

The Incarnation

Luke 2:12

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I. God With Us

A babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12), and you shall call his name Immanuel which is translated “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). This is what we celebrate at Christmas. Volumes have been written regarding this historic event. The vocabulary necessary to read what the greatest scholars in history recorded about this event requires a graduate level education—the incarnation, the hypostatic union, the magnificent condescension, and so on.

Incarnation, Hypostatic Union, Magnificent Condescension

The incarnation means that God, the Son, became flesh. The hypostatic union means Jesus, even though a man with a human nature, maintained his divine or godly nature. These two natures are distinct but in the same person. The magnificent condescension means that it was quite magnificent that God would take rank with humanity and enter into His own creation. Why so much study about the simple birth of a child?

It’s been said that the Hypostatic union is the cornerstone of our redemption.¹ And no doubt, apart from the incarnation, we wouldn’t be celebrating Christmas. And although I hesitate to impinge upon the mood of Christmas with what appears to be academic questions, I think some need to be asked:

Questions

1) Why did Jesus have to become a human? 2) Isn’t there some other way God could have dealt with humanity? 3) Is this just a sentimental way God gets our attention (After all, who doesn’t love babies?) 4) Is the incarnation just another religious story? 5) What makes it unique and the only right answer especially when compared with other religions?

The Beauty of Truth

I am under the conviction that a true and defined love is superior, in every respect, to an undefined and subjective love. A fireman who runs into a burning building with all the knowledge of fire science and architecture, is no less a hero than one who runs in full of ignorance, and will very likely be more effective.

¹ R. L. Dabney, *Topical Lectures on Scripture*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

I think we'll find that the reason so much scholarship has been dedicated to this event is due to it being the only reasonable, logical and satisfactory answer to man's dilemma. There is no system or religion which captures the quandary of the human predicament and then solves that quandary quite like the incarnation. It is the only answer! The deeper the study and the more acute the understanding, the more beautiful it all appears. Small children don't appreciate the sacrifices of parenthood as much as older ones.

A Family Instructional Guide

In Thomas Vincent's Family Instructional Guide we see three questions which address why the incarnation was necessary. I would challenge you to have some family or friend time and discuss these questions and answers. See how well you can answer the questions before looking at the answers. Consider how impossible it would be for there to be any other solution to man's dilemma. I am confident these questions will help you appreciate what we are celebrating with deeper wisdom and insight.

QUESTION 8: What did Christ, the eternal Son of God, become, that he might redeem the elect?

ANSWER: Christ, that he might redeem the elect, being the eternal Son of God, became man. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son of a woman," etc. (Gal. 4:4).

This question assumes a need for redemption. There is a curse on the human race, death. On the day you eat of it, God said, you shall surely die. We accept death as natural and normal. But death is a judgment from which men need redemption.

QUESTION 9: How was it necessary for the redemption of the elect, that Christ should become man?

This is the heart of our question. Why couldn't God simply handle the event from heaven? Why all the drama? Why the nativity scene?

ANSWER: It was necessary, in order to the redemption of the elect, that Christ should become man: (1.) That he might be capable of suffering death for them, which as God, he was incapable. Without which suffering of death there could have been no remission or salvation. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb.

9:22). (2.) That he might be their high priest to reconcile them unto God. “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham; wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:16, 17).

It was men who sinned, therefore it would have to be men who suffered the consequences of sin. The Son of God didn't become an angel or a tree or a river. He became a man because men sinned. He became one of us to represent us. God in heaven is a just God and there must be punishment for sin. It would not be right for God wink at sin.

QUESTION 10: Was it necessary that the Redeemer of the elect should be God as well as man?

The deity (or God-hood) of Christ is denounced by cults and atheists alike. Yet it has been determined to be the linchpin of the Christian faith. Why is it so important to acknowledge that Christ was God with us?

ANSWER: Yes; because if he had not been God as well as man: 1. He could not have borne up under, nor have got loose from, the weight of wrath which was laid upon him for the sins of men. 2. His sufferings would have been of finite extent, and so could not have made satisfaction to God's infinite justice, which was offended by sin.

If Christ were merely a man, even a righteous man, His death would have been satisfactory only for one. He could not have endured the sins of the world and the due wrath for those sins. His sacrifice would be finite, if He were a finite being He could not have satisfied God's infinite justice. This is why all cults don't look at the work of Christ on the cross as fully satisfactory for sin. The works of men must be added.

A baby born in a manger addresses and resolves the quandary of the human dilemma like nothing else. It is truly a beautiful story. Some call it the greatest story ever told. But it is much more. The only hope of humankind lied wrapped in swaddling cloths. Let us pray for expanded vision of this incarnation—this magnificent condescension. As the great hymn expresses:

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the' incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with men appear,
Jesus, our Immanuel here.