



THE CREED

WHAT WE BELIEVE



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Week 4 - "Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin, Mary."

We are continuing our walk through the Apostles' Creed, the earliest statement of the Christian faith. And one of the reasons to learn and know and read the Creed is because it is so counter-cultural. Our culture is always telling us what our purpose is, who we are, what we believe about ultimate reality. And in our day, those narratives are very centered on me - I am who I want to be, reality is what I make of it, and I make myself and form my own identity, and it's a false story that is making us sick and making life not work the right way.

But as that message has gotten louder, it has become a real challenge for the church because we just spent decades saying church can be cool and fit really well in our culture. Christianity can be cool and culturally acceptable, too.

And one of the things the pandemic exposed was that that kind of cool Christianity didn't work. Trendy, fad-seeking Christianity didn't provide the strength people needed to weather a couple of years of pressure and isolation and fear. Many left the faith, and the many more that remained were divided and failed to love one another and were blown around by the news, by fears, and by really loud doubts about the faith blasted on social media.

Christianity that isn't anchored to deep reality and history and a global movement of God isn't weighty enough for times like we went through and will go through.

The Apostles Creed, while not inspired by God or quite as weighty as scripture, as a summary of the minimum of what all Christians through all time believe, has been

immune to passing fads. It is a reminder that the church is bigger than our day and generation. And in a culture that loves to erase the past, look down on the past, consider ourselves superior to all of our ancestors, that's really counter-cultural. In the world that is constantly working to tear down history, and replace it with nothing of any significance, the creed reminds us that our age is not the only age, nor the most important one¹².

It reminds us of the brotherhood and sisterhood of all Christians - we are affirming these things alongside Augustine, the Reformers, the global Church, the Apostles, and all those yet to come and become Christians. We are part of something really big and immovable, a kingdom that can't be shaken, scripture says.

So so far, we've seen that the Creed says:

**"I believe in God the Father, Almighty
Creator of Heaven and Earth,
And in Jesus Christ His Only Son, Our Lord."**

And today we look at the next phrase **"He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin, Mary."**

And there's an awful lot that this phrase tells us about what Christians believe about God and the world He made. And the passage that embodies this important truth well is Luke 1:26-38, so if you'd turn there, we're doing Christmas in March today:

Luke 1:26-38 "26In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30And the angel

¹ "I have never been able to understand where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time. It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record. . . . Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death."

— G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

² Many of these introductory thoughts on the importance of Creeds were derived from Carl Trueman's book, [The Creedal Imperative](#). It is a worthy read for anyone eager to learn more about the history of the creeds and their value in the life of the church.

said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32He 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, 33and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
34And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”
35And 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. 36And 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. 37For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38And 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.

Let’s look first at the big picture here: Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a Virgin. We won’t zero in on who the Holy Spirit is today because that will come up in a few weeks when the line in the Creed we’ll look at will be a direct, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

But for today, we’ll point out that the Spirit, who is God Himself, the third person in the trinity, overshadowed a virgin named Mary so that she became pregnant with Jesus, who would be both true God and true man.

I. Believing This Requires Us to Believe in a Supernatural Dimension of Reality

And, to point out the obvious, this doesn’t happen.

Virgins don’t get pregnant.

This goes against all the laws of nature. This doesn’t happen naturally, even once in awhile.

That’s why Mary hears this message from an angel, and her question is immediately, **Luke 1:34 “34And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”**

This is a miracle of God.

Now what we do with this claim says alot about what we believe about the Bible, and what we believe about the world we live in.

The Bible here tells us something supernatural happened. And if we look at the Bible suspiciously or try to explain this away or try to come up with some way Christianity can be valid without us having to accept all the crazy claims the Bible makes like this one, that says a lot about what we think about the truth and authority of this book.

Ultimately, Christians believe Jesus really was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary because this book, which we believe to be God's revelation to us, tells us it happened.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”

Christians believe that God has revealed Himself in two books: the book of the world or creation where we can learn some general things about Him, and the book of the Word, or the Bible, where God specifically reveals Himself and tells us His story. There He tells us the things we can't learn from science, but that He had to reveal in history and through the apostles and prophets and put into the scripture for us today.

And if we reject this - if we reject the truth that the virgin conceived, it is because we are rejecting the truth and authority of the Bible, and the implications of that reach into every area of life and into all the rest of what we believe.³ Our source of knowledge about God as Christians is the place God revealed Himself to us. That happened most fully in Christ and happened perfectly in the Bible - we believe God has spoken, His word is true, and it has authority.

