

We usually just read verse 14 –

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

But when you read the whole chapter, the sign of Immanuel takes on new significance.

It’s a time of political turmoil,
with the whole Middle East in upheaval.
Sound familiar?

Everyone looks anxiously at the prospect of war –
because one sure result of war is famine.

With marauding armies pillaging the land, you can be sure that they will take your food,
and trample your fields –

and if you get called off to defend your country,
your family may not be able to get what is left of the harvest.

And if the invading army catches sight of your son or daughter –
well, we don’t like to think of the consequences!

Our situation today is not quite so dire – but we live in the same world:

We worry about the fiscal cliff – we might have a slight tax increase next year!
And we fear for our children’s safety from the occasional gunman who goes nuts.

But into this crazy, uncertain world,

Isaiah comes to king Ahaz and says, don’t be afraid – their plans will not stand.
And he tells Ahaz, “ask a sign.”

But Ahaz refuses and pretends to be pious: “I will not put the LORD to the test.”

And so God chooses the sign.

And the sign that God chooses is one that stands for all ages –

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”

Our world has gone crazy.

Whether it was the mad lust for power of the ancient kings,
or the mad lust for pleasure of today,
the world is not as it should be.

But into this world where nothing is as it should be,

God says, “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”

Talk about something that shouldn’t happen!

Virgins shouldn’t conceive!

But when she does, the child who is born shall be called Immanuel –
God with us.

Read Hebrews 2

Children, what temptations do you face?

Do you ever snatch a cookie when Mom isn't looking?
Are you sometimes tempted to hit your brother?
Do you sometimes want to lie and say that your sister did it—
when you know full well that she didn't?

How are you tempted?
Maybe your temptations are more passive:
are you tempted to just “forget” that Mom told you to clean your room.
Or you know that you really should let your brother play that game with you,
but it's easier without him...

Was Jesus ever tempted like that?
We don't know all the details of Jesus' childhood,
but we do know that Jesus endured all the same sorts of temptations that we do.
“He had to be made like his brothers in every respect.”
“He himself has suffered when tempted.”

So how does this work?
Jesus has survived all these temptations, and so can you!
Is that it?

NO!! That's not the point at all!
“Because he himself has suffered when tempted,
he is *able to help* those who are being tempted.”
When you are tempted to forget your God,
remember Jesus.
Because he is able to help!

That little lie that you told your mother—
maybe it wasn't a big issue.
It was just a little thing, right?
But in that moment when you lied,
you said, in effect, I don't want Jesus' help.

So – how does Jesus help?
He helps because he is our Redeemer.
He redeems us from the *guilt* of sin.
And he delivers us from the *power* of sin.
And he does this because of *who he is* as true God and true man.

I've given you the bulletin outline in the correct catechism order,

but for the purposes of preaching it,
we're going to take point 2 first!

Q. 22. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

A. Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

And to see how this happened, let's look at Luke 1
Read Luke 1:39-56

1. **“Conceived by the Power of the Holy Ghost, in the Womb of the Virgin Mary”
(Luke 1)**
 - a. **The Favored One (v26-38)**

How should we think about Mary?

Perhaps the better question is: do we ever think about Mary?

Protestants usually don't think much about Mary—except at this time of year!
And yet Mary's song clearly says that all generations will call her blessed.

We are commanded by the Word of God to call Mary “blessed”

So the question for us is *how* should we call Mary “blessed”?

We should start with Luke 1:28, where Gabriel says to Mary:

‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’

Now, if an angel of the Lord showed up and said this to you,
how would you respond?!

You might be “greatly troubled” and try to figure out what this means!

And Gabriel replied,

Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall call his name Jesus.*

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

*And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,
and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever,
and of his kingdom there will be no end.*

Mary has found favor with God.

We should not be slow to see the connections.

Noah “found favor” with God (same phrase in the LXX).

(The phrase is used 47 times in the LXX,

to speak of how one person “finds favor” in the sight of another).

In the same way that Noah was called to be a sort of “second Adam”
Mary was called to be a “second Eve.”
We don’t need to be afraid of saying that.
Eve was the mother of all living,
And because Mary is the mother of the life-giving Son of God,
and because he has adopted us as brothers,
Mary becomes the mother of all who have new life!

If we have been adopted as Jesus’ brothers,
and if the life of Jesus has been imparted to us,
and if that same Jesus was born of Mary,
then Mary is rightly considered our adoptive mother!

