

Understanding the Incarnation of Christ

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[0 : 00] Time wouldn't permit me to go through them all. And these readings will lead us into our understanding of the incarnation of Christ.

This morning we'll read, then we'll pray, and then we'll come back together at God's Word. The first reading is taken from the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 1 through to 4, 5, sorry.

This is the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 1 through to 5. I'm going to move my way through these, so I'll probably hear pages turning.

Now I hear God's Word. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through Him, and without Him was nothing that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

[1 : 12] Turn to Philippians, chapter 2, if you would like. I'll pick it up in chapter 2, verse 5.

It's speaking about Christ's humility, and of course, example. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing.

Taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And of course, finally, if we can turn to 1 John, that's the letters of John at the end, near the end, rather. 1 John chapter 1, verses 1 to 4.

[2 : 47] And of course, these are just a few verses that we're reading to think through the incarnation of Christ.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.

The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testified to it, and proclaimed to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. Let us pray.

[3 : 52] Father God, for all those in the church today, for all your people here locally in this church, and indeed in the church, but here we recognize our prayers reflect the people that are in the church, and we would ask Father God that the truth of your incarnation would not only encourage us and fill our hearts, but give strength to those who are weary, those who are heavy laden, those who are just weighed down so heavily by the concerns of humanity, that we recognize that we have a fallen humanity, and that fallen humanity brings us great concerns.

It troubles us. It troubles us when it's our humanity that's causing the problem, and it brings us great trouble when we see the fallen humanity in others, those that we love, those that we know, those that even we don't know.

And we recognize, Father God, that in a fallen world with fallen humanity, there is always going to be problems. And we recognize that the only way of escape is through Christ, and so we would ask this morning that we would each turn to you and not to our own way, that we would not be like Ahaz, who was given a wonderful opportunity to ask anything of you, something big, but decided not to.

He decided to turn to others. We pray, Father God, that we would not do that, but that we would turn to you and ask and seek and know that you are God, and that we would receive your promises and believe that we are the people of your promise in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, we have read a few, and it is only a few selected verses throughout the New Testament, and of course one in the old from Isaiah, to reflect upon the incarnation of Christ, that Christ coming into this world fully God and fully man.

[5 : 59] And it asks, or it rather answers, the age-old question of, will God really dwell on earth? This is the question asked in 1 Kings 8, and of course the incarnation answers that question.

Will God really dwell on earth? I mean, it's almost unimaginable that how can God, who created the world and everything in it, dwell on earth?

How do you fit him in to a finite space? How will that work? Is it possible for God to dwell on earth? And this, of course, can give us great strain, mental strain, when we try and figure it out.

Now that we have the incarnation, it's not quite so difficult. We understand how God dwell on earth. Now, of course, there is a difference between God's presence being everywhere and God dwelling on earth.

There's a difference between the two, and I hope we appreciate the difference. And we're not just talking here about God being eternal, we're talking about God being infinite.

[7 : 07] When we think about God's infinity, the infinity of God, the infinite nature of God, in the sense that we don't have to be like Ahaz, who looks to the world to supply our needs or to supply our wants, because the world lacks, and only an infinite God with infinite resources can actually provide us with what we need.

And so, to answer the question, how can a big God that's too big to fit into his creation actually fit into his creation, we understand that it is answered in the incarnation, that Christ is God incarnate, that he is fully God and fully man.

Now, of course, that takes some understanding, but it is really worth understanding, for the very simple reason is, as Tozer would point out, that if we do not know who God truly is, then we cannot worship him as he truly is.

In other words, you have to know who God is to be able to worship him, lest you worship something according to your own imagination, which, of course, as you know, is idolatry.

It's something that we are commanded not to do, commanded against. We are not allowed to participate in idolatry. And, of course, the incarnation helps us to avoid that error.

[8 : 38] And it is an error. In fact, one of the biggest selling books in the world, I'm not going to call it a Christian book, though it was written, apparently, by a Christian for Christians, selling well over 14 million copies, although it was turned down by sort of about nine Christian publishers, and it went a different route, only then to be published by a Christian publisher, it actually commits one of the greatest acts of idolatry, and it's blatant.

It's not even hidden. But, of course, only an understanding of the incarnation and the command of God would allow us to see that. So, when we talk about worshipping God, we can only worship God properly if we're worshipping God as he is revealed.

This is important. What the Gospels also do is that they remain silent on a lot of decades of the life of Jesus.

You get the narrative of his birth, you get the time as a child when he is in the temple, and then decades of silence. And then he begins his public ministry, we would assume, somewhere in his 30s.

But all that time in between, you know nothing about. There's just absolute silence. And, of course, God is present dwelling in the world, and, of course, there's silence about it.