Virgins don't conceive. But we have it on good authority that this one time, one did.

And what we do with miracles reveals something about the way we look at the world.

If we believe that everything that happens in history is the result only of natural forces and that all nature is the whole of reality, then we will look to explain away miracles.

But Christians are people who believe there is more to reality than everything in nature,

³ Erickson 688.

that there is a personal Creator of heaven and earth, who made everything, set it all in motion, and then, importantly, stays involved with his creation.⁴

Christianity depends on God existing and acting supernaturally, and at times performing miracles like the virgin birth and the resurrection.

By affirming that Jesus was conceived in the womb of a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are saying they believe that God not only exists, but is still active in the world. And the Christian faith is a faith that is absolutely dependent on God intervening in creation and doing miracles.

The virgin birth of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the miracles that Jesus did to confirm His authority, were all real miracles that God did.

There are a number of ways we might deny this.

Naturalists deny any miracles at all. They think there is no god, so therefore, everything obeys a natural law.

Deists say that maybe a god did a miracle at creation, but he took off and is no longer involved. He programmed creation and opened the app and then left, and since then everything has obeyed natural laws that He coded with no exceptions.

But sometimes even as Christians, we read about these miracles, and in order to make the faith more palatable, we try to come up with natural explanations for them.

So we read the story of the miraculous parting of the Red Sea and the Jews crossing it as they escaped from Egypt. And well-meaning people have said it was actually the sea of reeds that they crossed, it is much more shallow, sometimes just a marsh where the water is a few inches deep, and a strong wind could dry it up so people could cross over. (And we think we've solved the problem by explaining away the supernatural event, but now we have another problem - Pharaoh's army drowned in a few inches of water!)

Or we read about Jonah being swallowed by a great fish and living. And people will say, yes, that's unlikely, but there's a story from the late 1800s of a man being swallowed

⁴ Erickson 687.

by a whale and being found alive days later in its belly after it was harpooned.⁵ So it can happen.

Or we read that sometimes some mammals do reproduce asexually on rare occasions, virgin births do happen sometimes in nature.

And we try to explain the miracles by making them not miraculous, but just really rare natural occurrences. And I think we mean well, we want to make belief easier.

But we aren't really helping. Because Christians have to believe there is more to reality than just what is natural.

We have to get away from trying to get the faith to fit in the prevailing naturalistic narrative of our day. It would be easier for sure if we could just say, "you don't need to change what you believe about the world to become a Christian." But you do.

We believe in real science. We can endlessly study and explore and learn from nature. Christians should not be anti-science, in fact our view that the material world is real and obeys laws because there is a lawgiver can be the foundation for good science.

But we also believe there is more to reality than what could be discovered by science. There is supernatural reality. God is outside this creation, we'll never find Him in it personally, but He is still involved and, at times, He pushes aside the laws of nature that He established and acts supernaturally.

And people have tried in history to take everything supernatural out of Christianity so that they're left with what they've called the essence of the faith, our moral teachings. But the essence of our faith is not our moral teachings Jesus.

The essence of our faith is Jesus Christ, the son of God incarnate, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead and the third day He rose again. That's the essence of the faith, not the moral code, which is important, but it's not Jesus.

And to take out the miraculous is to make it not Christianity.

⁵[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Bartley#:~:text=James%20Bartley%20\(1870%E2%80%931909\).which%20was%20dead%20from%20harpooning.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Bartley#:~:text=James%20Bartley%20(1870%E2%80%931909).which%20was%20dead%20from%20harpooning.)

So don't try to make Christianity more palatable by taking all of the supernatural out of it.

That's like trying to get your kids to eat salad by taking all of the vegetables out of it. You got them to eat something, but it wasn't salad.

Christianity without the virgin birth, the resurrection of Jesus, God active in the world He made isn't Christianity. And if you take all of that out to get people to accept it, what have they accepted? Nothing that will save them or change them.

You can get most of our moral teaching from natural law or from many other religions. But our need is Jesus.

It's healthy to be skeptical of many so-called miracles. I hear about a faith healer and I roll my eyes and say, "prove it." The Bible says to test all things. But if that skepticism becomes universal and you won't believe in supernatural working of God because you're so skeptical about everything, you lose the faith.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Yeah, it's impossible.

