

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW
LESSON 7 – GOD THE SON: HIS INCARNATION

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard of these 2 guys – Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster? Probably not. Those 2 men created the Superman character in 1932. They sold the idea to Detective Comics (later DC Comics) in 1938 and Superman first appeared in *Action Comics #1* in June of 1938.[from Wikipedia article] After Superman came (in no particular order): Batman, Spiderman, the Hulk, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, The Silver Surfer, the Flash, Green Lantern and on & on. We love superheroes with their superman powers & qualities. I suppose we have all wondered what it would be like for a human being to have superhuman powers.

Christian theology teaches something even more amazing: God, the Creator & Sustainer of the universe, actually became a man! He lived and walked this earth and His powers exceed those of comic book lore. His name is Jesus Christ.

Review: Last week we looked at God the Son – His Deity and eternity. As *The Baptist Faith and Message* (booklet)states, “Christ is the eternal Son of God.”(page 8) In previous lessons we have established that Jesus Christ is fully divine as the second Person of the Trinity.

Today we focus on His humanity. The statement in *The Baptist Faith and Message* (booklet) reads, “In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary.”(p. 8)

What is meant by the word “incarnation”? Here is a 2-part definition from the *American Heritage College Dictionary*: “incarnate – embodied in human form; incarnation – The Christian doctrine that the Son of God was conceived in the womb of Mary and that Jesus is true God and true man.”(page 686)

One more statement from the book, *The Baptist Faith and Message* by Kelley, Land and Mohler: “Christ’s coming in human form is called the incarnation; He was literally God in human flesh.”(page 41)

TEACHERS: It is important to begin this lesson with clear, concise definitions so everyone is on the same page. **Do not assume that they know this!** Long time members, new believers and seekers all may be fuzzy in their understanding of theological terms.]

J.I. Packer has described the incarnation as the “supreme mystery” associated with the gospel.(from *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer, page 45). In his book *Miracles*, C.S. Lewis calls the incarnation “the grand miracle”.

So, needless to say, the incarnation is a vastly important doctrine. It is also a vast doctrine which cannot be exhaustively covered in a 30 minute lesson. Our goal today is to explain the most important scriptures and concepts.

I. THE INCARNATION: THE FACT OF IT

The 2 key passages which we will explore are: John 1:1, 14 and Philippians 2: 5-8.

John 1:1, 14(read)

In John's Gospel he uses the concept of the "word" or *logos*. A word is the expression of a thought/concept in the mind. It is very clear from verse 1 that the word was God. Verse 14 clearly indicates that the word became flesh, i.e., took on human form and that John along with others saw Him, heard Him and touched Him as eye-witnesses. See also 1 John 1:1 (read) – this is the same author, the Apostle John, who refers to Jesus as "the Word of Life". So, Jesus Christ is clearly Who John refers to – He was and is God and He became a man. What follows is a summary of the truths in John 1 as stated in Mark Driscoll's excellent work Doctrine page 213:

- The Logos is eternal (John 1:1-2).
- The Logos has always been with God (John 1:1-2).
- The Logos is a Person distinct from yet equal to God (John 1:1-2).
- The Logos is the Creator (John 1:3).
- The Logos became flesh (John 1:14).

Philippians 2:5-8

This is one of the great theological passages in the New Testament. It answers this question: *What did it mean that God became a man?*

In this and previous lessons we have already established that Jesus Christ was/is God, that He has always existed. The theological term is the "pre-incarnate" Christ – Christ before He became a man. This passage in Philippians looks at the meaning of the pre-incarnate Christ becoming incarnate.

[TEACHERS: Read Philippians 2:5-8 to the class]

Let's break down this passage...

Verse 5 – the context of the passage is unity through humility. Paul is instructing the Philippians on the importance of unity in the church, which comes thru the humility of each individual member. That's why he says have this "attitude"(NASB) or, literally, "mind". The King James says "Let this mind be in you..."; the NIV says "Your attitude should be...". Then, Paul states the ultimate and perfect example of humility: Jesus Christ as He stepped down from heaven and became a man.

Verse 6 – "who although He existed in the form of God...". This is yet another clear statement of the Deity of Jesus Christ! "...did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped..."(NASB). The King James says "Thought it not robbery to be equal with God"; the NIV is almost exactly the same as NASB. It is the idea that He did not regard His standing as God as something to use for selfish ends, to be greedy, to take by force. He had it but did not use it for selfish ends, but...

Verse 7 – “emptied Himself...”(NASB); “made Himself of no reputation”(King James); “made himself nothing”(NIV). [TEACHERS – I disagree with the NIV translation of this word]. Now, what is the meaning here? The Greek word means “to deprive of content or possession”. I believe that Kittel has the best explanation:

“...the heavenly Christ did not selfishly exploit His divine form and mode of being, but by His own decision emptied Himself of it or laid it by, taking the form of a servant by becoming man.”[Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Volume 3, page 661]

The great John Calvin states, “...He suffered his divinity to be concealed under a veil of flesh” [from *Calvin’s Institutes*, Book Two, Chapter XIII, page 246].

Now, He still had the attributes and glory of God. A few examples: the transfiguration, Matthew 17:1-8 (the glory of the pre-incarnate Christ shown in dazzling brightness for Peter, James and John to see); He performed miracles; He walked on water; He knew what people were thinking, etc. In Matthew 26:53, when He was arrested, He told one of His disciples that He could have called 12 legions of angels (72,000) to fight for Him if He had wanted to! But He didn’t do it because He knew He had to go to the cross and die for our sins. Again, He had the power but did not use it for selfish ends.