That *doesn’t* mean that you should go around praying to her!
But you do *honor* her as the one who was more highly favored by God
than any other woman in human history!

b. The Blessed One (v39-56)

Our gospel lesson for today shows how this worked in her own lifetime.
In verse 39, we hear that Mary arose *and went with haste into the hill country,
to a town in Judah,
and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.
And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.*

God had promised that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb (1:15).
John now demonstrates the presence of the Holy Spirit by leaping in his mother’s womb!
Notice that it was the voice of *Mary* that caused John to leap in the womb.

It does not say that the proximity of Jesus made John leap in the womb,
but it was the voice of Mary.

Certainly it was *because* Mary was bearing Jesus in her womb
that John leaped in Elizabeth’s womb,
but it was *Mary’s* voice that triggered the response.

When he heard the voice of the blessed virgin—
the one who was “greatly favored by God”—
the mother of our Lord—
he rejoiced.

When John heard Mary’s voice, he leaped in his mother’s womb,
and when Elizabeth heard Mary’s voice,
her response was the same:
*She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry,
‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!
And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?’*

Elizabeth marveled that such a blessed woman would visit her!

It was an old-fashioned custom that the greater should not visit the lesser—
rather, the lesser visits the greater!

And yet Mary did not exalt herself,
she showed respect to her older relative, and came to visit her.

*For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears,
the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*

*And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment
of what was spoken to her from the Lord.*

Three times Elizabeth declares Mary blessed.

She is blessed among women.

She is blessed because the fruit of her womb—our Lord Jesus Christ—is blessed.

And she is blessed because she believed the Word of the Lord.

1) We bless Mary because she is blessed among all women.

She alone was chosen to be the woman who bore the seed promised to Eve.

2) We bless Mary because she was the *Theotokos*—the God-bearer.

She bore in her womb the eternal Son of God as he became flesh and dwelt among us.

She is the only woman in human history who had one of the Trinity in her womb.

As the old hymn put it: “to show God’s love aright, she bore the world a savior”

Mary had a unique privilege:

she was the one woman who gave birth to the Seed of the Woman
that would crush the head of the serpent.

Even as the curse came upon the human race through the failure of a woman,
so also redemption comes to the human race through the faith of a woman.

3) And so we also bless Mary because she believed that there would be a fulfillment
of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

We bless her because of her uniqueness in salvation history (bearing the Son of God),
but also because she is an example of faith.

So while she is unique, she is also one of us.

She was one who believed God’s promises and faithfully walked before God.

Our catechism asks in question 21:

Q. 21. Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect?

A. The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

I want to take a moment to make sure that we understand this language of “nature” and “person.”

The Bible doesn't use this precise language,
but as the church wrestled with the question "who is Jesus?" in the 5th century,
we began to realize that we needed some way
to talk about the human and the divine in Jesus.

Perhaps the best way to do it is to ask some questions.

What do you think of these statements?

Mary gave birth to God.

God shed his blood for us on the cross.

A man sits at the right hand of the Father.

How about these?

It was Jesus' human nature that wept.

When Jesus said "not my will, but thine be done,"
it was his human nature that was speaking.

The divine nature in Jesus supported his human nature in bearing our sins.

It was Jesus' human nature that died on the cross,
while his divine nature remained in perfect harmony with the Father.

These last statements are all wrong.

Very wrong.

Because while they use the term "nature," these statements actually turn Jesus into two persons.

There is a very simple distinction between "nature" and "person."

Natures exist.

Persons act.

"Nature" refers to a set of properties or characteristics.

If you have a human nature, then you have a set of properties or characteristics
that pertain to all humans.

But natures don't do anything.

Rather, persons act according to their nature(s).

Think of it this way:

when was the last time that your nature did anything?

Yesterday, my nature took a walk.

NO!

My person took a walk—according to my nature which permits such activity!

Jesus is one person—

therefore there is one who acts in Jesus.

But Jesus has two natures—

therefore there are two sets of properties that his actions draw upon.

Therefore, Jesus wept.

It was his person that wept—according to the properties of his human nature.

Jesus died.

It was his person that died—according to the properties of his human nature.
Natures don't *do* anything.
Natures simply *are*.
Persons act—according to their nature(s).

