

Redeemer OPC, Hawaii
Adult Sunday School
The Apostles' Creed (4)
"Third Article - The Son's Advent"

I. Introduction.

- A. Review: Our Use of the Creed. We stand on the shoulders of Christians in the past, especially in matters of biblical interpretation and doctrine. A wise man once said, "Even a pygmy standing on the shoulders of Calvin can see farther than Calvin" (unknown). The Apostles' Creed is a set of earlier doctrinal "shoulders" upon which we stand to look past heresies and see truth. I.e., it laid the doctrinal foundation to be built upon later with more detailed understanding, definitions, and creeds to battle heresies and hold fast the confession of our faith and hope. Without being anachronistic, we can unfold the greater complexities of the doctrines given so basically in the Apostles' Creed in order to see the foundation of later development of our understanding of the Bible's doctrines and formation of creeds and confessions. That is what we have attempted to do from the beginning of our study.
- B. Further Review. Last time, we studied the identity of the Son in whom we believe for our salvation and found that He is none other than God in human flesh, the Second Person of the Trinity, eternally generated of the Father, who took to Himself a fully human nature to be our Savior and Lord. We continue to unfold what the creed has to say about Him and His earthly, saving ministry by addressing His advent, His arrival in the world in space and time, in the fullness of time, to carry out the long-promised work of redemption. When we use the word "advent," we usually associate it with Christmas that takes place in December. We might think we're a bit

out of time bringing it up now (though it is never a bad or unseasonable time to talk or learn about the Person and work of Christ). However, it isn't as out of sync to address it now (Mar. 22) as one might think. Christ's advent really didn't begin at Christmas. If He was born in December—which may be accurate, but we aren't told directly in Scripture—then He was conceived right around the time of year we are in now, perhaps even the month we are in. And it is His conception with which the Apostles' Creed begins in connection with Christ's arrival in the world.

II. He “Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit.”

A. The Paternity (Fathering) of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

1. This is another of the ways by which we consider Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. Literally, God is His Father.
2. It was divine power that accomplished the miracle of the Incarnation, and what theologians call the “hypostatic union.” That simply is a theological term, drawn from a NT Greek word, and it refers to the union of the human nature with the divine nature. It had to be by divine power because only God has the supernatural power to bring about a miracle, and particularly for that miracle to involve both human and divine natures.
3. Christ's human nature, therefore, was sanctified by the Holy Spirit and held holy, harmless, and undefiled from the sin nature of Mary. This is the answer to the bad Roman Catholic theology of the Immaculate Conception. The question that faced the church at one point as theological knowledge was growing was, “If the sin nature is passed along through the parents, and Jesus was born of a human parent, how did He avoid having a sin nature?” As Rome went farther and farther off track by not looking hard enough at Scripture and holding to the gospel, they answered this question poorly.

Their answer was to formulate their doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. By the term “immaculate,” they meant without the stain of sin. By this doctrine, they were not expressing the belief that Jesus was immaculately conceived, but that Mary was immaculately conceived! That *she* had no stain of sin because *she* had no sin nature! What is our answer to that doctrine and to the question that occasioned it? First, Mary herself WAS a sinner, just like the rest of us, and Scripture shows us that she knew it. In Mary’s Magnificat, her song of the magnificence of God, she said, “My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God *my Savior*” (Luke 1:46-47; emphasis mine). She knew she was a sinner, and she knew that she therefore needed a Savior. So, the Roman Catholic doctrine is disproved and shown to be false by a simple, brief Scripture statement. As for the question, the answer is also supplied by Scripture. Heb. 7:26 says, “For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens.” If Jesus was holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners during His ministry as our high priest, then at conception He also had to be holy (set apart unto moral purity), innocent (without personal guilt of sin), undefiled (not corrupted with any sin or impurity), and separated from sinners (having no sin nature and thus committing no sin).

