

# The Incarnation

Thinking people when confronted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ find it hard to believe.

What is being asked is reality which passes beyond man's ability to fully understand for we are dealing with the spirit realm.

For example:-

**The Atonement.** How, they ask, can we believe that the death of one man, Jesus Christ, put away all the world's sins?

How can His death nearly 2000 years ago have any bearing on God's forgiveness of our sins today?

**The Resurrection.** How can we believe Jesus rose physically from the dead, into an unending life?

**The Miracles.** Granted Jesus healed, there are many case histories of other healers, but walking on water, feeding 5000 from a few loaves and fishes, or raising the dead back to physical life? Stories like these are surely quite incredible.

**The Virgin Birth.** Which is widely denied among Christians in this century. How can you expect me to believe such a biological anomaly?

**The Incarnation.** This is the supreme mystery that the gospel message confronts people with, the really staggering Christian claim that this Jesus of Nazareth was God made man.

That this Jesus was as truly and fully divine as He was human.

**Here are two mysteries for the price of one.**

The plurality of persons within the unity of God, and the union of the Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus.

**John 1:14** [NIV] *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

**God became man, the divine son became a Jew.**

The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lay, stare, wriggle and make noises.

Needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child.

There was no illusion or deception, the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality.

The more we think about it the more staggering it becomes, beyond fiction, yet fantastically true.

The truths mentioned above are the real stumbling blocks in Christianity.

It is when these revelations are faced as part of the true gospel that Jews, Moslems, Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses and many others, and it is impossible to believe.

**It is from misbelief or at least inadequate belief of the incarnation that all other difficulties in the gospel story usually spring.**

Once the incarnation is grasped as a reality all these other difficulties dissolve.

If Jesus had been no more than a very remarkable, godly man, the difficulties in believing what the New Testament tells us about His life and work would be insurmountable.

**Hebrews 1:2** [NIV] *“...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”*

As Jesus was the same person as the Eternal Word, the Father’s Agent in creation, it is no wonder if fresh acts of creative power marked His birth, life, death and resurrection.

The Incarnation is in itself an unfathomable mystery; but it makes sense of everything else that the New Testament reveals about Jesus Christ.

The gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us in some detail how the Son of God came into the world, but the main point of this story is not the circumstances of the birth but the identity of the baby.

## **The baby born at Bethlehem was God**

**Jesus was the only Son of God, not a son but the Son.**

John in his gospel repeats the phrase *“only begotten son”* four times to make sure we understand the uniqueness of Jesus [see **John 1:14, 18; John 3:16, 18**].

Does this statement that Jesus is God’s Son mean that there are really two gods?

Is Christianity then polytheistic, as Jews and Mohammedans maintain?

Does the phrase *“Son of God”* imply that Jesus, though in a class by Himself among created beings, was **not** personally divine in the same sense as the Father is?

In the early church, this was the belief held by the Arians, and in modern times Unitarians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christadelphians and others have taken the same line of belief.

These questions have puzzled some but the New Testament leaves us in no doubt how they should be answered.

The apostle John carefully and conclusively expounds the answer to these questions.

John does **not** use the term *“Son”* in the beginning of his explanation of the Incarnation but speaks first of *“The Word”*.

Commencing in this way he makes sure there will be no misunderstanding, and the original readers would pick up the reference to the Word in the Old Testament writings at once.

God’s Word in the Old Testament depicted God’s creative utterance, His power in action to fulfil His purpose.

**Genesis 1:3** [NIV] *“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”*

**Psalm 33:6, 9** [NIV] *“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.” ... “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.”*

## **The Word of God is God at work**

John in the first 18 verses of his gospel gives us seven things about The Word showing Him to be divine.

**John 1:1-4, 14, 18** [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” ... “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” ... “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.”*

**1 In the beginning was the Word** [verse 1]

Here John tells us the Word had no beginning of His own, when created things had their beginning the Word “was”.

**2 And the Word was with God** [verse 1]

Here John reveals the Word’s personality, as the power that fulfils God’s purposes. *“A distinct personal being who stands in an eternal relation of active fellowship to God”* (this is what the phrase means).

**3 And the Word was God** [verse 1]

Here John states the Word’s deity.

Though personally distinct from the Father, He is not a creature, the Word is divine in Himself as the Father is.

The mystery with which the verse confronts us is the mystery of the personal distinction within the unity of the Godhead.

**4 All things were made by Him** [verse 3]

Here John states the Word is the Father’s Agent in every act of creating that the Father has ever performed.

The fact that all things were, and are, beings created through the Word is further proof He is **not** among the things made any more than the Father is.

**5 In Him was life** [verse 4]

Here John shows the Word as the *“breath of life”*.

There is no physical life in the realm of created things without the Word being present.

