

The wonder of the incarnation

Introduction

I have written many papers on Christology, including several on the human nature of Christ.¹ However, here I wish to centre upon the amazing basis of the incarnation and dwell on what it means that the Word became flesh² and that Jesus achieved the work of salvation as a man. The Fall of man was so great that it necessitated the incarnation of the Word.³

Now it is clear that the value of the salvation Jesus achieved is due to his Person. Since Jesus is God he is infinite in his person and so the value of his life is infinite. This gives salvation its depth. The death and life of Jesus are worth millions of people, in fact an infinite number. So when Jesus died innocent he could not just redeem one person but an infinite number of people – the elect. Jesus as God-Man could redeem many.

But here I wish to concentrate upon the life of Jesus incarnated. I want to investigate what it meant for Jesus to be the Word in the flesh. This is a cause of wonder and amazement.

Errors

First we need to briefly mention a number of errors about the incarnation; most of these appeared in the first three centuries and were completely rebutted. Since I have described these before, and because the subject is well covered in dogmatics, we need not spend too much time on this. In general, heresies tend to either over-emphasise Jesus' human or divine nature. Here I will simply mention key errors regarding the incarnation that carry over to today.

Docetism

This was a subset of Gnosticism, which sought to mingle Christianity with paganism, Greek philosophy and mysticism. As a Gnostic doctrine, Docetism was dualistic and thus saw material things, such as human nature, as evil. Jesus could not, therefore, have a real human nature but only gave the appearance of having it; in fact the Greek word *dokeo* meant, 'to seem or to appear'. Since he was holy, Jesus must have only had a spiritual nature and the appearance of a man was merely a sort of phantom. Jesus did not really die as a man on the cross.

Monophysitism

In Greek, *monos* = single, *physis* = nature, therefore, 'one nature'. There are several forms of this. One aspect is held by Eastern orthodox churches that do not recognise the decrees of Chalcedon (451 AD).

¹ See, for example, 'A Simple Examination of the Two Natures of Christ'.

² It is strictly wrong to say that 'God became man' since the Father and the Spirit were not incarnated, though they were active in the incarnation of the Word – the Second Person of the Trinity.

³ This position of Aquinas is usually upheld by the Reformed. A few Reformed, plus others, assert that the incarnation would have occurred even if Adam had not sinned. However, this is an academic issue since the fact is that Adam did sin.

Monophysitism teaches that Christ only had one nature and it usually emphasises the divine nature of Christ which was only clad in the flesh. Christ does not have a genuine human nature.

One form is Apollinarianism: Christ is divine and has no human nature. Another is Eutychianism: the human nature was swallowed up by the divine to create a third nature (called: *tertium quid*). This denies the distinction of natures in Christ and the humanity of Christ.

One form of Monophysitism that sometimes appears today from ill-informed disciples, is that Jesus did not have a real human nature but had a special kind of heavenly nature that appeared to be human. Another is that Jesus acted in the divine nature on Earth; his work on Earth was not as man but as God.

It is vital to assert that if Jesus' human nature was not real humanity then there would be no salvation. Redemption had to be secured by a man, representing all men born of Adam. Jesus was born as a real man under the law, obeying God's law to perfection as a man – and thus was able to obtain all the divine promises for the perfect man under the law, which became our inheritance in Christ. More of this later.

Kenotic Theories

This regards the modern arguments over what Paul mean by Christ 'emptying himself' (Phil 2:7). Proposals include:

- Christ emptied himself of: Divine consciousness.
- Christ emptied himself of: his eternal form of being.
- Christ emptied himself of: relative attributes of Deity.
- Christ emptied himself of: integrity of infinite divine existence.
- Christ emptied himself of: divine activity or attributes.
- Christ emptied himself of: exercise of divine prerogatives.

Essentially, the gist of this 19th century heresy is that during the incarnation the Logos divested himself of the divine attributes. Some extremists actually said that the Logos laid aside his Godhead and became a human soul.

The relevant passage is:

Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. Phil 2:5-8

'Made Himself of no reputation' has been translated as:

- 'Emptied himself' (ASV, NASV, NAB, RSV, NRSV, Darby, YLT). BB Warfield condemned this as a mistranslation.
- 'Made Himself of no reputation': (NKJV, KJV, WEB).
- 'He made himself as nothing' (BBE).

The Greek text is: avllv e`auto.n evke,nwse(morfhn dou,lou labw,n(evn o`moiwm,ati avnqrw,pwn geno,menoj) kai. sch,mati eu`requei.j w`j a;nqrwpoj(

avllv e`auto.n evke,nwse means, 'But himself deprived of power / made of no effect / gave up what one possesses'.

