

Mary, One-flesh and God
A Mid-week Advent Sermon

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

When God instituted the holy estate of marriage, He blessed it as a separation and joining. In so doing, it is written, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) Man and woman separate from their parents, headship changes, authority shifts, and a new home is created. And the manifestation of the estate of marriage, a chief purpose for its institution, is the procreation of children. Man has a part to play in the creation, as in marriage man and wife are blessed to make another in their image.

This day and age, that doesn't always work out. Simply put, since the fall, not all marriages are blessed to bring forth children. Medically, the reasons are numerous, as one person or the other or both are unable to conceive, but they all boil down to one reason in the end: sin. Thankfully, God provides another purpose for marriage—mutual enjoyment and consolation—even as He also provides other means by which a childless couple can care for and raise children.

However, even in marriages that are able to conceive, sin plays a part in that conception. For one thing, there is pain in conception and child birth, as God had cursed the first woman. (cf. Genesis 3:16a) For another thing, there are complications, still, in conception and development of children, as they can be conceived and born with any number of maladies and deformities. But, most atrociously, this sin-sickness, which our Confessions call concupiscence, is passed on from father to child in conception, and the child is a sinner from the moment it is formed in the womb—a child made in the image and likeness of their parents. "I am a sinner like my father before me, and his father before him, and his father before him..."

Nevertheless, in marriage a man leaves his father and mother to be joined to his wife, and they become one flesh. That one-flesh union is found in their children. I'm not merely talking about the biological act that takes place in order to conceive a child, but that each child is an amalgamation of the traits, characteristics, personalities—the persons—of its parents. You have father and mother, and a one-flesh child that is of father and mother. They are part father and part mother. You hear it when onlookers coo over a child, "Ooooh, he's got his mother's eyes. He's got his father's nose."

When the woman was made of the rib of Adam, he exclaimed, "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." (Genesis 2:23) I suppose you could say that a woman can say something similar as she holds her newly born infant: "This child is flesh of my flesh." There is no doubt about it for her; the child she holds is from her and is flesh formed in her flesh—the child's flesh is her flesh and bone and blood.

When the virgin in Bethlehem asked the angel how she would conceive because she doesn't know a man, it was a question based on this estate and its blessing. It takes a man and a woman to make a baby, and the baby is the one-flesh result of the union in the holy estate of marriage. Gabriel says to Mary, "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." (Luke 1:35)

The Holy Spirit, the power of the highest, and the flesh of Mary...and from that is conceived the Holy One who will be called the Son of God. This is entirely flesh of Mary's flesh. Jesus receives no flesh from His Father, at least as much as we may assume based on this text. Spirit does not give way to flesh; the Spirit created the first flesh by the Word and act of the Father, when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26a), then took some of that red earth and formed the man from it, breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. (cf. Genesis 2:7) In Nazareth, it was different, though. God uses the procreative act to bring His Son into the flesh; in order to be one with you, Jesus had to be like you in every way, from conception to death. This is the Seed of the woman

being conceived (cf. Genesis 3:15), and God is joined to the flesh of Mary. Jesus is conceived and develops in the womb of His mother in a way like you were conceived and developed in the womb of your mother.

But, He has no earthly father. Joseph is encouraged to take the Child as his own, but the fact remains, Jesus has no earthly father. He cannot say that he is a sinner like his father before him, and his father before him, and his father before him, etc. In fact, Jesus is the very image of the Father. (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15) Jesus is that very thing which, by way of the fall of Adam has been lost for the generations since. He is, therefore, the second Adam. (cf. Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:45) Jesus is everything you were supposed to be in Paradise, but which was lost to you by way of the fall of Adam.

So, there can be no doubt: that which was conceived in the womb of Mary is true God—"God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God," God from eternity, the Son of God as the power of the Highest overshadowed the virgin in Bethlehem. And He is also true Man, flesh of His mother—flesh, bone, and blood like yours. We pull it out only once a year, but this is what you confess of Jesus on Holy Trinity Sunday when you speak these words from the Athanasian Creed:

[Jesus] is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man, born from the substance of His mother in this age: perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to His humanity. Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.

Jesus in one Christ by unity of person, fully God as of the nature of the Father and fully man, born of the substance of His mother. In Jesus, there is a one-flesh union going on in the womb of the virgin, as God unites with man—unites with you, dear hearer.

Jesus takes that flesh of His that is like yours to a hill outside of Jerusalem, where He sheds His blood like yours for your redemption and salvation. There, on a makeshift tree, He undoes the curse of the tree in the midst of the garden, and He makes it so that you, who do not know the fullness of the image of God, might receive Him who is the image of the living God. He unites with you in flesh like yours by way of His mother, in order that He might give that flesh over to death and unite you to Himself and His Father in heaven.

He does that by way of His Word. Therein, He speaks faith into you, giving you trust in Him over and above whatever trust you may want to place in yourself for redemption and salvation. He does that by way of Holy Baptism. Therein, He washes you clean from all of your sin, giving you the gift of the Holy Spirit who unites to you to bring you faith, forgiveness, life, and salvation—the merits won for you by Jesus on the tree of the cross.

Jesus does that especially in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. You hear it in the very name of the Sacrament. Communion speaks not only to the mystical union of Christ's body to bread and blood to wine, but to his very body and blood to you as you eat and drink that same bread and wine. There at the rail, as the dear Doctor Nagel would always say, you are bodied and bloodied together with Jesus, as you eat His body given over to death and drink His blood shed for remission. You are united in this eating and drinking to the suffering and death of the Holy One who is the Son of God.

Thank God for the one-flesh union that took place in the womb of the virgin. There, God took on the flesh of the virgin, the Son of God unites Himself to flesh like yours, and becomes for you the Second Adam. He conforms you to His image, He who is the very image of the living God, by forgiving you for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus.