

A Lord's Day Snippet!

Biblical And Southern Studies

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445

1 The Lord that made both heaven and earth,
And was himself made man,
Lay in the womb, before his birth,
Contracted to a span.

2 Behold, from what beginnings small
Our great salvation rose;
The strength of God is owned by all;
But who his weakness knows?

3 Let not the strong the weak despise;
Their faith, though small, is true;
Though low they seem in others' eyes,
Their Saviour seemed so too.

4 Nor meanly of the tempted think;
For O what tongue can tell
How low the Lord of life must sink,
Before he vanquished hell?

5 As in the days of flesh he grew
In wisdom, stature, grace,
So in the soul that's born anew,
He keeps a gradual pace.

6 No less almighty at his birth,
Than on his throne supreme;
His shoulders held up heaven and earth,
When Mary held up him.

Joseph Hart (1712-1768)

The Overshadowing of Mary

**"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee:
therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."**

Luke 1:35

These are the explanatory words of the angel to Mary upon her seeking to comprehend the message that she would conceive a son and name Him JESUS. Her child will be great, the Son of the Highest, the recipient of the throne of His father David, the one who reigns

forever over the house of Jacob, and His kingdom shall never end. A concerned Mary asked, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” The phrase “I know not a man” is euphemistic for intimacy in marriage or I am a virgin. We are considering the angel’s explanation to her.

First, the Holy Spirit shall come upon you. This speaks of the formation of Christ’s human nature which is ascribed to the Holy Spirit; the third person of the Trinity who is the sanctifier. God the Spirit separated and sanctified Jesus’ conception preserving it from the taint of original sin. This tells how He did it. His coming upon Mary must be understood as an effectual operation in forming the human nature of her flesh and substance. This was distinct from the normal formation of men; this act of the Spirit of God was extraordinary or beyond the norm of human reproduction.

Second, the power of the Highest shall overshadow you. This overshadowing is an implicit declaration of the presence of God. The Holy Spirit is the power of the Highest. Here God the Holy Spirit is operating in this event in His office. The same person of the Godhead, who brooded over the waters at creation (Gen. 1:2), will do so now. God the Holy Spirit’s almighty power “shall overshadow” Mary. What does that mean? The semblance of a cloud was coming upon her. In ancient Greek it carries the sense of obscuring. This was also evident in the bright cloud overshadowing them at the Transfiguration of Jesus. Here it is like the Shekinah glory where the cloud of glory represents the presence and power of God. The Holy Spirit not only forms the human nature of Christ (Heb. 10:5), but He will protect Mary and defend her. One of the ways He will do that is by causing Joseph to take her to be his wife though he has heard of her conceiving a child. He will work His sovereign will in this event.

Third, therefore also the holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God. The word “therefore” implies that Christ was not birthed by ordinary generation. Why? He must be “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). “That holy thing” literally is the holy offspring. The human nature of Christ is here called a “thing” because it was not a person and never existed of itself because it was taken into union with the person of the Son of God who was/is eternal. If this were not the way, there would be two persons in Christ and there would then be four persons in the Godhead. Jesus Christ is God/man in one eternal person. He is to be a “holy” one who is free from original sin, and he will be the second Adam. Jesus did not become the Son of God (He always was the eternal Son of God), but He was to “be called the Son of God” or He was now to be manifested as such in human nature. The angel is not giving a reason why Christ should be the Son of God, but why he should be acknowledged, as such by His people. “Moreover, the word, ‘also’, is not to be overlooked; and the sense is, that seeing that human nature, which should be born of the virgin, would be united to the Son of God,

it likewise should bear the same name, being in personal union with him, who was so from all eternity” [Gill].

Thus, that which was conceived in Mary was of the Holy Spirit. The “conception of the germ of a human nature in the womb of the virgin was an act of the Holy Spirit” [Kuyper]. Remember that the conception of Christ was not a new person coming but the One who already existed from eternity. Also, it is not the conception of a human person, but it is the taking of human nature. This one born of Mary was just a partaker of our flesh and blood who was separate from sinners in order to qualify as our substitutionary sacrifice for sin.

John Owen commenting on the human nature of Christ by the Holy Spirit’s omnipotent power which formed the substance of the body. “1. That the Lord Christ could not ... be said to be the *Son of the Holy Ghost*, although He supplied the place and virtue of a *natural father in generation*.... 2. That this act of the Holy Ghost, in *forming of the body of Christ*, differs from the act of the Son in *assuming* the human nature into personal union with himself: for this act of the Son was not a creating act, producing a being out of nothing, or making anything by the same power to be what in its own nature it was not; but it was an ineffable act of love and wisdom, taking the nature so formed by the Holy Ghost, so prepared for Him, to be His own in the instant of its formation, and thereby preventing the singular and individual subsistence of that nature in and by itself.... 3. It hence also follows that the conception of Christ in the *womb*, being the effect of a *creating act*, was not accomplished *successively* and in process of time, but was perfected in an *instant*.... The ... miraculous operation of the Holy Ghost, it seems purposely to be hid from us in that expression, ‘The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.’ Under the secret, glorious covert hereof we may learn to adore that holy work here, which we hope to rejoice in and bless God for unto eternity.”