

Introduction

- Greetings.
- Our series began on the very first page of the Old Testament, where we saw the Spirit of God hovering over the universe in its raw state.

Genesis 1:2 NKJV

² The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

- The earth, we are told, was without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep.
- And the Father spoke. And what He spoke was Words. We associated those words with the Son. And the Words that were spoken were carried along by breath. We associated that breath with the Spirit.
- So, on the very first page of Scripture, we see the Holy Trinity operating in absolute unity, speaking the vastness of the created universe into existence.
- It was a speech act of astronomical proportions!
- Today, we turn our attention to some of the opening pages of the New Testament, to [Luke 1](#).
- Here, we see the same Spirit in the exact same posture. The Spirit is hovering again.

- But the scale has flipped. His focus is no longer on the infinite vastness of an unformed universe. He is no longer poised to begin flinging stars across the universe.
- He is poised to begin work on a single microscopic cell inside the womb of an obscure teenage virgin in an obscure village called Nazareth.
- To the human eye, nothing was happening.
- There are no cosmic explosions, no lightning strikes, no peals of thunder, no visible legions of angels.
- Yet what takes place in Nazareth totally eclipses the majesty of Genesis.
- In Genesis, the Holy Spirit formed a physical cosmos out of nothing so that man could dwell with God.
- In [Luke 1](#), the Holy Spirit initiates a new creation at the microscopic level—conceiving a real human nature from Mary’s flesh—so that God could dwell with man.

Let’s read the passage together.

Luke 1:26–28 NKJV

²⁶ Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name *was* Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!”

Luke 1:29–33 NKJV

²⁹ But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great,

and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

Luke 1:34–38 NKJV

³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*” ³⁶ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible.” ³⁸ Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

- Now, friends, I must tell you that I approach the task of preaching this morning with an immense sense of trepidation.
- I do so because the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ is a marvellous, majestic, magnificent, and unfathomable mysterious miracle.
- Many theologians are happy to stop there.
- To attempt to understand or explain the incarnation is to tread on holy ground.
- Attempts at explaining the incarnation have generated more heresies and doctrinal controversies than perhaps any other single doctrine in the history of the church.
- And so, this morning I tread very lightly and I speak very carefully and reverently, praying that the Lord would guard against any slip of the tongue.
- If I make a slip, call me out. I will own it and I will apologise publicly.
- That said, there are 2 things that I see the Spirit doing in this passage that I would like to highlight this morning.

- Both of those things have parallels in the Old Testament.

1. The Genesis of the Second Adam: The Work of Formation

- Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her that she will conceive and will give birth to a son.
- Understanding something of how human biology works, Mary responds by asking,
- “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”
- That is, she was still a virgin and had not yet had physical relations with Joseph.
- Gabriel explains that physical relations will not be necessary because God will work a miracle in her.
- The Person, the Active Agent who will perform this miracle, is none other than the Holy Spirit.
- Gabriel says that the way in which He will do this is by coming upon her and overshadowing her.
- Now, friends, the language that Gabriel chooses is saturated with creation imagery.
- Just as the Spirit moved over the dark, lifeless void in [Genesis 1](#) to bring forth physical life, He now moves over the dark, lifeless void of a virgin’s womb in [Luke 1](#) to bring forth another form of life.
- Now, this language of *creation* and the *forming of life* will make some of us uncomfortable — as it should!

- To argue that Jesus was created is to commit the heresy of **Arianism**, a teaching from the 3rd and 4th centuries that Jesus was not co-eternal with the Father but that He was created at a fixed point in time.
- Let me make it abundantly clear that I am not saying that the Spirit created the Son.
- The Son was pre-existent and co-eternal, along with the other members of the trinity.
- So what is happening here? Why all this talk about creation?
- Well, quite frankly, if there was no physical conception, a miracle needed to take place; a body needed to come from somewhere!
- Now, as modern evangelicals, we seem to prefer for the doctrine of the incarnation to be couched in the language of a “glorious condescension.” We are comfortable with the idea that the Son of God condescended and that He “assumed a human nature.” That is, He “took His humanity upon Himself.”
- However, while we are comfortable with the idea that Jesus somehow took on flesh, what we do not seem to talk about much is where that flesh actually came from.
- It hurts our brains to think about this stuff!
- Since we cannot really explain what happened, we are happy to conclude that God just “somehow became a man.”
- But Luke makes it very clear that it is the Holy Spirit who is the Active Agent making all of this possible.
- So, the Holy Spirit acts as the Divine Architect of a new creation.
- He does not create the Son. The Son already exists.