[10 : 08] Very similar to the way John finishes his Gospel, and he says, look, I could have written down so much more concerning what Jesus said and what Jesus did, but what I have written is so that you may believe and by believing have eternal life.

In other words, John understands that, yes, everything could be written down, but what has been written down is to focus your attention to give you understanding that you may believe and by believing have eternal life.

God is, John is drawing our attention down in the same way God is by giving us specific information, by revealing that which will focus our mind and heart on what it's meant to be focused on.

Now, of course, that doesn't stop people from wondering, but we're not meant to wonder. The point of Scripture in what it tells us is to draw our attention down to the important areas of focus that God would have us look at.

The Incarnation is, of course, one of them. God wants us to know what the Incarnation means, why it's so important. So let me try and introduce this.

[11 : 22] As we have seen, there is no salvation without representation. No person can be saved, ever, unless they are represented by Christ.

All people are represented by one of two people, either Adam in the garden, fallen man, or Christ, who is their substitute, their representative.

So there is no salvation without representation. But there is no salvation either if God didn't choose to love. No, God is love, and God could have remained love without ever sending his Son, because that is the very nature and character of God.

We get to experience the very nature and character of God because of his choice, and his choice was to send his Son. And by sending his Son into the world, we get to not only know God, but we get to experience the love of God in the sending of the Son.

The Incarnation is God declaring to the world his love for them, that God so loved the world that he gave his Son. The Incarnation is God giving his Son into the world.

[12 : 39] And so in the New Testament, especially in 1 John, you get to see that John has to defend the Incarnation. He has to defend the truth that God has come in the flesh.

There are many people who want to deny that God has come in this way. And John says in 1 John 4, 2, every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

In other words, one of the defining marks of your genuineness as a believer is that you will acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, that God became man, that you will affirm the Incarnation.

And so he tells his readers at the beginning as we read, look, we saw him with our eyes, we touched him with our hands, we heard him with our ears, we, every physical way, we are able to testify to you that we have seen him, heard him, and touched him, that this is God in the flesh.

Now, of course, none of these passages mention the Incarnation, but these passages are only possible because of the Incarnation, the fact that God came and dwelt among us, that he is with his people.

[14 : 02] And so God gives love, God demonstrates that love in the Incarnation by sending the Son, and God in the flesh is Christ Jesus.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, to put this in simple forms, the Word of God that people heard is the Word of God that people now see. What they heard throughout their life growing up, hearing the Hebrew Scriptures, they now see.

They now see God. They see the Word that they heard. And this is, of course, John's point. People can now see and hear and touch Jesus.

Now, of course, there's more to the Incarnation than Jesus Christ simply representing us. Of course, that is the very pinnacle, Christ's death on the cross. It is the central point that we ought to be focusing on, but we ought not to focus on that at the expense of neglecting everything else, which I think tends to happen.

And the Incarnation is about God loving us and sending his Son, and he takes on our form. He takes on our likeness. And so what we see in the person of Jesus is true humanity, which we have never seen.

[15 : 24] We've never seen true humanity prior to Jesus coming. You could go back to, perhaps, Adam and Eve, perhaps.

And, of course, belonging then to Jesus is going to take some explaining as well because this true humanity says something about our humanity, doesn't it? Well, Jesus is born of a woman.

Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit. No man was involved, but he was born of the Virgin Mary. He was conceived. Now, it is impossible for virgins to conceive.

How do virgins conceive? Well, they don't conceive. That's the point. But he's conceived by the Holy Spirit. And yet, Mary had a son.

A baby was born. The baby came out of Mary's womb, just like babies come out of other mothers' wombs. And baby Jesus would have been like many other babies.

[16:28] He would have had fingers and toes and hands. He would have been hungry. He would have been tired. There would have been no terrible twos or tantrum threes because he's God.

Jesus was fully God and fully man. What does it mean? It means that Jesus' anatomy was the same as ours.

It means that his central nervous system was the same as ours. Jesus was fully God and fully man. It meant that when the Roman soldier pierced his side, water and blood flowed out because he's fully human.

But of course, when God sent his son and Christ took on humanity, he didn't convert to humanity as though he converted from God to being a human.

He was fully God and fully man. And in many ways, Jesus was the true biological son of Mary. But he was conceived of the Holy Spirit.

[17:39] And we can get into X and Y chromosomes if we like because we all know that X and Y chromosomes take a man and a woman and of course there is no presence of a man. So what are the chromosomes within Christ?

Well, there's something to think about. But he is fully God and fully man and Mary is to call his name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

So he became flesh. The word became flesh. You could touch it. Jesus was born a baby boy but that doesn't allow us to draw any conclusions about the gender of God.