Therefore that first set of statements

God was born of Mary,
God shed his blood for us on the cross,
A man sits at the right hand of God,
these are all true.

These refer to the person of Jesus Christ—a person who is both truly God and truly man.

There are several examples of this.

The most famous is Acts 20:28,

where Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to “care for the church of God,
which he obtained with his own blood.”

Paul speaks of God shedding his blood for us.

The full way of saying this would be,

“God shed his blood for us in Jesus Christ,

acting according to the properties of his human nature.”

But Paul says simply that God obtained the church with his own blood.

Likewise in Luke 1:43 Mary is called, “the mother of my Lord.”

Lord is one of the words for God (as Mary says three verses later,
“My soul magnifies the Lord.”)

The early church properly declared that Mary should be called the “God-bearer,”
because she truly gave birth to God (in Jesus Christ).

So what does all this mean?

This means that Jesus did not have a split personality.

He did not have two centers of activity that were trying to do two different things.

His two natures operated in perfect harmony,
because he was one person.

When Jesus said, “not my will, but thine be done,”

it was not as though his humanity was operating,
and his divinity was out to lunch.

It was the whole Christ who spoke—

in the anguish and suffering that was possible to him
because of the properties of his human nature.

When he said, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?!”

it was the whole Christ who spoke.

Hebrews 1-2 speaks of the deity and humanity of Christ,
and what that means for us.

Hebrews 1 points out that Jesus is the one through whom God created the ages,
He the very radiance of the glory of God,
and his inheritance is an eternal sonship,
in which he rules as king forever.

Hebrews 2 is all about how Jesus is greater than the angels
because he humbled himself, and became like us, lower than the angels.

In other words, Hebrews 1 is about how it is necessary for the Redeemer to be God.
Hebrews 2 is about how it is necessary for the Redeemer to be man.

2. “God and Man in Two Distinct Natures, and One Person, Forever” (Hebrews 2)

a. Why Must He Be a True and Righteous Man? (v10-13)

¹⁰ *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

Hebrews 2:10 says that “it is fitting”—in other words,
there is something appropriate about God making the champion of our salvation
perfect through suffering.

Why is it fitting for the founder (or champion) of our salvation
to be made perfect through suffering?

The apostle Paul often speaks of our union with Christ (how we are *in him*).

Hebrews starts by focusing on Christ’s union with us.

The Divine Son must be like us in all things.

In order for him to be a faithful and merciful high priest he must be like us in all things.

The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes this nicely:

Q16: Why must He be a true and righteous man?

A16: He must be a true man because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin; he must be a righteous man because one who is himself a sinner cannot pay for others.

You can see this in Hebrews 2:14.

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood,
he himself likewise partook of the same things,
that through death he might destroy the one who had the power of death.”

If the wages of sin is death – then I deserve death,
and so if I am to live, then someone needs to die in my place!

In verse 13, Hebrews quotes Isaiah 8.

¹³ *And again,*

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Hebrews 2 connects our readings from Isaiah 7 and from Luke 1.

In Isaiah 7-8 God reveals to Isaiah his purposes for the captivity of Israel by Assyria.

The northern kingdom of Israel will be carried away captive,

and the southern kingdom of Judah will be spared for a time.

And the signs of this are two sons: 1) the sign of “Immanuel” (God with us)

“The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name, “Immanuel”

and 2) in Isaiah 8 there was a second sign – a second son –

Maher-shalal-hashbaz (whose name means “quick to the plunder”)

which signified the destruction of Damascus and Samaria by the Assyrians.

After hearing these tidings, Isaiah says,

“I will wait for the LORD who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob,
and I will trust in him.

Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel
from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.”

Now Hebrews says that Jesus sings these words today.

The first quote is from Isaiah 8:17–“I will put my trust in him.”

Why did Jesus sweat in Gethsemane?

He was sweating according to the properties of his human nature,
because he had to live by faith and not by sight.

He has fully identified with us, even in our life of dependence and faith in God.

His trust was in his Father,

as he said on the cross: “into your hands I commit my spirit.”

The second quote is from Isaiah 8:18–“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Isaiah had spoken these words regarding how he and his children were signs to Israel.

Now Jesus speaks these words to show that he and his children

are signs and symbols to the nations.

Jesus says that Isaiah’s promise of Immanuel includes you!

