



# **Peninsula City Church**

## **The Christmas Season**

### **The Incarnation**

Michael Podhaczky

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# The Incarnation

## An Introduction

**Q.** What is the incarnation and how does it impact you and your world?

For many even Christ-followers the focus at this time of year is on baby Jesus, presents, holidays and family etc. But how many are impacted by the incarnation of Jesus Christ? How many know what the incarnation is and what it is about? Do you know what it is and what it is about?

Picture this, you are in hospital as you have been in an accident and you are only left with the sense of smell. Your mother/wife/sister wants to communicate their presence to you in some way. So they wear perfume that you would remember as being theirs. Now the perfume isn't who they are, but is simply an extension of themselves to connect on your level. God also is not essentially a body, but He became human. He extended Himself to communicate on our level so we could respond.<sup>1</sup>

Our messages during this Christmas season will reflect the coming of Christ, the message of hope His incarnation has delivered. Salvation was His purpose, and it remains available to all who ask today. But what is the incarnation?

## 1. The Incarnation

**Q.** What is the incarnation?

The incarnation is the revelation by God of the pre-existed Christ in a human body. Thus Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was not His origin, but His coming to earth and taking a human body. Christ has always existed before anything was created as He is eternal, Jn 1:1,2; 17:5; 1:14. The pre-existent and pre-incarnate Christ created the world (Jn 1:3; Heb 1:2; Col 1:16). As the pre-incarnate Christ, He is seen in the Old Testament as the Son (Ps 2:7); the Lord (Hos 1:7; Gen 19:24) and the angel of the Lord (Ex 3:2-4). These are known as a Theophany i.e. either a visible or auditory revelation of the pre-incarnate Christ as God, Gen 16:7-14; 22:11-18; 31:11-13; 32:30; Ex 3:2-5. In the Old Testament times God the Son came in the form of a person, while in the incarnation in the New Testament He actually became a person.

“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day; He saw it and was glad.’ ‘You are not yet fifty years old,’ the Jews said to Him, ‘and you have seen Abraham!’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘Before Abraham was born, I am!’” (Jn 8:56-58 ESV).

He was divinely given the name Jesus at His conception and then named Jesus at birth, Matt 1:21,25. Here lies the necessity of the incarnation, as, “God chose Jesus Christ the Word, as the way He would speak and act among us.”<sup>2</sup> The idea of the incarnation was Christ taking a body or literally, ‘en-flesh-ment,’ and came as a human. That is,

“The ultimate reason for all the necessity, for everything *must*, is the eternal counsel and good pleasure of God... The incarnation, therefore, is not an afterthought of God so that Christ is appointed only to repair what had been marred and destroyed by sin and by the devil, but it is God's first and final purpose to reveal His glory in Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Accommodation.” <https://bible.org/illustration/accommodation> (30<sup>th</sup> November 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Goldsworthy, Graeme. *According to Plan: The unfolding revelation of God in the Bible*. (Leicester, England: IVP, 1998), 77.

<sup>3</sup> Hoeksema, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*. Vol 1. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Pub., Assoc., 2004), 498. Italics are his.

The uniting of Jesus Christ's two natures i.e. His human and divine nature is traditionally seen to have happened in the incarnation. The accepted Christian position of the person of Christ was formulated from the Council of Chalcedon's definition, which in a brief statement that accepted Jesus as fully God and fully human.<sup>4</sup> Regarding this it has been said that,

"Here are two mysteries for the price of one — the plurality of persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus... Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation."<sup>5</sup>

In an earlier statement of belief called the Nicene Creed of 325 AD it was declared that,

"We believe in one God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man..."<sup>6</sup>

While in an enlightening approach the regarding the Chalcedonian Creed Wayne Grudem has proposed that,

"The early church considered the Incarnation to be one of the most important truths of our faith. Because of this, they formulated what has come to be called the Chalcedonian Creed, a statement which sets forth what we are to believe and what we are not to believe about the Incarnation. This creed was the fruit of a large council that took place from October 8 to November 1, 451AD, in the city of Chalcedon (in modern Turkey) and 'has been taken as the standard, orthodox definition of the biblical teaching on the person of Christ since that day by' all the major branches of Christianity."<sup>7</sup>

It is understood that, "There are five main truths with which the creed of Chalcedon summarised the biblical teaching on the incarnation:

1. Jesus has two natures — He is God and man.
2. Each nature is full and complete — He is fully God and fully man.
3. Each nature remains distinct.
4. Christ is only one Person.
5. Things that are true of only one nature are nonetheless true of the Person of Christ."<sup>8</sup>

In the Westminster Shorter Catechism, used for Christian teaching it states that,

"The Incarnation the act whereby the Eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what He is, God the Son, took into union with Himself what He before that act did not possess, a human nature, and so He was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever."<sup>9</sup>

Some of the Scriptural support for this foundational Christian teaching is: Jn 1:1,14; Rom 1:3; 8:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:7-8; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Jn 4:2; 2 Jn 7; Eph 2:15; Col 1:21-22; 1 Pet 3:18; 4:1.

