



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Luke 1:26-38

“Miscellaneous Topics #13: Son of Mary and Son of God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Audio begins] Today we are turning to the first chapter of the other book that Luke wrote, the Gospel of Luke, and we are reading the account of the announcement of the birth of our Lord, which Gabriel the angel brought to Mary the virgin. So will you turn with me to Luke chapter 1, verse 26, and we shall read through verse 38. The subject for today is “Son of Mary and son of God” and this is the passage that we shall consider in a few moments. Remember the first part of this opening chapter of the Gospel of Luke records the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist to Zacharias the priest, and then there follows the announcement of an even more supernatural birth of a greater person, the Son of God. Verse 26,

“And in the sixth month (that is the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elisabeth the mother of John, and in the sixth month) the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary:

for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?”

And may I just comment, it is often been commented upon that Mary’s answer seems almost precisely that which Zacharias answered when the news of the supernatural birth of John was given to him, in the 18th verse he replied, “Whereby shall I know this, for I am an old man and my wife well stricken in years.” But a careful reader will notice that Mary does not question the fact of this birth’s happening, she merely asks to understand the manner in which it should be accomplished. It is not “How shall I know this will come to pass” but “How shall it come to pass, since I do not know a man.” “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing.” And it is I think very precisely written by Luke “holy thing” for he is referring to the human nature of our Lord not his person, he is an eternal person who has existed from eternity past, but at the incarnation he took to himself an additional nature, so that it is proper to speak of his nature as a thing. The word of God, if we are, if we bother ourselves enough to study it precisely, is the most accurately written book that we have,

“Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (and again it is precisely accurate for not only is our Lord in his humanity the person of the Son of God, but also in his deity he is the person the Son of God, for the properties of both of the natures adhere to the one person) And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the

handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”

Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] We are grateful Lord that we are able to approach Thee through the savior, who was born in the manger in Bethlehem. We thank Thee that those ancient words express the substance of our faith, “Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary.” We thank Thee for him who is as much God as if he were only God, and is just as much man as if he had never been God. We thank Thee for the perfection of his humanity, the completeness of his deity. And we worship Thee Lord through him, who went to the cross at Calvary and offered himself a sacrifice, well pleasing to Thee. And so we come with confidence and with boldness because we know the righteousness and justice of our God has been satisfied in the saving ministry of Jesus Christ.

And we thank Thee Lord that he is great, not only shall be great but is great and has been great. Great in the fact that he has saved great sinners from great ruin with a great salvation. Great also in the fact that not only does he save us but in the midst of our great wants and needs and lacks, he has great provisions, and is guiding us to a great destiny in a great heaven. And so Lord we worship Thee and thank Thee, and particularly in this season of the year when we think again of the beginning of the earthly ministry of our Lord. We thank Thee that all of this has been accomplished to the glory of God and our salvation is certain and sure.

And Father we pray that through the experiences that we shall have in the next few days and weeks, others too may come through us, if it should please Thee, to share in the life of the Son of God. And so enable us to worship and to praise and also to witness in the power of the Holy Spirit. We especially pray for each one present, for the friends who are unable to be with us, for those who are hindered, we ask Lord Thy

blessing upon them, upon our country, upon its leadership, and especially today upon the whole body of Jesus Christ. Lord, we bring the entire body to Thee and pray Thy blessing upon it, and upon each member. And oh Lord, if there is one in this auditorium who has not yet come to faith in Christ, may today be the day that they turn to him. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] I think it is safe to say that never have the young been so turned off by the organized church as they have been in our day. And yet I think it is also true to say never have the young, of our land at least, been so obsessed with Jesus. We remember a few years ago when Billy Graham and the Campus Crusade for Christ had their meetings on the campus at Berkley in California, that there were signs that numbers of young men carried around in the midst of the crowds, which had upon them, “Jesus yes, Christianity no” and the message did not go without understanding.

