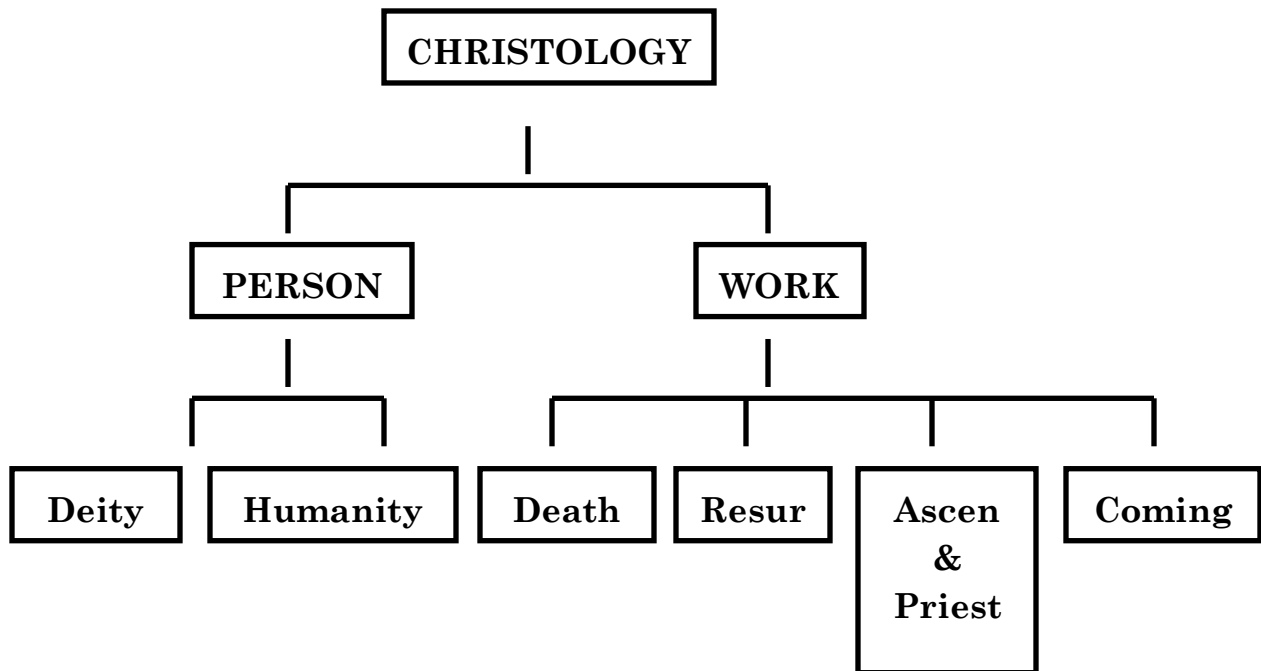


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B0518 – May 8, 2005 – Major Bible Themes
Chapter 08 – God the Son: His Incarnation

The study of Christology can be organized under two heads: His Person and His Work. The first two lessons on Christ are organized under His Person and rightfully investigate His humanity and deity. The ramifications for not understanding His Person are tremendous for if He was not truly human then He can't atone for the sins of men yet if He is not true deity then His death can't be of infinite value. So, a right understanding of His Person is crucial to having a right view of His Work, the second main head in a study of Christology. Last week we explained from Scripture the deity and eternity of Christ. This week we turn to the evidences of His true humanity upon which we will complete the formal study on His Person and will turn in the following five weeks to consider His Works.



I. THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

The humanity of Christ is not often questioned. It is certainly more common for people to question the deity of Christ. But as we showed last week those who question His deity are

really giving us a commentary on themselves rather than Jesus. They are showing us that the Father has yet to reveal to them who Jesus really is and that they are in a state of just condemnation having not believed in the only begotten Son of God. However, although seemingly less important, it is equally crucial to recognize the true human nature of Christ. “Since Christ must become a true man if he is to atone for the sins of men, the question of his humanity is not merely an academic one, but a most practical one.”ⁱ What proofs do we have of Christ’s humanity? There are six: 1) He had a human birth, 2) He had a human development, 3) He had the Essential Elements of Human Nature, 4) He Had Human Names, 5) He had the Sinless Frailties of Human Nature, and 6) He is Called a Man

A. He Had a Human Birth

According to Gal 4:4 “*in the fullness of time God sent forth his son, born of a woman.*” The accounts of Jesus’ birth in Matthew and Luke confirm the virgin birth which was prophesied in Isa 7:14. His human birth was prophesied to come through the lineage of Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and finally David so that the first verse in the NT Jesus the Messiah is called “*the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matt 1:1) and Luke traces this lineage back to Adam. Importantly, the human authors, under divine inspiration, are careful not to attribute His humanity to both Joseph and Mary but to Mary alone, Joseph being His step-father (e.g. Matt 1:16).ⁱⁱ

However, if he had a human birth through the virgin Mary then did He not inherit a sinful human nature from His mother? The Bible is clear that he “*knew no sin*” (2 Cor 5:21); that he is “*holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners*” (Heb 7:26; and that “*in Him there is no sin*” (1 John 3:5). Some mechanism assured His avoidance of a sinful human nature. What was the mechanism? We have basically two options.