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<sup>4</sup> "III. Symbolum Chalcedonense: The Symbol of Chalcedon." <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iv.i.iii.html> (29<sup>th</sup> November 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 53.

<sup>6</sup> "Nicene Creed." <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/creeds/nicene-creed> (30<sup>th</sup> November 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 556.

<sup>8</sup> Perman, Mat, "How Can Jesus Be God and Man?" <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-can-jesus-be-god-and-man> (29<sup>th</sup> November 2016).

<sup>9</sup> "The Westminster Shorter Catechism." [http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC\\_frames.html](http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC_frames.html) (29<sup>th</sup> November 2016).

By way of example see,

<sup>1</sup> “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... <sup>14</sup>  
And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the  
only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:1,14 ESV).

The incarnation in reality, purposefully engages with fallen humanity’s desire for self-improvement. But this self-improvement is only found in the incarnation; as it is out of reach of human effort and understanding and is only found in the tangible and visible God Christ. That is, Christ the incarnate Saviour.

“The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding.”<sup>10</sup>

It needs to be pointed out here that, the incarnation is not to be confused with the Virgin conception or the Birth of Jesus Christ. There is a difference between the incarnation and the Virgin Birth in its meaning and process. So, fundamentally, the incarnation is that God took on human nature becoming God-human. According to Scripture, the incarnation came about through the virginal conception (a more accurate description than virgin birth)<sup>11</sup> of the Son of God by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary (Matt 1:16, 18,20,23, 25; Lk.1:27; 34-35; 2:5; 3:23; Gal 4:4; Is 7:14, 9:6). While the virginal conception; means that Jesus was miraculously conceived in Mary’s womb without a human father, but by the supernatural overshadowing influence of the Holy Spirit.

The important theological meaning and the purpose of the incarnation is clear. It is a reminder that our salvation is supernatural and fully a gift of grace. It is evidence of the uniqueness of Jesus as the only Saviour. It is also proof of the power and sovereignty of God. Consequently, rejecting the incarnation has implications reaching far beyond the doctrine itself. But accepting this truth has a great and wonderful impact on humanity.

## 2. The impact of the incarnation

**Q.** How does it impact you and your world?

The coming of Christ is the message of hope. Through His incarnation He delivered this hope, through salvation as His purpose. This hope remains available to all who ask to this very day. It has rightly been pointed out that,

“The incarnation is (becoming flesh) of God is at the very centre of the gospel event by which God restores the true relationship between Himself and the human race.”<sup>12</sup>

The incarnation can have a great and wonderful impact on you and your world. Christ still remains in the human body that He took, and He will come back to earth in the same form as when He ascended to heaven,

<sup>11</sup> “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when Christ (this Man) had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet” (Heb 10:11-13 ESV).

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<sup>10</sup> Luther, Martin. “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come. In *Come Let Us Adore Him: Stories Behind the Most Cherished Christmas Hymns*. By Robert Morgan (Ed.). (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2005), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Primarily used by Roman Catholics to emphasise not only about the virgin status of Mary at the time of Jesus’ conception but also the perpetualness of her virginity after giving birth to Jesus. Thus, a distinction is drawn here, however, one can continue to use the term ‘virgin birth’ but with understanding. Virginal conception is the point of conceiving, when God supplied, by a special work, both the human component ordinarily contributed by the male and, in addition, a divine factor (the incarnation).

<sup>12</sup> Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 264.

The incarnation of the Son of God is central to our faith. If we lose the human side of the incarnation, then we lose much of our faith. Because as the writer to the Hebrews said,

<sup>14</sup> “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. <sup>16</sup> For surely it is not angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham. <sup>17</sup> Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb 2:14-18 ESV).

The historical reason for the incarnation lies in the fact of sin. For example, people could not come near to a holy God because of their sin. But in the incarnation they could now ‘touch and see’ a tangible, visible God in Christ Jesus. That is, God became approachable; people could now get to know God personally. So, in the incarnation the Second Person of the Godhead, became the mediator between God the Father and humanity, cf. 1 Tim 2:5,

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5 ESV).

As they did in the first century so we can also now come near to the holy God and get to know His personally because of Christ’s incarnation. John in the introduction to his gospel recorded the truth that in the incarnation Christ had come to bridge the great gulf between the invisible God and the seen humanity. Christ did this by becoming a human Himself. Remember that no one had ever seen God the way that he or she was about to see Him (1 Tim 6:11-16, esp. v16). Consequently, as the only-unique Son, Jesus had come to reveal or declare (exegete) the Father proclaiming what He is like (Jn 1:18; see also Jn 14:6-11). Coming as a human, Christ brought the invisible and the visible together in one place. He was wholly God and wholly human, at the same time in the one person. So, verse 18 is the climax of John’s introduction.<sup>13</sup>

“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, He (Christ) has made Him known” (Jn 1:18 ESV)

John then took the rest of his gospel to explain the introduction and verse 18.

