

LESSON 5

THE INCARNATION

Introduction

The Person of Jesus Christ emerges at two places in Christian doctrine: in connexion with the nature of God and His redemptive work. As the divine Son of God who came from the Father, Christ manifested the nature of God: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Jesus claimed, "He that seeth me seeth him that sent me" (John 12:45). In addition to revealing the Father, Christ came as the Mediator in God's work of reconciliation. He took upon Himself the form of man and became obedient unto the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). God's work of redemption was accomplished through His Son who became man.

The Apostles testified that they met God in Christ. When the questions were put to the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" they answered, "The son of David" (Matt. 22:42). When Jesus asked His disciples a similar question concerning His identity, Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Even the most dubious disciple, Thomas, came to the point of falling down before Jesus and exclaiming, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Paul emphasized the deity of Christ. Immediately after his conversion, he proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:20). In the Colossian Epistle, Paul stated that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9).

There was no question in the minds of Jesus' associates that He was human. However, the disciples experienced in Him the presence of God. Their inspired interpretation of their experience was "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

The Meaning of Incarnation

Although the words 'incarnation' and 'incarnate' are not in the Bible, their component parts do appear several times in the New Testament. *Carne* is a Latin word meaning 'flesh'. *Sarx* is its Greek equivalent.

In Christian doctrine, the Person of Jesus Christ must be considered in connexion with the _____ of God and the _____ of God.

(nature, redemptive work)

To the disciples, Jesus was both _____ and _____.

(human, divine)

The adjectival form of the word often is translated as 'carnal'. 'Incarnation' signifies the assumption of human flesh or form by the Son of God. John's Gospel explicitly sets forth the Incarnation, but it does not explain how the Son of God took upon Himself human flesh.

The Virgin Birth of Christ, set forth in Matthew 1:18ff. and Luke 1:26ff., is related to the Incarnation. While other Scriptures affirm that the Eternal Son of God became man, Matthew and Luke seem to be concerned with the question, How did the Incarnation take place? Their answer is the Virgin Birth. They do not explicitly state a doctrine of the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God, but they deal with the origin of the Person Jesus Christ. They do not explain how a pre-existing person became man; they simply state how Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was begotten. Brunner states, "The doctrine of the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God in Paul and John, and the doctrine of the conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, are two independent parallel attempts to interpret the mystery of Jesus."¹ The Biblical accounts of the Virgin Birth and the Word becoming flesh (incarnation) are related but not identical.

The Virgin Birth

The meaning of the Virgin Birth

Matthew and Luke present the birth of Jesus of a normal human mother who was a virgin in the strictest sense of the word. Jesus had no human father, and the Scripture does not imply a supernatural father. His conception was a special miracle wrought by the Holy Spirit. No branch of the Christian Church nor heretical sect within it has ever regarded the Holy Spirit as the Father of Jesus. Greek mythology describes the cohabitation of gods with women, but the Bible gives no indication of such a view with regard to the conception of Jesus. The accounts state that Jesus was begotten of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Although the narratives of Matthew and Luke do not set forth a doctrine identical to that in the Gospel of John, their statements can be brought into harmony with John's doctrine of the Incarnate Word.

¹Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), p. 352.

God's Son's becoming human flesh or form is called I _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The Incarnation and Virgin Birth are related in that the _____ explains how the _____ took place.

(Virgin Birth, Incarnation)

The Virgin Birth means that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a normal human _____ without a human or supernatural _____.

(mother, father)

The account in Matthew 1 and 2

Matthew 1:1-16 traces the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph. For many scholars, the genealogy appears to be in contradiction to the statement in Matthew 1:18, "When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." It should be remembered that the Jews looked upon adoptive fatherhood in a very realistic way. According to the Old Testament, if a man died without a child, his brother was obligated to take his wife and raise up an heir for him. The son was regarded as belonging to the dead man rather than to the brother by whom he was conceived. Jesus was reared in the household of Joseph and was regarded legally as his son.

