new thing in scripture.

There had been a number of such miraculous conceptions before. Isaac's conception had been miraculous.

so too Samson's so too Samuels so too John the Baptists. The work of God in each of these cases however had been to bless the normal means a husband and wife coming together in the normal way.

but not so in Jesus's conception. With Jesus we are in the presence of the uniquely miraculous.

In his conception there was no human involvement whatsoever. in the second place the spirit's work was necessary if Mary was to give birth not just to any son but to a sinless son.

[12:37] A sinless son. In answering Mary's question Gabriel touched on her future son's holiness. Verse 35 look at these words.

the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore that's a key word therefore the child to be born will be called holy.

Mary would give birth to a holy son and she did and Jesus was holy.

He was perfectly holy and he was perfectly holy right from the very beginning. For the first time since the creation of Adam and Eve someone sinless had entered the world.

For the very first time someone had been born sinless. You remember Adam and Eve were not born they were created.

[13 : 53] This is the first and only time that someone had been born sinless. There was no sin on his record nor was there sin in his heart.

And in explaining this we have to say or state the truth in a negative manner. Sadly we live still in days when people trace the sinlessness of Jesus to the alleged sinlessness of Mary.

And I have to say it was not because Mary was sinless herself. Now we may take it for granted that Mary was a very godly young woman who loved the Lord.

But Mary had sinned just like everyone else. And Mary was as much in need of a saviour as you and I. So the question is a pressing one.

How could a sinful mother give birth to a sinless son? The answer to that question is this.

[15 : 11] Jesus was perfectly pure all because of the Spirit's work alone. Verse 35 again teaches us this.

The Holy Spirit will come upon you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy.

Mary. This operation of the Holy Spirit, this work of the Holy Spirit upon Mary is what guaranteed the sinlessness of her son.

And then in the third place the Spirit's work was necessary if Mary was to give birth to a divine son. Not just to any son, not just to a sinless son, but to a divine son.

She was told that her child would be called the Son of God. Verse 35 As such her son would share his heavenly Father's nature.

[16 : 22] He would be as fully God as God the Father. And so Jesus was. And the scripture evidence for that is plentiful.

It was the amazing thing that happened in the incarnation. The divine son, the second person of the Trinity, a son who both was and continued to be God, took our nature so that he might live among us and die for us as one of us.

How could such a thing happen? How could a mere girl becoming pregnant with and then giving birth to a child and for that child to be called Emmanuel, God with us, how can it be?

Once again, it is the spirit alone who can account for this great mystery. Without him, Mary could not have given birth to such a son as Jesus was, the son of God.

We're in the realm once again of the uniquely miraculous. Apart from the spirit's special work, a child who was both the son of Mary and the son of God would have been forever impossible.

[17 : 53] That's why the spirit's work was needed. That Mary would give birth to any son, the spirit was necessary.

That Mary should give birth to a sinless son, the spirit's work was necessary. That Mary should give birth to a divine son, the spirit's work was necessary.

So from the necessity of the spirit's work, we should move on a little further to think about the nature of the spirit's work. And we can sum it up in this way.

The spirit's work in Jesus' incarnation was a work of creation. A work of creation. It was he, the same spirit, who was at work in the original creation recorded in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, who created the human nature that the divine son united to himself.

And this takes us right to the very heart of God's plan of redemption. The entire human race had fallen into sin, and we had brought ruin and judgment upon ourselves by our rebellion against God.

[19 : 23] How are things to be made right? How are things to be remedied? By a divine saviour, who in our nature would live and die for us.

It was the will of God that salvation be accomplished by a man, a last Adam, as 1 Corinthians 15 verse 45 calls him.

One who would stand where the first Adam fell, and by whose obedience the many would be made righteous, as Paul teaches in Romans chapter 5 verse 19.

And that's why the incarnation took place. As John puts it in the prologue to his gospel, the eternal word, who was with God in the beginning, and who was himself God, became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

And it was by the Spirit that all of this came about. He was the maker of both the human body and the human spirit that the Son of God, in the words of one theologian, wrapped around himself. [20 : 46] I want to examine this a little bit more closely by asking what kind of human nature did Jesus have? And there are three parts to the answer of that question.