Recently, there has been released by Decca Records, *Jesus Christ Superstar* an eighty-seven minute rock opera, hard electronic examination of the passion of Jesus Christ. In it of course, there is no true understanding of who Jesus Christ is or he is presented as a very definitely human person. There is even implied within it a relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. In one blues number she wails her fear of and desire for Jesus in these words, “He’s a man, he’s just a man and I’ve had so many men before.”

And then the thing that interested me about this is the fact that the chorus repeatedly asks the question, “Who are you, what have you sacrificed? Who are you, what have you sacrificed?” The question of Jesus Christ’s identity is something that our Lord himself raised when he was here, for remember it was he who spoke to Peter at the climax of one section of his ministry and said, Peter and the others with him, “Whom do men say that I the son of man am?” and then after Peter had given his little answer to that he said, “But whom say ye that I am?” And implied throughout all the gospels, is a tremendous

interest on the part of Jesus Christ in the answers that men give to the question, “Who are you, and what have you sacrificed?” We read for example, that at the conclusion of one of his miracles they turned one to another and said, “What manner of man is this that even wind and sea obey him?” We remember that they said to him, “Are you the Messiah, tell us. Why are you keeping us on pins and needles?” for that is, I think, the way that word in the Greek text should be rendered. “Who are you, what have you sacrificed?” “Art Thou the King of the Jews?” they said. And they also said, “Who is this son of man?” “Who are you, what have you sacrificed?” That question of course is a question that Jesus Christ sought to answer. And I think that as we read the Gospel of John, particularly, it almost seems as if that was the question that he wanted to answer more than anything else, for in that gospel, remember, it is characterized by the statements that we call the “I am” statements. “Who are you Jesus, what have you sacrificed?” “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” “Who are you Jesus, what have you sacrificed?” “I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me though he were dead yet shall he live.” “Who are you Jesus?” “I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.” “Who are you Jesus?” “I am the door, by me if any man enter in he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.” “Who are you Jesus Christ?” “I am the good shepherd.” “What have you sacrificed?” “I lay down my life for the sheep.”

We cannot answer this question properly of course, if we do not consider the birth of our Lord. And that is what we want to consider this morning. Luke who tells us the story from Mary’s view point, and Matthew who tells it from Joseph’s view point, unite in seeing him as God and man, David’s son, David’s Lord. “Who are you?” “Son of God.” “Who are you?” “Son of David.” “What have you sacrificed?” “I have laid down my life for the sheep.”

On the first pages of Scripture, before Eden’s gate is shut and locked by bolts of flame, heaven gave word of what was to come. After man had sinned in the garden, the

undoer of man's sin is said to have been, or would be, the seed of the woman. And so the thought of Messianic motherhood had fallen deep within the heart of the Hebrews and down through the centuries many of the women who were born within Israel and within the line must have wondered if perhaps they might be the mother of the Messiah. And then when the fulness of time had come, the angel Gabriel was sent to a man by the name of Zacharias. And Zacharias was told that his wife who was barren was going to have a son who would be great in the sight of the Lord, he would be the forerunner of the Messiah. And as the news was carried about, I am sure that the question arose more insistently in the minds of many of the spiritual among the Hebrews, “Whence will come his Lord, who shall be greater than he? Where shall we find the mother elect?” The one mother in Israel from whose seed shall come the Messiah.

Well six months after Elisabeth had become pregnant God commissioned an angel by the name of Gabriel, it was the same Gabriel who announced the time of the first advent to Daniel hundreds of years before. It was the same Gabriel who had come to Zacharias and to announce the forerunner's coming, and it is he who comes to announce the birth to the virgin Mary. Luke tells us that he went to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.

