

**DO WE BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?**  
**Second in a Series: "Belief in a Post-modern World"**  
**Isaiah 7: 14 July 27, 2014**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

*"(He, Jesus) was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried",* so states the Apostles' Creed. He, Jesus Christ, is *"God's only Son, our Lord",* so states the Apostles' Creed. Perhaps one of the hardest things to say and believe for Post-modernists in the Creed is that Jesus was *"born of the Virgin Mary"*; when people have problems with the Creed it is often on this point, the miracle of the virgin birth.

The scripture we just read from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible translates the prophecy from Isaiah as saying, "Behold, a young woman shall conceive..." (Isaiah 7: 14 RSV) The King James Version of the Bible translates this, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7: 14 KJV) There is much made about the nature of the Hebrew word translated "young woman" one place and "virgin" another. But, of course, the early church clearly understood the word to be "virgin". For in the gospel of Matthew 1: 23, clearly referencing this passage from Isaiah, it notes: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means God with us). (Matthew 1: 23 RSV). So the gospel writer Matthew clearly understood the word to mean "virgin" not just "young woman" and so used a very particular word in the Greek language, *PARTHENOS*, to emphasize this point. Also, the early church, writing the core of the Apostles' Creed in 180 A.D., this clearly liturgical worship-used phrases—Conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate—clearly also understood that Jesus Christ the Son of God was conceived by a miracle wrought by God's hand and born miraculously by a virgin. The Apostles' Creed was not finalized into its present form until 500A.D. but the core of it, that which we are examining today, was dated much, much earlier. Clearly, the people who knew the people who knew Jesus believed that He was born of the Virgin Mary, testified to both in Gospel of Matthew and the earliest portions of the Apostles' Creed.

This earliest core of the Apostles' Creed was written to counter what was referred to as Marcionism. Marcion was an early leader in the church who believed that there was the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament, not the same God, and that we could reject the Old Testament God, the Old Testament Law because now we knew better through Jesus. He edited out large portions of scripture, and also those portions of the New Testament that had Jesus referring favorably to the God of the Old Testament. People trying to put their particular "spin" on the Bible, editing out those portions they don't like in order to make particular points, is nothing new. Heresy is nothing new. Marcion also denied a real incarnation; he disliked the idea that God and flesh could be united in the person of Jesus. There are many people today who like the humanity of Jesus, but dislike and deny His divinity. They like the teachings of the man but not that He is the Son of God. They collapse Jesus into a set of ethics to be followed, rather than a divine Savior and Lord. People with an inherently scientific worldview would have to say that unless we can prove Jesus was born of a virgin they will not believe. So the Apostles' Creed was written to dispute Marcion—No, Marcion, Jesus is the Son of God; He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. His incarnation, begotten of the Father, placed by the Holy Spirit into Mary, who was herself a virgin, is a miracle. The virgin birth is a miracle. The incarnation is a miracle. The perfect merger of God's spirit and our humanity in the person of Jesus is a miracle.

And we accumulate Bibles to suit our own prejudices. I LIKE, we may say, this version of the Bible. As if our LIKING IT gives it some special authority. How Post-modern is that? There are literally hundreds of

versions of the Bible in circulation now, lining the lucrative pockets of Bible publishers. But I believe it has done us a disservice. Not only do we just listen to those portions of scripture we personally like, and like Marcion, discard those we do not like. But we can even accumulate scriptures that we like better. The NIV version in our pew pockets I was shocked to discover when Dr. Jim Platt was leading his class here is not a translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek. There are many paraphrases out there which do not even pretend to be translations, to try to go back to the original languages in order to understand what the original authors intended. Humanity becomes the measure of the authority of scripture not the reverse. We tell the Bible which parts we will believe and which parts we will edit out. We LIKE the loving God revealed in Jesus but the Old Testament Law is harsh and we reject it. We even tell God which Bibles we like better. Marcion was declared to be a heretic and excommunicated from the church in 144 A.D. But he is alive and well in Post-modernism today.