We cannot say that God is male. We cannot say that God is female. Sexuality is biological. That needs to be restated in this present world it seems.

But it's a fairly easy one I think that your sex is determined by your biological placement, position that God gives you.

[18:47] Jesus had to be born something. He had to be born somewhere. And so he is born as a Jew. He is born to Mary.

He is born as a boy to fulfill the purposes of God. Well that book for instance was written by a man called William P. Young.

The book was called The Shack. In that book God is played by a large black African woman. woman. Bought by over 14 over 40 million copies were sold.

God is not allowed to be portrayed in any way other than the way he has revealed himself in scripture. To do so would be to committed idolatry. If we were to do that like that book does what we actually do is that we commit the same sin as those who made the golden calf in order to worship the God who brought them out of Egypt.

That's the sin that's actually being committed. But of course even though Christians read the Bible and we would assume understand some of it it didn't stop 14 million of them buying the book and reading the book and in many cases thinking that it was a good book.

[20:22] I guess to those Christians this message would seem bland and boring and it's not very exciting I appreciate that but it is the truth and the truth is the only thing that sets you free.

So we are not allowed to think of God in any other way than the way God has revealed himself and that does take effort to understand.

Jesus is revealed in a certain way. Jesus did not convert to humanity but he assumed humanity.

He took on human form. He came in the likeness of man in fully human form but without sin. Jesus is born of a woman but not born into sin.

In other words what this shows us is that if Jesus is fully man if he is fully human then it shows us that sin cannot be part of humanity.

[21:26] Sin doesn't make us human. Because if it did Jesus couldn't be fully human. But Jesus is fully human. he is fully man.

And of course the world began with the first man and the first woman being created without sin.

They had true humanity. So the idea that sin is a necessary requirement of being human is just false.

It cannot be true. If it were true then Jesus couldn't be fully human because Jesus committed no sin and neither did was he sin. There was no sin in him.

sin. And therefore when people say I'm only human, don't put the blame on me, I'm only human, even that song, I'm only human, don't put the blame on me, identifies the problem in the wrong area.

The problem's not humanity, the problem is that you are less than human. human. If the presence of sin corrupts humanity then it means that you are less than human.

[22 : 37] If true humanity is the absence of sin, then the presence of sin in humanity means that you can no longer have a full uncorrupted humanity.

humanity. So when people say I'm only human, they're identifying their weaknesses, they're identifying a number of other things, but the problem is not humanity, the problem is the fact that sin has corrupted humanity.

humanity. It's not that you are human, it's rather that you are less than human. Because the humanity that God created was a humanity without the presence of sin.

And Jesus is fully human and Jesus has no sin. And so the problem is not humanity, the problem is sin in humanity. It destroys the good that God made.

It corrupts the good that God gave. And so we're not fully human. We are very much less than human.

[23 : 38] And to become fully human is to belong to the fully human person and fully God, Christ. That's what the incarnation is showing us.

It is showing us that we are less than human if we are separated from God in Christ Jesus. Because sin destroys humanity. well, there is a phrase throughout history, and I'll give you the quote, and the phrase is this, that what Christ did not assume, he did not redeem.

What Christ did not assume, he did not redeem. Christ became human to redeem humanity. Christ became human to redeem humanity.

Gregory of Nanzanias said, what he did not assume, what God Christ, God did not assume, he did not redeem. Meaning that Christ became human to redeem humanity.

In Hebrews 2, it says that Jesus partook of flesh and blood, that through his death, physical death, he might destroy the one who had power of death, that is, the devil.

[24 : 55] He had to take on human form for his blood to be shed. It goes on to say that it is not the angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

Jesus did not assume the likeness of an angel. Jesus did not become an angel, because angels are not redeemed. In 1 Peter, we learn that angels long to look into the gospel, they long to see the work of God, but they don't get to experience that work of God for themselves.

They don't get to experience the salvation that we have received. Why? Because Christ assumes that which he redeems, or rather he redeems that which he assumes.

Christ did not become an angel, but he became fully man, fully God, and fully man. So Christ died for humanity. humanity, because what he did not assume, he did not redeem.

And so by becoming human, he is indicating to the world what it is that he has come to redeem. Angels don't get to enjoy the salvation we enjoy.

[26 : 11] They don't get to, they get to look into the atonement, they get to see the incarnation, but they don't get to partake in it in terms of experience. they can witness, but only we get to enjoy that conversion experience, because God became man in order that we may be brought to him.

And therefore, Christ is also human to fulfill, in many ways, human obligations before God. The first man disobeyed God.