And I must confess that has always produced a sense of surprise in me, because you see, as you read the Old Testament you do not read anything about Nazareth. Now I know that some Hebrew scholars have suggested that the word natzor, which is translated in Isaiah chapter 11, verse 1 as a branch or a shoot has been thought by some to be the Hebrew equivalent of Nazareth, but that I think is very poorly based in philology. The facts are that so far as we can tell there is no sure evidence in the Old Testament that our Lord was to live in Nazareth. We know that he would be living in Galilee for Isaiah had prophesied that light would come to Galilee of the nations, but Nazareth of all the cities in Galilee this was the least likely. History, poetry, and prophecy had passed it by. And even Galilee they said was too dry to produce a prophet, but this village they commonly

said about Nazareth, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” and it was to this precise place that God in his sovereign activity gave us, brought us, the Son of God. And we read that he came to a virgin whose name was Mary, the house of David was certainly fallen in ruins for the heir apparent to the throne of David was a carpenter who worked at the carpenter’s bench, and his betrothed was a simple virgin by the name of Mary. Protestants find it very difficult to form an unbiased estimate of the character of the virgin Mary. We are repulsed, generally, by the Ave Maria’s of our Roman Catholic friends, which they often repeat to her. We are amused, if we study the Scriptures, at the dogmas that they proclaim, such as the dogma of the immaculate conception, the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary, for we do not find any evidence whatsoever of these things in the word of God. And we are shocked by the apotheosis of the virgin who, it seems to a protestant, is prayed to more frequently than Jesus himself, who is certainly prayed to so far as we can tell more earnestly than our Lord is prayed to himself.

And so we are inclined to go to the other extreme and consider Mary to be just an ordinary person. Now I think that is the protestant error, because just because we find it hard to dissociate in our minds the virgin mother from these Marian assumptions and curiosities that we see in the Roman Catholic church that is no reason for failing to see the type of person that the virgin Mary undoubtedly was. If we remember, for example, that no one had ever been so addressed by an angel as Mary was, we should at least realize that she was an unusual person. The angel had come to Daniel and had said, “Oh Daniel, greatly beloved” but he said something more significant than that to Mary. He said, “Hail thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee. Fear not Mary thou hast found favour with God.” And so the least that we can say about Mary is that it was obviously the intention of the Holy Spirit of the triune God to prepare a person who would be the fittest of all, at the time, for the bearing of the precious seed of God.

And so he came to Mary, and Mary, as far as I can tell, was a person whose heart and mind was suffused with holy Scripture. That is evident not only because she was a

reflective reasoning kind of person. That is evident from the statements that are made about her. She puzzled in her heart what kind of greeting this would be. Later it is said that she puzzled over the things that Jesus said. And she cast about in her mind seeking to put together the things that she knew about him into a comprehensible whole. Not only that but later she will break out into the *Magnificat* in the presence of Elisabeth. And as you read the *Magnificat* through with you Old Testament you will discover that the things that she has done in this beautiful song that came by prophecy from her, is to simply take phrases from the Old Testament Scriptures and put them together in this magnificent tribute of praise to God. And so it is obvious that Mary was not only a student of Scripture but a deep student of holy Scripture. And I am inclined to think that of all the women who have been born of man, the virgin Mary is the noblest of them all. And the angel came to Mary and he said to her, “Mary thou art highly favoured the Lord is with thee” and our English text says at verse 28 words that properly belong a little later in our text, “blessed art thou among women.” Now you will notice the angel does not say, “Blessed art thou above women” but “blessed art thou among women.” Mary would be the first to say that the things that some say about her are not true. She would be the first to say that she needed a savior just as others needed a savior, for in a few moments she will speak about the fact that her heart has rejoiced in God her savior. But at the same time, it is true that she was blessed. Mary, someone has said, was not a vessel to dispense blessing, she was a vessel to receive blessing. And when we hear “Hail Mary full of grace,” we are not to understand this as meaning, “Hail Mary thou art full of grace like a fountain to dispense grace to men,” for in the text of Scripture it is always passive, “Hail Mary full of grace because God has poured out his grace upon you.” “Blessed,” not a blessing but “blessed art thou among women.” It is Mary who has been blessed above women.

But we must go on to the communication, and I must confess as a preacher, when I come to speak of the message that the angel Gabriel brought to Mary, I confess that

preaching is an awfully poor medium for conveying truth. If I really were to speak of what was in my heart I would like to say I wish that I had the tongue of a Shakespeare, and the grammar of a Shakespeare, in order to extol the glories of the significance of this great passage which the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary. But in the final analysis, whether I spoke the message in ungrammatical, unlovely English, or in beautifully phrased, grammatically beautiful, and syntactically beautiful, and beautiful in diction English, I still would do a poor job of trying to expound this truth. Mr. Spurgeon said, “Fine words are but tawdry things to hang beside the unspeakable, unspeakably glorious Lord” and that is true. Who can expound the glories of the Son of God?