F.C. Burkitt maintains that the word 'begat' in the Matthaean genealogy does not indicate physical paternity but only the transmission of legal heirship. The genealogy does not state specifically that Joseph begat Jesus. Rather the repetition of terminology is broken, and the writer states that Joseph was "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (1:16). "Certainly, according to Jewish usage, a child born to a man's wife, and acknowledged by him, was to all intents and purposes his son."² Through his legal father, Joseph, Jesus is presented as belonging to the house of David just as truly as if he were in a physical sense the son of Joseph. Matthew does not represent Jesus as an adopted son who had an actual father. Joseph alone and no other human being could assume the rights and responsibilities of a father with respect to Jesus.

The author of Matthew's Gospel had no difficulty in accepting the miracle of Mary's conceiving by the power of the Holy Spirit. A God who had the power to make man's body from the earth and to breathe life into it surely had the power to form the child in Mary's womb apart from the ordinary processes of nature. Because this conception was unique, neither Joseph nor Mary understood the event apart from special revelation.

Since Matthew focuses attention on Joseph who was the legal father of Jesus, he includes an account of the Lord appearing to Joseph in a dream in which Mary's pregnancy is explained (1:20). There was a law which demanded death by stoning for both the man and woman in a case of seduction (Deut. 22:23-24; Lev. 20:10). Jewish law also permitted an adulteress to be divorced quietly. Betrothal was a legal

² J. Gresham Machen, The Virgin Birth of Christ (reprinted by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, in 1967), p. 129.

Matthew's genealogy implies that _____ was Jesus' _____.

(Joseph, father)

One indication that Joseph was not Jesus' actual father is Matthew 1:16 which does not state that Joseph _____ Jesus, but rather that he was the _____ of Mary of whom _____ was born.

(begat, husband, Jesus)

Is this statement true or false?

Joseph and Mary did not understand Mary's conceiving apart from special revelation.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

arrangement which was binding upon both man and woman. However, the marriage was not consummated until sexual relationship after the marriage supper.

Joseph is instructed to "fear not to take unto thee Mary to be thy wife" (1:20). The terms 'son' and 'wife' are carefully avoided in Matthew 2. Joseph was told by the angel to take "the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt"(2:13; cf. 2:20, 21). Emphasis is placed on the fact that Mary was His mother.

The angel which appeared in a dream to Joseph revealed that the name of the child should be Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins" (1:21). In showing that Jesus fulfilled the promises of the Davidic Messiah, Matthew cited Isaiah 7:14 which tells of a virgin who would bear a child whose name would be called Emmanuel. Emmanuel means 'God with us'. The Hebrew word in Isaiah 7:14 is 'young woman' instead of 'virgin'. The Septuagint translated 'young woman' with a Greek word meaning 'virgin'. The Greek rather than the Hebrew text is quoted in Matthew 1:23. 'God with us' originally did not mean that the child was divine in nature. God was with the Israelites in their wilderness journey and promised to be with Moses; however, Moses was never thought to be divine. Emmanuel took on a new meaning after the resurrection. John reinterpreted the nature of Christ in the light of His life and resurrection and he stated that whoever had seen Jesus had seen the Father. 'God with us' came to be understood as a reference to the divine nature of Jesus.

Joseph did not divorce or put away Mary but took her to be his wife; however, the marriage was not consummated until after the birth of Jesus (1:25).

The Virgin Birth in Luke 1 and 2

Luke's account of the Virgin Birth differs from Matthew's; however, the two do not contradict one another. Mary instead of Joseph is the central figure in Luke 1 and 2. Her virginity is emphasized in the description of her engagement to Joseph (1:27—the word 'virgin' appears twice). Whether Luke intended to identify Mary or Joseph with the house of David in verse 27 is disputed. He did point out Mary's relation to Elizabeth which reveals the connexion of Jesus to the priestly house. It is possible also that Mary could trace her ancestry to David.

Divine activity in the birth of a son to a barren woman was not unusual in Israel's history. Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah are examples of women whose sons were the result of miracles. Elizabeth stood in this same tradition. Mary's circumstances differed from theirs, however, since she was

The use of 'child' and 'mother' rather than '_____' and '_____' in Matthew 2 is an additional evidence that Joseph was not the actual father of Jesus.

(son, wife)

Emmanuel, which means '_____', took on new meaning after the _____.

(God with us, resurrection)

The fact that the marriage of Joseph and Mary was not consummated until after the birth of Jesus is another indication that _____ was not the _____ of Jesus.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

One way Luke's account of the Virgin Birth differs from Matthew's is that _____ instead of _____ is the central figure in Luke.

