

## The Incarnation of Christ

Let's introduce our study by reading Matthew 1:18-23.

Christmas is a beloved holiday to many people. However, it's based on a false date for Christ's birth: although the Bible doesn't specify when Jesus was born (since His death, not His birth, is its focal point), all the indications are that He was born around the time when summer switches to autumn. Besides that, Christmas is based on paganism: it was originally a celebration of the shortest day of the year, but (due to compromises) it found its way into Christianity in the fourth century. But...

Christmas does have one major redeeming value: it focuses attention on the incarnation of Christ, without which there could've been no death of Christ; incidentally, because Christmas focuses on the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ, that's why some people, like the modern "Jews," don't celebrate it. Incarnation comes from the Latin "in" which means "in" and "caro" which means "flesh"; The Incarnation, then, refers to God taking upon Himself a human form. So when Jesus was born into the world, God—for one time in all human history—became man!

**Let's consider some *perceived* problems with the incarnation of Jesus.**

**Firstly, there's the perceived problem of the miraculous.** Many people have been trained to view the world in a purely naturalistic way; to such people, the miraculous is impossible. However, if the existence of God is assumed, then miracles aren't unreasonable; consider the ways in which God created and still creates human beings. Beginning with ourselves, He creates us, men and women today, by the law of natural generation (i.e., it isn't a "miracle" when a baby is born). Moving back a little in time, He once created a man—Isaac—by divinely empowering a man and a woman who were past childbearing age. Moving back even further in time, He created a man—Adam—without the agency of either a man or a woman; and He created a woman—Eve—with a man but without a woman when He created Eve. Now if these are admitted to be factual accounts recorded in Scripture, then it's only one more step to believe that Jesus was born of a woman without a man.

**Secondly, there's the perceived problem of the mysterious.** Some admit the possibility of the miraculous but resist the idea of incarnation for philosophical reasons; i.e., they don't understand deity and humanity could coexist in the same person and how someone could continue to be God while limited by a human body. (This sort of thinking is obviously inconsistent, for if one believes in miracles, then he shouldn't have a problem accepting the usual answers to these perceived difficulties. Anyway...) We must admit that the incarnation is certainly mysterious. As with other mysterious phenomena, the incarnation may never be completely understood in this life. But aren't we surrounded daily by mysterious facts which are nonetheless facts? In other words, just because we can't explain something doesn't mean it didn't or can't happen. Yes, it may very well be impossible for us to understand how God and man can coexist in the same body, but surely if this were an important salvation fact to be understood, God would've explained it. Right? Shouldn't there be at least a few things left for us to accept by faith? The doctrine of Jesus being 100% man while simultaneously being 100% God is well supported by Scripture and the consistent testimony of the inspired writers, writers who saw no philosophical grounds for disbelief in the incarnation.

**Thirdly, there's the problem of hereditary depravity.** Calvinists believe that all men inherit Adam's fallen sin-nature by means of natural conception; consequently, the birth of Christ to an earthly parent presents a problem for Calvinists because Jesus would take on the sin-nature of Mary, making Him born in sin and inclined to sin. Their supposed remedy concerns the work of the Holy Spirit in conception; i.e., it's asserted that the Spirit somehow blocked the transmission of sin from Mary to her Offspring. But this is an needless conclusion that merely causes doubt in the true doctrine of the incarnation. Here are the facts: Children don't inherit the sin of the parents: Ezekiel 18:20 says that "The soul who sins shall die. The son will not bear the guilt of the father...." Jesus was innocent at birth and remained sinless until His death. Luke 1:35 reads, "the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." First Peter 2:22 says that Jesus "committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth." Hebrews 4:15 teaches that He died "without sin."

**Fourthly, there's the problem of the immaculate conception.** The Catholic church attempts to solve the problem of "original sin" by stating that Mary herself was conceived and born without sin; they say it was a miracle not recorded in Scripture. "The Immaculate Conception," as it's called, is a human doctrine devised in an attempt to remedy a dilemma created by another human doctrine, and it's a useless doctrine for the same reasons as I just noted with reference to the hereditary depravity doctrine. Now...

**Let's consider the fact of the incarnation.**

**Firstly, the incarnation of God is a doctrine of inspired Scripture.** It was foretold in the Old Testament. In Genesis 3:15 God said to the serpent, "'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall [crush] your head, and you shall [wound] His heel"; this earliest Bible prophecy implies the incarnation. In fact, this prophecy is unique in that only here do we find the words "her seed"; elsewhere in the Bible births of babies are uniformly associated with the seed of the man, not the woman. Although veiled by abstract language, this verse points forward to the birth of Jesus; He was conceived entirely from the seed of Mary—apart from the seed of man. In Isaiah 7:14 God said, "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel"; this divinely given sign was very explicit. A virgin (in this case a *woman* who had never been fertilized by a man) would conceive and bear a son (an undeniable miracle); He would be identified as Immanuel—God with us. This is a clear reference to the incarnation of Jesus. It was also stated in the New Testament such as in our text (Matthew 1:18-23): Luke 1:26-37, John 1:1 & 14, Galatians 4:4, and Philipians 2:5-7.

