

The Incarnation—God in the Flesh

A Theological Study and Writing

By
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The greatest one-time event in all history occurred when Jesus Christ came to Earth to dwell among men. This event was “the manifestation of God in the flesh.” Jesus (Yeshua, Hebrew), who is and was the second person of the Triune God, took on Himself humanity. Written for us to read in the Gospel of John (1:1, 14), it is one of the landmarks of understanding the God-man side of our Lord. The term used to help one understand this essential Christian doctrine is “Incarnation.” Incarnation has at its core the essential and eternal fact that God loves man (His creation) so much that He condescended to become one of us. Why? So that He could do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Confirmed in the Scriptures, God purposed and planned the incarnation before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 10:5). It was planned so far in advance that even the prophets foretold the coming of the Incarnate One. Isaiah 9:6 states that “*a child*” would be born, a reference to His humanity; however, this precious truth went on to say that “*a son is given*” which recognized and revealed his purpose and divinity. Although He was the Son of God, He was God. This verse in Isaiah goes on to say that this child (Jesus) will be called “*The Mighty God*” and “*The Everlasting Father.*” Jesus, the Christ, possessed a human body that was different than any human that had ever been born; for He was sinless. It is clear in Scripture that He came “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Romans 8:3).

One of the questions asked by the card-carrying Atheist crowd and the unbeliever on the street is “Why would God take on the frailty and weakness of human flesh and dwell among men”? This is an understandable question.....But not just for the unbelieving critic, it is a question that the believer, the born-again Christian with a finite mind might ask. Again, why? Again, the answer comes back in that God loves mankind (His creation) so much, that He gave His Only Begotten Son; that whosoever believes in Him might have everlasting life. Sin requires

a blood sacrifice and God knew that a “spotless lamb” must be “once and for all” given in order for His most wonderful creation, man, to be reconciled to Him.

The Lord Jesus made no room for doubt about the purpose of His incarnation. In His own words He stated on different occasions that “He came to seek and to save that which was lost,” (Luke 19:10); that He came “to call not the righteous but sinners,” (Matthew 9:13) “to give His life a ransom for many,” (Matthew 20:26) and to save the world (John 12:47).

Christ Jesus came into this world, not out of necessity, but by grace. This act of grace was the greatest condescension. This God who dwells on High in infinite glory emptied Himself by taking on the form of a servant and dying in our place. This act, this act of grace, was done because He is gracious and merciful.

We are to test all Biblical teaching by Scripture and judge accordingly. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is not to be confused with the false teachings associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Bluntly stated, Mary was not born sinless, nor did she remain a virgin after the birth of the Holy Child Jesus (Matthew 13:55). According to Scripture, the only person that was sinless was Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). All other human beings were born in sin and are guilty of sin, (Romans 3:23).

Although the Scriptures teach that Christ is both God and man, fully human and fully Divine, Jesus Christ is not two persons. The person who from eternity existed with the glorious Godhead, the second Person of the Trinity, is the same person who was manifested in the flesh at the virgin birth. He did not assume a human person that would make him two persons. However, He did assume a human nature. In all the Scriptures (Gospel) Jesus referred to Himself as “I” and “Me” thus never suggesting duality of persons. Some passages refer to both natures (God and human), but always there is the intention of one person (Philippians 2:6-11; Romans 1:3-4).

The Divinity of Jesus and the Humanity assigned to Jesus are not ever mingled or combined together, but each remains distinct from the other. Can the visible also be invisible, or the

infinite finite? Christ's two natures cannot be mingled together that one overshadows the other nor combine together forming a separate entity. If it were possible, then Jesus would be neither God nor man. Since Scripture is very clear that Jesus is both God and man, His two natures are and will ever be distinct. He is God-man.

One of the deepest mysteries of every age is the understanding of the Incarnation. *As man, Christ was born of Mary (Luke 2:52), as God, He does not change (Hebrews 13:8); as man, He slept as we would (in a boat, Matthew 8:24); as God, He upholds the universe by His power (Colossians 1:17); as man, He died (Luke 23:46); as God, He lives forever (eternally) (Hebrews 7:22-25).*¹

Jesus is not just a person in whom God's moral attributes of goodness, love, wisdom, etc. are present in a special way. It is God Himself. God's very being was revealed truly and in reality incarnate in Christ. Without ambiguity, the Scriptures reveal this truth. The Apostle Paul declares with emphasis and truth, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). It was not merely God's moral qualities that became incarnate in Christ, but the fullness and completeness of God's being....and thus, God's physical and metaphysical attributes as well. Colossians 1:9 says that it was God's pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him. The fact that Jesus rose physically from the dead in the same body that had died (Luke 24:39) and then ascended into heaven as a man in His physical body (Acts 1:9; Luke 24:50-51) provided Paul the truth that it was not in the past tense that Christ Jesus dwells (present tense) in bodily form. Thus, at the time Paul was writing, he understood that the ascended and exalted Christ was still man in heaven, with His body...but also spirit in that God is Spirit. Jesus has both an earthly body and a spirit body. A body that is immortal.

