

God is Near Us

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God with Us and God among Us

Introduction

- Nicene Creed has an essential character, namely saying 'yes' to the living God.
- What does it mean to call God a 'living God?' "It means that He has shown Himself to us. We cannot define Him in anyway we like, He has defined Himself and now stands before us as Lord..."
- The heart of all our creeds is our yes to Jesus Christ.
- "By the power of the Holy Spirit He was born of the Virgin Mary." This is the focal point of the Creed because "the heavens, the veil behind which God is secluded, are swept aside and the mystery touches us directly. The distant God becomes our God, becomes Emmanuel, God with us.

Grammar and Content in the Sentence from the Creed

- Who is the "He?" Christ, the only Son of God, true God from true God, one in being with the Father. The "He" is God Himself, Father Son and Holy Spirit who all play a part in the Incarnation of the Word. (13)
- Mary is the means, the doorway, through which God steps into human history. Through Mary, God doesn't simply observe the course of human events but rather becomes an active agent from within. (13)
- Mary places herself entirely at the disposal of God the Father's will. Our Lady's 'yes' provides a body, a human nature for God the Son and Mary becomes a living tabernacle. (14)

The Biblical Background to the Sentence

Matthew 1:18-25

- Matthew is writing to a Jewish, Jewish Christian audience and wants to show the continuity of the Old and New Covenants. (14)
- Matthew places **St. Joseph** in the foreground to show that Jesus is the son of David, who fulfills the promise God made to David (Psalm 132:11). Jesus transforms David's kingdom into God's Kingdom, from Israel to the whole world. The genealogy shows the whole course of history, with all of it's brightness and darkness was leading up to and preparing the way for the coming of Christ. (15)
- Matthew shows that **Our Lady** also fulfills the Old Testament. Isaiah, giving King Ahaz a sign of God's favor, foretells that a virgin will conceive. We don't know how that actually played out in the context of the original prophesy, however the promise also reached far into the future... like a star of hope pointing into the unknown. (15)
- Joseph shows God's faithfulness to Israel, Mary, His faithfulness to the world. (17)

Luke 1:26-38

- The word “overshadow” is used to describe the Holy Spirit’s action upon Mary and is also used in the OT to describe the holy cloud that rested over the Tent of Meeting to show God was present (Ex. 40:34). Mary is the new Ark of the Covenant and Tent. God lives in Mary’s “yes.” (17)
- Luke, in other places shows Mary as the new temple and ark. Zephaniah 3:14 speaks of the daughter of Zion being a dwelling place for God. (18)
- Church Fathers and early iconographers depict Mary as the living Church with St. Joseph as the high priest (bishop). St. Joseph is the head of the household and guardian of the sanctuary, viz. the Bride and God within her. (18)
- We see in the Annunciation that God asks man to consent, He does not dispose things as He wishes through His own power. (19)
- Since no one can choose or will their own conception free from sin, the Immaculate Conception shows that salvation was God’s initiative, “no human being can set in motion the process of salvation by his powers alone.” (19)

John’s Prologue (1:13ff)

1. “The Word was made flesh...”
 - We are so accustomed to hearing this phrase about the Word becoming flesh that we have lost the wonder and awe of its truth. (20)
 - This would have confounded both Jews and Greeks. It is an eternally “new” statement of faith because it’s something that man could not have devised but was planned and fulfilled by God. (20)
 - The Word becoming flesh (*sarx* in Greek) points forward to John 6 and the Bread of Life discourse when Christ says, “The Bread that I will give is my *flesh/sarx* for the life of the world. God the Son takes on flesh, offers that flesh on the Cross and then continues to feed us with the flesh in the Eucharist. (21)
 - God the Son becomes small, taking on the human nature of a child. The Logos (the Word) contracts, encompassing the whole of the Scriptures in this one short phrase (Jn.1:13) is contained the whole Gospel.
2. “... And pitched His tent among us.”
 - This refers back, once again to the Tent of Meeting in the Old Testament while the Hebrew people were on their way out of Egypt to the Holy Land.
 - The humanity of Christ is the new *tent/skene* where God dwells among His people in the desert of this earthly life.
3. Verse 13... Singular and Plural Versions
 - “But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, **who were born** not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God.”
 - Early copies of the Gospel have both versions, singular and plural “**who was/were** born of God...”

- The singular version hints at Jesus' miraculous conception in Mary's womb, which makes possibly *our* birth and the plural version of the verse in Baptism. Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit singularly, we (plural) are conceived and born by the power of the Holy Spirit in Baptism. (22-23)
- To be a Christian is more than just adopting certain religious notions and a moral code. It means being given divine life within us, sharing in God's divine life and being a part of a new creation which God is constantly bringing to completion with the prayers and presence of Our Lady. (23)

The Footprints of God

- "God is not tied down to stones but rather to living people. The yes of Mary opens for him the places where he can pitch his tent... she is the beginning of the Holy Church." (24)
- The Christian faith, as expressed in the Creed, is the spiritualization and purification of the longing for God expressed in the history of religions yearning for God's dwelling in the world. (24)
- Christians regard as holy those places where God became man and lived in this world (Nazareth, Bethlehem, Jerusalem...). We see in these places the footsteps of the Redeemer. (24)
- The patriarchs dug wells wherever they went in order to have water, the basic element of life. Jesus reveals Himself as living water to the Samaritan woman. (25)
- This text was given as an address in Loretto, where the Holy house is. On the back wall of the house, which is now a chapel, are the words... "Et Verbum Caro Factum Est." "And the Word became Flesh."