The question is, what did the Second Person give up during the incarnation?

Since Jesus was 'crowned with glory and honour' (Heb 2:9-10) for dying on the cross to secure redemption, it seems certain that what Jesus gave up was the outward expression of his divine glory. If the Second Person came to Earth in his full divine glory, every man on earth would have died in the presence of divine holiness. Jesus 'put his glory aside', or hid it.

Jesus did not cease to be God, or cease to have glory, his infinite attributes were hidden in his flesh.

Jesus did not stop being God, his glory was hidden.

In fact Jesus did not lose something but took something. He did not hold on to his equality with God but made himself of no reputation taking on the form of a servant, despite his equality with God. Jesus laid aside the glory of his equality with the Father.

The emptying does not refer to the divine nature of the Logos but the assertion of divine prerogatives. As incarnate man, Jesus retained his divine nature. Occasionally, the disciples got a glimpse of this, such as at the Transfiguration.

As God, the Second Person cannot change; he is immutable. He never lost any attribute.

Related passages include:

And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. Jn 17:5

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. 2 Cor 8:9

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Heb 2:9-10

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Heb 2:14

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. Heb 2:17-18

This doctrine gradually lost most of its support in the 20th century, but some people inadvertently make statements today that are similar.

Table of Christological Heresies

This is a simple summary of the essential Christological heresies.

Bold type = early church heresies,⁴

⁴ Taken from Paul Fahy, 'Christological Heresies'.

Overemphasised Humanity	Overemphasised Deity
Ebionism ⁵	Docetism
Dynamic Monarchianism (Adoptionism – humanity deified)	Gnosticism
Arianism (Subordinationism)	Modal Monarchianism (Sabellianism, Patripassianism) ⁶
Nestorianism ⁷	Apollinarianism
Socinianism	Eutychianism
Open Theism	Monophysitism
	Monothelitism ⁸

Important factors

The Word did not cease to be what he was before the incarnation. The Word took on flesh, assumed something, acquired something. This was acquired from his mother.⁹

His Person was not changed or altered in any way. He remained the eternal, unchangeable, infinite God, the Second Person of the Trinity.

He did not take on a human person or just a human body, but a human nature consisting of body, soul and spirit.

The incarnation constituted Christ as part of the human race.

The incarnation was effected by the virgin birth and supernatural conception. The Holy Spirit sanctified Jesus from conception and kept him free from sin (Heb 9:14).

The promise of a man sent from God to be the deliverer

Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Lk 24:27

This is the Messianic promise of the OT. The single best exposition of this in the NT is Stephens's sermon in defence of his life (Acts 7).

I will not give an exposition of this theme in this paper. Here I just want to point out that the hope was for a man; not an angel, not a miracle, but a man under God.

⁵ Ebionism teaches that Christ received the Spirit after his baptism and was not pre-existent.

⁶ Modal Monarchianism emphasises the unity of God above the separate permanent persons in the Godhead. God is one in nature and person but this one God reveals himself in three ways (or modes). Modalism. *Patripassianism* specifically refers to the belief that God the Father was born in the incarnation, suffered and died.

⁷ Nestorianism teaches that the unity of Christ's two natures was moral or mechanical, but not organic; thus he was two persons (Dyophysite); the human being controlled by the divine. The logos indwelt Jesus making Christ a God-bearer rather than a God-man. Denies the unity of Christ's person.

⁸ From the Greek compound word *monos*, 'will' and *thelo*, *thelema*, 'will'. Christ had no human will but only the divine will.

⁹ Anabaptists teach (with others) that Christ brought his human nature from heaven and Mary was a mere conduit through which it passed. This would make his human nature a new creation, not Adamic. It would be similar to our nature but not organically part of it. Christ would have no relation to man as head and no ability to be a mediator, and therefore no salvation.

The Messiah is less than an angel

Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger. When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honour. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen -- Even the beasts of the field, The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas. Ps 8:2-8

The Proto-evangelium: The Messiah will be a man born of Eve

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel. Gen 3:15

The Messiah will spring from the Semitic line

And he said: 'Blessed *be* the LORD, the God of Shem'. Gen 9:26a

The line of Shem, in Noah's prophecy, is the line of godliness.

