Basic Christian Theology

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Christology: The Doctrine of Christ (2)

The Virgin Conception

The incarnation of Jesus didn't begin the moment he was born, but nine months earlier when he was miraculously conceived in the womb of his mother Mary. The supernatural event known as the "virgin conception" was essential for Jesus to fulfill his mission as Savior and Lord. While some have traditionally referred to this event as the "virgin birth," there is no record that Jesus' *birth* was supernatural or unique—only his *conception*.

1. **The Biblical Testimony of the Virgin Conception**

   a. **Genesis 3:15** – "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*"

      - **Meaning:** By omitting any relationship to Adam, God suggests that the promised offspring will not partake of Adam's sin. Rather than being fathered by Adam, Jesus would be fathered by God.

   b. **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.*"

      - **Virgin**: Matthew uses the Greek word "parthenos" (LXX also), which always means "virgin." In addition, Matthew is recording what the angel said to Joseph in a dream. So, to deny that "virgin" was intended would be to say that the angel got it wrong as well.

   c. **Matthew 1:18-25** - "*Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke*

from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

- Quote: As Stephen Wellum indicates, "*God himself worked supernaturally to conceive in Mary the human nature of the eternal Son, such that as a man he would take up the David-messianic vocation of saving the people of God*" (Wellum, 237).

d. Luke 1:26-38 – "*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 favored 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 favor 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.' 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.*"

- Theology: Mary's pregnancy was nothing less than a supernatural act of God's grace through the agency of the Holy Spirit. While it is completely unnatural and unheard of for a woman to become pregnant without a human father, the angel emphasizes, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (1:37).

e. Group Discussion: What are some reasons the virgin conception was necessary for Jesus to be Messiah?

The Incarnation

While the incarnation began with the virgin conception, it was realized when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. At the moment of Jesus' birth, God became human and began his mission to redeem sinners and reverse the sinful effects of the fall.

1. Jesus is God and Man

a. John 1:1, 14 – "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God….and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*"

- Theology: When Jesus came into the world—God in human flesh—John indicates that Jesus "dwelt among us," which comes from the word "tabernacle." Therefore, just as God filled the tabernacle/temple in ancient Israel, God filled a human body in Jesus.

- Hypostatic Union: Theologians refer to the results of the incarnation as the "hypostatic union." The word "hypostatic" comes from the Greek word "hypostasis," which means "subsistence, existence, survival, or the ability to maintain." Therefore, the hypostatic union indicates the permanent union of Christ's human and divine natures at the same time. According to the Council of Chalcedon, AD 451, Jesus was at the same time human and divine, involving a hypostatic union of the two natures without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. Charles Feinberg explained, *"The hypostatic union is that which was effected and brought into being by the incarnation"* (MacArthur, 264). Jesus is not two persons, but one person with two natures—the divine and the human. Jesus' incarnation is permanent, meaning that he will always be the God-man.

2. The Divinity of Christ

   a. Jesus is referred to as God throughout Scripture: Jesus was prophesied to be God (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Micah 5:2; Psalm 110:1).

   b. Jesus is referred to as "*God*" (John 20:28; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1; 1 John 5:20).

   c. Jesus is referred to as "*Lord*" ("Kyrios," a Greek reference to the God of the Bible; Luke 2:11; Matthew 3:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

   d. Jesus is referred to as "*I Am*" (John 8:58); "*The Alpha and Omega*" (Revelation 22:13); "*The Son of Man*" (Daniel 7:13-14).

   e. Jesus claims unity with God the Father (John 5:17-18; 10:30; 14:7-9; 17:5).

   f. Jesus is described as the "*image of the invisible God*" (Colossians 1:15), the "fullness of deity" (Colossians 2:9), and "*the exact imprint of [God's] nature*" (Hebrews 1:3). The word "imprint" means "duplicate."

   g. Jesus possesses the incommunicable attributes of God (e.g., omnipotence, omniscience, sovereignty, holiness, eternality, ability to forgive, acceptance of worship, etc.).

   h. Jesus performed the supernatural works of God (e.g., healing, casting out demons, controlling the weather, raising the dead, etc.).

3. The Humanity of Christ

a. **Jesus had a human body and experienced human emotions**. He was born (Luke 2:7). He grew into manhood (Luke 2:40, 52). He experienced fatigue, hunger, thirst, sadness, grief, joy, etc. (Matthew 4:2; 26:38; John 4:6; 11:35; 19:28).

   Group Discussion: In terms of Jesus' mission, why is it essential for him to be fully God and fully man?