

The Incarnation

The incarnation of Jesus is a profound mystery and a glorious miracle. In fulfillment of the promise made at the time of the fall, a woman gave birth to the only One who could crush the head of the serpent; she gave birth to the man who is God! The child Jesus was, as promised (Genesis 3:15), from the seed of the woman alone, not the man. He was born, as promised, to a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). He had no human father (Matthew 1:18-25; Galatians 4:4).

Thus Jesus does not merely become God as a result of an especially holy life (the Adoptionist heresy of the second and third centuries). He is God from eternity in His divine nature; and He is God who takes on a human nature from the moment of His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary. As the angel Gabriel promised, He is miraculously conceived, and He is called the Son of God because that's who He is. Thus, shortly after His conception in Mary's womb, when Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, "*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.... 'Why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'*" (Luke 1:41, 43). Elizabeth, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, acknowledged that Mary was already carrying within her the Lord; that was not something merely potential but something already real.

Accordingly, the ancient church and we in union with it call Mary the mother of God, or literally, "the God-bearer" (*theotokos*). We do so in order to defend this truth that already from the moment of His conception the divine nature was joined to and took to itself a human nature. The title is not intended to make of Mary some sort of co-redeemer along with her Son, as many in the Roman Catholic Church teach. Rather, the title is intended to defend against the error that Christ only *became* the Son of God at some time after His birth.

The doctrine of the incarnation and the virgin birth of Christ is rightly called one of the great pillars of the Christian faith. If one could remove it, the Christian religion would collapse. For if Jesus were not born of a virgin, without a human father, then He would not really be the Son of God. Then He would have been conceived and born with original sin, just like the rest of us. He would have needed a saviour Himself. He could not have saved even Himself, much less the rest of us. Yes, were He not born of a virgin, then all of the Scriptures would be a lie and Jesus would be the greatest fraud ever perpetrated on the human race.

But because God alone is His Father, He was not born sinful and a sinner like the rest of us. Original sin was not passed on to Him in the course of a natural conception. For though natural and lawful conception in and of itself is not sinful, it is the means by which all human attributes are passed on to the parents' offspring, including original sin. Without a human father, Jesus received a human nature and all that is essential to a human nature (i.e., a human body and soul from His virgin mother). But by virtue of His miraculous conception and the union of

the divine nature with the human nature, He did not receive original sin and the other attributes that flow from or are the consequences of original sin. He is the Holy One of God, promised by the angel Gabriel, the Saviour promised throughout the Old Testament and proclaimed throughout the New.