Here is the Christian Bible answer to the problem of the origin of all created things and the continuance of life in all its forms.

**Colossians 1:17** [NIV] *“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*

**Hebrews 1:3** [NIV] *“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”*

Life is given and maintained by the Word.

**Created things do not have life in themselves**, but the life is the Word, the second person in the Godhead.

**6 And the life was the light of men** [verse 4]

Here John shows the Word to be the light that reveals the Godhead.

In giving life, the Word also gives light.

That is to say, every man receives knowledge of God that leads to a relationship with God through the Word.

Not only is life given to us by the Word but our sense of existence, awareness of our existence, our intellect and consciousness also come from the Word.

Without the Word creating and sustaining us we would not just die, we would not exist.

## 7 **And the Word became flesh** [verse 14]

Here John introduces the incarnation of the Word.

The baby in the manger at Bethlehem was the Eternal Word of God.

John having shown us who and what the Word is, a divine person, author and sustainer of all things, then tells us the Word was revealed by the incarnation [spirit embodied in flesh] to be God's Son.

**John 1:14** [Amplified] *“And the Word became flesh and tabernacled, fixed His tent of flesh and lived a while among us. We actually saw His glory, His honour, His majesty; such glory as an only begotten Son receives from His Father, full of grace, favour, loving kindness and truth.”*

The identification is confirmed in verse 18.

**John 1:18** [Amplified] *“No man has ever seen God at any time; **the only unique Son, the only begotten God**, who is in the bosom, that is, in the intimate presence of the Father. **He has declared Him. He has revealed Him, brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him and He has made Him known.**”*

John has now established the point at which he was aiming throughout the prologue to his gospel narrative.

John has now made it very clear what is meant by calling Jesus the Son of God. The Son of God is the Word of God.

We have seen what the Word is, and that is what Jesus the Son is.

## **The baby born at Bethlehem was God made man**

When the Word became flesh, a real human baby, He had not ceased to be God, He was no less God than as a baby than before the incarnation, but He had begun to be man.

Jesus was **not** now God minus some elements of His deity, but God plus all that He had made His own by taking manhood to Himself.

The Word who had made man was now learning what it felt like to be man.

He who had made the angel who became the devil was now in a state in which He could be tempted by that angel.

He could not indeed avoid being tempted by the devil, and the perfection of His human life was only achieved by conflict with the devil.

**Hebrews 2:17-18** [NIV] *“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make*

*atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”*

**Hebrews 4:15-16** [NIV] *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

The mystery of the incarnation is unfathomable.

We cannot explain it: we can only formulate it, as John and the writer of Hebrews do.

## **How then are we to think of the incarnation?**

The New Testament does not encourage us to puzzle our heads over the physical and psychological problems that it raises, but to worship God for the love that is shown in it.

**Philippians 2:5** [Phillips Translation] *“He, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to His prerogatives as God’s equal, but stripped Himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man, and, having become man, He humbled Himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death He died was the death of a common criminal.”*

This was a great act of condescending love and self-humbling, all for our salvation.

The crucial significance of the cradle at Bethlehem lies in its place in the sequence of events that led the Son of God to the cross at Calvary, and we do not understand the baby in the stable until we see it in the context of a man on a cross.

**2 Corinthians 8:9** [NIV] *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”*

Here is stated not only the fact of the incarnation but also its meaning.

The taking of manhood by the Son of God is set before us in a way we should view it always. Not simply as a marvel of nature but rather as a wonder of grace.

**John 17:5** [NIV] *“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”*

The Word emptied Himself and became poor, not by laying aside His divine powers and attributes, but His divine glory and dignity.

There is no scripture to validate the idea of the Son shedding any aspects of His deity, and Jesus never condemned any man for worshipping Him as God.

The impression of Jesus which the gospels give is that He was not wholly bereft of divine knowledge and power, but that He drew on both intermittently, while being content much of the time not to use them. The impression is one of divine capacities restrained.

How are we to account for this restraint?

John’s gospel in particular makes much of the complete submission of the Son to the Father’s will.

**John 5:19, 30** [NIV] *“Jesus gave them this answer: I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also*

does.” ... “By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”

**John 6:38** [NIV] “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”

**John 8:28** [NIV] “So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.’”

It is the nature of the second person of the Trinity to acknowledge the authority and submit to the good pleasure of the first person.

Though co-equal with the Father in eternity, power and glory, it is natural to Him to play the part of the Son, and find His joy in doing His Father’s will. Likewise, it is natural for the first person of the Trinity to plan and initiate the works of the Godhead and natural to the third person to proceed from the Father and the Son to do their joint bidding.

The obedience of the God-man to the Father while He was on earth was not a new relationship occasioned by the incarnation but the continuation in time and space of the eternal relationship between the Son and the Father.

