

## THE BOY JESUS

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Here's the happiest woman of all time. Although the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is obviously error, there is no need to assume that during the time she was pregnant with Jesus, Mary was living in sin, indulging unholy passions, subject to Satanic emotions, as are so many pregnant women. We read that God has always had "some" who have demonstrated perfection of character through the exercise of faith:

"Some few in every generation from Adam resisted [Satan's] every artifice and stood forth as noble representatives of what it was in the power of man to do and to be—Christ working with human efforts, helping man in overcoming the power of Satan. . . . Satan was greatly disturbed because these noble holy men stood untainted amid the moral pollution surrounding them, [and] perfected righteous characters" (RH, March 3, 1874).

The Virgin Mary was obviously among these "some few." The story of the Annunciation in Luke 1:26-38 makes clear that she "believed," and for that reason alone was righteous—solely by faith. When the angel Gabriel made his announcement, she said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." Luke 1:38.

"Through the Holy Spirit she [Mary] received wisdom to cooperate with the heavenly agencies in

the development of this child who could claim only God as His Father" (DA 69).

"The effect of prenatal influence is by many parents looked upon as a matter of little moment; but heaven does not so regard it" (MH 372).

"Even the babe in its mother's arms may dwell under the shadow of the Almighty through the faith of a praying mother" (DA 512).

It may be difficult for us to grasp Mary's relationship to Christ's freedom from an "evil propensity" because we neglect the prenatal influence she gave Him. Countless artists have pictured her as a beautiful teenager in the stable at Bethlehem holding the Holy Baby in her young arms. But nothing in the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy requires us to believe these Christmas cards. Roman Catholic teaching does insist that Mary was scarcely out of childhood:

"In one of these rude dwellings [in Nazareth] there lives a girl of thirteen or so, Mary by name, who has already been given in marriage to a young carpenter near the age of 20. The actual ceremony has not taken place. The couple are betrothed and must wait even as long as a year before they come together as man and wife" (Father Warren H. Rouse, O. F. M., in *The Southern Cross*, Diocesan paper for San Diego, Dec. 1973).

"According to the customs of her time and people, Mary was probably no more than 14 when her parents arranged her marriage and Joseph was probably about 18" (Pastoral Letter of National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Nov. 1973).

If one takes into account certain Bible facts, there are grave problems in accepting this popular idea. Matthew speaks of Jesus' four "brothers" plus "sisters," making a total of at least six (Matt. 13:55, 56). John makes plain that Jesus' "brothers" were older than He—they were "the sons of daughters of Joseph" but not of Mary (John 7:3-5; cf. DA 87, 90). Obviously, Joseph's "sons and daughters" were by a previous marriage, and Mary was affianced to Joseph to be a stepmother to them. Later she became the natural mother of Jesus. What widowed father of at least six motherless children could wisely select a teenager to be their stepmother, however beautiful she may have been?

Mary herself discloses a detail of her life story that may help us realize that she could have been an older woman who had apparently been denied every Jewish woman's greatest desire—to be married and have a male child:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed: For He that is mighty hath done to me great things" (Luke 1:46-49).

The Greek word translated "low estate" is "humiliation" in Acts 8:33. There is no reason to accept the Catholic and popular Protestant view that Mary was a popular teenage girl when she gave birth to Jesus. She may well have been an older woman, perhaps even not beautiful, who knew the inner pain of rejection and "humiliation," and yet who had overcome her self-pity and

developed a beautiful faith. She was the mother of One who Himself became "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." She suggests that maybe she was also "acquainted with grief." For sure, she had an enormous capacity for sorrow, because old Simeon told her in the Temple that a gigantic "sword" as big as Goliath's "shall pierce through thy own soul" (Luke 2:35; LXX uses that word for Goliath's sword). How could the Lord let that happen to an innocent woman unless she had been specially trained to endure and pain and sorrow?

The newly pregnant Mary could find only one friend in whom to confide her glorious secret—a woman who had also known sorrow, "well stricken in years" (cf. Luke 1:7 concerning Elizabeth). This could indicate that Mary was herself a mature woman seeking such companionship.