The Messiah will be of Abraham's line

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. Gen 22:18a

The Messiah will be from Jacob's line

A Star shall come out of Jacob; a sceptre shall rise out of Israel. Num 24:17c

The Messiah will be of the tribe of Judah

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people. Gen 49:10

The Messiah will be of the line of Jesse

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him. Isa 11:1

The Messiah will be a descendant of David

The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed. 1 Sam 2:10

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever. 2 Sam 7:12-16

I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations'. Selah Ps 89:3-4

On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old. Amos 9:11

He is an genuine man

For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. and we hid, as it were, *our* faces. Isa 53:2-3

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist. Isa 11:1-5

The Messiah will spend some time in Egypt as a child

When Israel *was* a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. Hos 11:1

The Messiah is a man filled with the Spirit

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. Isa 42:1

The Messiah is God's Son and a King that will rule

Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, 'You *are* My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the nations *for* Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* Your possession'. Ps 2:7-8

The Messiah will be a prophet like Moses, raised from Israel

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear. Deut 18:15

The Messiah will live in Galilee and bring revelation

Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. Isa 9:1-4

The Messiah brings good news to the poor and needy

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; he has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. Isa 61:1-3

There are many more Messianic prophecies in the OT, but these will suffice to show that the Messiah is a real man.

The birth of the Messiah

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.' Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.' Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her. Lk 1:27-38

When the fullness 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. Gal 4:4-5

The miracle of the incarnation is that Jesus is a real human being derived from Adam and Eve but is also the Son of God without any sin; that is without a sinful old nature. [Note that in the glory the saints will be real but renewed human beings with no sinful nature.]

Many have speculated how this can be and the details are hidden in God. However, we have sufficient information to posit something.

Jesus was born from a human ovum carried by Mary; but no human sperm. To fertilise the ovum, the Holy Spirit was present with Mary in some special way and activated the egg by the power of God.

We can thus posit that the sinful human nature is passed on through the generations by the male sperm.¹⁰

Being born from a human ovum, Jesus was a genuine human being. Jesus derived his human nature from his mother but took his own deity from the action of Holy Spirit.

The incarnation in doctrinal terms

Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was

¹⁰ This has been asserted by Karl Barth and Arthur Custance.

incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets.

And I believe one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. AMEN.

Definition of Chalcedon (451 AD)

Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul [i.e. human soul and spirit] and a body. He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we ourselves as far as his humanness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted. Before time began he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these "last days," for us and behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness.

We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten -- in two natures; and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one "person" and in one reality [*hypostasis*]. They are not divided or cut into two persons, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word [*Logos*] of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus have the prophets of old testified; thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us; thus the Symbol of Fathers [the Nicene Creed] has handed down to us.

The Westminster Confession

8:2 The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature,(1) with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin;(2) being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance.(3) So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion.(4) Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.(5)

(1)John 1:1,14; 1 John 5:20; Phil. 2:6; Gal. 4:4. (2)Heb. 2:14,16,17; Heb. 4:15. (3)Luke 1:27,31,35; Gal. 4:4. (4)Luke 1:35; Col. 2:9; Rom. 9:5; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Tim. 3:16. (5)Rom. 1:3,4; 1 Tim. 2:5.

8:4 This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake,(1) which that He may discharge, He was made under the law,(2) and did perfectly fulfil it;(3) endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul,(4) and most painful sufferings in His body;(5) was crucified, and died;(6) was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption.(7) On the third day He arose from the dead,(8) with the same body in which He suffered;(9) with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father,(10) making intercession;(11) and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world.(12)

(1)Ps. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:5-10; John 10:18; Phil. 2:8. (2)Gal. 4:4. (3) Matt. 3:15; Matt. 5:17. (4) Matt. 26:37,38; Luke 22:44; Matt. 27:46. (5) Matt. 26; Matt. 27. (6) Phil. 2:8. (7) Acts 2:23,24,27; Acts 13:37; Rom. 6:9. (8) 1 Cor. 15:3,4,5. (9) John 20:25,27. (10) Mark 16:19. (11) Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24; Heb. 7:25. (12)Rom. 14:9,10; Acts 1:11; Acts 10:42; Matt. 13:40,41,42; Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4.

8:5 The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father;(1) and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.(2)

(1)Rom. 5:19; Heb. 9:14,16; Heb. 10:14; Eph. 5:2; Rom. 3:25,26. (2)Dan. 9:24,26; Col. 1:19,20; Eph. 1:11,14; John 17:2; Heb. 9:12,15.

8:7 Christ, in the work of mediation, acteth according to both natures, by each nature doing that which is proper to itself:(1) yet, by reason of the unity of the person, that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature.(2)

(1)Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 3:18. (2)Acts 20:28; John 3:13; 1 John 3:16.