And the heart of this message is in verse 32, “He shall be great.” Great in his cognomen, his name shall be called Jesus. Jesus means Jehovah saves. Jehovah is salvation. As I’ve often said to you, every time that Mary went to the back door of her home, opened the door, leaned out of the door and called our Lord home for one of the meals, she preached the gospel. She said, “Jehovah saves, come home!” and everybody in the whole community got a new preaching of the gospel. “Who are you?” “Jehovah saves!” His very name tells forth who he is and what he has sacrificed, so great in his name.

He is also great in his character. Think of him as the prophet who comes from God to give us the one infallible message from God. Now I know there were great prophets. There was the prophet Isaiah. I love Isaiah. To me he is the prince among the prophets. But Isaiah did not speak infallibly. Oh he spoke infallibly in the word of God, but Isaiah spoke other words than those that are found in the word of God. And Isaiah’s lips often spoke words that were not true. He was not an infallible prophet. Jeremiah was a great prophet but he was not an infallible prophet. The New Testament apostles were great in their preaching and in their ministry, but they were not infallible. Words escaped from the lips of the Apostle Paul that were not true. Fortunately we do not have them in the word of God, but he was a man and not inspired at all of his utterances. But every word that Jesus Christ ever spoke was the pure word of God. He was the one prophet in

whom we can trust implicitly. He can tell us implicitly and completely and finally what God's message is for us because he is God. He is great in his prophetic gift, he is great in his high priestly office, for it is he who came to carry out the will of God and offer himself upon the cross at Calvary.

And he is great in his office of king, and the world shall ultimately see our Lord Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But when we have said prophet and priest and king, we have not exalted the glories of the offices of Jesus Christ, he is redeemer, he is mediator, he is head of the body and many other offices are given to him in holy Scripture, and in all of them he is great. We could preach for the rest of 1970 on the greatness of the offices of the Son of God and then we should say just as Spurgeon did, “words of tawdry things to hang beside the unspeakably glorious Lord.”

But he is great in his achievements. We may say about men, “They are great” but we know they do not completely fulfill the duties that they are supposed to. We can say of our presidents, “Lincoln was a great president” but we know he was not always great. We may say of Washington, “He was a great man” but we know he was not always great. Jesus is great in his achievements because he perfectly fulfills all of his duties which he has by virtue of his offices. He is great in his prophetic gift for he never fails. He is great in his priestly work because he never fails in that. And even at the present moment he is still carrying on his priestly ministry of praying for those for whom he died.

He is great also in the number of the saved. I know in Believers Chapel you are inclined to think if you listen to me very long that in the final analysis there is going to be a little company of people in heaven that perhaps two thirds of whom have attended Believers Chapel [Laughter] during the times down here on the earth. And I know that in the Bible it is true the saved are looked at as few. The way is broad that leads to destruction and the way is narrow that leads to life and it is our Lord himself who said, “Few there be that find it.” But that is a proportionate thing. Heaven is going to be peopled with many, he shall justify many. He shall declare righteous many. Heaven is going to be full of people.

There are going to be countless multitudes in heaven, because the elect of God are many. In fact, a multitude which no man could number, of every tribe and kindred and tongue and nation they shall all be there and all of the voices of this countless multitude shall glorify the Son of God.