By Jesus literally exegeting the Father was to show what He is really like. The term exegesis (exeg\’e’sis) basically means to lead out, to draw out, make the sense clear or to make known what one is reading. Christ, in taking on a human body (the incarnation), brought the Father out from being invisible into full view for all to see and know. So, Christ’s incarnation shows us what God is like. That is, if you want to know what the invisible God is like, look at Jesus Christ. The incarnation also shows us what it means to be truly human (even if we are a broken image of Him) we can now see the true image of God in us through Jesus. The incarnation of Christ took place to impact the world. To make known to you and the world who God is and what He is like in His character. So, we need to give Christ away as He gave Himself to the world and not keep Him to ourselves. As has been pointed out Jesus Christ,

“He freely speaks and acts in our history, dwells in the midst of His people, and even became human in the incarnation of the Son.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Morris, Leon. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament. The Gospel According to John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 112.

<sup>14</sup> Horton, Michael; Horton, Michael. *Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples* (Kindle Locations 389-390). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

So, how does it impact you and your world? Well not everyone is open to the truth of the incarnation. In fact, it has been proposed that,

“If we do not understand the weight of the miracle of Christ’s incarnation, it is because we do not understand the weight of the holiness of God. The incarnation is shocking. It is outrageous to think that an infinite and holy God would voluntarily become finite to live with unholy sinners. In fact, the incarnation is so appalling that it separates Christianity from Islam and Judaism. The Jerusalem Talmud says, ‘If man claims to be God, he is a liar’ (Ta’anit 2:1), while the Qur’an says, ‘Allah begets not and was not begotten’ (Sura al-Ikhlās 112). Jews and Muslims understand how ludicrous it is to think that a holy God would humiliate Himself by becoming human... Jesus embodies the holiness of God because He is God and has been with God from the beginning. This means that, when God acted under the old covenant, Jesus—as part of the godhead—was right there with Him. This is why the incarnation is a shocking miracle.”<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, the coming of Christ is the message of hope. It was through His incarnation that He delivered this hope. That is, His grace gift of salvation was His purpose. This hope remains available to all who ask today.

## Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

**Q.** What is the incarnation and how does it impact you and your world?

As shocking and outrageous as the incarnation may seem, it is a divine part of the gospel and is an important part of the message of hope of salvation. To think that the holy God would humiliate Himself by becoming human maybe shocking and outrageous, but that is the miracle of the incarnation, He did just what needed to be done. The incarnation was not a second thought by God, but it was God’s first and final purpose to reveal His glory in Christ. It is the reason why God did what He did and why we as Christ-followers are to tell the world about Christ. On this matter it has been pointed out that,

“His only-unique Son bore the shame and insults for His Father’s glory. But the Father would not separate from His Son, nor will He now turn His face from those who likeness the Son took upon Him, and for whose sake He bore the shame. The incarnation is the ultimate reason why the service of God cannot be divorced from the service of man.”<sup>16</sup>

So, Christ as the only-unique Son came to exegete the Father proclaiming what He is like and He offered the grace gift of salvation. The incarnation is at the heart of the gospel by which God can restore the true relationship between Himself and a broken humanity. Yes, that includes you. This grace gift remains available to all who ask today. It has been rightly said that,

“If Jesus Christ is less than God or less than human, then He cannot be our Saviour.”<sup>17</sup>

As those around you this season are more open to spiritual things, He is our message to share during at this time, which reflects the coming of Christ, the message of hope found in His incarnation. He came as the mediator between God and humanity, as the man Christ Jesus. That is, He has delivered, salvation as His purpose, and it remains available to all who ask today. So, it has been,

“In short, the Spirit worked with matter in creating and sustaining the old world and does so also in the new creation; the gospel testifies to the incarnate God and His saving work in the

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<sup>15</sup> “The Shocking Implications of Incarnation.” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-shocking-implications-of-incarnation> (30<sup>th</sup> November 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. (London: SCM, 2015), 81

<sup>17</sup> Hart, Larry D. *Truth Aflame: Theology for the Church in Renewal*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 318.

flesh; the Spirit gives us the faith to embrace Christ through visible means in a historical institution, and the result of the Spirit's work is a visible body, not just the private experience of individuals... The only safe route, therefore, is to receive the Father through the incarnate Son. Christ is the saving content of Scripture, the substance of its canonical unity.”<sup>18</sup>

Some things to reflect on in light of the incarnation of Christ,

- How did Christ, by taking on a human body, bring the Father out from being invisible into full view for all to see and know? Through the incarnation.
- If someone asked you “How does the Father love, or how does the Father see us, or how can I get to know and talk to the Father?” what would you tell them? It is through Jesus Christ.
- What would you say to someone who said to you, “Show us the Father, and we will be satisfied?” We need to show them Jesus Christ who came to exegete the Father.
- Have you been declaring the Father through Christ to those around you? Why/why not?
- How do you intend to go about declaring the Father through the incarnate Christ to help those who do not know Him and other Christ-followers to understand that they are or can become children of the Father?

So, we need to seek every opportunity to give Christ away as He gave Himself to the world and not keep Him to ourselves.

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<sup>18</sup> Horton, Michael; Horton, Michael. Pilgrim Theology: Core Doctrines for Christian Disciples (Kindle Locations 7079-7081, 7150-7151). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.