Another difference between Luke and Matthew is that Luke pointed out Mary's relation to _____ which connected Jesus with the priestly house.

(Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth)

unmarried. Ordinarily the pregnancy of an unmarried woman would bring shame to her; therefore, it is understandable that Mary was troubled by the message of the angel (1:28-29). It was revealed that the conception was not an event of shame and disgrace but of grace and favour from God (1:30).

The message of the angel concerning the name of the child was the same as that given to Joseph (Matt. 1:21). She was to call his name Jesus, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Joshua which means 'Yahweh is salvation'.

Some scholars have argued that the announcement of the angel did not exclude the natural conception of Jesus after Mary married Joseph. This argument does not appear to be in line with Luke's intention since he recorded Mary's response, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (1:34). The clear implication is that Mary understood the conception would be before the consummation of her marriage.

The virgin conception meant that Jesus would have a unique relationship to God: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (1:32). The uniqueness of Jesus' birth would be brought about by the Holy Spirit and the power of the Highest who would overshadow Mary (1:35). The child which was miraculously conceived would be holy (set apart to God's service) and would be called "the Son of God" (1:35).

Every maiden of Israel would have rejoiced in the angelic message that she had been chosen to be the mother of the Davidic Messiah. And yet the virgin conception broke normal social customs and endangered the reputation and life of Mary; therefore, her submission to the Lord's will was needed (1:38).

Like Matthew, Luke 2 is careful to signify that Mary was the "espoused wife" of Joseph before the birth of Jesus (cf. 2:5). Jesus is designated as the firstborn son of Mary, but not Joseph (2:7). After forty days at the time of Mary's purification and the presentation of Jesus to the Lord, Mary continued to be designated as the mother of Jesus but Joseph was not designated as His father (2:33). When Jesus was taken to Jerusalem for the Feast at the age of twelve, Joseph and Mary are referred to as His parents (2:41). Mary naturally made reference to her husband as the father of Jesus (2:48). It was natural that Jesus should be known in the community as the son of Mary and Joseph.

Since the unique conception of Jesus could have been misunderstood and could have brought

Another difference in Luke's and Matthew's accounts of the Virgin Birth is that Luke records the angel's appearance to _____ rather than to Joseph.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The virgin conception meant that Jesus would have a unique relationship to _____.

The uniqueness of Jesus' birth was brought about by the _____.

(God, Holy Spirit)

shame to Mary, it was not a matter of public knowledge; therefore, it should not be surprising that reference to the Virgin Birth is absent from the New Testament epistles. However, Luke indicated in the introduction to the Gospel that he had investigated the events concerning Jesus' life and teachings. He accompanied Paul to Jerusalem at the time Paul was taken prisoner by the Jews. Perhaps Luke remained in Palestine during the time that Paul was in prison at Caesarea. These two years would have given him ample time to have conferred with Mary and others.

The significance of the Virgin Birth

The Virgin Birth accounts do not imply the pre-existence of the Second Person of the Trinity, but neither do they deny its possibility. They explain from the perspective of human experience how the unique Person Jesus came to be born into the home of Mary and Joseph. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus had established His deity, a fuller meaning could be seen in His unique conception. During His lifetime, there was no question regarding Jesus' humanity as the son of Mary and Joseph. After His deity was recognized, it became evident that the Virgin Birth was God's method of sending His Son in the flesh. Jesus was more than a human descendant of David whose life could be used and empowered by God. Not only was God present with Jesus to guide and to empower Him, but God existed in Jesus as a part of His nature. This doctrinal position was elaborated upon by John and Paul.

The Incarnation of the Eternal Son

Israel had expected a descendant of David who would be righteous and could be used by God to deliver her. For God to give power and victory to the Messiah would mean that God was with His people. The prophets had taught that God had departed from them because of their sinfulness. It would be necessary for God "to come" to them when they repented. Brunner points out that Jesus stated, "I am come to call sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13).³ God came in Jesus not just in power to bless His people but in person to be with them. For God to reveal Himself to them, it was necessary that He enter their history and dwell in their midst as a person.

³Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, p. 350.