The Bible facts support the view that Mary was among those "some few in every generation. . . [who] perfected righteous characters." Thus the prenatal influence she gave to Christ did not involve Him in participation with human passions of anger, unbelief, or hatred as so often is the case with unhappy, rebellious, evil-tempered, drug- or alcohol-addicted pregnant mothers.

Elizabeth gives us a clue into what made Mary so outstanding: "Blessed is she that believed" (Luke 1:45). Roman Catholic error is always a clever counterfeit that hides an important truth that otherwise we might neglect. Their dogma of the Immaculate Conception seeks to hide a beautiful lesson here:

Mary was a sinner, but saved by grace. Of all women of all time, she is outstanding for one reason: as no other woman “she . . . believed.” Abraham is “the father of the faithful [those who believe],” but even he stumbled and staggered in his up and down learning how to believe. But not this woman. From the moment the angel made the stunning announcement, she said with immediate alacrity: “Behold the hand maid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). The prenatal “faith” care she gave her Son was like that of no other mother in history. But the uniqueness was environmental, not genetic. And the uniqueness did not “exempt” Jesus from having to meet the most awful temptations any sinful human being can experience.

Reports in the press indicate that Pope John Paul II would like to declare as a new dogma a widespread belief in the Roman Catholic Church—that Mary is the Co-Remptrix of humanity and Mediatrix of all graces. *U. S. News and World Report* says “that would make her a participant in salvation” (June 16, 1997). Again, a papal error counterfeits a precious truth: Mary took good care of Baby Jesus. She shielded her holy fetus from involvement in drugs, alcohol, or other poisons. This in no way contributed to His righteousness, but it gave Him a healthy body in which to suffer for us, live for us, and die for us.

It will make you happy if some day the Lord can say of you, “Blessed is he/she who believed?!”

The most interesting Character of all time! As Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit, God had to

be His Father from the earliest moment of conception. But “unto us a child is born.” He becomes a member of our fallen race.

This divine paternity did indeed impart to Him an advantage that no other human baby has ever had. But we must not misunderstand. When we have the faith of Jesus, we have the same advantage. If this were not true, all the inspired statements we read about Christ being our “example” would be meaningless. Christ never knew that He had this advantage except by faith (DA 81, 82). The “advantage” was not an “exemption” from our human nature or flesh; it was a joining of the divine nature to our fallen sinful nature. That’s what made all the difference.

Further, His so-called “advantage” did not excuse Him from our most terrible conflicts with temptation to sin. If anything, His “advantage” in being conceived of the Holy Spirit only exposed Him to a far more severe conflict than any fallen descendant of Adam has ever had to meet. Seen this way, His “advantage” can be understood as a disadvantage.

Neither did His divine paternity impart to Him any pre-programmed character as such, for His life was to be a life of faith:

“Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb. 5:8, 9).

“Christ, coming to earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character” (DA 762).

“He rendered perfect obedience to His Father’s commandments. In coming to the world in human form, in becoming subject to the law, in revealing to men that He bore their sickness, their sorrow, their guilt, He did not become a sinner” (SD 25).

He “developed” a perfect character through constant conflict with temptations to sin. Just how did His “advantage” operate? A Scriptural principle may help us understand.

In every converted soul a battle is waged continually between two motivations—one to evil, and the other to holiness. One comes from the genetic inheritance of a sinful nature (and in our case by our own cultivated tendencies to evil); the other is supplied by the working of the Holy Spirit who contends against these evil motivations.

Christ being the God-man, He experienced this same constant conflict. Having never sinned, He had no “evil propensity,” no cultivated tendencies to evil—which are sin. But because He inherited our genetic nature through His human mother, He knew the strength of the motivations to evil that constantly assail us. Not only did He in reality (not merely vicariously) bear our fallen, sinful flesh; He also “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” “made to be sin for us” (1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21). Those who maintain that Christ was “exempt” from battling with the terrible power of sinful addictions need to consider what Peter says. If you are any kind of an addict (and who isn’t an addict to sin?), take heart; you have a Saviour who overcame in your flesh and knows the strength of your addiction.