But as **Luke 1:37 says, "37For nothing will be impossible with God."**

II. To Believe This is To Affirm The Two Natures of Jesus: Truly God and Truly Man

God did the impossible. By His Spirit He caused the virgin to conceive, so that when Jesus came, He was the Son of God and the Son of Mary. And this wasn't a sexual union, so Jesus wasn't half God and half human. It was a miraculous overshadowing by the Spirit so that Jesus would have two complete natures in one person.

Jesus was truly God and truly man, what theologians call the hypostatic union. Again:

Luke 1:31-35 "31And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32He 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, 33and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

35 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.

So Jesus was truly human and truly God.

Some might object and say, “You can’t be truly human without a human father.” I saw a tik tok video yesterday (because i have kids) where the guy was claiming Jesus couldn’t have had X and Y chromosomes because he didn’t have a human father.

But remember, this was a miracle.

But Adam and Eve were truly human, made by God to be that way, without a human father or mother. And Jesus came as the second Adam to reverse the damage that the first Adam had done.

And all Christians through all time affirm that Jesus is truly man and truly God.

There are Three Important Errors to Avoid:

1) One Error is to Believe Jesus wasn’t Truly God.

Some have said that Jesus was just a man, a superior one and really good one, maybe even the ultimate one, but somehow less than God. Or perhaps that he learned and grew so much that he attained deity - he went farther in righteousness and learning than any of us could and graduated to being God. Deity was the greatest of all human achievements.

The problem is that doesn’t make sense of passages like:

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

The Word, the second person of the trinity, has always existed. And in the incarnation, He took on humanity. God took on flesh, and that’s who Jesus is. Not something less than God.

There are dozens of passages that affirm His deity. A few:

In **Matthew 28:9** He accepts worship

Titus 2:13 He is called “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

John 8:58 -“Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

John 20:28-29, doubting Thomas worships Him and Jesus commends Him for it.

Isaiah, in predicting the virgin birth in **Isaiah 7:14**, says this:

Isaiah 7:14 “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

The scriptures affirm that Jesus is Immanuel, which means God with us.

And this happened because God descended to take on humanity, a person didn't achieve deity. Jesus didn't become God. The Son has always been God, and He took on flesh in the womb of Mary.

2) Another Error is to Believe Jesus Wasn't Truly Human

So some have said that Jesus is God who for a time pretended to be a man. He pretended to learn and grow as a PR move. Kind of like a president going to hammer a few nails into a house they're rebuilding after a hurricane, for the cameras to see, and to show some solidarity. Jesus pretended to learn and grow to say, “I'm not really one of you, but I'm with you.”

There used to be a doctrine called Docetism, from the Latin word “docetae” which means “to seem.” It said that Jesus only seemed human, and everything that seemed human about Jesus was an illusion.

The greeks typically thought the material world was evil, and God could never therefore become man, so Jesus wasn't actually human. He just seemed human, but ultimately was just a phantom, (or maybe like those holograms on Star Trek.)⁶ Some greeks thought that if he was God, He was God “trapped in evil matter,” but not really truly human.⁷

But scripture says this:

⁶ More on Docetism can be found here: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Docetism>

⁷ Horton, Michael. *The Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). 469.

1 John 4:2-3 “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

So the closest followers of Jesus said that to deny that Jesus came in the flesh was to deny Him altogether and to be against Him - anti-Christ.

3) Another Error Is to Believe Jesus Was a Cross Between God and Man - a Mixture

Some others have said that Jesus was a mixture of God and man. He had God as His Father and Mary as His mother, so he was basically a cross between the two. He had some of the attributes of his human mom (like needing to learn, getting tired, getting hungry, needing sleep,) but also some attributes of God the Father, like miracle-working power.

But the problem with that is that if you mix his nature with another nature, you have a third thing altogether.

If you mix God’s nature with anything else, you have cut it, you have diluted it. And you no longer have God, you have something less than God. And scripture affirms that Jesus is not less than God.

If you mix human nature with divine nature, you have someone that isn’t human, you lose His humanity. And scripture affirms He was very much a man.