**Secondly, the incarnation is the only reasonable explanation for the historical Jesus.** Jesus possessed the attributes of God. (I'm speaking in the past tense because we're speaking of Jesus as man.) What attributes? Well, (1) He was omnipotent (all-powerful). *He demonstrated this power over nature* in Matthew 8:27: The men marveled saying, "'Who can this be that even the winds and the waves obey Him?'" *He demonstrated this power over demons* in Luke 4:36: "They were all amazed and spoke among themselves saying, 'What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.'" *He demonstrated this power over disease* in Luke 4:40: "Now when the sun was setting, all those who had anyone sick with various diseases brought them to Him, and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them." *He also demonstrated this power over death* in Mark 5:41-42: "He took the child by the hand and said to her ... 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.'" And immediately the girl arose and walked. And they were overcome with great amazement."

(2) Jesus was omniscient (all-knowing). *This was demonstrated in the case of Nathanael* in John 1:48-49: "'How do You know Me?' Jesus answered to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' Nathanael answered and said to Him, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'" *This was demonstrated in the case of His early followers* in John 2:24: Jesus "did not commit Himself to them because He knew all men." *This was also demonstrated in the case of the Samaritan woman* who said to her peers: "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). Not only did He possess the attributes of God, but also...

(3) Jesus possessed the nature of man. In other words, He was made up of body, soul, and spirit. To Thomas Jesus said, "'Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a [mere] spirit does not have *flesh* and bones as you see I have'" (Luke 24:39). To Peter, James, and John He said, "'My *soul* is exceedingly sorrowful'" (Matthew 26:38). To His Father He said as He died, "'Into Your hands I commend My *spirit*'" (Luke 23:46). Like a man, *He became hungry*: Mark 11:12 says that He was hungry. Like a man, *He grew tired*: John 4:6 says that "being wearied..., [He] sat by the well." Like a man, *He was tempted*: Hebrews 4:15 says that He was "tempted as we are." Like a man, *He died*: John 19:30 tells us that Jesus "bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."

**So ...** to accept the historical account of Jesus, we must concede to both His deity and His humanity. It's inconsistent to accept the Lord's humanity while denying His deity, for both are equally evident in His life. Many heresies have arisen from the desire to make Jesus only God or only man. The only fair and consistent verdict is that Jesus is both God and man or God-man, and the incarnation is the only way deity and humanity can coexist in the same person. Now...

Here are some problems if the incarnation is *not* true: (1) *The New Testament narratives are false, and we have no authority whatsoever.* (2) *Jesus was conceived naturally, ruling out His pre-existence.* And (3) *If Jesus was conceived by a human father rather than the Spirit of God, then He's not God and He has no power to forgive our sins.* Well...

**Let's consider the significance of the incarnation which means that "God came near to us."**

**Man has always craved God ... in a tangible, visible manner.** The idolater who bows to stones and trees is mutely expressing the desire of the human heart for a god who can be seen and otherwise sensed. Job desired to see God that he might present his case before Him: "'Oh that I knew where I might find Him...! I would present my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments.... Look, I go forward, but He isn't there, and backward, but I can't perceive Him; when He works on the left hand, I can't behold Him; when He turns to the right hand, I can't see Him'" (23:3-4 & 8-9). Philip revealed this same longing to see God when he said in John 14:8, "'Lord, show us the Father.'" And God's answer to this universal longing of mankind was and is the incarnation of His Son. Jesus reassured Philip with this response: "'He who has seen Me has seen the Father'" (v. 9). The Son of God became man for this very purpose: He became man to explain the Father to the world with a clarity that surpassed the ability of mere flesh and blood: John 1:18 reads, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." Furthermore...

**Man has always needed an intercessor who was both a divine prince and a fellow pauper.** Before Christ came, the conflict between God and man was irreconcilable. God is holy, apart from sinners, while man in his sin could not approach God. So if peace were ever to be realized, an intercessor would have to step in, someone sympathetic to both parties, someone who was both a prince and a pauper.

(1) Jesus was a divine prince: just as a prince is closely related to a king, so Jesus was divinely related to the Father. Jesus loved the Father; He was one with the Father in nature, thought, and purpose. So Jesus was the best representative that the Father could've sent to man to express His character and Cause: Hebrews 1:3 speaks of Jesus as "being the brightness of [God's] glory and the express image of His person." But (2) Jesus was also a fellow pauper: just as a fellow pauper shares in the daily struggles of life with his neighbors, so Jesus shared our human experiences. He experienced life on Earth at the common, human level. In other words, He wasn't protected from poverty, temptation, or exhaustion, meaning that He understood from experience the human condition. Besides that, He had a genuine love and compassion for man that He proved on the cross. So in turn, Jesus was the best representative that humanity could've sent to the Father. So (3) Jesus was (and still is) the perfect intercessor. He was God incarnate, meaning that He was both God and man. He alone had a nature compatible with both parties, and He's therefore the tie that brings and binds man and God together. Graham Scroggie wrote, "Christ was human and ... divine.... The evidence of each is abundant, and the necessity for both is obvious. Had he not been man, He couldn't have sympathized with us; had He not been God, He couldn't have saved us." So, as Hebrews 7:25 says, Jesus is "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them."

### **In Conclusion...**

Let's read Luke 2:1-7. ... What an amazing and marvelous moment in time! God became man, laying helplessly in a manger. Even before the shepherds and the wise men arrived, we're given a quiet moment to reflect and to praise God for this world-changing miracle.

Martin Luther once wrote....

*All praise to Thee, Eternal Lord,  
Clothed in a garb of flesh and blood;  
Choosing a manger for a throne,  
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone.*