Being conceived of the Holy Spirit, Jesus also knew the motivation to holiness that it is our privilege to know through faith. But being conceived of the Holy Spirit did not force Him automatically to be righteous. His “advantage” only enabled Him to choose freely:

“Unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation. Temptation is resisted when man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action and, knowing that he can do it, resists, by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power. This was the ordeal through which Christ passed. . . . In His closing hours, while hanging upon the cross, He experienced to the fullest extent what man must experience when striving against sin” (5BC 1082). [Yes, He knew the strength of the terrible struggle addicts have.]

“As a free agent, He was placed on probation, with liberty to yield to Satan’s temptations and work at cross-purposes with God” (idem).

In other words, Christ was “programmed” neither toward sin nor toward holiness; but He felt the full force of the undertow that has swept us all into sin and He simply refused to be swept into it. “He knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart” (5T 177).

Sad to say, many have the gospel so backwards that they make it bad news. Of these two conflicting motivations, almost everybody thinks the sinful-nature motivation is the stronger. They expect to be defeated by temptation, assuming that sin is stronger than the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome it. But this very assumption is itself the

heart of sin, for it discloses an inner antagonism against the righteousness of God. Such a conviction is rooted in a heart-leaning toward the idea that God deserves defeat in the great controversy with Satan (this conviction may all the while be unconscious). We suppose our sin is too strong for God, and so we demonstrate this conviction by thinking that it's impossible for "poor me" in my circumstances to obey the law of God; so we give in and yield to temptation. This is how sin functions.

Now it's a simple step further to declare that it would have been impossible for even Christ in His incarnation to obey the law of God if He had "taken" our same sinful nature and been tempted in our identical circumstances. If we can't overcome, then of course He can't—unless He is given that special "exemption."

Here is the fulcrum of defeat, disclosing why the nature of Christ is a spiritual life-or-death matter. This is the root of our deep beneath-the-surface sympathy with Satan's charges, for if sin is really stronger than the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome it and condemn it in our fallen, sinful flesh, then Satan has to be right in his campaign against the government of God. Then that government must crash. A vote in Satan's favor is itself the essence of sin. We can't be neutral; we will "vote" one way or the other by our faith or by our unbelief.

The truth of the cross is beautifully illustrated in the experience of Jesus when He came to earth. Although He was fully man, "in all points tempted

like as we are," yet His heart was without sin, and therefore pure. It thus remained—wonder of wonders!—the reservoir of love. In that respect He differed from all other human beings who have been born into the world. He alone knew no sin, no *surrender* to egoism in any form.

We cannot suppose that any conscious memory of His preexistence remained with Him in His earthly childhood. As a babe in His mother's arms in the stable at Bethlehem, He had no conscious intelligence beyond that of other human babies at birth. He could not acknowledge the adoration of the shepherds or the wise men from the East. As a child in Nazareth, did He entertain Joseph and Mary with tales of the glories of heaven which He knew in His preexistence there? Like a fortunate child who has been to the "big city," did He tell his playmates in the rustic mountain village of His exploits as the Commander of the heavenly angels? No; as a child, Jesus learned wisdom as we must learn. "The Child grew" and "increased in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:40, 52). The wonder of Christ is the wonder of His birth, God in human flesh, subject to the laws of mental and physical growth as we are all subject to them, yet "without sin." Certainly He was not born with any miraculous memory of His divine preexistence. All these divine advantages He laid aside.

By the time a child reaches that age, very deep thoughts can course through his/her mind. Patterns of choice are being formed that determine the whole of afterlife. Jesus was twelve when He first visited the national festival of His people known as

the Passover. For the first time He looked upon the famed temple and watched the white-robed priests lay a bleeding sacrificial victim upon the altar. Alert and reverently inquisitive, His young mind sought the meaning of the strange symbolism of this offering of an innocent lamb. No one could tell Him what it meant, not even the priests themselves. They mouthed phrases and performed rituals the meaning of which they could not grasp. For four thousand years God's servants and offered the blood of beasts as an atonement for sin. To the Youth's inquiring "Why?" no one could give an answer, nor could anyone explain the mystery of blood sacrifice. Is it possible, wondered Jesus, for the "blood of bulls and goats" to take away sin?