Belgic Confession

Article 18: Of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

We confess, therefore, that God did fulfil the promise, which he made to the fathers, by the mouth of his holy prophets, when he sent into the world, at the time appointed by him, his own, only-begotten and eternal Son, who took upon him the form of a servant, and became like unto man, really assuming the true human nature, with all its infirmities, sin excepted, being conceived in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, by the power of the Holy Ghost, without the means of man, and did not only assume human nature as to the body, but also a true human soul, that he might be a real man. For since the soul was lost as well as the body, it was necessary that he should take both upon him, to save both. Therefore we confess (in opposition to the heresy of the Anabaptists, who deny that Christ assumed human flesh of his mother) that Christ is become a partaker of the flesh and blood of the children; that he is a fruit of the loins of David after the flesh; made of the seed of David according to the flesh; a fruit of the womb of the Virgin Mary, made of a woman, a branch of David; a shoot of the root of Jesse; sprung from the tribe of Judah; descended from the Jews according to the flesh; of the seed of Abraham, since he took on him the seed of Abraham, and became like unto his brethren in all things, sin excepted, so that in truth he is our Immanuel, that is to say, God with us.

The Second Helvetic Confession

Chapter 11 - Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Saviour of the World

CHRIST IS TRUE GOD

We further believe and teach that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was predestined or foreordained from eternity by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. And we believe that he was born, not only when he assumed flesh of the Virgin Mary, and not only before the foundation of the world was laid, but by the Father before all eternity in an inexpressible manner. For Isaiah said: 'Who can tell his generation?' (Ch. 53:8). And Micah says: 'His origin is from of old, from ancient days' (Micah 5:2). And John said in the Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,' etc. (Ch. 1:1). Therefore, with respect to his divinity the Son is coequal and consubstantial with the Father; true God (Phil. 2:11), not only in name or by adoption or by any merit, but in substance and nature, as the apostle John has often said: 'This is the true God and eternal life' (I John 5:20). Paul also says: 'He appointed the Son the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding all things by his word of power' (Heb. 1:2 f.). For in the Gospel the Lord himself said: 'Father, glorify Thou me in

Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made' (John 17:5). And in another place in the Gospel it is written: 'The Jews sought **all the more to kill him because he...called God his Father, making himself equal with God**' (John 5:18).

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We therefore abhor the impious doctrine of Arius and the Arians against the Son of God, and especially the blasphemies of the Spaniard, Michael Servetus, and all his followers, which Satan through them has, as it were, dragged up out of hell and has most audaciously and impiously spread abroad in the world.

CHRIST IS TRUE MAN, HAVING REAL FLESH

We also believe and teach that the eternal Son of the eternal God was made the Son of man, from the seed of Abraham and David, not from the coitus of a man, as the Ebionites said, but was most chastely conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the ever virgin Mary, as the evangelical history carefully explains to us (Matt., ch. 1). And Paul says: '**he took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham.**' Also the apostle John says that '**whoever does not believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is not of God**'. Therefore, the flesh of Christ was neither imaginary nor brought from heaven, as Valentinus and Marcion wrongly imagined.

A RATIONAL SOUL IN CHRIST

Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ did not have a soul bereft of sense and reason, as Apollinaris thought, nor flesh without a soul, as Eunomius taught, but a soul with its reason, and flesh with its senses, by which in the time of his passion he sustained real bodily pain, as himself testified when he said: '**My soul is very sorrowful, even to death**' (Matt. 26:38). And, '**Now is my soul troubled**' (John 12:27).

TWO NATURES IN CHRIST

We therefore acknowledge two natures or substances, the divine and the human, in one and the same Jesus Christ our Lord (Heb., ch. 2). And we say that these are bound and united with one another in such a way that they are not absorbed, or confused, or mixed, but are united or joined together in one person the properties of the natures being unimpaired and permanent.

NOT TWO BUT ONE CHRIST

Thus we worship not two but one Christ the Lord. We repeat: one true God and man. With respect to his divine nature he is consubstantial with the Father, and with respect to the human nature he is consubstantial with us men, and like us in all things, sin excepted (Heb. 4:15).

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And indeed we detest the dogma of the Nestorians who make two of one Christ and dissolve the unity of the Person. Likewise we thoroughly execrate the madness of Eutyches and of the Monothelites or Monophysites who destroy the property of the human nature.

