

"The Miraculous Conception of Jesus - Why Believe?"

As a father of five, trust me, I know, or at least I should know at this point, a thing or two about conception. Any of you with kids out there should also know how the whole "baby thing" works. Even if you don't have kids, you should know. It's not a secret. It's basic stuff, right? Man plus woman in the right situation and at the right time can equal child. Today, through advances in science, we know a lot about more about conception than ever before but no matter how much we continue to learn and discover, even in it's most basic form, conception is fascinating isn't it? A lot of things have to happen for life to begin.

But as Christians we know that conception is more than just simple biology. It is the way of God's design. After all, it was God who told Adam and Eve in the garden to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). He designed us to be committed to him first and then to each other as man and woman. And through that commitment *can* come the gift of children. So when a married couple announces they are expecting a child or adopting a child, there is generally nothing strange or out of the ordinary about that story is there? Of course, there will always be those odd couples, like this one you may know who have a 20 year old and a 1 year old and three in-between - God bless them. But regardless of the difference in ages of the kids or even the age of the parents (Abraham & Sara), all children are gifts from God aren't they? They most certainly are and this story of couples expecting children has been repeated over and over since the first couple on earth.

But what about this story? A young virgin - an unmarried teenager to be exact - who has never been with a man gets pregnant. And the father? He is no other than God himself. Whatever story you have or might have about pregnancy - no matter how complicated, funny, or even painful it is, no story will ever come close to this one. Because this is not the way babies are conceived. This story goes against everything we know. It's not natural! Yet as Christians, this unexplainable mystery of conception is exactly what we confess each and every week in the words of the Apostle's Creed. Today, as we continue our Lenten Sermon series asking the question, "Why believe" in the words of

the Creed, our focus is on the phrase, “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary.”

Now, I’m sure to non-Christians, this just sounds weird. We confess, in public no less, that we believe that our Lord was conceived not by a man like all the other babies born in the world, but by God’s Spirit. There was no “couple stuff.” It was, in the truest sense, a miraculous conception! And we go on to confess that this baby, who developed in his mother Mary’s womb and was born in the natural way, just like most of us, is our Lord. That sounds like a tough sell, maybe even to some of us. So why believe such a mystery?

Before we tackle that question, let’s look at the words in Matthew Chapter 1. Now I know it may seem a little strange to read these words during this time of Lent instead of the time of Christmas but think about this. At Christmas, we kind of rush to the birth. We need a baby in that stable! But today, we’re in no hurry. We don’t have to get to the birth or even to the wise men. We are simply slowing down in an effort to really focus on why we confess that our Lord was conceived and born in such a way.

Matthew writes, “The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way” (Matt.1:18). Mary was engaged to Joseph. Before they “came together,” she was found to be with child “from the Holy Spirit.” Joseph was an upright guy. He wanted to do the right thing so he was determined to end this thing with Mary in quiet. But that was not part of the plan. In a dream, an angel of Lord appeared to Joseph and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. Why? Because according to the angel, “for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” Let’s stop here for a minute.

Joseph was told by an angel that Mary was pregnant by a **divine** miracle and instead of saying, “*whatever,*” or “when I find the real man who did this to her, it will be a divine miracle if that man lives,” Joseph believes. This had to have gone against everything he knew to be true but from what can only be through the gift of faith, he believes. If you think about it, believing in the miraculous conception of Jesus was probably just as hard for Joseph as it may be for you and me. But just like Joseph, and for each and every one of us, it all comes down to faith. Through the gift of faith, given to us by the same Spirit of God at our Baptisms who conceived our Lord, we too have been given the power to believe in this miracle.

But even with the gift of faith, we can still struggle with this, can't we? One reason, I think, is that we have been taught from an early age to put things we don't understand

to the test of logic. If after we are given the facts about something we then decide that those facts pass the test, we have the “green light” to believe. If those facts don't pass, then it must not be true. Well, let me tell you, using this rationalistic way of thinking in an effort to figure out much of anything in our Christian faith will not work. Christianity is not a scientific experiment; it's a divine revelation. A revelation of God revealing himself to us as a real person! Think about that as we move on in our reading.

The angel then tells Joseph that his virgin fiancée will bear a son and they shall call his name Jesus. And this child, the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, will do something incomprehensible. This baby will grow up to “save *his* people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

You see, the Incarnation - God breaking into his own creation in the form of a man to save his people from their sins - as Christians, is as real as this church building. Yes, it's a mystery but this is the way it had to be. Our Lord's life had to begin like no other because he is like no other. He is God in the flesh and his sole purpose for being conceived and born, as mysterious of a way as it might seem to us, was to save his people from their sins. So why believe it?

If you had to answer that question of why you believe in the miraculous conception of Jesus, could you give an answer? Hopefully you could but are you willing to give an answer? I sure hope so because as Christians in this world, we will continue to be questioned by those who think we are idiots for believing in what seems impossible. But we will also continue to be questioned by those who want to know what it is we believe and why we believe it because they see something there that is appealing and they want it too. Either way the answer is the same and we should be able to articulate that answer with the utmost confidence.

We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ was conceived by the Spirit of God and born of a virgin mother. He was God in the flesh, who in his short time on this earth, showed us how we should live as his children. And he was God in the flesh, who even though he was perfect in every way, took all of our imperfections. He took all of our sinful habits. He took all of our lying, cheating, and adulterous ways. He suffered through all of them to the point of death. And God, the father allowed it because he loves us all that much. Now, because of the resurrection, to echo Paul's words in Romans, we have been “justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). To be very clear here. None of this could have happened if Jesus was just another man

conceived by just another couple. That's my answer and it's taken from God's Word to us.

Of course your version may be different but I encourage you to have an answer because the bottom line is that every single person no matter how good they appear or think they are, deep down knows they are not perfect. But not everyone knows that perfection is what God demands. Jesus Christ our Lord, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary is that perfection and through faith in him, faith that drives us to repentance, our relationship with God is reconciled and restored.

The truth is we all must be willing to live within certain mysteries of our faith. There will always be those who question. Maybe even some of you still have questions but remember this. Faith is not about how much we know or how well we explain things. The thing is, no matter how educated or articulate a person may be, no human is able to comprehend how God gives himself completely to us in the person of Jesus Christ. That is the work of the Holy Spirit alone - the same Spirit who started this whole thing with the miraculous conception of our Lord- and the same Spirit who will sustain our faith to life eternal. May God grant it so for all of us. **Amen.**