- Rather, the Holy Spirit miraculously acted upon Mary's ovum at the single-cell level, so that true human conception occurred.
- It is important to clarify that we are talking here about a single-cell — the zygote or fertilized ovum — which then developed through normal human gestation into a foetus and a newborn.
- Why?
- Because If the Holy Spirit had created a fully formed foetus and placed it inside Mary, Mary would have been merely an incubator or surrogate. This was an ancient error (often linked to **Valentinian Gnosticism**), which claimed that Jesus passed through Mary "like water through a pipe" without taking anything from her.
- The early church fathers strongly rejected this doctrine, arguing that Mary was a genuine mother to Jesus and that He was a genuine descendant of David.
- So, the Spirit acts upon Mary's very substance, forming what will, in time, develop into the body of Christ. At the same time, the Father says, "Go!" At the same time, the eternal Son condescends and assumes this miraculously fashioned zygote as His own.
- While the bible does not explicitly say that these things happened simultaneously, we must make clear that they did to guard against the 5th century heresy of **Nestorianism**, which was the idea that Christ was not one divine person possessing two natures but that He was two distinct persons.
- This prompted the church to develop the doctrine of the **hypostatic union**, which argues that Jesus' human nature never existed as an independent human *person* for even a nanosecond before being assumed by the Son. Instead, at the moment of conception, the Son adds a human nature to Himself.

- With the consequence, just as we saw in the beginning, where all three members of the trinity were acting in unison for the creation of the world, here we see again a glorious trinitarian act!
- This brings us to the second thing that the Spirit does, and the second Old Testament parallel.

2. The Shekinah in the Womb: The Work of Preservation

- The bible tells us that every human child descended from Adam by ordinary generation inherits a corrupted human nature.
- This presents us with a problem.
- How could the Son of God, Who needed to remain sinless so that He might make restitution for our sin, take on this humanity without being contaminated?
- Roman Catholics hold to the doctrine of the immaculate conception, which is the idea that the Virgin Mary was free from original sin from the very first moment of her life in her mother's womb. God, they believe, gave her this special grace ahead of time because she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus. If Mary was sinless, then the Christ could be conceived in her womb and not be contaminated.
- However, there are several reasons why this doctrine is untenable.
 - Firstly, it lacks biblical support and is absent from early church teaching.
 - Secondly, it directly contradicts the biblical doctrine of original sin.
 - Thirdly, if Mary was exempt from original sin, she will also have been exempt from its effects. She would not have died a physical death. Her mortality confirms a fallen nature.

- Fourthly, if we demand a sinless mother for a sinless son, we equally demand sinless grandparents and ancestors right back to the beginning.
- I think it is safe to say that Mary was not sinless.
- So, if Mary was not sinless, how did God ensure that Christ would not be contaminated?
- This, friends, is the second work of the Spirit in the incarnation of Christ.
- Gabriel tells Mary that the power of the Highest will *overshadow* her.
- The word Gabriel uses for “overshadow”—*episkiazo*—is not accidental. It is the exact word used in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of [Exodus 40:34–35](#).
- In Exodus, after Moses and Israel completed the construction of the Tabernacle in the desert, a miraculous event occurred: the cloud of God’s glory descended and *overshadowed* the tent.
- The presence of God filled the sanctuary with such holy intensity that not even Moses could enter.
- The overshadowing of the Spirit rendered that tent a consecrated, untouchable sanctuary where absolute Holiness could dwell in the midst of a sinful people.
- In [Luke 1](#), Gabriel tells Mary that the power of the Highest will *overshadow* her.
- He then uses a conjunctive adverb — the word *therefore* — to explain that there are 2 consequences for the one who will be born: (1) He will be holy, and (2) He will be called the Son of God.
- What is happening here?

- Gabriel is using Old Testament imagery to convey a point.
- Mary's womb will become the new, living Tabernacle.
- At the precise moment of conception, as the Spirit descends upon Mary's womb, He overshadows it with Shekinah glory, not just forming but also guarding and preserving what will become Christ's human body from the contamination of sin at its point of origin.
- The Spirit ensures that when the Son of God assumes His human nature, He assumes it in an immaculate, sinless, and pristine condition—fully human, yet entirely untainted by our fallenness.

Conclusion

- Friends, as I was trying to show last week, the Spirit of God is not just some impersonal force that shows up occasionally.
- He has been active throughout redemptive history and we see continuity and consistency in His personhood and His works.
- In Genesis, He hovered over the vast cosmos and formed a physical world.
- In Exodus, He hovered over the Tabernacle and filled it with glory.
- In [Luke 1](#), He hovered over a virgin's womb, facilitating the incarnation of the very Son of God, the One who would be the ultimate Spirit-filled man, the perfect prototype of what it means to be a holy temple of God.
- And here is the wonder for us today: The Spirit did not do this so that we would merely admire Him from afar.
- Through the work of Christ, that very same Spirit now cleanses and indwells every single person who trusts in Him. You are sitting here today as a living temple of the Spirit, not just because of the work that Christ did, but also

because of the work that the Spirit did in preparing the way for Him to do that work.

- And that is all this finite servant of God has the boldness to say.

Communion

Prayer for the body: Dave James

Prayer for the cup: Jon Craig

Benediction

Philippians 2:5–8 NKJV

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.