THE DIVINE NATURE OF CHRIST IS NOT PASSIBLE, AND THE HUMAN NATURE IS NOT EVERYWHERE

Therefore, we do not in any way teach that the divine nature in Christ has suffered or that Christ according to his human nature is still in this world and thus is everywhere. For neither do we think or teach that the body of Christ ceased to be a true body after his glorification, or was deified, and deified in such a way that it laid aside its properties as regards body and soul, and changed entirely into a divine nature and began to be merely one substance.

THE SECTS

Hence we by no means approve of or accept the strained, confused and obscure subtleties of Schwenkfeldt and of similar sophists with their self-contradictory arguments; neither are we Schwenkfeldians.

OUR LORD TRULY SUFFERED

We believe, moreover, that our Lord Jesus Christ truly suffered and died for us in the flesh, as Peter says (I Peter 4:1). We abhor the most impious madness of the Jacobites and all the Turks who execrate the suffering of the Lord. At the same time we do not deny that the Lord of glory was crucified for us, according to Paul's words (I Cor. 2:8).

Jesus is the Son of Man

Actually, this is Christ's favourite term for himself during the incarnation. In fact the term appears scores of times. Some examples include:

The Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head. Matt 8:20

The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day. Mk 9:31

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father's, and of the holy angels. Lk 9:26

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. Jn 3:14

Jesus had human flesh

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. Jn 1:14

Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh. Rm 1:3

Of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen. Rm 9:5

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death. Col 1:21-22

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh. 1 Tim 3:16

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Heb 2:14

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh. 1 Pt 4:1

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. 1 Pt 3:18

Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. 1 Jn 4:2

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 2 Jn 1:7

The Word took on flesh

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 nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. Jn 1:1-4

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. Jn 1:14

Here John is asserting that Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word (*Logos*), who is equal with God and existed from the beginning with God. He is the Creator.

Note: **was** the Word, and the Word **was** with God, and the Word **was** God, He **was** in the beginning with God. This contrasts with verse 14, the Word **became** flesh. ‘Was’ refers to his essential and eternal being as the Logos; his relationship in the Trinity. ‘Became’ shows his willingness to assume flesh, a true human nature which he took into perfect union with himself.

This act of assumption did not effect any change in the Godhead, which is immutable. The uncreated essence of the Logos was not changed. ‘*The Second Person of the Trinity entered into a new relation but wrought no change in the essence of the Godhead.*’¹¹

Jesus had a human ancestry

Both Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels by explaining the descent of Jesus from Adam (Luke) and Abraham (Matthew). Luke is anxious to prove that Jesus was a real man, writing to Gentiles, while Matthew is focused on proving that Jesus is the expected Messiah, a descendant of Abraham.

Jesus is placed firmly in human history

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. Luke 3:1-2

Luke the historian tells us that Jesus conducted his ministry during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea and Herod was the Tetrarch of Galilee. This established the political period.

Luke also tells us that Jesus ministered while Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests in Jerusalem; thus establishing the religious background.

Jesus was a real man in real history.

Secular testimonies

There are a few secular historians that testify to the existence of Jesus as a Jewish prophet. The most significant of these is the Jewish historian Josephus who wrote a Jewish history for the Romans. He says,

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.¹²

Jesus was called a man

But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. Jn 8:40

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know. Acts 2:22

¹¹ Alan Cairns; ‘Dict. of Theological Terms’, Art. Incarnation.

¹² Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 3.3.

But the free gift *is* not like the offence. For if by the one man's offence many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. Rm 5:15

For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. 1 Cor 15:21.

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Heb 2:11

Jesus was a person in every way except sin

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Heb 2:17

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. Heb 4:15

Jesus exhibited normal human characteristics

Physical characteristics

Growth

And the Child grew and became strong. Lk 2:40

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature. Lk 2:52

Hunger

And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Matt 4:2

Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. Matt 21:18

And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. Lk 4:2

Thirst

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink'. Jn 4:7

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!' Jn 19:28

Tiredness

And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Matt 8:24

Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. Jn 4:6

Emotional characteristics

Compassion

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Matt 9:36

And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick. Matt 14:14

Now Jesus called His disciples to *Himself* and said, 'I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat'. Matt 15:32