List three probable reasons the Virgin Birth is not referred to in the New Testament.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(The unique conception of Jesus could have been misunderstood. It could have brought shame to Mary. The Virgin Birth was not public knowledge.)

The doctrinal position elaborated by John and Paul was that God existed in _____ as a part of His _____.

(Jesus, nature)

God came in Jesus not just in power to bless His people but in p _____ to be with them.

(person)

Romans 8:3

To the Romans, Paul stated explicitly that the Eternal Son was sent by God in the likeness of sinful flesh. Paul avoided saying that the Son assumed sinful flesh as part of His nature. He gave as a reason for the Incarnation of the Eternal Son the condemnation of sin in the flesh. The Son defeated sin in two ways: (1) He assumed bodily existence in the likeness of sinful flesh, yet did not yield to the power of sin; (2) He was an offering for the sins of others.

2 Corinthians 8:9

In challenging the Corinthians to be generous in their giving to help the impoverished Jerusalem saints, Paul appealed to the example of the Incarnate Christ. The statement implies that Christ was rich during His pre-existent state with the Father but He became poor when He took upon Himself the likeness of human flesh.

Galatians 4:4-5

Paul stated that in the fulness of time God sent His Son to redeem those who were under the Law. This Scripture affirms that the object of the Incarnation was redemption, the liberation of those enslaved in sin. In accomplishing redemption, He had to submit to the human conditions of man's nature (born of woman) and of His social and physical environment (born under the Law—v. 4). His birth of a woman points to His humanity. His coming from God indicates His divinity. His divine and human natures were necessary for His redemptive mission.

Romans 1:3-4

The two phrases Paul employed to describe the Son of God designate His humanity and divinity. Paul stated that he was set apart to the Gospel which concerns the Son of God. Jesus' human nature ("according to the flesh") was born of the seed of David. His divine nature as the Son of God with power was marked out (designated or declared) by His resurrection from the dead. Paul's statement implies that Jesus' humanity as a descendant of David was not questioned during His lifetime. His human nature was recognized by His bodily form, the flesh. His divine nature was recognized by His spiritual power, manifested in His resurrection. This Scripture does not speak of the pre-existence of the Son, but it does state the two natures of Jesus Christ.

After you have read all of the text on this page, match the following Scripture references to the four statements of Paul concerning the Eternal Son's coming in the flesh.

2 Corinthians 8:9

Romans 1:3, 4

Galatians 4:4

Romans 8:3

_____ "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman."

_____ "... though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor."

_____ "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."

_____ "Made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection."

(Gal. 4:4, 2 Cor. 8:9, Rom. 8:3, Rom. 1:3,4)

Philippians 2:6-8

One of the great Christological passages in the New Testament was given to illustrate the virtue of humility. Christ's pre-existence is assumed in the statement of His existence "in the form of God." That state of existence parallels the statement "that, though he was rich..." (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul left no doubt concerning Christ's divine nature—He was "equal with God" (v. 6). Yet He did not consider the glory and wealth of that position something to be coveted or forcibly retained. He emptied Himself ("made himself of no reputation"; impoverished Himself; stripped Himself of His glory and privileges) in order to take "upon him the form of a servant" (slave). In becoming a servant, He became like human beings and was born like other men. He appeared in history as a man ("being found in fashion as a man"). He humbled Himself to the point of being willing to die on the cross as a criminal in obedience to God's will. Because of His perfect life of humility and obedience (sinlessness), God exalted Him in the resurrection. Through His action, Jesus proved Himself worthy of the dignity of the Divine. God is love, and Jesus Christ spared no sacrifice in expressing His nature of love. God is righteous and will not betray man. Christ expressed ultimate loyalty to God, thereby demonstrating His uprightness.

The manner and degree to which Christ humiliated or emptied Himself in becoming a servant and assuming human nature eludes clear and concise description. When He became the baby of Mary, did He retain remembrance of His pre-existent glory? If He did, could He have entered fully into the human experience? If He did not, how could He continue to be divine in nature? The Synoptic Gospels emphasize His human experience in their semi-biographical descriptions of His birth and life. They do indicate that Jesus had a unique relationship to the Father and an unusual depth of spiritual insight, but they do not indicate that His divinity robbed Him of the truly human experience. He faced life and temptation as other men except that He did not yield to the power of sin. His victory came as a result of His trust and submission to God's will and His dependence on the power of the Spirit. The writer of Hebrews pointed out that though He was a son, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered (5:8). He entered into the truly human experience when He took upon Himself the seed of Abraham (cf. Heb. 2:16ff.). He understands our desires and weakness because He has been "tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). The author of Hebrews supported Paul in the Philippian Epistle concerning the self-emptying (*kenosis*) of His divine privilege in order to enter into a real human experience. He did not retain the advantages of divinity—although He remained divine in nature—when He took the nature of man.