Jesus as the God-man did not know all He might have known, but only what the Father willed Him to know.

We see now what is meant for the Son of God to empty Himself and become poor. It meant a laying aside of glory, a voluntary restraint of power, an acceptance of hardship, isolation, ill-treatment, malice, misunderstanding and finally a death that involved physical, mental and spiritual agony.

It meant love to the uttermost for unlovely mankind.

The incarnation message is that there is hope for hopeless and sinful mankind; hope for pardon; hope for peaceful reconciliation with our Creator and hope for glory.

All this because subject to His Father’s will, Jesus Christ became poor, was born in a stable so that just over 30 years later He might die on a cross.

This is the most wonderful love story that the world will ever hear, this is the true “*spirit of Christmas*”.

The “*Christmas spirit*” is the spirit of those who, like their Master, live their whole lives on the principle of making themselves poor, spending and being spent, to enrich their fellow men. Giving time, trouble, care and concern, to do good to others and not just their own friends and relatives, in whatever way there seems a need.

**Philippians 2:5-11** [NIV] “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

## **What does the incarnation mean to each of us personally?**

**John 3:16** [NIV] “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

The fact that God so loved the world, restated in personal terms, means that God is emotionally concerned about you and I personally. It is a statement that we mean something to God.

There is a strange contradiction in human nature, the fact that a person can reek with pride, display a swollen ego and strut like a peacock and still be the loneliest and most miserable person in the world.

Deep within their beings they are almost overwhelmed by their great loneliness, to the sense of feeling they are an orphan in the final scheme of things. No father to whom they can run, no mother to whom they can go for comfort.

Our inward feeling tells us that there is no one anywhere who is emotionally concerned about us.

Any concern of our own narrow little family is not the answer to our needs for they will all die along with us.

This complex is one of the bitter results of sin.

When Satan seduced Eve by the question “*did God really say...*” he was saying in effect “*you don’t really matter to God, for God has lied to you*” [Genesis 3:1]

**In the humanistic approach of society, the individual is no longer the concern. The individual really does not matter anymore.**

We are taught to think of the human race in terms of statistics.

This is the curse of statism, the dictatorship philosophy and the weapon of totalitarian governments back to the days of the Roman Empire down through history to modern Nazi, Fascist and Communist ideologies.

The state is made to be everything. The party and political correctness or the organisation means everything, but the individual means nothing at all!

## **God deals with individuals**

When the eternal Son of God became the Son of Man and walked on earth, He always called individuals to His side.

Jesus Christ did not preach to the multitudes as though they were a faceless crowd, He preached to them as individuals and with knowledge of the burdens and needs of each one.

The individuals mattered to Him, and He was emotionally concerned with each one of them.

For example, the woman whose accusers said she was taken in an act of adultery, was lying in the dust ready to be stoned to death, but the Son of Man raised her gently to her feet. He assured God’s forgiveness for the individual as He told her to go and sin no more.

[John 8:3-11]

Jesus selected mothers from the crowds and touched and blessed their infants and assured them individually that the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

[Mark 10:14]

**Jesus Christ did not come into our world to deal with statistics! He deals with individuals and that is why the Christian message is and always has been “*God so loved the world*”.**

But the world does not know the individual factor in the Love of God.

Dwight Moody once said *“If I could get everyone in the world to believe God loves them, I would get everyone in the world converted!”*

That may have been an overstatement but I believe for far too many God’s Love is just for mankind as a group and not a personal love for each of us.

The Christian message must always include God’s Love for the individual in whatever state we find them.

They must be convinced that there is some One who is concerned and is not happy because of the way they are. He is One who knows their name, is constantly aware of their pains and passions and loves them where they are and as they are. They mean so much to Him that He was willing to sacrifice His only Son so that they could be saved from their ultimate end, their death.

**All people must hear the Good News that they matter to the living and loving God of all creation.**

Above everything else in the whole universe, He cares for them and calls them to know the gracious plans He has for them individually.

What a message for the sinner!

What a message for the failure!

What a message for the lonely!

What a message for those who have lost loved ones in death!

What a message for the helpless men and women in hospitals and institutions!

What a message for those bound in habits of abuse and self-gratification!

God cares for them personally.

**To God the crowd is simply a congregation of individuals.**

God plainly tells us in His Word that there is none righteous and that we all must be saved from our deserved death and will perish eternally if we do not repent.

But in the sense of being hopeless and beyond forgiveness and impossible of conversion there is not one individual.

Our part is to turn to God in faith, confessing our great need, and thanking Him for revealing His love and concern for us through Jesus Christ the Eternal Son of God and Man.

The Word, the Son of God was born in a stable to die on a cross for you and I individually.

**John 3:16** [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*