And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. Mk 6:34

He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Heb 5:2

Astonishment

When Jesus heard *it*, He marvelled. Matt 8:10

He marvelled because of their unbelief. Mk 6:6

When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him. Lk 7:9

Grief

Jesus wept. Jn 11:35

Being grieved by the hardness of their hearts. Mk 3:5

Distress

He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Matt 26:37

My soul is exceedingly sorrowful. Matt 26:38

My soul is exceedingly sorrowful. Mk 14:34

Sorrow

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it. Lk 19:41

Agitation

Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. Jn 11:33

Perplexity

Now My soul is troubled. Jn 12:27

Love

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him. Mk 10:21

Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him!' Jn 11:36

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Jn 13:23

As I have loved you, that you also love one another. Jn 13:34

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you. Jn 15:9

When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by. Jn 19:26

Displeasure

When Jesus saw *it*, He was greatly displeased. Mk 10:14

Anger

He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offence to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.' Matt 16:23

Why do you test Me, *you* hypocrites? Matt 22:18

And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts.
Mk 3:5

The Lord then answered him and said, 'Hypocrite!' Lk13:15

Sarcasm

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Matt 23:27

And He said to them, 'Go, tell that fox'. Lk 13:32

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over *them* are not aware *of them*. Lk 11:44

You are of *your* father the devil. Jn 8:44

Joy

That they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. Jn 17:13

Intellectual characteristics

Wisdom

And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. Lk 2:40

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men. Lk 2:52

Perception (intellectual analysis and discernment)

But Jesus perceived their wickedness. Matt 22:18

Jesus perceived. Mk 2:8

Jesus perceived their thoughts. Lk 5:22

Jesus said, 'Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me.' Lk 8:46

He perceived their craftiness. Lk 20:23

Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone. Jn 6:15

Suffering: in mind and body

For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Heb 2:10

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. Heb 2:18

Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. Heb 5:8

The humiliation of Christ

The states of Christ

This doctrine is largely ignored today. The states of Christ¹³ regard the relationship of the Lord not a condition; his status, particularly with regard to the law; his mode of existence. There are three states:¹⁴

- The pre-existent state of eternal divine being: Jn 1:1-3; Eph 3:9; Col 1:17.
- The humiliation; the earthly state: 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 4:4-5; Phil 2:6-8.
- The heavenly state of exaltation and glory: Phil 2:9-11; Heb 2:9.

In his humiliation Jesus was under the law;¹⁵ in his exaltation he is above the law, having fulfilled it perfectly.

The humiliation had two elements:

- The emptying: Jesus laid aside his divine majesty and assumed human flesh taking the form of a servant.
- The humiliation: becoming subject to human weakness and frailty and being subject to the law.

It is possible to identify five stages in the humiliation: incarnation, suffering, death, burial, and the descent into Hades (not Hell).

Jesus' suffering

We need to try to understand the depth of the suffering of Jesus on Earth. He had full knowledge of his glory and holiness (Jn 17:5) in his Person and simply being in a sinful world must have been appalling and painful to him. Every day Jesus saw the fulness of a sin-cursed world and its effects on people that should have been glorifying God.

We have little understanding of this but it must have grieved the Lord daily to be surrounded by sin. We have some experience of sanctification and are appalled at the wretched state of some people and the cruelty inflicted on others by wicked men. But Jesus experienced this in its fulness. He saw the real depth of that sin.

He also knew the end of things and thus understood the grip that death has on people. His reaction to Lazarus' death shows us that Jesus was grieved by what death does to people.

To walk the streets of Jerusalem and see the appalling hardship of the sick and the poor, as well as the greed of the rich aristocrats must have grieved Jesus deeply.

But Jesus had years of this suffering.

Jesus suffered in body and soul (Matt 26:38). Too many preachers concentrate on the physical suffering of the Passion but Jesus suffered in his soul every moment. We will examine this in a moment.

¹³ Lutherans teach that only Christ's human nature is subject to the states; the Reformed teach that it is the Person of Christ that is subject to the states.

¹⁴ Some theologians only speak of two since Christ as God-man only existed in two states.

¹⁵ We will avoid the argument of some Reformed people that in this state Christ was under the condemnation or curse of the law (e.g. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p331). I deny that Christ was ever under condemnation because even under the law Christ was a perfect man.

Born under the law

When the fullness 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. Gal 4:4-5

It is vital to appreciate what Paul says here. Christ had to become a man and be born under the law in order to effect redemption.¹⁶

The redemption of men required a Saviour that would suffer and die as a man on their behalf. This meant that this Saviour had to perfectly fulfil the law or he would be condemned by the law as a sinner and die for his own sins.

Thus the Messiah had to:

- Be born as a man (to effect salvation for men) but be God in Person (to effect salvation for many men).
- Be under the law and live a perfect life (in order to redeem men who are under the law).
- To die for the sins of others.
- To be raised from the dead. (Proving that his sacrifice was accepted by God as an atonement for men.)