Philippians 2:6-8 teaches--

1. Jesus pre-existed in the form of _____ and was equal with _____.
2. Jesus took upon Himself the form of a _____ and the likeness of _____.
3. He was obedient to God's will even to _____ on the _____.
4. Because of Christ's perfect life, God exalted Him in the _____.

(God, God, servant, man, dying, cross, resurrection)

The problem of understanding the self-emptying of Christ in Philippians 2 is due to the two following questions:

1. How could Jesus have entered a true _____ experience if He remembered His _____ - _____ glory?
2. How could He have retained His _____ nature if He did not?

(human, pre-existent, divine)

The humiliation of Christ and the assumption of human nature demonstrate the possibility of man's relating to God. Although God is transcendent and far beyond man's earthly level of existence, the relationship of humanity and divinity became a reality in the Person of Christ. God has not left man to grope in the darkness of this world. He has come to sinful man in His Son. He has entered the stream of history in the human experience and has looked at life through the eyes of man. Sinful man is not left desperate and hopeless because God's Son was willing to impoverish Himself for man.

Christ's assumption of human nature demonstrates the possibility of _____ relating to _____. God has come to sinful _____ in His _____.

(man's, God, man, Son)

The image of God in man and man's creation in God's likeness are made more understandable in the self-emptying of Jesus. The human nature and divine nature are not in opposition except as man is controlled by sin. Christ in His human experience defied and defeated the power of sin to control His life. The two natures of the human without sin and the divine in the one Person Jesus Christ were not antagonistic but compatible. The human nature is not omnipotent and all-wise but remains dependent in creaturely existence. The quality of creaturely dependence is not evil. Sin enters when man refuses to accept his dependence on God and fails to live by faith. In His human experience, Jesus was a man of submission, obedience, and trust.

Jesus' self-emptying makes it easier to understand two things:

- 1. The image of God in _____.*
- 2. Man's creation in _____ likeness.*

(man, God's)

Colossians 1:15-20

This important Christological passage grows out of Paul's statement that Jesus Christ has delivered us from the domain of darkness into the Kingdom of God, an act of redemption or deliverance through the forgiveness of sins. This Scripture emphasizes the divine status of Jesus Christ and His ultimate power which guarantees deliverance for those who trust in Him. Although His pre-existence is not specifically stated, it is implied in the statement that all things were created by Him (v. 16). The fact that He is Creator logically suggests that He has authority and power over that which has been created. He existed before creation, and He maintains the existence of all things. He is the firstborn from the dead through the resurrection; therefore, He occupies the position of the head of humanity (v. 18). Not only can His nature represent humanity, but the Father was pleased that in Him the complete being of God should dwell (v. 19). Again Paul mentions reconciliation of man and God in the Person of Christ who shed His blood on the cross. The work of Christ opened the way back to God for sinful man.

Colossians 1:15-20 emphasizes Christ's _____, and states that the Father was pleased that in Christ the complete being of _____ should dwell.

(divinity, God)

The Incarnate Logos

John 1:1-18

John's Gospel gives special attention to the divine nature of Jesus Christ. His eternal sonship and messiahship extend beyond the ministry in Palestine at a particular period of time. His relationship to God is not a matter of encountering God in historical events but of being related to God in nature.

The opening verses of John's Gospel recall the Creation account in Genesis 1. According to Genesis, God spoke and creation came to pass. John thinks of Jesus as the spoken Word who brought everything into existence. The Word (Logos) was not only face to face with God in the beginning, but the Word was equal to God—"the Word was God." Not only did He give life to the plant and animal world, but man must look to Him for the way to live his life—"the life was the light of men." Man with physical life only is no different from the animals. His higher life, "the true light," comes from Christ who is the Light of the world.

