

## **6<sup>th</sup> July 2025, Reflection – The Creed (4): ‘...conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of Mary’ ONLINE**

Church buildings are full of symbols and imagery. Whenever schools come to visit, I get them looking for symbols. We usually start with the main one – the cross – the universal symbol for Christians everywhere. We may also think about others – the fish, the dove symbolising the Holy Spirit, the various symbols of the four gospel writers (in order – a man, lion, bull, eagle) or even looking for triangles and threes as symbols of the Trinity.

There’s one symbol, though, which is less well known – indeed I wasn’t aware of it until recently. You’ll find it in the windows at both St Mary’s and All Saints – **SHOW PICTURE 1, KEEP ON SCREEN**. Here’s Jesus represented in each window, and you’ll notice that he’s framed by what looks like a pair of brackets. Those brackets are there for a reason. Imagine two overlapping circles – **SHOW PICTURE 2** – and that these circles represented the two natures of Jesus – human and divine. The overlap between the two symbolises that Jesus was both human and divine – **BACK TO PICTURE 1 AGAIN** – and *that’s* why he sits between them. Jesus Christ, Son of God – the human rescuer and the divine Son – fully human, fully divine. **BACK TO MATT ON SCREEN**.

The dual nature of Jesus is our theme for today. We’re covering the content of the Creed through the summer, and last week we focused on the identity of Jesus – specifically his three most important titles, or names: Christ, Son and Lord. **This week is really about *why* Jesus can be all of those things – it’s because he is both fully human and fully divine.** Not half and half, or mostly one and part of the other, but fully both. It’s a mystery, but it’s a profoundly important mystery, which sits at the heart of everything we believe as Christians. It’s like the foundations of a huge building – you can’t see them, but without them, the building would be sunk – quite literally. In this case, the big edifice is the Church, the place where God dwells by his Spirit – and the foundation is the perfectly integrated humanity and divinity of Jesus.

***Why? Well it comes down to this. Unless Jesus is divine he can’t undertake our rescue mission at all; but unless he’s human he can’t take our place and win our freedom.***

The author of the letter to the Hebrews makes this very point: Jesus ‘shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.’ The author goes on to say: ‘For this reason, he had to be made like them, fully human in every way.’ Note: not just some ways, or lots of ways – but every way. A real, flesh and blood, normal person. Why? ‘...in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.’

Jesus needed to be human in order to act, as the letter to the Hebrews says, as priest and sacrifice. And again, it’s extraordinary that he is *both*. He is both the intermediary (the priest), but also the very creature whose death puts things right (the atoning sacrifice) – or as John says, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

But God’s people already had a detailed and thorough system of sacrifices – why does Jesus have to come at all? The author of Hebrews goes on to say that these sacrifices were imperfect – that’s why a perfect sacrifice was needed. And the only perfect being is God. So, God has to come to be the perfect priest and the perfect sacrifice.

This is ultimately the message of the Old Testament prophets. As God’s people’s disobedience becomes ever more entrenched, it becomes clear that **God’s rescue mission can’t be achieved by a great human being. God has to come, himself, to put things right.** The great prophet Ezekiel receives a revelation about God coming to shepherd the flock himself. And Isaiah makes this promise (that God was going to come to earth) much more concrete: the Messiah would come as a special child who would be called Mighty God and Everlasting Father (that’s the one we often read at Advent). In another prophecy, this special child was called ‘Immanuel’, which means ‘God with us.’

It is this passage that the angel shares with Joseph in his famous dream in Matthew chapter 1. After centuries of waiting, the rescuer was finally coming – and Joseph was told to name his name Jesus, which means ‘God saves’ – saves us from what? ‘Save us from our sins.’ But this is not just a human rescuer, a political or military leader – it will be God with us – Emmanuel.

**And to demonstrate the divine and human nature of this anointed one, the ultimate rescuer, he would need a unique birth – human and divine parentage.** Mary was the human mother, but it was the Holy Spirit who would cause her to be pregnant – God would be the Father, quite literally. Joseph was given the remarkable task of being the human step-parent, if you will – but the birth Father was God Almighty.

The nativity story, as it unfolds, makes this dual nature of Jesus very clear – he is born in the city of the King, David’s home, but angels sing at his birth and the nations pay tribute. Or as St John reflects on the meaning of Emmanuel: ‘the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.’

The Church wrestled with this glorious mystery for a long time – but in the end, the Creed settled the question: Jesus was fully both – human and divine. In the long version:

‘eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.’

Or, as the Apostles Creed very helpfully summarises, our title for today: ‘who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.’ Fully God, fully human.

**Why does all this matter?** Let me offer three short, but profoundly important reasons: **first, it matters for our salvation.** Unless Jesus is God, he cannot be the perfect sacrifice. But unless he’s human, he cannot be a sacrifice at all. Our forgiveness, our salvation is complete and total because Jesus is both fully God and fully human. Hallelujah!

**Second, it matters for our worship.** Deep worship rests on a deep grasp of who we’re really worshipping. We need to fall on our knees in awe of the glorious, risen, ascended, Lord Jesus, ruler of creation, the alpha and the omega, who holds the keys of death and hell. *And* we need to lift our hands in praise to Jesus the gentle Saviour, the Lamb who lived with us, loved us and gave himself for us. Majesty and intimacy. A majesty and intimacy grounded on Jesus – fully God and fully human.

**Finally, it matters for our lifestyle, our whole lives.** Jesus as human is *our example* – we live like he lived, and love like he loved. Jesus as God is *our strength, our shield, our ultimate authority*. We serve him first. Again, we need to hold both things together. The Lordship of Jesus without the lifestyle of Jesus is harsh, the clanging cymbal. The lifestyle of Jesus without the Lordship of Jesus risks bending to the culture on difficult issues. But the lifestyle and the Lordship of Jesus is dynamite – dynamic, mature, grounded faith.

So, it turns out those brackets are quite important after all! And Jesus sits right in the centre – fully God and fully human. A Jesus whose salvation is perfect, whom we worship with majesty and intimacy, whose Lordship and whose lifestyle directs and centres our lives. **A Jesus whose identity lasts for all eternity – the same yesterday, today and forever.**

**I believe in Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. Amen.**