Christ's new covenant that he will establish will be in his blood, blood that he must shed. And so we're indicating again and again and again the importance of the incarnation, which brings us back full circle to our original statement, that there is no salvation without representation.

that what the incarnation is showing us is that Christ must become man to represent us as our substitute before God.

There is no other way. Christ says it himself. There is no way to the Father except through me. So what are some of these important conclusions then that we can draw?

[27 : 33] Well, number one is this, that when Satan attacks the work of God in creation, he doesn't attack the trees, he doesn't attack the land or the plants or the rivers or the mountains, he attacks man.

He goes straight after the image of God. He attacks humanity, those made in God's image. The promise is made soon after by God that he would send a savior into the world born of the seed of the woman, the one who would crush the head of the serpent as we read in Hebrews too, just there a moment ago.

And of course, now Satan goes after the last Adam, the new Adam that will do what the first Adam failed to do. Think of how Herod was killing children. Who do you think was behind that? Think of how Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness. He's going after, again, the very image of God or God now in the likeness of man.

And of course, when we read the book of Revelation, we learn that one of the visions that John has is a woman in labor. And right next to her is a dragon. And we know that this dragon is the serpent of old, the devil, who seeks to destroy the child.

[28 : 53] Don't confuse yourself while it's in Revelation. It's retelling the account. In Hebrews, we learn that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, but his whole self was turned towards God, unlike the first man who was tempted, but who turned into the temptation rather than away from it.

The incarnation demonstrates to us how we are to live before God. But it does more than that because it demonstrates to us, it gives us the sense of assurance that Jesus is righteous. How do you know that Jesus is righteous? How do you know that Jesus is the righteous one who can take away the sins of the world? We know that a lamb must be without spot or blemish. John calls Jesus the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But how do you know that Jesus is without sin? How do you know that he can lay down his life as the righteous sacrifice without spot or blemish?

You know because of how he lived. His life confirms his righteousness. The way that you see him speak and act and live and walk and do the things that he does.

[30 : 07] We get to see through the incarnation that God in Christ, God the Son in humanity is righteous. That's how important it is.

We need the life of Christ to prove that righteousness, to confirm that righteousness before we get to the death because no sacrifice is acceptable before God. if it has spot or blemish.

So it takes the life of Christ for us to get to see the importance of the crucifixion or rather to see why only Christ could lay down his life or humanity.

at no point does it ever say that the deity of God, of Christ, overwhelmed, overrode his humanity.

As if to say, as some Christians have done, well of course Christ could do that, he was fully God.

That's to misunderstand the importance of Christ's humanity.

[31 : 06] Christ got tired, he got hungry, he got a number of other things that he had to turn to God for. He spent so much time in prayer, in his humanity, up on the mountain, teaching his disciples to pray.

Well here's the exhortation as we close. when we are unsure, there's almost perhaps nothing worse than uncertainty.

Well there is quite a lot worse, but in terms of, in terms of the context of knowing and understanding, uncertainty is, causes great trouble.

When we're wanting something to be ready, and we're not sure if it's going to be ready, where we, our uncertainty shows up in asking questions. How long will it be? Will it be ready by then?

Will you have it for me by then? All of these questions are, are seeking certainty. They're seeking an answer which can then produce certainty. When we leave something in someone's care, I've often found it, I've often found it interesting.

[32 : 15] I've heard, just in conversations, you know when you, you sat in a restaurant which doesn't happen that often and suddenly some of the people on the next table are speaking too loud and you get to hear their conversation.

You really don't intend to. Well you're stood in a supermarket aisle and you're listening. Man alive. And you hear what people care about and say, I'll let you borrow it but please look after it.

It's the only one I've got. Please don't break it. And it could be a car, it could be a thing. And then of course they say, can you babysit my children and I'll pay you two pounds an hour. And I'm thinking, hang on a minute, I'm pretty sure that children are worth more than two pounds an hour compared to your car that you're willing to lend out.

So people, this idea of certainty, are you sure it's going to be safe? Are you sure you've packed it well? Are you sure you've wrapped it well? Perhaps you're sending a present off. Are you sure you've put enough bubble wrap around?

Put an extra layer just in case so it doesn't break on transit. And what we're after is certainty. And we want the certainty because we want the assurance.

[33 : 22] And so what God gives us in the incarnation is certainty. It is the answers to the questions if we only knew the questions to ask. And we've tried to cover some of them this morning.

God is giving us huge amount of assurance in the incarnation. Reminding us with great detail that God became man, fully man, to redeem us back to full humanity.

That God became man to redeem us back to full humanity. And so the incarnation doesn't just answer questions about the birth of Christ Jesus.

It answers them concerning his life, his death, and of course our future. Amen.

We're going to come to our final hymn before we finish.