4. Also in connection with the paternity of the Holy Spirit, it shows that what was conceived was divine, a divine nature, as Christ the Logos acted through His Spirit to take to Himself human nature.
5. The covenantal significance. He was not conceived by man, which means that the Mediator who was conceived and born could not be a human person,

but only have a human nature. (Human nature is what we all have that makes us human: a true body and a soul that has intellect, will, emotions. Personhood is what makes each of us different from every other human. So, for Jesus Christ, His personhood was provided by the second Person of the Trinity; He couldn't abandon that. At the same time, He is still fully human.) As Berkhof points out, "But the person of the Son of God, who as such was not included in the covenant of works and was in Himself free from the guilt of sin." So, not only did He not have personal sin, but He also was not born "in Adam"; therefore, the guilt of Adam's first sin was not imputed to Him under Adam's representation in the covenant of works. This is the reason that it is so important that we maintain and confess the scriptural truth that He was born of a virgin. He could not have been born of a human father, or He would have been born under the covenant of works with Adam as its head, and the guilt of Adam's first sin would have been charged to His account, like it has been charged, or imputed, to all of us who are born of a human father and mother. He would then have had guilt of His own to pay for, and could not have been our Savior.

III. The Incarnation. This takes into account both statements: conception by the Holy Spirit in Mary, and born of her who was a virgin. But, keep in mind that the Incarnation of Christ occurred at His conception, not His birth. It was at His birth that His Incarnation was manifest to the world.

A. Two Natures. He was fully God and fully man from the moment of His conception onward. He still is; He will be forever. In the instant of conception, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ took to Himself a fully human nature, uniting it to Himself in hypostatic, or personal, union. As we said, Jesus Christ had a fully human nature

without having human personhood. It just means that He had everything that it takes to be human—a true physical body and a human soul with human mind, will, and emotions. And yet, that which distinguishes Him from every other person is that He is the Second Person of the Trinity. If He had human personhood, it would have meant that His divine nature would have had to rid itself of the Person of the Son of God; that would strip God of one of His three Persons, and that can't happen. It is impossible because God can't change.

B. Jesus Christ's Essence. Later it would be put this way, that He “was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, and born of her substance.” This draws a distinction between the divine and human natures, but not a division. With the two actions joined together, it implies that each of the two natures retains its own qualities, or attributes. This basic doctrine was foundational in the resolution of later controversies against heretics, and therefore in the formulation of later creedal statements.

1. As we have already seen, this was a defense against Gnosticism, especially that form of it known as Docetism. The term comes from the Greek word *dokeo*, meaning *I appear*. This sect of Gnosticism said that Jesus only appeared to have a human body, but was not really human.

2. It also stood against the heresy of Arius, and assisted in the later formulation of the Nicene Creed. Arius's claim about Christ was that He was neither fully God nor fully man, but rather a third kind of being, and the first of God's creations. He claimed that God created everything else through Him. (This is the exact position of the Jehovah's Witnesses today, and these statements can be heard from them, almost verbatim.) Of course, this denies both the Deity of Christ and His true humanity, and left Arius and his

adherents with no Savior at all.

3. It stood against the heresy of Eutyches, and provided a foundation for later doctrinal formulations by the church. Eutyches taught that the two natures of Christ were mixed, or confused, and melded into one another.
4. It stood against the heresy of Apollinarius, and provided a foundation for later doctrinal formulations by the church. He taught that the divine nature swallowed up the human spirit and took its place.
5. It stood against the heresy of Nestorius, and provided a foundation for later doctrinal formulations by the church. Nestorius taught that the two natures in Christ were actually two persons. But that would leave Christ with a split personality.
6. It stood against the Monophysites, and provided a foundation for later doctrinal formulations by the church. They taught that Christ was one Person and one nature—that one nature was absorbed into the other.
7. In every case, these heresies would have made Christ no Savior at all because He could not be a true Mediator and Substitute, nor could He make an atonement of infinite and eternal value that fully satisfied God's justice. These heresies were dealt with at the councils of Nicea (325 AD), Constantinople (381 AD), Ephesus (431 AD), and Chalcedon (451 AD).