Jesus had a true human nature. In reply to the question, how did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

That's question 22 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The answer is, Christ, the Son of God, became man by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul, or a rational soul, a soul that was able to reason.

And when we think about that, we're really at the very beginning point of human existence. At conception, which is the beginning of human existence, Christ's body was so small it would have needed a microscope to see it.

His spirit or his soul was invisible to the human eye. But nevertheless, it was a true human being that was being formed in his mother's womb.

[22 : 18] And that's important to underscore because it wasn't long in the history of the church before the genuineness of Christ's humanity came under attack.

There was a heresy in the early church called docetism which denied the trueness, the reality, the sincerity of Christ's human nature.

And yet when we turn to the pages of the New Testament, the evidence for Christ's true humanity is overwhelming. He was truly one of us.

He did not, He could not, cease to be the fully divine person He had been from all eternity. But He did become as fully human as you and I.

If you turn over to chapter 2 of Luke's Gospel, for example, we read about Him growing and becoming strong in verse 40, increasing in wisdom and in stature in verse 52.

[23 : 29] In other words, in the Lord Jesus as a boy and as a youth, there was the same normal development that we see in our own children. And as you read through the Gospels, what do we see?

We see Him hungry. We see Him thirsty. We see Him tired and in need of sleep. We see Him weeping at the grave of His friend Lazarus and on the cross we see Him dying.

This is what makes the Lord Jesus our sympathetic High Priest. He knows from within what it is to be a true human being.

the second answer to that question about the true humanity of Jesus, what kind of humanity did He have? Jesus had what we might call a derived human nature or a genetically linked human nature. And under this point we have to think back to the Spirit's work being a work of creation. And to think clearly that the Lord's human nature was the Spirit's creation.

[25 : 03] The creative work of the Holy Spirit. And when we think about that we should ask ourselves what did the Spirit use in order to create the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think about the first creation as we try to answer that question. The first man was not made out of nothing. God used the dust from the ground to make the first man.

Out of that dust Adam was created. What about with Jesus' humanity? When God's task was to form a human nature for the divine son, what did he use?

And the answer to that question in the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary of her substance.

That's what the Spirit used. Of her substance. In other words, Mary contributed to her child what every mother does.

[26 : 33] As one writer has put it, an ordinary ovum produced in the ordinary way was miraculously fertilized by the power and benediction of the Spirit.

And this is what we mean when we speak about Jesus' human nature being a derived or genetically linked human nature. His human nature wasn't created out of nothing.

Mary was no mere pipe or channel through which her son physically unconnected to her was born into the world. No, Jesus' human nature was his mother's human nature and through her human nature of a line of ancestors stretching back all the way to Adam.

And my friends, this is no small or insignificant point. It's not hair splitting. It's so vitally important to grasp. It is what had to be the case if Jesus was indeed to be the promised Savior.

You remember how prophecy in the Old Testament scriptures had identified the coming one as being the offspring of Eve and a son of Abraham?

[28:01] and a king in David's line? And through Mary, his mother, that is exactly what Jesus was.

He was genetically linked to the house of David and to the people of Israel and to the human race as a whole, just as God had said and prophesied through his servants in the Old Testament scriptures.

And the third answer to that question about the nature of Christ's humanity is this. Jesus had a holy human nature.

The Holy Spirit will come upon you as we've read. The angel said to Mary, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, therefore, therefore, the child to be born will be called holy.

The holiness of our Saviour's human nature is from the Holy Spirit. Now, if you go back to Reformation times, and if you read, say, John Calvin on this subject, it was thought back then in those early days of the Reformation, that the Spirit's work in connection with Jesus' holiness was described as a sanctifying work.

[29:41] Calvin writes, we make Christ free of all stain because he was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation might be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam's fall.

So he traces the Holy Spirit's work in producing a sinless human nature for Jesus as being a sanctifying work.