We could account for the virgin birth and avoidance of a sin nature solely by 1) supernatural means or 2) by a combination of natural and supernatural means. The Scriptures do not specify. We find that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). I tend to take option 2; some combination of natural and supernatural means was required to produce a true human nature which was not sinful. This mechanism requires that the female egg be a sinless and therefore immortal substance. The evidence for this phenomenon is *parthenogenesis* in mammals which reveals that a female egg, when provided with nutrients can produce a complete organism without being inseminated by a male sperm. Inasmuch as this is true it follows that the sin nature is passed on through the male sperm such that when it unites with the female egg the whole being is conceived in

sin (Ps. 51). If you are interested in the details of this mechanism then I suggest the book *The Seed of the Woman* by Dr. Arthur C. Custance. This work is available electronically at www.custance.org or a hardcopy can be purchased through the Dallas Theological Seminary Library. Whatever the mechanism, Jesus Christ was born of a woman in such a way that He had a true human nature that avoided any element of sin.

B. He Had a Human Development

Dr. Luke records most of the data of Christ's birth and human development. This shows the human element involved in the inspiration of Scripture. Dr. Luke, being a medical doctor, had a high interest in medical related issues such as His birth and His human development, and therefore gives us detailed information we don't find in the other gospels. Luke records *"the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."* (Luke 2:40). Of course, the fact that he had no sinful nature contributed to his ability to develop mentally, spiritually and socially. "By the age of 12 Jesus was fully conversant with the Hebrew Scriptures and able to debate deep spiritual matters with the leading theologians of the day."ⁱⁱⁱ (Luke 2:41-46). His understanding and answers amazed everyone who heard him (Luke 2:47). When his mother found Him and rebuked Him, Jesus replied, *"Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"* This response shows that at the age of twelve He knew that Joseph was not his father but that God was His Father and that He was the Messiah of Israel. *"And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men"* (Luke 2:52). This mental development did not come by attending the Rabbinic schools (John 7:15) but by his training in a godly home, his concentration at the synagogue (Luke 4:16), his visits to the temple (Luke 2:41-46), his personal study of the Scriptures (Luke 4:17), and his unique experience of being personally taught by His Father (Isa 50:4-9). Apparently, His Father would awaken him every morning to disciple Him. His Father taught Him all that He was to accomplish in His mission, including His sufferings and His death and Jesus willingly submitted to His Father's plan (Isa 50:5-6). Jesus actually grew in wisdom and knowledge and along with this self-consciousness of His identity as God's Son and Israel's Messiah. This development, of course, took place in His human nature. At the same time His divine nature was ever present even from the time of infancy. As Walvoord observed, "Christ at the same moment has seemingly contradictory qualities. He can be weak and omnipotent, increasing in knowledge and omniscient, finite and infinite".^{iv}

C. He had the Essential Elements of Human Nature

So, He had a human birth and a human development. He also had the essential elements of human nature; body and spirit which compose a human soul. Hebrews 10:5 says “*A body you have prepared for me*” and “*we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ*” (Heb 10:10). Even in the resurrection He says to Thomas, the skeptic, “*See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have*” (Luke 24:39).

Not only did He have a human body but He also had a human spirit. “*Jesus, aware in His spirit*” (Mark 2:8) and “*Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit*” (Luke 23:46). The body + spirit = a human soul and so the Scriptures confirm when Christ says, “*My soul is deeply grieved*” (Matt 26:38). So, Jesus had all the essential elements of human nature. When we say this “we must always distinguish between a human nature and a sinful nature; Jesus had the former, but not the latter.”^v

D. He Had Human Names

First of all, the name “*Jesus*” is His human name, it is the Greek equivalent of Joshua and it means “*Savior*” (Matt 1:21). He was also called “*the son of Abraham and the son of David*” (Matt 1:1). The name “*Son of Man*” is applied to Him more than 80 times signifying the Son related to mankind and designating Him as the rightful heir to the throne of David in the earthly Millennial Kingdom.

E. He had the Sinless Frailties of Human Nature

He experienced human emotions such as weeping (John 11:35), compassion (Matt 9:36) and grief (Matt 23:37). He had a real human body that hungered (Matt 4:2), thirsted (John 19:28), got tired (John 4:6) and ultimately experienced the pain of scourging (John 19:1) and the horror of crucifixion on a cross (John 19:18).