So Christians took centuries wrestling with these questions and wondering how these things could both be true. So finally, in 451 AD, they called a council, where they got together church leaders and scholars from around the world to suss this out and and make a statement about Who all Christians believe Jesus to be. This council, the Council of Chalcedon⁸, issued the Chalcedonian Creed⁹, which said, among other things, that:

⁸ Read more about the Council of Chalcedon here:

<https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/council-of-chalcedon>

⁹ The Chalcedonian Creed, or Chalcedonian Definition: *“Following, then, the holy Fathers, we all unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus Christ is to us One and the same Son, the Self-same Perfect in Godhead, the Self-same Perfect in Manhood; truly God and truly Man; the Self-same of a rational soul and body; co-essential with the Father according to the Godhead, the Self-same co-essential with us according to the Manhood; like us in all things, sin apart; before the ages begotten of the Father as to the Godhead, but in the last days, the Self-same, for us and for our salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin*

- 1) Jesus was truly God and truly man.
- 2) Jesus was human in all ways that we are, but was without sin.
- 3) Jesus possessed 2 natures - He was God and man. And those two natures existed in Jesus without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.
- 4) The distinction of each of his natures was preserved but occurred in one Person, Jesus.

This means Jesus is not God who looked like a man, He is really a man.

Jesus is not a mix of God and man or a cross between God and man, He is truly man and truly God.

Jesus was not a superman because He is God, and He was not a lower form of God because He was a man.

He was always God and never ceased to be or became less than God.

He was truly human, but didn't have sin in His genes like we did. The human nature of Jesus was just like Adam's nature was before the fall in the garden. It was un sinful human nature.¹⁰

This is important for a lot of reasons.

1) One is that it is dignifying of humanity.

When God first made us, He knew this was the plan all along. He knew He would take on humanity. So when He made people, he made us a fitting creature for Him to become. So people aren't inconsequential. We are not just animals. God was one of us in the incarnation - and He planned that all along. Which elevates our view of humans. Any view

Theotokos as to the Manhood; One and the Same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; acknowledged in Two Natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the Natures being in no way removed because of the Union, but rather the properties of each Nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into One Person and One Hypostasis; not as though He were parted or divided into Two Persons, but One and the Self-same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as from the beginning the prophets have taught concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself hath taught us, and as the Symbol of the Fathers hath handed down to us."

¹⁰ Horton, Michael. *The Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). 469.

of humanity that sees us as the scourge on the earth, the ones who are here ruining everything,

2) It is dignifying of the unborn.

The Holy Spirit didn't come upon a baby that was born, the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and the result was a baby in the womb. From conception Jesus was God. And so when we see the unborn on an ultrasound, we can say "God was one of those once."

3) It Magnifies The Love of God for Us

Listen to **Philippians 2:5-8** "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

He emptied Himself - but He didn't empty Himself of his deity. He emptied Himself by what he took on: the form of a servant, being born like people, dying, and dying the death of a cursed person on the cross.

This whole thing is called the doctrine of the humiliation of Christ which Westminster Shorter Catechism sums up as his being born in a low condition, being under the law, undergoing the miseries of life, experiencing the wrath of God on the cross, experiencing the death of a cursed person on the cross, being buried, and remaining dead for a little while.¹¹

Jesus accepted true humanity, not humanity with an easier go of it, but full humanity, including the worst stuff: a hard life, death of friends, poverty, betrayal, opposition, and a criminal's death. And He did it for us. What kind of love is this?

4) It Reminds Us of How Sympathetic God Is

These doctrines also matter because they tell us that Jesus fully understands by experience what we are going through.

¹¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 27. Available here: <https://www.opc.org/sc.html>

Hebrews 4:15 “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

We have a Jesus that we approach, that is praying for us, who can fully sympathize with what we are going through, because while He is truly God, and truly man, his humanity is not mixed with his deity.

In other words, Jesus experienced everything that we experience. He was tempted just like we are. But he never used his deity to cheat at being human.

Sometimes we think Jesus being God was like his cheat code in a video game. The game gets hard, so you type in the cheat code, and now you're invincible. Or it was like he got to take the test with the answer key in his hand.

But there was no mixture of His deity and humanity. Jesus is truly human, and never used his deity to cheat at humanity.

His being God never made life easier for Him, never made His experience less human, never made Him above temptation and weakness. He took on full humanity.

So just as we have to labor and study to learn from God, so did He. Just as there are things we don't fully understand, in His humanity, He had those too. He is a fully-sympathetic high priest, He has been there. Just as we have to study to learn the word of God, Jesus emptied himself and became man and had to study and learn as well. Just as we have to walk by faith and hope in the promises of God, Jesus had to as well.¹²

And in our temptation we know that He wasn't less tempted. If anything, Jesus was tempted more because he never failed. We give up and fall to temptation quickly, so we never experience the full extent of how severe temptation can be. Jesus experienced the full onslaught of temptation and didn't fail - He knows our temptation better than us. And Hebrews says:

Hebrews 2:18 “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

¹² Bavinck, Herman. “The Person of Christ,” in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2006). Volume 3, Page 238.