He is great in the estimation of his people too. You know if we were to stop at this point and I were to say, “Let’s have a testimony meeting and everybody say what you can say about Jesus Christ and I’ll begin.” And then along about January the second when I finish [Laughter] someone else will want to stand up and you will begin to extol the glories of the Son of God and you will be saying things that I never said. And when you get through I’ll raise my hand and say, “I’d like to say some more.” And this would go on and on and on for all of us have our own estimates of the glories of the Son of God. And some of those estimates are peculiar to us because they are things that he has done for me and for you that he has not done for anybody else. And throughout all of the ages of eternity the saints shall be extolling the glories of the Son of God for he is great, great in the estimation of his people, great also in the fact that he shall bear the glory of the throne. That of course is especially stressed here. It says he shall be called the Son of the Highest and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And there is going to be upon this earth a kingdom in which the Lord Jesus shall rule and reign. And he shall sit upon that throne of David, he shall rule over the house of Jacob and those who belong to him shall share in that wonderful rule.

I am constantly surprised that people can read the Bible and do not see that our Lord is to have a kingdom upon this earth. I do not see how it is possible to freely read the word of God and not come to that conclusion. I think of a story which I read almost twenty-five years ago of a conversation that took place between a Jewish man who had studied a little bit of the New Testament and a Christian clergyman who was a believer in Jesus Christ but was an amillennialist. That is, he did not believe that there would be an earthly kingdom in the future. And he was trying to get the Jewish man to believe in the

virgin birth of Jesus Christ. And the Jewish man turned to Luke chapter 1, verse 32 and he asked the clergyman, he said, “Do you believe that what is here written about the Messiah is to be literally accomplished, that God is going to give unto him the throne of his father David?” and the Christian minister said, “No I do not. I rather take it to be a figurative language, descriptive of Christ’s spiritual reign over the church.” Then replied the Jew, “Neither do I believe literally verse 31 in which it is stated that ‘a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son and they shall call his name Jesus.’ I rather take this to be merely a figurative manner of describing the remarkable character for purity which the Son of God, according to this text, shall have. But why” the Jew continued, “do you take verses 32 and 33 figuratively, while you believe implicitly that verse 31 is to be fulfilled literally?” And the clergyman replied, “I believe in the virgin birth because it is a fact.” And the Jew said, “Ah, I see the difference. You believe in Scripture because it is a fact, I believe in Scripture because it is the word of God.” And the Jewish man had overthrown the Christian clergyman.

He shall be great in his kingdom, great in his throne. But not only there, he shall be great throughout all the ages of eternity. And one of the prayers that Jesus prayed was, “Father, I will that those whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory.” And the prayer shall be answered and we who have believed in him shall be with him throughout the kingdom days and throughout the ages of eternity, beholding his glory. And as a matter of fact, at the present time, when a man passes out of this earthly existence into the presence of the Lord, he immediately comes to understand the glory of Jesus Christ in a way that he never possibly could while upon the earth.

Last night I was reading a book, an old book which I have, it was issued in 1795. It’s written by Isaac Watts, one of the great independent ministers of his day. It’s called *The Glory of Christ*, and it’s a remarkable treatise on the glory of Jesus Christ. But you know, I don’t know the precise year that Isaac Watts died, it was in the 18th Century. But if I had been in heaven when Isaac Watts arrived and I went up to Mr. Watts as he arrived

in heaven and I would say to him, “Now Mr. Watts I just want to say to you I enjoyed the ministry of your book *The Glory of Christ* while I was on the earth” he’d say, “Ssh, don’t mention it in heaven, don’t mention it.” He’d said, “I’d love to be able to go back down there and take some of the best pages that I ever wrote and rewrite them.” Because he’d learned more in a few moments in heaven about the glory of Jesus Christ than he did in all of his best moments of the study of holy Scripture. Jesus Christ shall be great, great in his offices, great in the number of the saved, great in his achievements, great in the estimation of his people, great in his kingdom, great throughout the ages of eternity. Now that’s message enough isn’t it?

But the angel doesn’t stop here, for Mary says, “Gabriel, how, how? Tell me how. I don’t know a man.” And so then there follows this wonderful explanation of the virgin birth, which doesn’t completely satisfy us because it doesn’t tell us a lot of things that we would like to know. And this morning after I finished expounding this text, and I was standing out in the hall, a young lady came up to me and said, “I would like to ask you a question about that.” And she proceeded to ask me a question which is not covered by our text. There are just some things that the text does not say, for we read in the New Testament, “Great is the mystery of Godliness.” And we shall never fully understand how our Lord Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary, but the angel gives us some interesting information.