There is no question that the Word made flesh refers to Jesus Christ (v. 14). This verse is a clear statement of the Incarnation. It points out that He became a human being who dwelt in the midst of men, yet men could behold the glory of the Father in the Son. The Son is the Bearer of God's redemptive grace and the Light who guides men in the way of truth (right living—v. 17). No closer relationship to God can be described than that of the "only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father" (v. 18). His relationship to the Father makes it possible for Him to reveal God.

John's doctrine of the Incarnate Logos sets forth His eternal pre-existence, His assumption of human nature, and the redemptive purpose of His Incarnation.

Attempts to Define Christ's Nature

The New Testament gives statements which point both to Christ's full humanity and to His full divinity. The reality of Jesus' human nature and the genuineness of the human life are fully assumed in the Synoptics. The teaching of the Scripture that Jesus was sinless does not deny His human nature. Sin is a distortion of true humanity rather than an essential element of it.

Although Joseph and Mary received special revelations concerning His birth, they did not understand

Identify whether each of the following statements is from Genesis or John.

1. Jesus is the spoken Word who brought everything into existence. _____
2. God spoke and creation came to pass.

(1. John, 2. Genesis)

In John 1:14, the Word made flesh refers to _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

John's doctrine of the Incarnate Logos sets forth three facts:

1. Jesus' eternal _____;
2. His assumption of _____;
3. The redemptive purpose of His _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

the full implications of the visions and statements of others concerning Jesus: "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). "In all probability as He grew up His companions and the family saw nothing in Him to lead them to believe that He was a supernatural Being, but were only impressed with His remarkable mental force and moral purity."⁴ Luke states that Jesus grew intellectually, physically, and spiritually (cf. 2:52).

Paul and John give explicit statements that Jesus pre-existed and is divine. He is not a created being who in turn created the world but is eternally with the Father—"the Word was God" (John 1:1). He was in the form of God and equal with God before He took upon Himself the nature of man (Phil. 2:7-8). Even after He received the nature of man, all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him (Col. 1:18).

How is Christ to be understood? Can He be truly divine and truly human at the same time? How can both human and divine natures co-exist in His person? At different periods in the history of the Church, theologians have given varying answers to these questions.

Ebionism

Ebionites were Jewish followers of Jesus who held that Christ was merely a man. He did not possess a divine nature, thus there was no incarnation. He was an unusual man in that He had a special relationship with God. At His baptism, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Him, qualifying Him for the prophetic office, and elevating Him in piety to the position of Son of God. Ebionites shared the intense monotheism of the Jews; therefore, they rejected the divine nature of Christ. For Christ to have been divine appeared inconsistent with their belief that there is one God.

Docetism

This Greek word means 'to appear'. Docetism arose from those who had been influenced by the Greek philosophy that spirit is good but matter and flesh are evil because they deteriorate, are temporary, and are imperfect. Docetics could not conceive of God's having come into contact with human flesh. They rejected the Incarnation as only an appearance. Jesus was not a real human being but one who only appeared in human form. According to this view, the divine Christ could

⁴Lorraine Boettner, Studies in Theology (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1947), p. 183.

*Is this statement true or false?
In all probability Joseph and Mary believed during Jesus' childhood that He was a supernatural being. _____*

(false)

The humanity and divinity of Christ, and the co-existence of two natures in His person are problems which many _____ have dealt with at different periods in the history of the _____

(theologians, Church)

Ebionites believed Christ was merely a _____, but He was an unusual man in that He had a special relationship with _____. At His _____, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Him and elevated Him in piety to the position of _____ of _____.

(man, God, baptism, Son, God)

Docetism rejected the Incarnation as only an _____. Jesus did not really become a human being; he only appeared in _____ form.

(appearance, human)

not have been born of Mary nor could He have suffered at the hands of the Jews.

Adoptionism

Paul of Samosata concluded that the Logos or Christ came upon Jesus at His baptism, at which point He became the adopted Son of God. Jesus was born of Mary and lived like any ordinary person. There was no real union of the divine and human natures in the one Person. Rather the Logos came to dwell in the man Jesus at His baptism. The view is very similar to that of Ebionism.