Jesus, as man, mediates for us (1 Timothy 2:5), "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." He was man when Paul wrote the letter and He still mediates for us in like manner. Because Jesus is human like us, He can more fully sympathize with us and therefore can effectively come to our aid when we are tempted or are

¹ Barnes, The Milk of the Word, page 45.

having to go through pain and suffering. He knows that sorrows and sufferings because, as man, He identifies with us.

Jesus came into this world 100% God and 100% man. He was not 50% man and 50% God. Christ Jesus' divine nature is complete. It did not lose anything in becoming incarnate. Likewise, His human nature is full and complete. Christ does not merely have a human body, only to have His human soul replaced by His divine nature. Christ has all of the elements of true and complete God-like attributes...because He is God-man.

Five points summarize the biblical evidence that Jesus, the Christ, even though having two distinct and unchanged natures that retained their own properties, He nonetheless remains One Person; (In fact three in one...God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit). These five points are:

1. Both natures are represented in Scripture as constituting "one thing," that is, as united in one Person. In John 1:14 Christ is "the Word" representing His deity and "the flesh" representing His humanity. Other Scripture passages, Romans 8:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 2:11-14; 1 John 4:2, 3; and Galatians 4:4.
2. Scripture makes no distinction between "I" and "You" in Christ, but it does do this within the Trinity where we see one person communicating with or addressing the other.
3. Both natures of Christ are presented as "I." Not only do the Scriptures never distinguish between an "I" and "You" in Christ, as is done in the Trinity, but the Scriptures explicitly refer to both natures as "I," which leads us to understand that they are a single individual.
4. Jesus never refers to Himself in the plural, as God (who is three Persons) does at times. Jesus does not refer to Himself as "I" but does so when He refers of Himself together with the Father when He uses the term "we" (John 14:23). God, however, refers to Himself in the plural in Genesis 1:26; 3:22 and 11:7. This, of course, simply lets us know that He refers Himself as three Persons.
5. There are many passages that refer to both natures of Christ. However, it is clear that only one person is intended. I.e. Romans 1:1, 3; Romans 8:3; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6, 7).

All of the above are fantastic **truths** that should be a part of our **thinking**, a part of our **teaching**, a part of our **training**, and forever part of our **theology**, as we reflect on the Incarnation of Jesus, the Messiah, Our Redeemer.

The Bible gives at least three (3) major reasons and purposes for the incarnation:

1. **To Redeem Sinners**—God desired to identify with humanity in order to provide an effective and perfect sacrifice for our sin. This is a remarkable and amazing truth. Redemption was the divine reason for the Incarnation. The redeeming attribute and quality of God is most noteworthy. Man’s transgression in the Garden of Eden doomed mankind with an active sin nature (Ephesians 2:1-3) and removed/severed our relationship with God. More misery was added to man’s plight, a predicament that seemed hopeless; that is, that the payment for sin is death (Romans 6:23a). The world desperately needed a Savior.

Animal sacrifices served as short-term solutions for man’s sin (Old Testament times). This wasn’t good...it was temporary and man needed something permanent...something far better than continual slaughter of animals for the remission of sins. This is where Jesus, as God, came into the picture. His onetime death and resurrection would be sufficient to pay for the sins of humanity (Hebrews 10:1-9). “Once for all” is literally a “God-send”, not just a casual saying. Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, died “once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

Paul, the Apostle and Persecutor of the Christians (the Way) as Rabbi of Tarsus, wrote and left no doubt as to the intent of the incarnation when he made the statement in 1 Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Truly, God became man to redeem sinners from their lostness.

2. **To Regenerate Sinners**—Since God incarnate took the initiative to redeem us back to Himself by purchasing us with His blood (Sin has to be blood bought), He also had the prerogative to bestow His holy nature on those who believe and are saved. To be

regenerated is not a difficult term to understand, it simply means a whole new life, one that reflects the image of God and godliness. Having become flesh, God made it possible for sinful people to live an “abundant” life (John 10:10); a life unfettered by sin and the awful consequences that sin brings to the unregenerate life.

