

Name:

This I Believe

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE APOSTLE'S CREED

Week 3: I Believe that Jesus was
conceived by the Holy Spirit, born
of the virgin Mary

Day One

The presence and activity of God are established in the opening words of Scripture (see Gen. 1:1). Throughout the Bible we read of God's miraculous work as what the creed has summarized as "the Father Almighty." He's infinitely powerful, yet intensely personal.

READ EXODUS 40:38-38

In the Old Testament the glory of the Lord was seen as a cloud that rested on the tabernacle, the portable temple of God's people, the place where they worshiped God. This visible representation of the glory of the Lord was called the *shekinah*. In Ezekiel 10 the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord, the *shekinah*, leave the temple, but Ezekiel also had a vision of God's glory returning to a new temple, which is recorded in Ezekiel 43:1-5.

READ LUKE 1:35

The Bible says the Holy Spirit would "overshadow" Mary in order for her to conceive a son. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the same word for overshadow is used to describe the cloud of God's glory in Exodus 40:35, where the Bible says, "Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD [*shekinah*] filled the tabernacle."

Luke connected the *shekinah* glory of God to the conception of Jesus. His overwhelmingly glorious presence in the tabernacle and the temple now manifested itself through Mary as she conceived, carried, and gave birth to her firstborn child, the only Son of God.

What do you think would be lost if the creed said "born of the virgin Mary?" without saying "conceived by the Holy Spirit"?

The Scriptures are full of miraculous births of people meant for a specific purpose: Sarah and Abraham had Isaac, the promised child and father of God's covenant people (see Gen. 18:9-14); Jacob and Rachel had Joseph, the royal savior (see Gen. 30:22-24); Manoah and his wife had Samson, the judge (see Judg. 13); Elkanah and Hannah had Samuel, the prophet (see 1 Sam. 1); and Zechariah and Elizabeth had John the Baptist, the preacher of repentance and the kingdom of God (see Luke 1:5-25,57-63). In each of these cases, the Lord opened barren wombs and provided a child when none seemed possible-although the woman

conceived with her husband. In each case the unexpected birth was foretold. In the Book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah characterized Israel as a barren woman longing for children and prophesied that she would one day be a mother (see Isa. 66:7-14).

How did each of the miraculous births in Scripture point to Jesus?

All of history had been leading up to Jesus. The opening chapter of John's Gospel uses the same language as the creation story in Genesis, words like in the beginning, light, darkness, and world. John was clearly pointing to Jesus as the Almighty, the Creator, Christ, and Lord as the only Son of God. Then John gave a beautiful picture of the supernatural birth.

READ JOHN 1:14

The Greek word John used for dwelt means "to tabernacle." God has tabernacled with us through the birth of Jesus, making His glory known to the world.

In what ways has God made Himself known to you?

How does it change your life to know that God wants to be with you?

Prayer

Father, You're truly the God of the universe. You're so much bigger, so much more glorious than I can understand. Thank You for caring so intimately for me, even in all Your majesty, that You sent Your Son to become flesh and blood for my sake. Holy Spirit, help my heart remember and be comforted in knowing that I have a God who truly empathizes with me in every way and loves me enough to dwell with me. Amen.

Day Two

In the birth of Jesus, we see God entering our world in a beautiful and unexpected way. An early church theologian named Athanasius described God's incarnation this way: "He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and self-revealing to us."

When Athanasius said Christ stooped to our level in the incarnation, he reminded us that God condescended, voluntarily put aside His superiority, and made Himself like us in order to have communion with us. The very God of the universe humbled Himself by taking on Himself total humanity in its weakest form, a baby.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:3-8

Identify and list the words used to describe the humility of Christ:

Like faith, humility is ultimately demonstrated in obedience to God. Jesus humbled Himself in obedience to God. Verse 6 says He "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." This means Jesus didn't cling to His position of honor, holding Himself above the will of God. It wasn't beneath Him to live and die as a man even though He was and is part of the triune God.

Look at the story of Mary to see Christlike humility. To be clear, the Bible doesn't give any explanation for why God chose Mary. Like us all, she was a sinner in need of a Savior (Luke 1:47). Scripture doesn't say she was rewarded for her godliness, but we see her humble obedience demonstrated in her response to God's grace.

READ LUKE 1:26-38

Put yourself in Mary's place. She was a young girl, most likely barely in her teens, engaged to be married, and an angel appeared to tell her that she was going to be pregnant. If that wasn't shocking enough, Mary would become pregnant while remaining a virgin, and the baby would be the Son of God. Surely no one in history had ever been more surprised.

Notice in Mary's response to the angel that she was afraid (see v. 29), she had questions (see v. 34), yet she submitted herself to God's will in humble obedience (see v. 38).

What about complete obedience to God frightens you? Explain.

What questions do you have about living by faith?

In what areas of your life are you most prone to pride?

What will you do so that Mary's words become the posture of your heart?

I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.

Luke 1:38

Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, thank You for making my heart new and united with Christ. Thank You that in my union with Him, I'm reminded that You've chosen the weak things of the world, including the Messiah born of a virgin, to shame the wisdom of the wise. In the incarnation, Christ, You stooped to my level in order to reveal Yourself to me. Make me Your ambassador and proclaimer of this beautiful gospel message. Amen.

Day Three

Popular culture often looks down on ideas and events that seem as irrational and unbelievable as the virgin birth. Some say science and culture have progressed to a point that we can leave supernatural beliefs behind in favor of what can be proved, observed, and repeated. However, the Bible is full of miracles.

Ultimately, as a Christian, you must decide whether you believe in an almighty God who has authority and power over all things. If the God of the Bible exists, miracles are simply part of the deal; that's just part of how an almighty Creator works. It's quite logical to conclude that a supernatural God works in supernatural ways. It's His nature.

*Nothing will be impossible with God.
Luke 1:37*

**Do you believe these words of the angel who spoke to Mary?
Why or why not?**

Belief in the virgin birth is essential in shaping the Christian life. It testifies to the nature of Jesus as both God and man, as well as to the fact that we have an all-powerful Father who is active in the world He made, revealing Himself to people. And finally, it tells us that Jesus did not inherit Adam's sin nature (Rom. 5:12-32).

Many, if not most, difficulties with or objections to believing in God are more about ourselves and our circumstances than they are about God. Take a look at the story of a father who was in a difficult situation but was learning how to believe. Then answer the following questions related to the four areas addressed in the group session.

READ MARK 9:14-29

1. SYMMETRY

What difficult, painful, or hopeless situation are you facing that seems as if it would take a miracle to change for the better?

2. CLARITY

Just as the disciples were unable to save the boy, we're completely dependent on Jesus' miraculous work in our lives. We've already seen that Christ is the only way to experience true and eternal life. We can't be good enough, try hard enough, have good enough intentions, or know the right things to say or do to attain eternal life on our own. Salvation is the greatest miracle of all, transforming sinful people into the righteousness of Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:21). All other miracles point to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

How have you experienced God's work in your life to accomplish things you could never do for yourself?

3. COMMUNITY

In what ways do you struggle with pessimism? How can you set an example for the people around you by believing that anything is possible with God and that no situation is hopeless?

4. COUNSEL

Consider the areas of pessimism and bad attitudes in your life. In what specific ways do those attitudes reveal a lack of faith in God's ability to work in those circumstances?

Prayer

Reflect on the confession and plea of the father in Mark 9:24.
Cry out to God, making this your prayer. Be specific about the areas in which you need to trust Him.

I believe; help my unbelief!
Mark 9:24

