



The Incarnation of Christ

While we refer to Christ as “very God of very God,” we must not forget the other side of the issue as well. In the modern day we tend to celebrate the birth of Christ in a sentimental fashion and forget the full and blazing glory of the deity of Christ. Yet it is also possible to think of Christ as having something less than a full human nature. We must keep both teachings if we are to have a full and biblical Christ. It was not just an appearance of a human, but it was a real human body and a real human being that God created in the womb of Mary and took to Himself in the 2nd Person of the Trinity and dwelt in.

Docetism

Docetism was an ancient heresy that moved some of the early theologians to write on behalf of the truth. This group did not believe that God in any real way could become man. They did not believe that the Son of God could be born of a human mother. Since they believed that matter is evil and in a peculiar way that the divine cannot experience change and suffering (which is true in His divine nature), they did not believe that Jesus could be linked to Mary by an umbilical cord and he could not suffer and die. It was unthinkable to them that He would or could take an ordinary body of flesh and blood. They taught that Jesus was born of Mary and was simply a man like all others. What they taught happened was that Christ, who was in some way a heavenly being, came upon Jesus at his baptism and left him at some point before he was crucified. The Christ, then, did not touch physical matter and did not have physical pain. Others thought that the humanity of Christ was nothing more than an appearance and a mask which He put on. Since his flesh was not real, in some way he was incarnate without human flesh.

Apollinarianism

Apollinarianism was another heresy in the early Church that awakened the theologians to set out the biblical teachings of Christ. This particular view denied that Christ as incarnate possessed a human mind. This teaching was at least partially based upon a reading of John 1:14 where the text says that “the Word became flesh.” They said that this meant that Christ took only the human body and not the human spirit or mind. The Apollinarians said that when the Word became incarnate the Word supplied the rational part. It left the teaching of Christ as being like a man but not really a man. He was a divine spirit united in some way to

human flesh, but he was not God and man but in some way a combination of God and man.

The response to this teaching was quite strong. The theologians of that time thought that this teaching was simply fatal to the humanity of Christ. Gregory of Nazianzen said this: “For that which he has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved.” Scripture sets out that Christ is our great High Priest because of His humanity: For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet without sin*” (Heb 4:15). One requirement for Christ to be tempted in all things as human beings are is for Him to be fully human and to be fully human means that He had a human mind. For Him to be tempted as we are in all things requires that He take to Himself a whole human nature.

Christ took to Himself a Real Human Body

The Scriptures know of nothing like the proponents of Docetism set out. They developed a philosophy and then argued from that. It is like virtually all heresies in that we start off with man instead of God or of a philosophy rather than Scripture and then we bend the data of Scripture to the dictates of our own understandings. Scripture sets

(Continued on page 2)

Associational News & Prayer Requests

If you would like to submit prayer requests or information for the weekly update, please email it to trinity@wamego.net.

J.C. Ryle, 1816-1900

Almost a century ago, J.C. Ryle, the great evangelical bishop, warned of diversions from truth: “I am afraid of an inward disease which appears to be growing and spreading in all the Churches of Christ throughout the world. That disease is a disposition on the part of ministers to abstain from all sharply-cut doctrine, and a distaste on the part of professing Christians for all distinct statements of dogmatic truth.”

“Let no scorn of the world, let no ridicule of smart writers, let no sneers of liberal critics, let no secret desire to please and conciliate the public, tempt us for one moment to leave the old paths, and drop the old practice of enunciating doctrine—clear, distinct, well-defined, and sharply-cut doctrine—in all utterances and teachings.”



The Incarnation of Christ (Continued)

(Continued from page 1)

out that Jesus was born in the usual human way. After his birth Mary offered sacrifices in the usual human way. We know that Jesus was hungry and thirsty. We know that he was tired and he slept. As the shortest verse of Scripture testifies, He also wept (John 11:35). When he was beaten and flogged, he bled. When it came time, He gave up His spirit and died. He was even buried and then was resurrected, but in that resurrected body Jesus told His disciples that He had a real human body made up of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39).

Christ' Humanity Had a Rational, Feeling and Choosing Soul

While it may sound strange to some to think of Christ having a soul, we must also remember that the soul is the immaterial part of a human being that thinks, feels and chooses. In order to prove that He had a human mind would mean from Scripture we would have to have evidence of the workings of a human mind. Luke 2:52 gives that evidence and it is strong: "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." This text teaches us that Jesus increased in wisdom and in His divine nature He could not increase in wisdom or knowledge, so this is clear evidence that He had a human mind. What was He doing, after all, asking questions of the teachers in Luke 2:46? This was part of the way that His human mind increased in wisdom. He was able to learn by acquiring information and wisdom.

Jesus was truly man in that He grew in His wisdom and He also had feelings. He lived in perfect joy since He had the Spirit without limit and the fruit of the Spirit is joy. Scripture tells us that He was full of the joy of the Spirit (Luke 10:21) and that He told the disciples that He wanted them to have His joy in them (John 15:11; 17:13). He went to the cross for the joy that was set before Him (Heb 12:2). While we have no record of Him laughing or telling a joke, we know that He lived in perfect joy which is the result of living in perfect love of God and being loved perfectly by God.

Jesus was angry at the stubborn hearts of those around Him (Mark 3:5) and with anger and zeal He cleaned His Father's temple of the crooks who were in there (John 2:13-17). As we know Jesus wept, was troubled in spirit and had sorrow. He had grief at the tomb of Lazarus and apparently over the city of Jerusalem as He wept over it. When Jesus was in the Garden praying before He went to the cross, His soul knew

agony and terror possibly like no one had ever known it before. He was full of so much fear and pain that He was literally sweating blood. His human nature could hardly contain the agony and wrestling that took place in His soul. Indeed He had a human body that had human feelings that were more sensitive because of His sinlessness.

Christ also had a human will and made choices in that will. What else could Matthew 26:39 mean when Christ prayed in agony for another way, yet He ended with "yet not as I will, but as You will." Here was the supreme example of what it means to pray "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Mat 6:10). This test of His will was not simply a divine work out of the blue, but it started with the temptation of the devil. After fasting for forty days and nights the devil appeared to Him and tempted Him with food. He then tempted Him with fame and fortune beyond belief, yet Christ stood firm and chose to obey the Father (Mat 4:1-11). We also know that Christ not only grew in wisdom, but that He learned obedience through His suffering (Heb 5:8) and was perfected through suffering (Heb 2:10). The whole life of Christ was enduring sinners who sinned against the Father He loved and in being in the presence of unholy beings. His whole life was suffering by not being in the full presence of the Father and adoration of the angels around the throne. His will was tested greatly when He was being tried before Pilate and even went to the cross when at any moment He could have called on legions of angels and have come down. But instead He loved the Father perfectly.

Scripture leaves us with no doubt that the incarnation of Jesus Christ was the incarnation of God in a full human being apart from sin. Because He took a fully human body and nature to Himself, Christ was able to suffer and die for all of the sins of His people in all of their parts. He died for the sins of their thoughts and minds. He died for the sins of their desires and feelings that are not for holy things. He died for all of their sinful choices. Not only that, He lived a perfect life by never having one sinful thought, feeling or choice. In this way He earned a perfect righteousness for His people. The Lord Jesus Christ in His human nature was indeed a perfect human and yet joined to the divine nature. In this He accomplished a perfect salvation and no one needs to doubt that Christ is sufficient in all ways as a perfect Savior. It is sin to think anything else.

Richard Smith