F. He is Called a Man

He was made a little lower than the angels (Heb 2:9). He refers to himself as a man (John 8:40). John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul call Him a man (John 1:30; Acts 2:22; 1 Cor 15:21, 47). He was known as a Jew (John 4:9). He appeared older than He really was (John 8:58). It is implied that He was a man in that He was a carpenter who had brothers and sisters (Matt 13:55). Even after His resurrection He is indistinguishable from a man (John 20:15). In His ascension He was a man and will return as a man in the same body He was born in, although glorified (Acts 1:9-11).

Once the divine nature assumed a human nature it ever retains a human nature. His physical body is located at a point in space at the right hand of the Father (Eph 1:20). From this position He can sit (Heb 1:13) and He can stand (Acts 7:56) and He is the head of the church and has all authority (Eph 1:21-22). Even though His humanity is at a definite location His divine nature is omnipresent, neither here nor there but wholly everywhere. Yet in all this it should never be supposed that He is two persons. He is but one person with two natures. In His divine nature he ever possesses all divine attributes. When He assumed a human nature he took up all essential human attributes. Since He is but one person it follows that His personality is located in His divine nature because the Son of God did not unite with a human person but with a human nature. Christ's human nature would have been impersonal apart from the incarnation.^{vi}

II. THE REASONS FOR THE INCARNATION

Now that we have established the incarnation, God come in human flesh we have to ask "why?" What are the reasons for the incarnation? I'll mention seven crucial reasons for the incarnation: 1) To Fulfill God's Promises, 2) To Reveal the Father, 3) To Become a Faithful High Priest, 4) To Put Away Sin, 5) To Destroy the Works of the Devil, 6) To Give Us an Example of How to Walk, 7) To Prepare for the Second Coming.

A. To Fulfill God's Promises

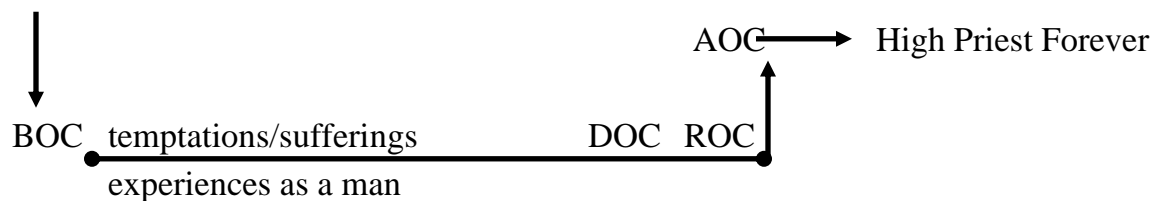
The OT is full of God's promises to send His Son into the world. Beginning in Gen 3:15 with the seed promise, repeated to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and David, finally culminating with the promise in Isaiah's day that the incarnate Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14). These promises gave two lines of evidence regarding the coming Messiah's. First, He would suffer as a servant and second, He would rule a glorious kingdom. But how could one Messiah both suffer as a servant and rule as a king? To reconcile these two ideas the OT Israelites figured that there must be two Messiahs; *Messiah ben Joseph*, the suffering Messiah and *Messiah ben David*, the reigning Messiah. They did not consider the possibility of one Messiah with two comings. Now that we have NT revelation we realize that the OT was prophesying of one Messiah with two distinct comings. In His first coming "*...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28). In His second coming He "*will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him*" (Hebrews 9:28). So, His first coming was in reference to sin and His second coming in reference to salvation. There are not two Messiah's but two comings of one Messiah.

B. To Reveal the Father

A second purpose of the incarnation was to reveal the Father. The Father is displayed in the OT as a holy, righteous, just, immutable, omnipotent, sovereign God. Jesus Christ came to reveal this God. John wrote *“No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him”* (John 1:18).^{vii} The author of Hebrews says, *“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power”* (Hebrews 1:1-3). Christ is the exact representation of God’s nature and the highest form of God’s revelation. Yet Christ also taught that He was not greater than the Father (John 14:28). He told those who asked Him to show them the Father that if they had seen Him they had seen the Father (John 14:9). He also said that He came to do the Father’s will and insomuch He revealed the Father’s will (Matt 26:39). He also claimed that the Father loves us and knows what we need even before we pray (Matt 6:8) and that He is the intimate Father of all who believe (Eph 1:5).

C. To Become a Faithful High Priest

A third and very important reason for the incarnation was so that Christ could become qualified as a faithful high priest after the order of Melchizedek. In the OT priests were taken from among men in order to act on behalf of men. To be our high priest, Christ also had to be taken from among men. For Christ to qualify to act on our behalf He had to enter into every range of human experience yet without sin.



