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The Incarnation

"And the Word became 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".

"But when the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons".

"And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh".

John 1:14; Galatians 4:4-5; 1 Timothy 3:16

Definition: From Latin "in carne," meaning "embodied in flesh" or "taking on flesh" — i.e. becoming human. In Christian theology, this term refers to the Son of God taking on human form. It describes the union of the divine and human nature in the Person of Christ, making Him both truly God and truly man. This is further explained by the Christian theological doctrine of the hypostatic union (see frame on next page). The incarnation is God's original Christmas gift of deity wrapped in humanity! Remaining what He was, He became what He was not.

In order to save us from our sins, Jesus had to be a true man. God's justice requires the penalty for human sin to be paid by one who is truly human (Romans 5:12, 18–19; Hebrews 2:17). Salvation requires a substitute who fully represents humanity. An angel could not pay the penalty for human sin because they are not part of the human family (and as spirits they cannot die). Similarly, all the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament could not take away sins, but only point forward to the coming

Saviour (Hebrews 10:1, 4, 11). Because God is immortal (1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16), Jesus took on a human nature, including a body capable of suffering and death (Hebrews 2:14-15; 10:5). Our redemption and the remission of sins required the shedding of His precious blood (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22).

In addition to being a true man, Jesus had to be sinless to have no debt of His own (Ezekiel 18:20; Hebrews 7:26-27). But He had to be much more than a sinless man. A morally perfect human could theoretically satisfy God's justice for themself, but not for others. A sinless human could not take the place of even one other sinner because sin is ultimately an offense against an infinitely holy God, thereby carrying a penalty of infinite and eternal moral weight. Even a sinless human would be finite, and a finite being cannot satisfy a penalty of infinite magnitude or provide an eternal remedy. No mere human can redeem another's soul (Psalm 49:7-8). Only a divine person can satisfy an infinite penalty. Therefore, to offer an atonement powerful enough to satisfy God's wrath and secure eternal life for innumerable sinners, Jesus had to be truly God as well as truly man. Only as God could He be a sinless man and offer a sacrifice of infinite, eternal value (Hebrews 9:12).

Hypostatic union: the Christian theological doctrine stating that in the one *hypostasis* (person) of Jesus Christ, two complete and distinct natures (divine and human) are united without confusion, change, division, or separation (Council of Chalcedon). Christ is thus one *person* in two *natures* — fully God and fully man. His divine and human natures coexist perfectly and distinctly without blending, diminishment or separation into two persons.

- Hypostasis (noun) — from Greek "hypo" (under; beneath) + "stasis" (a standing; a position): literally, that which stands beneath. Originally in classical Greek it referred to a sedimentary deposit — that which settles beneath — and by extension came to mean an underlying support or foundation. In theology, it signifies an underlying reality or substance; real being or existence; individual reality — an **individual subsistent person**. Hebrews 1:3 uses hypostasis to highlight the personal, concrete reality of God as revealed in Christ.
- Hypostatic (adjective): pertaining to or characteristic of a hypostasis; belonging to or describing an individual subsistent person.
- God is one divine essence (ousía) in three Persons (hypostases). Hypostasis refers to the individual reality of a person (*who* someone is), while ousía refers to their essence or nature (*what* someone is).

Jesus' two natures make salvation possible:

- human nature — necessary to suffer and die as our kinsman-redeemer (become the representative and substitute for humanity); enables Him to bear the penalty for sin.
- divine nature — necessary to offer a sacrifice of infinite worth; enables Him to make perfect atonement for sin, conquering death and securing eternal life for all who believe.

Together, the *hypostatic union* allows Jesus to be the perfect mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5). Only God can save, and only man can die. The Saviour must be both. He suffered and died according to His human nature. His divine nature gives infinite value to that suffering and death. Christ is uniquely qualified to atone for the sins of all who trust in Him — "nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Council of Chalcedon (451 AD): "Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, *without confusion, without change, without division, without separation*; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us."

Athanasian Creed (circa 500 AD): "He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is human from the essence of his mother, born in time; completely God, completely human, with a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity. Although he is God and human, yet Christ is not two, but one. He is one, however, not by his divinity being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself.

He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person. For just as one human is both rational soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and human."