Now I want you to notice as you read this first chapter that Luke especially, has designed to show us the contrast between the birth of John, the great forerunner, and Jesus. The same angel Gabriel comes to make the announcements to each. They are alike in this, that when he comes to Zacharias he says, “Fear not Zacharias.” When he came to Mary he said, “Fear not Mary.” When he came to Zacharias and announced the birth of the forerunner he said, “He shall be great before the Lord.” And when he spoke of Jesus he said, “He shall be great.” He said about John the Baptist, “John the Baptist shall be full of the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb.” But when he spoke to Jesus he

said he shall not simply be full of the Spirit from his mother’s womb, he shall be conceived by the Holy Spirit. And when he spoke of John as the forerunner he spoke of our Lord as the Son of God, “that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called Son of God,” but how?

Well I think we can see from the 35th verse that the Father is the father of the human nature of our Lord by the Spirit. And I wish I had time to expound this in some detail because there are certain nuances of the thought that ought to be made plain. But simply spoken, the words of our text say that the Holy Spirit shall fall upon Mary suddenly and irresistibly. I gather that from the fact that these Greek words that are translated here, “come upon” and “overshadow” are words that are used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in contexts that suggest the coming of a whirlwind, that suggest the stirring up of a man to a fit of jealousy, and which also in the case of the overshadowing, suggest the hovering of the Shekinah glory of God over the tabernacle. And so it appears that in answer to Mary’s question, Gabriel said, “the Holy Spirit Mary, is to come upon you suddenly and irresistibly, like the stirring up of a fit of jealousy in that sudden and irresistible nature of jealousy, he’s to come upon you like a whirlwind, he is to overshadow you like the presence of God overshadowed the tabernacle so that that holy thing that shall result from the work of God shall be a divine work. It is the product of the Holy Spirit.” Campbell Morgan says in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, “It was the touch of God upon the simple life that made it forever sublime.”

And so the Holy Spirit shall come upon Mary, the power of the highest shall overshadow her and the result of the working of God shall be the product of an embryo which shall ultimately issue in the mature Son of God. And so the Holy Spirit is the one who vitally energizes the womb’s embryo. And I think it is right for us to say that at every stage of this union that was produced it was the product of the Holy Spirit in the truest sense. So at the beginning, the union of deity with humanity was embryonic, then it was fetal, then it was infantile, then it was the union of childhood, then it was the union of youth, and

lastly it was the union of manhood so that Jesus has a perfect human nature. It is probably incorrect for us to speak about the virgin birth in the fullest sense. Jesus was born just as you and I are born. We really should speak about the virgin conception, for it was in the conception of our Lord that the miraculous and supernatural took place.

Now I think we can say another thing here. I think we can say then, that it is not correct for us to refer to Mary as the mother of God. Mary was the mother of the material, not of the moral nature of our Lord. In a moment she will say, “God my savior.” It is obvious I think then, that Mary is not immaculately conceived, she is not the mother of God. But, did not Mary conceive? Yes, we do read, “Thou shalt conceive in thy womb.” Does not the Apostle’s Creed say that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary? How then can we read here that Mary conceived? Well I think it is right for us to say that Mary conceived, and I think it is right for us to say that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was the active, efficient cause of our Lord’s conception. Mary is the passive material cause. And the result is that when Jesus Christ was asked the question, “Who is your mother?” he said, “Mary” and Mary was truly his mother. Mary was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, and he was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, but preserved by the Holy Spirit, supernaturally, from the sin principle that dwelt within her. And I think we can also say that by this virgin conception a fit body was received by our Lord in order that there might be a fit tabernacle for the holy Son of God.