Just as Isaiah had spoken of Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hashbaz

as signs to the nations of the coming judgment (and God’s presence in spite of judgment),

so also Jesus and the church (his brothers) are signs to the nations.

In the days of Isaiah the Assyrians were coming.

The Assyrians were famous for slaughtering babies, ripping open pregnant mothers,
and deporting whole populations.

We rightly join with those who grieve over the unjust killing of their loved ones
in the shootings and murders in our land –

those who mourn the loss of their children to the violence in our streets.
But 2000 years ago it wasn't a lone gunman –
it was the king, Herod, who ordered the systematic slaughter
of *every* baby boy under two years of age.

And into this world where people have been slaughtering children in every generation,
God sends a sign, as Jesus says:
“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Brothers and sisters, this Christmas, *you and I* are signs that Jesus holds up
before the watching world to say:

God has not abandoned you to sin and death!

And this is why the redeemer must also be true God.
As the Heidelberg Catechism says:

Q17: Why must He also be true God?

A17: He must be true God so that by the power of His Godhead He might bear in His manhood
the burden of God's wrath, and so obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

b. Why Must He Also Be True God? (v14-18)

This is the backdrop then for verses 14-15.

¹⁴ *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,*
¹⁵ *and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

When verse 14 says that “he himself likewise partook of” flesh and blood,
there is a recognition that “he” existed before he “partook.”

As 1:3 says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,
and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

The purpose of the incarnation was the destruction of sin, death and the devil.
Sin, death and the devil had dominion over us.
We were subject to lifelong slavery–bondage to the fear of death.

Death is a horrible curse.
Death is the entrance into the realm of God's wrath.

The only way to destroy the one who has the power of death *and* rescue us,
was for the Son of God to partake of flesh and blood.

And so the eternal Son of God was made for a little while lower than the angels,

not to help angels—but to help the offspring of Abraham.

We looked last time at the covenant of grace.

When Adam fell into death, God promised that he would provide a deliverer.

He chose Abraham to be the one through whom he would bring blessing to the nations.

“Through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”

God has now remembered his covenant and fulfilled his promise.

The Son is greater than the angels because through his humiliation and suffering,
he has helped the offspring of Abraham.

c. So that He Might Help His Brothers (v10-18)

¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

How does the Son help his brothers?

There are two words that Hebrews 2 uses—archegos and archierus

The first is in verse 10, translated “founder.”

Founder is a bit wimpy.

Perhaps it would better translated “hero” or “champion.”

Think of Hercules—he was often called “archegos”—this mighty warrior and deliverer.

The Son is the true “archegos”—the divine warrior and leader of mankind.

The idea of “founder” should be seen as “founder of the new humanity.”

He is the champion of our salvation—the hero who delivers us from our enemies.

This is of course very much what the ancient world expected of a deliverer:

A hero, a champion, a mighty warrior-king who establishes a new people!

But this champion achieves his great triumph over death and the devil,
through the suffering of death.

The Son is the great archegos—the great champion—

but he is the great champion—the founder of our salvation—

precisely because he is also the merciful and faithful high priest--
the archierus.

Indeed, notice that Hebrews says that

“He had to be made like his brothers in every respect [death included],
so that he become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God,
to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

By using these two “arch” words, Hebrews connects the kingly rule of Christ,
with the priestly sacrifice of Christ.

Jesus has defeated our enemies and he has paid for our sins.

That is how he helps us!

Because you are going to face temptation!

When you go home today you will be tempted to ignore your wife,
to speak harshly to your children,
to gossip about your friends.

You will be tempted to lust after someone who is not your spouse,
to cheat on your income taxes,
and above all to forget the message that you have heard—
to drift away from the champion of your salvation.

Hebrews calls you to hold fast.

There are times of great discouragement,
when you don't know how you are going to do what God has called you to do.
In those times the answer is not to “buck up” and just do what's right.
You'll never make it.

You need to see Jesus—

“crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death.”

He has partaken of our flesh and blood,

he has endured temptation and suffering—not just to set an example
that you've got to “suck it up and do your best.”

No, he has destroyed the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.

He has paid for your sins—
your sins are forgiven!

The way that Jesus has helped you is not by making surface repairs on the exterior of your life.

Jesus has helped by destroying the one who has the power of death!

Jesus has helped you by removing you from the realm of bondage to the fear of death,
and bringing you into the realm of life by his Son.