Men are convicted of sin by the law. The law brings this conviction (Rm 3:20, 7:7), establishes guilt (Rm 3:19) and promises wrath (Rm 4:15). However, the law is a ministry of death (2 Cor 3:7) and has no ability to confer life – but it points to a Messiah / Deliverer.

To redeem men under the law, the Saviour had to be a man under law, live a perfect life and fulfil the law and then die on behalf of men under the law. Thus the value of an infinite perfect life died in the place of an infinite number of sinful men.

If at any point the Saviour did not live as a man but used the advantage of his deity, then there would be no salvation at all. The Saviour would not longer be a man under the law but God over the law. Just one moment of acting as divine would have ruined redemption.

This shows the serious error of people who aver that Jesus did act in his divine nature to effect miracles or resist temptation. This is very serious heresy. Jesus' miracles were performed by the Holy Spirit who was upon Christ, acting on the prayer and faith of Jesus as a man.

The last Adam

'The first man Adam became a living being ['soul']. The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural ['soulish'], and afterward the spiritual. The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven. 1 Cor 15:45-47

Jesus is not a Second Adam (as some hymns declare) but is the Second Man; that is, after the resurrection Jesus is the firstborn of a new race of mankind, a spiritual/material mankind.

But Jesus is also the Last Adam, the last head of humanity; that is, the last of a new order of mankind – men that are submitted to God. There are no new orders of men. There are no men after Christ that will head the race as a new order. Adam was the head of the race

¹⁶ NB this proves that the erroneous ideas that Jesus had a special, divine kind of human nature from heaven are false. Such would not be born under the law.

physically but Christ is the head of the race spiritually. Adam was the type, Christ is the antitype.

There are two heads of the race. The first head, Adam, is the father of a sinful, fallen race of men. The second head, Jesus, is the father of a race of spiritual, godly men, a new creation. Adam gave rise to a dying race under wrath; Jesus gave rise to those with eternal life, resurrection life under glory.

The second man from heaven (*ho deuterios anthropos ex ouranou*). Christ had a human (*psuchikon*) body, of course, but Paul makes the contrast between the first man in his natural body and the Second Man in his risen body.¹⁷

The Adamic race is soulish (the spirit is dead towards God), but those in Christ are spiritual.

For Jesus to be the head of a new race of men, he had to be fully human and undergo all the grief and suffering of being human. He became a man and then took mankind into union with God.

The sufferings of the incarnation

For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Heb 2:10

People glibly pass over the suffering of Christ in his humiliation and give it no thought, concentrating on the passion of the cross. But Jesus suffered every day during his life on Earth. His holy character was deeply offended and upset by what he saw every day. Here are some aspects of Jesus suffering.

Temptation

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. Heb 2:18

Some people claim that Jesus was not tempted because he is God. This is countered by the text above which denies this heresy. Furthermore we have the details of his temptation in the wilderness by Satan. Before his ministry could begin in earnest, Jesus had to face the full onslaught of the enemy and defeat him alone. Temptations continued throughout his whole life and he triumphed over them all.

If Jesus did not face the temptations that we all face, then he could not be an effective Saviour. To be a Saviour he had to face our issues and win.

Discipline

Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. Heb 5:8-9

Jesus was always perfect and holy. He was born holy (Lk 1:35) and never stopped being holy until the cross where man's sin was placed upon him. 'Perfect' here means to be made complete, mature, to bring something to an end.

¹⁷ Robertson's Word Pictures.

But still Jesus needed to learn obedience as a Son in the flesh. This was training for the office of faithful High Priest.¹⁸ He needed to understand human frailties. He needed no discipline for disobedience but he needed to grow in human experience, just as he grew in wisdom as a child. Jesus had to learn by experience the things which affected men.

For example, he learned that tiredness or hunger can affect a person walking obediently. He learned that speaking the words of God can result in personal attacks. He learned that walking in truth can attract demonic attack. As God he already knew about these things but he needed to learn what it felt like in order to be a High Priest for us. Jesus learned obedience not from his Sonship but from his sufferings.

The furnace of affliction teaches us the most valuable lessons in walking in grace. Discipleship comes through sufferings. There is a Greek adage, '*Pathemata mathemata*', 'sufferings, disciplinings'.

Understand this, whatever your circumstances, Jesus has walked this way before us and knows how best to pray for us.

The humbling

Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Phil 2:6-8

Jesus was God. He created mankind after creating the world. Yet during the incarnation Jesus submitted to all sorts of authorities: his father, his mother, his synagogue elders, the Roman authorities and so on. This is humility on a massive scale. It would be like you shrinking and submitting yourself to the whims of an insect. The Lord of Glory occupied a menial position within his own creation.