So, do you believe in miracles or not? Do you believe that Jesus was born just of a young woman? Or do you believe, as the early church believed of Him, that He was born of a virgin? When I invite you stand up at the end of this sermon to say "I believe" and you come to the phrase "born of the Virgin Mary" what are you going to say? You may choose to say it or not say it. You may choose even to remain seated and say nothing. Because belief in today's world is complicated, courageous, complex. It is hard to say we believe in what the church has historically believed in our Post-modern world. But I want you to carefully consider other matters before you choose what to say. Because not just the birth of Jesus Christ into the world is a miracle. The forgiveness of sin is also a miracle; how what Jesus did on a cross 2,000 years ago forgives us our sin and reconciles us to God today. That's a miracle. When I come to your hospital room and I pray, I'm not just there to be nice and to reassure you; I'm there because I believe that God is powerfully at work in His world; I believe Jesus healed long ago and I believe that Jesus heals today. That's a miracle. And the greatest miracle of all, the one around which all of Christianity is centered, the resurrection of the dead; Jesus Christ on Good Friday, "crucified, dead and buried" (HE REALLY WAS DEAD NOT JUST ASLEEP) On Easter Sunday --"The third day HE rose again from the dead", as the Apostles' Creed attests. That's a miracle, perhaps the greatest miracle of all. But if Jesus weren't raised from the dead, then neither will we have eternal life in HIM, right? If we don't believe in the greatest miracle of all then we are in effect saying that we also will not be raised from the dead; there is no such thing as eternal life; because Jesus doesn't live we won't live also. As the scripture says: *"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain."* (1 Corinthians 15: 14)

Funny thing. Post-modernists still believe in heaven; want to believe there is a life after this one. But they want to pick and choose which parts of scripture they believe in; which things they hold authoritative; which parts of scripture they edit out; which miracles apply to them. These miracles related to Jesus are all connected. He's the Son of God because of the way He was born. Only the Son of God on a cross could take away our sin. Only Jesus can heal. And only the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, can be miraculously raised from the dead and miraculously do the same for us when we die. No, post-modernists, you don't get heaven if you don't believe in Jesus, and it's not some made up Jesus whom you have constructed yourself; no, it must be the Jesus revealed by scripture and attested to by the church, through its creeds, for 2,000 years.

I conclude with the story of the Apostle Peter's confession of faith. Jesus asks Peter the same question that I will in effect be asking you at the end of this sermon. He asks, *"Who do men say that the Son of man is?"* (Matthew 16: 13) And Peter stumbles around a bit and equivocates by saying, *"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* (v. 14) He basically answered, some folks, Jesus, think you're a very good person, a great teacher, maybe even a prophet,

but certainly just a human being. He gave the perfect Post-modern response. The opinion polls think this about you, Jesus. And some writers think that about you, Jesus. Maybe you were born of a young woman and maybe of a virgin, Jesus. A lot of opinions about you. Everything's relative, you know. Depends on your perspective. Depends how you interpret scripture. Depends who you're talking to and what they think. People's opinions about Jesus don't make HIM into those opinions. Because Jesus is Jesus; He is who He is. And then Jesus turns to His friend, I see Him stepping in real close and personal, I see Jesus looking Peter directly in the eye. No, no, Peter, that's not the question I am asking. I am asking you: *"WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?????????????"* (v. 15) That is always what Jesus is asking us. And Peter blurts out of his mouth something that is lodged in his heart; not a lot of speculative thought in advance; not trying to figure out all the theology; not trying to prove something scientifically. No, Peter just cries out to His Lord and Savior –*"YOU ARE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD."* (v. 16) And Jesus responds, *"Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."* (v. 17) The Spirit has come and begotten a miracle in the heart of the Apostle Peter. It is a real live living Savior present, born and alive in his heart. And then from out of Peter's mouth explodes a confession of faith –You are God's only Son our Lord. You are conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. Your death will forgive me and your life will make me whole. I believe in the resurrection and I believe in YOU JESUS. And in that day when I die I believe I will be raised from the dead, because of who you are, because you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!!!!

So Jesus Christ comes through the Holy Spirit and asks you, personally and up close, "Beloved, who do you say that I am?" Who do you believe in? I think perhaps FAITH in Jesus Christ in today's world, perhaps is the greatest miracle of all!!!! DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES? Would you please stand and answer Jesus' question to you today? Would you please stand and say with me The Apostles' Creed?

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*