We pray to a God who gets it. Who suffered through real temptation, and He knows. He didn't stay above it all, he took it all on and walked through it all. He knows.

5) It Means We Have a Mediator

In most world religions, there are mediators between God and man. Those who bring blessings, that reveal God to man, that carry prayers to God. There seems to be a fundamental need for someone to connect us to God.

There was a time when Job was suffering in the Old Testament. He had, for reasons he didn't understand, lost his family, his wealth, his health. And in Job 9 he was lamenting this gap between himself and God. He knew he could never understand him, that he could never convince God to withdraw his hand of discipline because he was a man and God is God and infinitely higher than him. And he said:

Job 9:32 “For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him,that we should come to trial together.33 There is no arbiter between us,who might lay his hand on us both.34 Let him take his rod away from me,and let not dread of him terrify me.35 Then I would speak without fear of him,for I am not so in myself.

He said, “How could I ever know God when God is not a man as I am? How could I ever speak without fear of him? If only there were an arbiter, a go-between, a mediator who could lay his hand on us both!”

Jesus is the answer to that and so many other prayers. One who is truly God and truly man. He gets us, and He gets God. Only God could lay His hand on God's shoulder, and only a human could truly claim to fully understand a human. Jesus is the answer for that longing.

We believe in a doctrine called the substitutionary atonement. That Jesus, dying on the cross, took the deserved punishment for all who would believe in Him.

But if we do the math, if Jesus is only a man, his suffering could maybe pay the price for one other person. One righteous person suffers so one sinner can be free. Let's say that could happen, he could pay the debt for one.

But if He is God, He is infinite. And his suffering could pay the price for all who believed in Him.

Also, His cross was horrifying agony. But it didn't last a day. How could that pay the price for the sins of millions that should cost them an eternity in hell? If He is infinite God it makes at least some sense to us. an eternity in hell for all? Infinite God.

2 Timothy 2:5-6 “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

And in Jesus, we have Him. He is truly God, so no human limitation keeps him from being fully one with the Father on our behalf. But He is fully man, so he can sympathize and knows us.

This means He can save you.

If you sense you are sinful and disconnected from God, as we all are by nature, your need is for the mediator who can connect you to God. And only Jesus can. Only his suffering can pay the price. Only his humanity can know your need. Only his deity can approach God on your behalf.

You have a hunger for this Jesus. And if you'll turn from sin and trust Him, you'll find certainty that He is the one who meets your deepest need.

We have a mediator between us and God. And He is enough for you - for whatever you've done.

Because he was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

III. Mary

Mary is one of two non-divine people listed in the Creed. We'll talk about Pontius Pilate, the other one, next week.

And Mary has a place of importance in Christian belief, important enough to be included by name in the Creed.

And we tend to swing between two extreme sets of errors with Mary.

One is to make too much of her.

Some would go beyond the Bible and say that Mary, like Jesus, was sinless. But listen to this song she sings in Luke 1:

**Luke 1:46 “And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.**

So she refers to God as her savior. Which means that, like you and me, she needed to be saved. She sinned like we do. Some have even said that Mary had to be virgin born as well so she could be sinless. But the sinlessness of Mary isn't taught in the Bible.

Also, some would teach that she was always the virgin Mary and remained so, but Jesus had brothers and sisters. So she was a virgin until the birth of Jesus, but not so afterwards.

And so because she was human and not divine, we don't pray to her or worship her. And she doesn't serve as the mediator between us and Jesus - Jesus is the mediator, and if we think we need a mediator between us and Jesus we are missing part of the story. So she can be wrongly worshipped.

But to avoid that, we run the other way and ignore her altogether.

But this is a faithful woman.

And even though she didn't share the sufferings of Jesus that redeemed us, He did that alone, she did have to suffer to give Him up.

Luke 2:34-35 “And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed)”

So from the time Jesus was conceived she knew that her womb was blessed, she was bringing the Messiah into the world. And when he was a child, she was told at his dedication that a sword will pierce through her soul.