Arianism

Also in the fourth century, there arose the view that Christ was more than man but less than God. He was the first and greatest Being created by God. He was not equal with God because He was subordinated to the Father and originated in time. Although the Logos created the world, He Himself was created beforehand and was dependent upon God. Arianism was condemned by the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

Apollinarianism

In the early part of the fourth century, a bishop in Syria concluded that it was impossible to combine the divine and human natures of Jesus the Christ. His view was based on a trichotomous understanding of man's nature as body, soul, and spirit. He stated that the human nature of Jesus consisted of His body and soul, but His spirit was divine. The divine Logos or Word which was with God and was God took the place of the human spirit in the Person of Christ. His view was rejected by the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381 because it suggested that Jesus was not a real or complete man.

Nestorianism

Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople, accepted the divine and human natures of Christ's Person but denied their union. The implication of his teaching was that there were two natures and two persons that remained separate even though they were intimately connected. The natures of God and man were not united in an incarnate life. God had not really become man but had come to abide in man.

Eutychianism

In defending the unity of Christ's Person, Eutyches went to the extreme of defining the divine

Adoptionism said that the _____ or Christ came upon Jesus at His _____ and He became the _____ Son of God.

(Logos, baptism, adopted)

Arianism said that Christ was more than _____ but less than _____. He was the greatest Being created by _____.

(man, God, God)

Apollinarianism held that the human nature of Jesus consisted of _____ and _____, but His spirit was _____.

(body, soul, divine)

Is this statement true or false?

Nestorianism said that Jesus had divine and human natures and persons but they remained separate. _____

(true)

and human natures as a fusion into a nature which was neither human nor divine but a combination of both. He stated, "I confess that our Lord was of two natures before the union, but after the union I confess one nature."

The settlement at Chalcedon in A. D. 451

Representatives of the Church met in council to deal with the problem of the nature of Christ. About 600 bishops attended and agreed on a Christological definition which has always been regarded by the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and conservative Protestant Churches as a satisfactory statement. The essence of the statement included:

We ... teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and the same truly man, of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with us according to the manhood, in all things like unto us, without sin, begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, ... to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without mutation, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Son and Only-begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

Conclusion

The doctrine of the Incarnation and a correct view of the Person of Christ are very important for several reasons:

1. The doctrine of the Atonement is affected by the doctrine of the Incarnation.

⁵For slight variations in the translation of the creed, see Otto Heick, A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 184; and H. R. Mackintosh, The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1913), p. 212.

Eutychianism held that the divine and human natures of Jesus were fused into a nature which was neither _____ nor _____

(human, divine)

YOU HAVE STUDIED SEVEN VIEWS OF JESUS' DIVINITY AND HUMANITY. REVIEW THEM. BE SURE YOU CAN GIVE A ONE-SENTENCE DEFINITION OF EACH.

The orthodox view which is held by Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and conservative Protestant Churches states that Jesus has _____ distinct _____, divine and human, the property of each being preserved and concurring in _____ person and _____ subsistence.

(two, natures, one, one)

The doctrine of the Atonement is affected by the doctrine of the _____.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

2. The reality of Christ in man's daily Christian experience is affected by his view of the real humanity and the real divinity of Christ.
3. Man's relationship to the transcendent God is inconceivable apart from God's coming in the Incarnation.

If the humanity of Christ is minimized, sinful man feels alone and helpless in his daily struggles with sin. After all, what can a transcendent God know about human experiences and struggles? On the other hand, if the divinity of Christ is neglected, He becomes a person who can offer no real help to sinful man even though He understands man's condition. For the religious liberal who sees Jesus as only a man, Christianity is reduced to this-worldly efforts on the part of man to do his best in improving society. Such a theology leads either to an optimistic humanism in which man can redeem himself or a pessimistic existentialism in which man must accept and make the best of what comes his way. Neither view is consistent with the Biblical teachings that a Divine Being has invaded this world, the domain of Satan, and is establishing the Kingdom of God through the power of God. Sinful man's hope must not be based on his ability to deliver himself, nor must he resign himself to the hopeless position of accepting the struggles and defeats which are destined to come his way. In the God-man, man enters a new realm of existence which brings power and meaning to his present existence and a future hope of complete victory.

