

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word

The Prologue to John's Gospel begins with the declaration that the Word was ever with God and, in fact, was God. Also, by the Eternal Word creation came into being. Verse 17 of John identifies this Word as Jesus Christ. John asserts that "the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." To be a Christian is to make from the heart the earth-shattering confession of Thomas when he said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Listen to John as he presents before us Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word:

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Verses 1,14)

Referring to the historical witness of the forerunner John the Baptist he writes: *John bore witness of him and cried out, saying, "This was he whom I said, he who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for he existed before me. For of his fullness, we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses: grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ." (15-17) He concludes his introduction with these astonishing words:*

"No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained him" (John 1:1, 14-18, NASB).

The New International translation of this verse reads: *No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

The teaching of the incarnation is the focus of verse 14. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." This is the great declaration for which the Gospel of John was written. It tells us that starting truth that God became a man. He became a human being, in fact as we learn from the witness of Mathew, Luke and the apostle Paul, he was a Hebrew Jewish male born of Mary in the lineage of Abraham and of David. (Matthew 1,2; Luke 1-2; Romans 1:1-4)

This is something new – astounding but true – that the Eternal Word of God did enter our history as a man so that men and women and children could see him. In him people could behold Gods' glory and God's grace through his life, his miracles, and teachings and above all else his death-burial and resurrection-ascension.

Interestingly, John chapter 1, verses 1 and 14 are parallel verses. The first speaks primarily of Jesus Christ as God. Verse 14 says in equally certain terms that Jesus the Christ is man, human.

At a given point in time God the Son, the Eternal Word, took upon himself human nature. He became a real human, yet a sinless, perfect man. As Man he was *holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners*. (Hebrews 7:26)

Yet we must not make the mistake of thinking he ceased to be God. God cannot cease to be nor can the essence of God be fractured. Nor can God ever lose his attributes although he can veil them and voluntarily not exercise them, assuming the role of a servant (Philippians 2:6-7). His deity, though veiled in human flesh, was never laid aside. What happened at the incarnation is the Word, the Son, became what he was not previously – a man without ceasing to be what he always was: eternal God! As Paul wrote, *"Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh"* (1 Timothy 3:16).

And the Word became flesh: the infinite became finite. The invisible became tangible. The invisible God in the second person of his triune being became visible so that it could be said, *"In him dwells all the fulness of deity in bodily form"* (Colossians 2:9).

Our Lord's humanity was very real. As the incarnate Word *"he increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man"* (Luke 2:52).

The duality of natures – divine and human – in one person – is clearly taught throughout the Scriptures in both the First Testament and the New Testament.

Isaiah wrote, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace"* (Isa. 9:6). This verse teaches us that the Messiah was to be one who was always God's Son and who became a man at a given point in time. Hence as a child he is born but as a Son he is given!

Paul echoes the same truth in Romans 1:3,4: *"...concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead."* Jesus was made the Seed of David according to the flesh. But he was declared always to have been God's Son.

We must not make the mistake of thinking Jesus was merely a divine man or merely a human God. Jesus is the God-man. He is fully and uniquely God as well as being perfect man. He is God with us, Immanuel.

This union of the two natures in the one person of Christ was necessary for him to fulfill the office of Mediator. It was a necessity for him so he could be the Savior. 1 Timothy 2:5f states, *For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom.*

The Word became flesh – he assumed human nature without ceasing to be God. He became the God-man, at the same time perfect God and perfect man, an absolutely unique person.

Why are these truths so utterly important? Why in particular is the humanity of Jesus Christ so important? There are a number of reasons. Principally the Incarnation made it possible for Jesus Christ to die. A true flesh and blood body made it possible for him to lay down his life for the sheep. He came to earth to die as our Sacrifice for our sin and transgressions. (John 10:11, 14-15; Matthew 20:28; 1 Peter 2:24-25)

Secondly, the eternal Son of God became man in order to qualify as our High Priest; as such he must be a man who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Jesus knew and experienced what it meant to be man. He suffered in his human nature and accomplished the perfect will of God (Hebrews 5:1-10; Hebrews 2:10-18).

Thirdly, by living a perfect sinless human life subject to the trials and temptations, even the direct assaults of the devil, Jesus acting as representative man like Adam, did qualify for the death he died as the Substitute for humans. Jesus as a man who always listened to the Father and obeyed him has also provided us with an example of how life that is fully pleasing to the Father can be lived. He is our pattern for godliness or holiness upon which our Christian life is to be constructed.

Let me draw your attention to the very interesting phrase in v. 14, he would “dwell” among us. Literally, the Word means “to dwell in a tent.” So we could translate this verse, “and the Word was made flesh and pitched his tent among us,” or “and the Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us.” God dwelt in a tabernacle in the midst of Israel in the Exodus pilgrimage and settlement in Israel. Later he dwelt in the Temple in Jerusalem between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. By John’s use of this term tabernacled he is asserting God himself was among us in the person of Christ.

The Tabernacle in all its furnishings and functions was designed to communicate spiritual truth and to prefigure Jesus Christ. These are some wonderful parallels which help us grasp the significance of the incarnation of the Eternal Word.

First, the tabernacle was the center of Israel's camp. Everything revolved around the tent of God's Presence. In like manner Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, is the gathering place of his people. Jesus said, *"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me"* (John 12:32).

Second, the tabernacle was the place where the covenant law with Israel was preserved. The tablets of God's Ten Words were put within the ark of the covenant. Jesus kept the law of God perfectly and in him God's law shines forth in its absolute purity. In fact, he is the greater Law-giver. He is the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets.

Because the tabernacle was the place where God dwelt among his people, it was also the place of revelation and the place where the people of Israel worshipped. It was referred to as the "tent of meeting." It was the place where God met with man and spoke to them. And in the presence of God and so often in response to his revelation they worshipped him.

Jesus Christ reveals God to men and women. We cannot see God, yet God is revealed perfectly to us in the face of Jesus Christ. He is the express image of God's invisible person. Through Jesus we have access by one Spirit unto the Father. He has provided by his shed blood and the gift of his Spirit access to the throne of grace. (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:15-17; John 14:9-10; Ephesians 2:18).

What John is saying to you and to me is that if we are to know God then we must come to know Jesus Christ. It is in beholding Jesus that we see the grace and glory of God. He is the way to the Father. Do you know him in the commitment of faith that results in eternal salvation? As the hymn writer George Doane expresses it;

You are the way: to you alone
From sin and death we flee,
And he who would the Father seek
Must seek him, Lord, by Thee.

Amen!