While she doesn't stand between God and man to suffer as a mediator, she certainly suffered to see her son go through all he went through, in life and in His torturous death, in order to be the Savior.

And she willingly took on that life.

She took on a life of service in the cause of redemption, she suffered much, she watched her son give Himself for the life of the world.

When we first meet her in scripture, she is asked to accept the impossible. And she is perplexed and in wonder and then submits herself to God completely. And all throughout the ministry of Jesus, we see Mary nearby, supporting the ministry of Jesus and the disciples. We see her at the garden tomb in the morning of the resurrection to be a first witness of the resurrected Lord. And she is never taking the spotlight, but always serving the Lord.

We don't pray to her, but we should pray to be like her.¹³

In response to all that God did for us in the incarnation: love like that, sympathy like that, suffering for us like that, we should look at Mary's example and say yes, we also want to be servants of that Lord.

Prayer of Confession

Father, we confess that so often our faith wavers when we hear of miracles. Even though we are living, breathing, evidence that you do the miraculous by breathing life into our bodies, we disbelieve that you are supernaturally active in the world. We doubt the witness of your word, and we would rather explain things away faithfully than faithfully believe and trust as Mary did in this passage today.

¹³ Paraphrased from R.S. Sproul in What We Believe.

But Jesus we thank you for your Incarnation, for being True God and True Man for us, so that you could be the Mediator between us and God, so our sins could be forgiven, so we could be given righteousness and acceptance before God.

Holy Spirit, we pray for your real power in our lives. We pray that you would empower us for the same kind of trust and obedience we saw in Mary. Help us to believe in the grace we've received, in the truth of your word, in your existence and active work in history, and in the miraculous future you have for us. Let that shape and change us.

Assurance

Romans 8:1-2 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

Works Cited During the Apostles' Creed Series (This is a Work in Progress)

The Creedal Imperative by Carl Trueman

Christless Christianity by Michael Horton

Christian Apologetics by Cornelius Van Til

This book takes into account the “noetic effects” of sin. That is, sin corrupts our minds and our wills, so that scientific and philosophical proofs alone cannot lead us to God. The need is for the power of the Spirit to overcome the circular reasoning of the secular worldview. This book is a needed addition to the above books because it provides an explanation for how someone becomes savingly convinced of the faith.

The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way by Michael Horton

A unique and refreshing systematic theology that explains the major doctrines of the Christian Faith.

Christian Theology by Millard J. Erickson

This serious systematic theology textbook explores each of the main areas of theology, with a strong biblical foundation and fair treatment of opposing views.

The Deity of Christ edited by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson

To Everyone an Answer, edited by Beckwith, Craig, and Moreland

This book presents the case for God's existence, for Christ, and for miracles. It answers philosophical, cultural, and religious challenges to the Christian faith. 20+ authors each write in an area of their specialty in this edited volume.

The Knowledge of the Holy by A.W. Tozer

Orthodoxy by G.K. Chesterton

Considered one of G. K. Chesterton's best works and a masterful apologetic, the British critic and philosopher makes compelling arguments here as to the rationale of belief and more. In its Preface, Chesterton writes that the purpose of this book is to "attempt an explanation, not of whether the Christian faith can be believed, but of how he personally has come to believe it."

The Reason for God by Tim Keller

This book answers a number of common philosophical arguments against the existence of God, including the problem of evil. Keller's intelligent and humble approach is helpful for those who doubt, for those who are skeptical, and for the believers aiming to help both see Jesus more clearly.

Reasonable Faith by William Lane Craig

This extensive work builds a case for the Christian faith starting with the existence of God, and then answering the problem of historical knowledge (which is important in proving the resurrection.) From there he explains who Jesus understood Himself to be, followed by an extensive historical proof for the resurrection of Jesus, and refutations of the claims against the resurrection.

Reformed Dogmatics by Harman Bavinck -

This is a four volume work on Christian Theology written by the great Dutch Calvinist theologian.

The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self by Carl Trueman.

This book explains so much of how modern people think of themselves. It expands on the corrupt way of thinking that jettisons the past and strives to find the true self in an unencumbered state of nature as opposed to in glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. This seeking after the self finds its expression in many facets of the sexual revolution, and explains why our culture is the way it is in our day.

Signature in the Cell by Steven C. Meyer

Westminster Shorter Catechism

This is one of the greatest summations of the Christian faith ever written by English speaking people.

What we Believe: Understanding and Confessing the Apostles' Creed by R.C. Sproul