The Virgin Birth maintains a balanced emphasis on the divinity and humanity of Jesus. If the Scriptures set forth only the pre-existent Logos, man would end up in Docetism. Mary's conceiving by the Holy Spirit coincides with the doctrine of the pre-existent Logos. On the other hand, the fact that Jesus was born of woman emphasizes His true humanity. The doctrines of the Virgin Birth and Incarnation are basic not only to Christology but to the value and meaning of the Christian experience.

A person's view of the real divinity and humanity of Christ affects his daily _____.

Without the Incarnation, man's relationship to the transcendent _____ is inconceivable.

(Christian experience, God)

Write the correct letter in each blank, matching the statement with result.

- 1. Result of minimizing Christ's humanity.
 - 2. Result of neglecting the divinity of Christ.
- a. Christ is only a man who can offer no real help to sinful man even though He understands man's condition.
 - b. Man feels alone and helpless in his daily struggles with sin.

(b-1. a-2.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What two doctrines require a consideration of the Person of Jesus Christ? _____

2. What caused the disciples to think of Christ as both human and divine? _____

3. Define Incarnation. _____

4. How does the Incarnation relate to the Virgin Birth? _____

5. State the meaning of the Virgin Birth. _____

6. How does Matthew's genealogy appear to contradict the statement of the Virgin Birth in Matthew 1:18? _____

7. Name three indications in Matthew that Joseph is not the actual father of Jesus. (1) _____

(2) _____
(3) _____
8. How does Luke's account of the Virgin Birth differ from Matthew's? _____

9. Give the probable reason reference to the Virgin Birth is absent from the New Testament Epistles. _____

10. Name four Pauline statements concerning the Eternal Son's coming in the flesh. (1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

11. List four basic teachings in Philippians 2:6-9. (1) _____
_____. (2) _____
_____. (3) _____
_____. (4) _____

12. What is the problem of understanding the self-emptying of Christ in Philippians 2? _____

13. Why is the humanity of Christ important to us? _____

14. List two phrases in Colossians 1:15-20 which speak of Christ's divinity. _____

15. How does John 1 relate to Genesis 1? _____

16. What did Joseph and Mary apparently understand about Jesus' nature during His childhood? _____

17. Give a one-sentence statement concerning the view of Jesus' divinity and humanity held by each of the following:
- (1) Ebionism. _____

 - (2) Docetism. _____

 - (3) Adoptionism. _____

 - (4) Arianism. _____

 - (5) Apollinarianism. _____

 - (6) Nestorianism. _____

 - (7) Eutychianism. _____

18. Give a one-sentence statement of the orthodox view. _____

19. What is the result of minimizing Christ's humanity? _____

20. What is the result of neglecting the divinity of Christ? _____

Supplementary activity (Level 2):

1. Read pages 226-240 in Christian Doctrine by Shirley Guthrie.
2. Can a person reject the Virgin Birth of Jesus and believe that Jesus is the Son of God?
3. Is the Virgin Birth of Jesus presented as a historical event or a theological teaching? Can it be proven?
4. What does "conceived by the Holy Ghost" really mean?
5. What is Docetism and how did it threaten the early Christian faith?
6. Explain the source of Jesus' sinlessness.
7. What caused the disciples to conclude that Jesus is the Son of God?
8. What does the title 'Son of God' signify about Jesus?

Advanced activity (Level 3):

1. Read pages 226-240 in Christian Doctrine by Shirley Guthrie, if the book is available, and answer the questions under Supplementary activity.
2. If Guthrie's book is not available, read an article on Incarnation and the Virgin Birth in a good Bible dictionary. Make a brief outline of the contents of the articles.
3. If books are not available for either of the above activities, read and make notes from a good commentary on the following Scriptures: Matthew 1:16-25; Matthew 2:13-15; Luke 1:26-56; Philippians 2:6-9; Colossians 1:15-20.

Seminar Discussion

1. Distinguish between the Virgin Birth and the Incarnation and state their relationship.
2. What evidences are there in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke which indicate that Joseph was not the real father of Jesus?
3. Compare and contrast the teachings of the Scriptures about the pre-existent Eternal Son of God with the Virgin Birth accounts.
4. What modern sect is similar to Arianism in its view concerning the nature of Christ? Do you know of other modern movements which hold the errant views of earlier centuries?
5. What happens if a proper balance is not maintained between the human and divine natures of Christ?