

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 47.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #47. *How did Christ humble himself in his conception and birth?*

A. Christ humbled himself in his conception and birth, in that, being from all eternity the Son of God, in the bosom of the Father, he was pleased in the fulness of time to become the son of man, made of a woman of low estate, and to be born of her; with divers circumstances of more than ordinary abasement.¹

Question 1—*What is the necessary condescension for the humiliation of Christ?*

Answer—The eternal Son of God, in order to partake of the low condition in his humiliation, took that wide step of an infinite condescension, stepping from heaven to earth, through the incarnation, 1 Tim. 3:16. God did not become an angel, though that would have been infinitely below him, but a man, taking the likeness of sinful flesh, Rom. 8:3; leaving behind that glory which he possessed with the Father existing before him eternally, John 1:14, 18. This assumption of humanity was so intimate that the divine Person of the Son is the very identity of the man incarnate, 1 Cor. 15:47. By this condescension, he who is the natural Son of God has become the natural Son of man, crossing that gulf which no man could do, John 3:13.

Question 2—*What is meant by fullness of time?*

Answer—If we should inquire, what is meant by *the fullness of time*, Gal. 4:4; there are several things to consider:

First, it speaks of the completion of an appointed interval at the end of which there is to be some expected blessed arrival, Eph. 1:10. Paul, in Galatians, is speaking of that time fixed by the Father when the blessing promised to Abraham should be fulfilled in Christ, 1 John 4:9, 10, 14.

Second, in this case, there is also an interval in which the administration of the law has become pregnant with this very expectation, Gal. 3:24. Through the law came that knowledge of sin which makes men weary in the flesh and longing for a righteousness not of themselves but of another, even Christ, Rom. 3:20-22. In *that fullness*, Christ came, Rom. 10:4.

Third, it points to the result of the coming of Christ in the flesh, even the passing of the church from the pedagogy of childhood to the maturity of spiritual adulthood, Gal. 3:25; 4:2, 3. It announces the movement from bondage and fear to the liberty of sons, having obtained forgiveness of sins in Christ, who alone can justify us before God, Acts 13:38, 39.

Question 3—*What are the first steps in this humiliation?*

Answer—The first steps are those comprehending the conception and birth of Christ:

First, we confess that he is made of a woman (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός), Gal. 4:4. He does not state that he was made of a virgin, which would have used the same verb, but of a woman, to emphasize that he was made of that portion of the human nature which is itself

¹ John 1:14,18; Gal. 4:4; Luke 2:7.

a derivation, 1 Tim. 2:13. In the creation, the man was not taken out of the woman but the woman out of the man being created for him, Gen. 2:23; 1 Cor. 11:7. Furthermore, the man was not made for the woman but the woman for the man, 1 Cor. 11:8. This order, and the manner in which the woman has come to possess the nature of man, has made her the weaker vessel, 1 Pet. 3:7. Additionally, this weakness of the human nature in the woman is demonstrated by the fact that the woman was first in the transgression, Gen. 3:6; for, as Paul affirms, she, and not the man, was deceived, 1 Tim. 2:14. Made of a woman emphasizes the weakness of the nature assumed together with the lower estate man has entered by reason of sin, Eccl. 7:28. Mary, who was a daughter of Adam, Matt. 1:16; Luke 3:38; was certainly infected with original sin, as well as the rest of Adam's posterity, Rom. 5:12; Luke 1:46, 47.

Second, besides the assumption of this nature from a woman, he adds to this state of humiliation by receiving the substance of this humanity in a circumstance of extreme poverty, Ps. 22:6. He was not born of a great princess, seated upon a throne, and attended by an obsequious court, but a lowly woman, who was of the seed of David, Luke 1:27, 32. (This is confirmed by the affirmation that Jesus was raised up from the very flesh of the house of David, Acts 2:30) Nevertheless, she was not married to some great prince or mighty potentate, but to a poor carpenter, Matt. 13:55. Her overall state was one of poverty, as witnessed by her offering for purification, Luke 2:22-24; Lev. 12:8. Moreover, she confesses herself to be of low social standing, Luke 1:48.

Third, Christ was born of this poor and lowly woman, Matt. 1:21, 25. By her, of her substance, he received the substance of his true human nature, Rom. 1:3. From this most unlikely and humble origin, Messiah was predicted to come and Christ, indeed, did come, Isa. 53:2. His birth was fraught with all the inconveniences of Mary's (and Joseph's) estate, Luke 2:7.

Fourth, his very conception was clouded with suspicion: 1.) Mary was an unmarried woman, found with child, Matt. 1:18. This circumstance was one that would have excited the concern that whoredom was involved, *cf.* Gen. 38:24. This would constitute a gross defiling of her, if it were true, Gen. 34:5. 2.) The fact of her betrothal would be further complicating, as she was viewed as already pledged to another, *cf.* Deut. 20:7. According to the law, premarital relations when the male is not found carried the death penalty for the woman, Deut. 22:20, 21. This is why Joseph was so careful in his deliberation and plans to put her away privately, Matt. 1:19; his suspicion was only abated by the words of an angel in a dream, Matt. 1:20. 3.) This pregnancy would also suggest that the child conceived was a bastard, who would stand in an awkward relation for Messiah, should it be true, Deut. 23:2. Bastards were the seed of adulterers and whores, not fit for any religious service in Israel, because they were children of transgression, Isa. 57:3, 4. By the Jews, they were accounted the children of the devil, John 8:41. Under the law, they were deprived of the privileges and rights of sonship, *cf.* Heb. 12:8. All of which might help explain certain sayings of the Jews in the Gospels, *e.g.*, Mark 6:3; John 6:42.

Finally, all of the attendant circumstances of his birth corresponded to this low estate: 1.) The requirement of circumcision, which was performed eight days after his birth, Gen. 17:10-14. It was at this time that he received his name, Luke 2:21. 2.) Then, he had to wait another thirty two days for his mother to be purified (a reminder of the curse) so she could enter the temple with him, Lev. 12:2-4. 3.) Lastly, he had to be taken to the temple, as the firstborn, in order to be sanctified unto the LORD, Ex. 13:2, 13; Luke 2:25.