The Boy turned away from the idle chatter and frivolous play of His companions. Not even His earthly parents could help Him. Silent and alone, He pondered the sight of shed blood that had impressed Him so deeply. Paul tells us what happened in His mind as he came to realize that the blood of goats, calves, or lambs could never atone for human sin. Not only in heaven before He came, but also as a youth on His knees, He gained an insight and formed a heart commitment:

"For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, He said to God: 'You do not want sacrifices and offerings, but You have prepared a body for Me. You are not pleased with animals burned whole on the altar or with sacrifices to take away sins. Then I said, "Here I am, O God, to *do* what You want Me to.'" Hebrews 10:5-7, TEV.

It was as if He prayed: Father, You have no need of all these rivers of beasts' blood! You have no delight in them because they cannot avail to wash away sin from even one human heart. But you have made Me what I am—I have a body that I can give! / have blood that I can shed. Here I am, Father—let *Me* be the Lamb of God! I will die for the sins of the world. *My* blood will be the atonement! I will be that "suffering servant" of Isaiah on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of all. Let *Me* be wounded for man's transgressions, bruised for his iniquities, that with *My* stripes he may be healed. Lo, I come—to do Your will, O God!

Paul adds that Jesus took away the Old Testament typical offerings, and established instead the antitypical offering of Himself:

"So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted Him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that He made of His own body once and for all" (Hebrews 10:9, 10, TEV).

No memory of his pre-existence could interpret for Jesus the solemn meaning of that mysterious Passover service. He could not recall the fateful agreement with the eternal Father before the world was, when "the counsel of peace" was "between Them both" (Zechariah 6:13), and the Son gave Himself to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. His own pure mind, undefiled with sin, gradually discerned the import of what He saw.

It dawned upon Him that these lambs and sacrifices "cannot make him that did the service

perfect in regard to the conscience” (Hebrews 9:9), and that “the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect” (Hebrews 10:1). This is all a *type*, He reasoned. Someone innocent, sinless, holy, and undefiled, must die as a Lamb of God if lost human hearts will ever be reached! The whole vain round of types and shadows must be dramatically brought to an end in the offering up of some divine sacrifice.

This was a conclusion that the wise men and priests of Israel in the course of millenniums had not discerned. But now, seeing for the first time what others had witnessed countless times “not discerning the Lord’s body,” this Boy of twelve understands. Through His youthful soul there surges the irresistible power of a mighty resolve. These poor souls, looking vainly to human efforts for salvation, must not be left mercilessly to what will prove at last only hopeless despair. *He will sacrifice Himself*. The Boy of twelve “saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him” (Isaiah 59:15, 16). “Christ . . . through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God” (Hebrews 9:14).

Behold the amazing work of love! He tabernacles in human flesh, a Boy of tender years, with the mysterious past all unknown to Him except by faith in the Written Word. He makes the same decision

which as Commander of the heavenly hosts He made in the councils of heaven. *He chooses to go to the cross*.

When the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us, we choose the way of the cross as readily as the Son of God chose it in the heavenly council ages ago, and again as a Boy of twelve in the Jerusalem temple. In each instance, whether in the heart of the Son of God or in the heart of a believing sinner, the results lead to resurrection—which is as much a part of the principle as is the cross. There is Good News: “He who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal” (John 12:25).

There are two crosses: the cross of Christ, and the cross for you and me on which we die with Christ as did the penitent thief. There was a third cross at Calvary, but there was no redemption for the impenitent thief who died on it. He was caught in a suffering and death to which he never surrendered. Rebellious, he cursed his fate and God unto the bitter end, *and perished*. Shall we rebel against the principle of the cross and follow him to eternal darkness?

Bearing our cross is made easy through seeing that other cross on which our divine Example died. Through understanding His cross, we can discern our own and find strength to bear it gladly.