BOC = Birth of Christ

DOC = Death of Christ

ROC = Resurrection of Christ

AOC = Ascension of Christ

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, ¹⁰ being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:8-10). So, Christ was perfected in His life sufferings as a man. He was tempted in all ways as we are yet without sin. Christ’s human nature was able to be tempted but able not to sin (*posse non peccare*). Christ’s divine nature was not able to be tempted nor to sin (*non posse peccare*). *“He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted”* (Hebrews 2:17-18). This means that Christ didn’t have it easier than you. We are often tempted to think that when Jesus was tempted it was just a show. That He wasn’t really tempted as we are. But I tell you He was truly tempted in His human nature. He did not “minister to His human need from His divine resources.”^{viii} This means that when He was tempted He didn’t just tap into His divine attributes to meet the temptation. The fact is He had to meet temptations the same way you and I do, by the power of the filling of the Spirit using the word of God. He knows exactly what you are suffering. He knows exactly how you feel when you are tempted because He’s been there. He’s met more suffering and temptations than any of us will ever meet. And so He is able to come to your aid when you are tempted because He qualifies as your high priest. Therefore it says, *“let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16).

D. To Put Away Sin

The fourth reason for the incarnation was so that Christ could put away sin by His sacrifice (Heb 9:26). If any purpose is the ultimate purpose this is it. Mark wrote, *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”* (10:45). He had to become a man in order to die for the sins of man. 1 John 3:5 says, *“You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin.”* There His purpose is set out clearly as *“to take away sin”*. John the Baptist, when he saw the Christ announced *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). Isaiah wrote, *“All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him”* (53:6). And when the Bible states that Christ tasted death for everyone (Heb 2:9) it means that He died in the place of every man, not just the elect. Anyone who appropriates this message by faith will not taste death for He tasted it for them. His substitutionary death on the cross is the basis for every blessing we enjoy.

E. To Destroy the Works of the Devil

“The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Christ’s death on the cross was a death blow to Satan. Satan had the power of death and Christ’s death rendered Satan powerless. John Stott says, “If, then, the whole purpose of Christ’s first appearing was to remove sins and to undo the works of the devil, Christians must not compromise with either sin or the devil, or they will find themselves fighting against Christ.”

F. To Give Us an Example of How to Walk

Christ left us an example *“for you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps”* (1 Pt 2:21) and *“the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked”* (1 John 2:6). How did Christ walk? In holiness under the filling of the Holy Spirit. Now we have an example of one who walked before us. “To the unsaved the Bible says, believe and live; to the saved, follow in his steps. This order is never reversed.” The Bible is not interested in the *reformation* of men but in their *regeneration* (John 3:1ff) and subsequent *renewal* of mind (Rom 12:2).

G. To Prepare for the Second Coming

His first coming was devoted to the putting away of sin but the second coming is devoted to salvation (Heb 9:28). There are two parts to salvation; the provision of salvation and the application of salvation. The provision of salvation occurred at the cross where Christ died for all men. The application of salvation happens subsequently when a person appropriates Christ’s provision by faith. The cross does not automatically save. Instead it is applied by God to the one who believes. If it automatically applied itself then faith would be unnecessary.

The moment a person believes he is freed from the *penalty of sin* which is death. Further they are freed from the *power of sin*. Their will is no longer enslaved to their nature which is sinful (Rom 6:3) but is free to righteousness accomplished when we are filled by the Spirit (Eph 5:18). However, we are not free from the *presence of sin* until we receive a glorified body.

The whole man was purchased on the cross and the whole creation was purchased on the cross. Salvation extends beyond mankind. The provision has been made at the cross for all men and all creation but the application of the cross occurs when a man has faith in Christ alone. The application of Christ's death to all creation awaits the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth (Rev 21-22). Therefore, His first coming was necessary to prepare for His second coming.

ⁱ Thiessen, Henry C. *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 219.

ⁱⁱ Matt 1:16 indicates that Christ had only one human parent because it uses a feminine singular relative pronoun "by whom" which can only refer to His mother, Mary. His enemies often supposed he was the son of Joseph but, of course, they were incorrect. They assumed He was only a man and denied His deity (e.g. Luke 3:23).

ⁱⁱⁱ Fruchtenbaum, Arnold, *Messianic Christology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1998), 51.

^{iv} Walvoord, John F., *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1969), 116.

^v Thiessen, Henry C. *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 221.

^{vi} Thiessen, Henry C. *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 223.

^{vii} God has never been seen in His whole being or essence. He has been and can be seen through various filters.

^{viii} Chafer, L.S., *Major Bible Themes* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), 57.

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