But it seems safer to us today as more reflection on Scripture teaching has taken place to link Christ's holiness with the Spirit's creative work.

Not his sanctifying work, but his creative work in the first place. God and so the humanity of Christ was created by the Holy Spirit and as such partook of the essential character of all that God creates.

You remember that repetition in the first chapter of Genesis? And it was good. And it was good. And it was good. All that God creates is good.

[30:49] And of the creation of man it was very good. And so the way the Spirit created the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, his body and his soul, ensured that he had a holy human nature.

a holy human nature was the very thing of course that Jesus needed for the perfect life that we sinners needed him to live on our behalf.

And so too for his death for us. Remember how scripture describes the Lord Jesus as the lamb without blemish or spot.

1 Peter 1 verse 19. You see had his nature been a fallen human nature a fallen human nature like our own it would itself have been in need of saving but Jesus was holy in his human nature.

It's perfect freedom from all guilt from every sinful taint was a vital qualification for Jesus in his work as saviour.

[32:20] And we have to attribute his unfallenness his perfect holiness to the Holy Spirit from whose creative hand Jesus' human nature came.

See how vital the Holy Spirit is in the creation of the human nature of our saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. And that leads me to the final point.

The result or outcome of the Spirit's work. The outcome of the Spirit's work in Mary's womb was a saviour who was human who was sinless and who was divine.

Fitted from the outset to begin to carry on and to complete the work the Father had given him to do. And this should teach us two things and I want to close with these two things. This teaches us the bankruptcy of our own fallen human nature.

[33:32] What are we like as human beings? Well on the one hand we are extraordinarily capable.

God has made us in his image and as a consequence we can do the most amazing things. Indeed there seems to be no end to what we can make, discover, achieve and fix.

We've even created artificial intelligence. And to what optimism and confidence and pride these capabilities in turn have given birth to.

We can do it give us enough time and we'll find a way to solve all our problems.

But why do we need a saviour from heaven? Well think of it like this. Suppose God had advertised for the post of a saviour of men and women.

[34:53] Wanted. someone who is able by their life and death to put humanity right with God to so deal with their sin as to fit them for heaven.

How many applicants do you think there would be or more accurately how many successful applicants do you think there would have been to such an advert?

And the answer is not a single one. We human beings who can do just about everything can't do the thing that we need done the most.

We can't make ourselves right with God. The miraculous conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary highlights the bankruptcy of our fallen human nature.

If a saviour was to be ours it was necessary that he come from outside. A saviour from heaven.

[36:08] Someone who would come into our world and do for us what it was impossible for us to do for ourselves.

This is the thing we must take home with us this evening as we reflect on the Spirit's work in the incarnation of Jesus. The bankruptcy of our fallen human nature.

We need someone from outside to come into our world in this manner in order to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Make us right with God. God's love. The second humbling truth arising from this great and glorious doctrine of the Spirit's work in the incarnation of Jesus is this see the greatness of God's love.

What does Jesus' entrance into the world tell us? it tells us that God thought we were worth saving.

[37:30] There's nothing more common than getting rid of things that we deem to be not worth repairing. They could be fixed but we just don't think it's worth it.

Imagine God coming to just such a conclusion about us. Those human beings those men and women those boys and girls they're just not worth it.

Not when the cost of saving them is so great. Not when the difficulties to be overcome are so immense.

But that's not what he says. amazingly astonishingly he says they are worth it. And so God's whole plan of redemption is set in motion.

The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. What are we to hear in that?

[38:42] We hear in those words a testimony to the greatness of God's love for human beings. He so loved the world that he gave his one and only son even though that giving meant his son becoming one of us and living in our midst and suffering at our hands and at last dying for us as the bearer of our sins.

He loved us love. great extent. And what response should this require of us demand from us love so amazing so divine demands my soul my life my all.

How this loving God his self humbling son and the Holy Spirit who is at the heart of it all the triune God oh how should he be loved and worshipped and adored and served by us all.

May God bless his word to us.