



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 6.6.1.1 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)

Jesus' Conception and Birth

The *Apostles' Creed* summarizes Jesus' state of humiliation in six phases: conception by the Holy Spirit, birth from the virgin Mary, suffering under Pontius Pilate, crucifixion, death, and burial. In Hebrews 5:7 this period in Jesus' life is called **"the days of His flesh."** The apostle Paul spoke of this time as knowing **"Christ according to the flesh"** (2 Corinthians 5:16).

The Bible makes it very clear that the Baby Jesus had no human father. He was conceived in Mary's womb by God, the Holy Spirit. When the angel Gabriel first visited Mary, a virgin girl in Nazareth, and told her that she would give birth to a son, she asked: **"How can this be, since I do not know a man?"** (Luke 1:34). With these words she did not mean she was unacquainted with any man; she was already betrothed (legally bound for marriage) to the carpenter Joseph at this time. What Mary spoke of was sexual knowledge; she was not having sexual intercourse with any man, and, therefore, there was no way she could become pregnant according to ordinary means.

Gabriel answered her plainly: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God"** (Luke 1:35). Is possible for God, the Holy Spirit, to create the beginning of a human being in Mary's womb and performing the role usually played by a male father? Gabriel's statement is the only answer we need: **"With God nothing will be impossible"** (Luke 1:37).

Thus, Mary became pregnant with a male baby in her womb. Mary visited her pregnant cousin Elisabeth in the hill country of Judea. When she went into Elisabeth's house and greeted her, Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, who led her to say: **"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe (John the Baptist) leaped in my womb for joy"** (Luke 1:42-44). Notice that Elisabeth called Mary the mother of her Lord. At this time the Son of God was already in Mary's womb, even though she was still a virgin.

Meanwhile, the carpenter Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy and he was trying to decide what he should do. He knew that this baby in her womb was not his child. The only possible conclusion he could come to was that Mary was guilty of sexual sin, and that it was only proper for him to break off his legal betrothal to her. But he was an honorable man, and he did not want to hurt Mary or her reputation in any way. Matthew tells us: **"Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly"** (Matthew 1:19). He did not know what Mary and Elisabeth knew, that this Child was **"of the Holy Spirit"** (Matthew 1:18).

At this point God intervened: **"An angel of the Lord appeared to him (Joseph) in a dream, saying, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins'"** (Matthew 1:20-21).

Joseph was already her legal husband, for in those days a betrothal was binding, and so now he began to live with Mary as her husband, to protect her from foolish gossip. But Matthew is careful to add that Joseph **"did not know her (sexually) till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS"** (Matthew 1:25).

Luke chapter 2 gives us further details concerning Jesus' birth: **"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn"** (Luke 2:1-7).

This is the way God sent His Son into the world – not in glory, but in poverty and humility. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary. His virgin birth was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, who gave this sign to King Ahaz of Judah 700 years earlier: **"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel"** (Isaiah 7:14). Matthew tells us that Jesus' birth was the fulfillment of this prophecy: **"All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel.' which is translated, 'God with us'"** (Matthew 1:22-23). The birthplace of the Messiah was foretold by the prophet Micah: **"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting"** (Micah 5:2).

Jesus' birth was also the fulfillment of the first Gospel promise in Genesis 3:15, where God said to Satan: **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."** Jesus was definitely the woman's Seed, born of the virgin Mary. He was the One who was destined to undo the damage caused by Satan through his temptation of Adam and Eve.

There are some who claim that Jesus was born without Mary's womb being opened, but there is no Scriptural basis for such a claim. Some also teach that Mary remained a virgin all her life, but this is highly unlikely. Mary was the wife of Joseph; there is no reason to believe that Mary refrained from a normal sexual life with her husband after the birth of Jesus. Such a sexual union is expected in marriage, as the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth: **"Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control"** (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). During Jesus' ministry, the Gospels often mention Mary with Jesus' brothers, who most likely were younger sons of Mary and Joseph. Jesus had four brothers: James, Joses, Simon, Judas, and several sisters (Matthew 13:55-56).

The virgin birth of Jesus is a clear teaching of Holy Scripture. But many so-called Bible teachers and Christian leaders today deny this doctrine. They consider it a mere fable invented many years after Jesus was born in order to enhance the reputation of the prophet Jesus. In order to remain faithful to Scripture, it is necessary for us to teach and confess that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. We should not go beyond this and teach anything that is a mere opinion held by Christian teachers, including some Lutherans, such as the teaching that Mary remained a virgin all her life. This teaching originated in the days when virginity was praised as far superior to the marriage state.

It is important to recognize that the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit and His birth of the virgin Mary happened at definite times and places. Luke's Gospel, in particular, is careful to stress the times and places where these events took place: Nazareth, Bethlehem, in the days of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, etc. In other words, the Bible account is not myth or legend but factual history.

Questions

1. What are the six statements in the *Apostles' Creed* that summarize Jesus' state of humiliation?
2. What is the Scriptural proof that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit?
3. How would you answer someone who claims that such a conception is impossible?
4. Why did Joseph think that he should break his betrothal to Mary?
5. How was Joseph persuaded to take Mary as his wife?
6. How did God arrange for Mary's Son to be born in Bethlehem?
7. Which prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled by Jesus' birth?
8. Why is it unlikely that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus' birth?
9. Why is it important for us to teach the doctrines of Jesus' conception and birth according to the Biblical account?