

The

CONCEPTION OF CHRIST

from a

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

If we remember Christ's birth at Christmas, should we fail to remember His conception nine months before Christmas on March 25? On this date Christians recall the conception of Christ, an event with particular relevance to the concept of respect for life in the womb. It was by counting nine months forward from March 25 that the date of Christmas was originally determined in the fourth century.

How did the third-century Christians come to choose March 25 as a special day for remembering Christ's conception? This choice of date seems to have been suggested by several passages in the Bible which use the imagery of the coming of spring to express the expected coming of the Messiah. Isaiah 35:1-24 declares: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom, like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly. . . 'Behold, your God . . . will come to save you.'" And Hosea 14:6 exclaims: "I will fall like the dew on Israel. He shall bloom like the lily. . ." The crocus and the lily (the red Palestinian anemone) were both early spring flowers. It therefore seemed logical and appropriate

to Christians of those early times to honor the memory of Christ's conception on the first day of spring: March 25 in the Julian calendar.

The Gospel of Luke I: 26-38 narrates the circumstances of Christ's conception. These circumstances were briefly summed up by the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) with the words: ". . . and by the Holy Spirit He was enfleshed from the Virgin Mary, and was made man." Before this moment of His conception God the Son was not yet man, but from this moment onward He was man.

Beginning with His conception, Christ's entire life was a saving sacrifice. We are told in Hebrews 10:5-7: "As Christ came into the world, He said. . . Behold! I have come to do your will, O God." By being conceived, Christ "emptied Himself (Philippians 2:7). He gave up the perfect bliss of heaven for a life of human suffering and disappointments. Christ's death on the Cross was merely the culmination of an entire lifetime of saving sacrifice. By choosing to be conceived in the womb of His virgin mother despite His divine foreknowledge of the Cross, Christ showed us that human life is worth living despite suffering and disappointments, pain and violent death.

From the beginning of His conception Christ merited our eternal salvation; this merit was so complete, so perfect, there could be no increase in it. At Christ's crucifixion there was no more merit than at the moment of His conception, although the crucifixion was necessary for man's salvation in order that man could see and understand God's saving love. By means of the

crucifixion, the saving love that was present at Christ's conception became visible.

By being conceived Christ re-confirmed the dignity of all human life from the moment of conception. By His conception He showed that the lives of all newly-conceived babies are valuable, for in each newly-conceived baby we must see the newly-conceived Christ. Without the conception day of Christ there would be no Good Friday nor Easter Sunday, no salvation nor hope of heaven. Christ's conception day marks the beginning of our redemption, a special time for remembering our obligations to babies in the womb who are now as once Christ was: small, and in need of protection.

The road to Golgotha began in Nazareth when God the Son humiliated Himself by taking on human life in its smallest and most powerless form. At the moment of His conception, Christ was already our Savior, though hidden and unknown. There are few better ways of preparing for Easter than by pondering the sacrificial and redemptive conception of Christ on March 25 the day the early Christians chose so many years ago for its biblical symbolism.