So, He took the form of a slave by becoming a man. But that is not all – He went further than that...

Verse 8 – After He came to earth He humbled Himself further by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross. Not only did He die but He died a humiliating and excruciating death – the death of a criminal!

Consider this: Ordinary men must die; only God can choose to die!

Now, why did He do it? He died to pay the penalty for our sin. He became like us so that we could become like Him! See 2 Corinthians 8:9. We will more fully explore the meaning and significance of His death in our lesson next week.

II. THE INCARNATION: THE PROCESS OF IT

At the beginning of this lesson we quoted *The Baptist Faith and Message* regarding the incarnation that Jesus Christ was “...conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.” We could say that this was the process of God becoming a man.

About 700 B.C. the Hebrew prophet Isaiah predicted how the Messiah would come into human history: [read Isaiah 7:14]. In Matthew 1:18-25, the birth of Jesus Christ is described and Matthew mentions Isaiah 7:14 as being fulfilled by the birth of Jesus!

As Wayne Grudem states, “Jesus was fully and completely human. He was conceived in the womb of his mother by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.” [from Grudem’s *Christian Beliefs*, page 67]

Micah 5:2, written about 800 years before Christ, predicted the birthplace of Messiah as being Bethlehem which was fulfilled in Matthew 2:1.

III. WAS JESUS FULLY HUMAN?

The Bible clearly teaches the humanity of Jesus in a variety of ways. Here is a quick reference list with scriptures: He was racially Jewish (John 4:9, plus His genealogy in Matthew 1); He grew physically, spiritually, mentally and socially (Luke 2:42, 52); He got tired (Matthew 8:24); He slept (Mark 4:36-41); He was hungry (Matthew 4:2); He was tempted (Matthew 4:1-11); He had male & female friends that He loved (John 11:3-5); He loved children (Matt. 19:13-15); He felt compassion (Matt. 9:36); He wept (John 11:34-35) and many other references to clearly show that Jesus was fully human.

Now, why raise this question? Because there have been false teachings down through history to the present day that deny the full humanity of Jesus. There are/have been groups who deny His Deity, including Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. There are/have been groups who deny His humanity. However, the Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is 100% God and 100% man, though without sin.

A similar false teaching is to separate "the Christ" from the man Jesus. Liberal theologian Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976) did this when he referred in his teaching & writing to the "Christ of faith" and the "Jesus of history" – as if they are 2 different beings or ideas. In our day, Unity School of Christianity (wrongly named!) speaks of the "Christ ideal" as something distinct from the man Jesus. These are thoroughly unbiblical teachings according to 1 John 4:1-3. Evidently, in the 1st Century there was already this false teaching that the Christ and Jesus were 2 different entities. In this passage John gives us the way to "test the spirits" that is, how to discern if a teaching was from God: if the teacher states that Jesus Christ has "come in the flesh" (verse 2).

[**TEACHERS:** a good resource for this & other lessons on Jesus Christ: Evidence For the Historical Jesus by Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, Harvest House, 1988, 1993. This answers the critics who say things like Jesus never claimed to be God, etc.]

APPLICATION PRINCIPLES: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

These are awesome truths about Jesus Christ but what can we take home as an encouragement – how can the Incarnation be a comfort to us? Two very important ways...

1. As we have already stated, if Jesus Christ had not become a man, He could not have died for our sins – we would not be forgiven! See 1 Timothy 2:5(read).
2. He can identify with our humanity. He experienced it but without sinning. See Hebrews 4:15-16(read). **APPLICATION:** We must never say or think that our problems or fears are worse than what anyone has ever experienced. We may feel that way when we are going through it but we must also remember that Jesus stepped down from heaven, became a man and suffered a painful death for us. He experienced all of the temptations that we do – He knows and He understands!

What are some ways that the Incarnation is an example to us?

Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears in their outstanding book Doctrine suggest that the Incarnation was a great model for missions and evangelism.[pages 240-242]

Consider this: roughly 40 times in the Gospel of John Jesus says that the Father sent Him. The Incarnation is the sending of the second Person of the Trinity into the world as a missionary! In John 20:21 Jesus said to His disciples, “as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” I am sure that this verse has been the theme of missions conferences for decades. Here’s a little secret: this is for all believers not just missionaries who go to Africa!

What else does the Incarnation teach us about missions/evangelism?

1. It crosses all cultural barriers.
2. Is evangelistic - we each are to share the good news of the Gospel with our world. Jesus pursued lost people – see Luke 19:10. Our mission field starts at the threshold of the church and our homes!
3. It is humble. Jesus left His state in glory to live a simple, humble life. For the sake of the Gospel we might be called to live a simpler lifestyle.
4. It values involvement in a local church.
5. It is global. We need to think globally. In Houston, the world is literally coming to us! In our church we have 5 Bible Study Classes which are taught in Spanish and two which are taught in Farsi plus many other programs/ministries which reach out to other cultures.

CONCLUSION

So, the greatest superhero of all is Jesus Christ – God in human flesh. As we wrap up today, consider this outstanding statement from Lewis Sperry Chafer regarding the Incarnation:

“If He were not man, He could not die; if He were not God, His death would not have had infinite value.” [from *Major Bible Themes*, 1926, 1953, Dallas Theological Seminary; Revised edition 1974, Zondervan; page 56.]