Now when we talk about the virgin birth, of course, there immediately arises the question, can we believe it? For just a few moments let me suggest to you reasons why we can believe the virgin birth account. In the first place I shall like to begin with a fact, acknowledged by those who do not believe in the virgin birth as well as by those who do believe it. And that is this; the early church believed in the virgin birth, that is evident. We have it in the New Testament records. There is no question about that the early church believed in the virgin birth. We can point to historical records not only of the

New Testament but records of the earliest part of the 2nd Century in which Christians referred to the virgin birth and their belief in it. In fact some of them point out that it was one of the things that it was important to believe. So the belief in the virgin birth is a fact. Well now if that is true then we have two possible explanations, ultimately. One, that belief was wrong, because the virgin birth is not a fact. Or, that belief was right because the virgin birth is a fact. And we cannot say, honestly, and face the evidence, we cannot say, “I do not believe in the virgin birth” if those who were closest to the scene best able to analyze and examine the facts and the accounts did believe. We are responsible if we say it was not true to give an explanation of why they were deceived. Now that has been attempted. It has been said that this was a myth of Jewish derivation. The striking thing that refutes that is the fact that there is no record in Palestinian Judaism at the time of our Lord of any Jewish person who interpreted the Isaiah passage in chapter 7, verse 14 of a virgin birth of the Messiah. It was unknown in Judaism. There are others who say, “Well it must have been a pagan derivation,” but there was a barrier between the Jews of our Lord’s day and the pagan world that was as deep as the barrier between Texas and Oklahoma, [Laughter] except worse.

Further, the accounts of the virgin birth are most clearly found not in the pagan parts of the New Testament, not in the Gentile parts, that would be better to say. Not in the Gentile parts of the New Testament, but in the Jewish parts of the New Testament, in the Gospel of Matthew, a book written by a Jew for the Jews, in the Gospel of Luke in the first chapter. And anyone who has ever read these chapters in the Greek text know that they rest heavily upon syntactic structure and idiom. Luke got these birth accounts from Jewish people. And his style with chapter 3, verse 1 is quite different from the style of these two chapters. Luke did his research in Jewish sources and there was the account of the virgin birth.

There are some who like to say, “Well you see the early church wanted to popularize its leader,” and so since Pythagoras and Caesar Augustus and Plato were great characters in

history to whom supernatural births had been attributed, it was only natural that the church should do this. But who would want to compare the truth about the conception of the birth of Caesar Augustus? Herod's mother visited the temple of Apollo and there she was visited by a serpent and the fruit of the union of the mother of Caesar Augustus and the serpent was Caesar Augustus. Who would want to compare that with the story of the New Testament records? In Greek mythology Palas Athena, the goddess of the Greeks, jumped fully armed out of the head of Zeus, and if the Christians were seeking to popularize their truth by inventing a sensational account of the origin of their leader, they surely did a very poor job of it in giving us an account of a woman who was in a manger with a few shaggy shepherds standing around and a little babe placed in that manger. That surely would not compete with the sensational accounts of the origins of the gods. No, the only thing that satisfies the facts is that the virgin birth is a fact. Early literature attests it, the old Roman confession attests to it, Justin Martyr in the 2nd Century not only believed it but defended it, Ignatius spoke of it as one of the mysteries to be shouted aloud and he died in 117 A.D. as a martyr. The New Testament accounts are independent, we have Matthew's account. We have Luke's account. We have a statement by Paul in Galatians 4:4, which is a strange statement if Jesus was born as other men were born and the greatest miracle of all, the historic Jesus Christ. As Albert McClain used to like to say so pointedly, “The miracle of a sinless life in the moral realm is a greater miracle than the miracle of a virgin birth in the biological realm. We have never seen a man like Jesus of Nazareth and this unique life must have a unique origin.”

It is customary sometimes for people to say, “Well this account must have been interpolated into our records here,” and then we are asked as New Testament scholars to answer that. Well, I think that it was Gresham Machen who was approached by a woman once and asked for the best argument against theosophy. And he said, “Madam, the best argument against theosophy is that there is no argument in its favor.” And when we consider the claims that the account of the virgin birth was interpolated into Luke chapter

1 for example, the best argument against it is that there is absolutely no argument for it. There is no text that shows that, it is purely a product of a feral imagination of a man unwilling to accept the supernatural. And if this were taken out of Luke chapter 1 what a let down we would have. John the Baptist supernaturally the product of the work of God for an old man and a barren wife are able to conceive naturally by the power of God, and then, there should be recorded for us the normal birth of Jesus. What a let down. It was obvious that John's birth is the prelude to something that is considered even more remarkable. And to extract the virgin birth from that chapter leaves it a dull and uninteresting chapter.