There have been countless incidents where the overwhelming evidence concerning God coming in the flesh has brought the unbeliever to his/her knees in full repentance asking for mercy. One incident of noteworthiness was about a famous American Union Civil War general and literary genius, Lew Wallace. Along with a long time ungodly friend, Wallace and his partner set out to write a book that “would forever destroy the “myth” of Christianity—the main “myth” being that Jesus was God in the flesh. With all kinds of information at his fingertips, he set out to write. *“He got no further than chapter 2 of his book when he suddenly found himself on his knees, crying out, ‘My Lord, and my God.’ He had found his evidence, and it overwhelmingly and conclusively supported the deity of Christ.”*² Realizing that it is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that produces genuine sorrow and repentance, we also must realize that Salvation is a God thing...not a man thing. God did it all. All in His time...All in His planning. “By Grace you have been saved...through faith...not of works” (Ephesians 2:9, 10) Praise God ...it is a gift from Him. A gift is given or it is not a gift. You might purchase a gift...but to be a gift it has to be given to someone else besides the one that redeemed it (purchased it). Scripture states that God has abolished death and brought life and immortality...through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:9-10). God crushed the authority that the devil had over man because of sin when He became flesh. Satan must have screamed and moaned when the babe that “would set the captives free” made his appearance on planet earth. God in the form of man but had a godly nature was crushing the head of the serpent.

3. **To Reveal the True and Personal God**—One of the well-known Greek philosophers, Aristotle, made a statement that “Men create gods in their own image, not only with

² Peter Colon, *The Incarnation: Why Would God Do Such A Thing?*; Israel My Glory (magazine), January/February, page 10.

regard to their form, but with regard to their mode of life.”³ However, Aristotle only knew the thinking and philosophy of men; He did not understand how he could be right and still be so wrong. Right in the sense that most people of this era feel that “We created God in our own image and likeness.” Man has always thought himself much more than he really is. The truth is that “man can create nothing without God’s help.” Every breath of man is ordained of God. Every possession man thinks he owns but doesn’t, every day that man thinks will end as he lays down his head at night, is foreordained by God. Therefore, man’s idea that we can create gods in our image is true...but he certainly can’t create God because God was before Creation. God existed before time began and God existed before man had his first thought. The Word states that God is the Beginning and the End...the Everlasting Father. The Word states, however, that God loved us so much, that while we were still in the state of sin (sinners), He died for us and gave Himself for us. Since no man is righteous and there is no man that is good, we are in need of a Savior that can make us righteous before the father.

Mankind, by nature, is a spiritual being. Throughout history it is evident that people have sought to know God. However, due to their worship of gods of their own invention, they have sorely failed in knowing the personal and All-Knowing, True God. Some of these man-made gods have caused people to fight in wars that they did not have to fight in. These gods, with man’s ideas of what a god might require for man’s acceptance, have caused countries to be swallowed up in defeat and have cost countless lives due to man’s ignorance and deep desire to know a supreme being that might, just might be real and worthy of honor. Only one God fits the mold for a Savior. Only One God has the abilities and attributes required of a True God. That is Lord God...Jehovah God.

Today’s world is no different. The personal God we know and understand in Scripture is still unknown in most parts of the world—even in the Bible belt where there are churches “in practically every part of the city.” There are churches being established every day somewhere in the world. However, tragic to say, there are many churches that have closed their doors for lack of funds or lack of interest. Somewhere there is a lack of

³ Ibid, page 11.

vision on the pastor's part or the participant's (congregation's) part. Somewhere they have not had the "True and Personal God Revealed to Them."

Many of the people of the world have customized their ideas about Jesus. They fail to appreciate the significance of the Incarnation. A well-known world leader, Mikhail Gorbachev (Russia) minimized the significance of Jesus when he stated, "Jesus was the first socialist, the first to seek a better life for mankind."⁴ Most people find it difficult to accept that a Jew, a mere carpenter from a small and insignificant village, could ever be the Creator of the Universe. When a disciple of Jesus said, "Show us the Father," Jesus made the statement of identification to not just the disciple, but to the world, "He that has seen me has seen the Father." He made it singular (He/has in lieu of They/have) which made it personal. Jesus saves individuals, not groups or churches. Salvation is a One on one covenant relationship—between God and an individual. God provides it all; man has to accept this gift with no strings attached.

Jesus' humanity does not mean that He was or is less than fully God. He was not part man and part God. Jesus did not masquerade or disguise himself as a man. This does not mean any thought or truth that His Godhead mixed with His manhood to make Him to be some type of strange type of 3rd being. God was indeed fully (completely) God and full (completely) man.

One of the best definitions of the incarnation is quoted in the Westminster Confession of Faith:

"The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which

⁴ Ibid, page 11.

person is Very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.”⁵

We exist to worship God. Having a richer understanding of the Incarnation of God the Son should greatly increase our desire and enjoyment of worship. Our recognition of Christ Jesus' worth will be heightened and our fulfillment and joy of knowing that we have a Savior that understands our hurts, our needs, our dreams and goals will be reason to give all of our praise to Him and Him alone. All glory and praise belong to Him. Worship the three in One, the Triune God-head.

⁵ Michael Bremmer, Website http://www.mbrem.com/jesus_Christ/incarnat.htm, a Reformed Theology Resource, Sola Scripture!, page 1 of 14.

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Note: There was some information taken from the magazine, Israel My Glory, January/February, 2002 in which the sentence structure and wording was translated in my own writing form. Where direct quotes came from magazines or websites,