In the final analysis, as you probably know, the credibility of the virgin birth rests upon the miraculous. In a final analysis God is the miracle. He is not imprisoned within natural processes. The simplest things we do not understand. I am looking at that electric light. Everyone in this room thinks he understands it. Well I understand electricity. I know that if I go over to a switch and flip the switch that light will go off. And I know if I turn the switch it will come on. But if I were really a scientist, and knew the proper questions to ask, I could keep asking you questions until finally you would have to say, the greatest scientist, “We have we do not understand beyond that.” And every scientist in this room knows that that is absolutely true. But we believe it. We believe in electricity, but we do not completely understand it. We shall never, probably, completely understand it, for the secret of the universe rests with God.

In the final analysis it is a fact that rests upon God, this virgin birth. Amid a God that mystery supreme, that cause uncaused, all other wonders cease, nothing is marvelous for him to do. Deny him, all his mystery besides. Mary knew it was a problem. That's why she said, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” And the angel comforted her by saying, “Now Mary, your cousin Elisabeth,” you remember she's the one that is barren, “she's six months pregnant.” By the way, you'll notice the first thing Mary did was take a

trip to see. [Laughter] And she was six months pregnant, not one month, so you could be sure and see it Mary. But then he added, “With God, nothing shall be impossible.”

And so I come back to the question with which I began, “Who are you and what have you sacrificed? Who are you?” “I am the one who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary.” “Who are you?” “I am the good shepherd.” “What have you sacrificed?” “I have laid down my life for the sheep.” The reason that Jesus Christ has come born of a virgin is that he might not be touched with our sin and that he might be the perfect substitute for us upon the cross at Calvary and dying for our sins by his mighty power as the God man deliver us from the greatness of our ruin and the greatness of our sin with a great salvation, for he shall be great.

There are four ways for God to make a human body. He can make a human body with a man and with a woman, as I and as you were made. He can make a human body without a man or a woman, as he made Adam. He can make a man without a woman, as Eve. He can make a woman without a man, as Eve was made. And he can certainly make a human body without a man, as Jesus Christ was made.

I must confess, when I come to this point I want to stop debating and arguing, and I want to bow down and adore. “Let us go even unto Jerusalem and see this thing which has come to pass,” the shepherds said. And so let’s with the shepherds and the wise men bow down before him who came that we might become the son’s of God. Shepherds, with your staves and shaggy coats, move over. Wise man, with your gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, move over please. Wondrous star with your guiding radiance that has brought these men to the birth place of our Lord, move over and make room for me. Who is he? The good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. No wonder Gabriel said he was great. Join the voices of the angelic hosts and the redeemed of the ages singing glory and hallelujah to the Lamb whose glory is the light of heaven itself and who shall reign for ever and ever and ever.

Would you like to share in the glory of the Son of God? It's a simple matter. All you need do is recognize that he is the one conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, who went to a cross and cried out, “My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?” and then in the achievement of his great salvation, “It is finished.” And if you hang upon him, not trusting the church, not trusting your good works, not trusting your education, not trusting your culture, not trusting anything else but Jesus of Nazareth, who is conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, Son of the highest, Son of God. In that moment of faith, God gives you a new life. You are born again. You become part of that heavenly company who shall share in the greatness of the Son of God.

For a few moments, before we stand for the benediction, will you not bow your head with me and if God is speaking to you, will you not speak with him about your relationship to Jesus Christ? Who is he? What has he sacrificed? The answer is plain. May God help you to respond. Let's be quiet for a moment before the benediction. Now may we stand.

[Prayer] Now unto him who is able to guard us from stumbling and to present us before the presence of his glory to his own exceeding joy, to the only wise God...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]