On top of the humility of submission to creatures, Jesus took the form of a slave or servant of men. He came to serve: '**the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many**' (Matt 20:28). His whole life was an act of service for mankind, ending in sacrifice – the ultimate service.

Assaults

For trouble *is* near; for *there is* none to help. Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me *with* their mouths, *like* a raging and roaring lion. Ps 22:11-13

Jesus suffered continual assaults from Satan, from demons, from satanically-inspired religious opposition, from the rejection of his own people, and from the persecution of political enemies. Every day Jesus suffered some form of assault.

Loneliness

I have trodden the winepress alone. Isa 62:3

Having been used to the glories of heaven, the worship of angels and the communion of love within the Trinity, Jesus (having laid his glory and majesty aside) must have suffered intense loneliness while living as a man upon the Earth. He still had communication by

¹⁸ Alford, 'the special course of submission by which he became perfected as our high priest was gone through in time, and was a matter of acquirement and practice.'

prayer with the Father but his surroundings were completely different. No one he fellowshiped with could understand his situation and even his own disciples failed to grasp the burden of his ministry until the resurrection.

The responsibility

I must be about My Father's business? Lk 2:49

Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work'. Jn 4:34

I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. Jn 6:38

Jesus must have felt a weight of responsibility that was crushing. He understood what was at stake: the whole plan of salvation rested upon his perfect obedience to the law unto death. Jesus could not make a single mistake of thought, word or deed but had to fully comply with the Father's will perfectly – or there was no salvation and the Father's decree would fail.

Anticipation of immense physical suffering

O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.

Matt 26:39

I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! Lk 12:50

From the beginning of his life Jesus knew what would be required at the end of his ministry. Even aged 12 he knew he had a divine mission to fulfil (Lk 2:49). As the time of the Passion neared, the anxiety about what lay ahead must have been heavy on his soul. What faced him would be the worst death that anyone suffered.

The sufferings of the cross: He laid down his life

Firstly, in order to die, Jesus had to lay down his own life willingly. No one could take it from him.

I lay down My life for the sheep. Jn 10:15

Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. Jn 10:17

We must understand that Jesus knew the depths of suffering that he was about to undergo (hence the anxiety in Gethsemane). He knew the depths of the physical afflictions, with scourging, thorns and the cross; but worse he knew what it would mean to have the weight of a sinful race placed upon your shoulders and die the pangs of death for all the elect. The pangs of millions of deaths were experienced in moments.

The sheer agony of this cannot be imagined. Think of the terrible agony that many have faced in history as they died; terrible anguish knowing that they faced judgment for their sins. Now multiply that anguish by billions upon billions.

But worst of all Jesus knew that he would have to be separated from the loving fellowship within the Trinity for a period when he became sin. This would be the hardest thing to cope with.

Whole books have been written on the sufferings of the cross and I cannot attempt to summarise this in a few paragraphs here; that would be an injustice.

The finality of Jesus' humiliation was the death on the cross and suffering for sin.

The culmination of that suffering was being forsaken by the Father for the duration of the punishment, becoming sin for us (Matt 27:46). The Logos (Word) remained united with the human nature of Christ and this was not forsaken by God, but the human nature, the human consciousness of Christ, experienced God-forsakenness. Close fellowship with the Father had sustained Jesus throughout his life. He depended upon this communion so that all he did was a reflection of what the Father did. Losing this relationship was the severest pain in the Passion.

The human nature for a moment missed the conscious comfort which it might derive from its union with the divine Logos, and the sense of divine love, and was painfully conscious of the fulness of the divine wrath which was bearing down upon it.¹⁹

The historical details

The Gospel writers give important details about the crucifixion to emphasise that this is a real point of history. We are told about a man carrying his cross because Jesus was so weak after torture (Matt 27:32); this man could be questioned after the event because he was named in detail. We read of the crown of thorns (Jn 19:2), being struck on the face (Jn 19:3), being speared by a Roman soldier releasing separated blood, proving death (Jn 19:34).

We learn that the day went exceptionally dark for three hours after noon (Lk 23:44-45). This was not an eclipse since the Passover was celebrated at the time of the full moon, when the moon is opposite to the sun. It was a divine miracle. This darkness was noticed by at least one of the pagan writers: Phlegon, a Roman astronomer.

Penal substitution

There are some important doctrinal aspects to the cross.

Some people dislike this doctrine but it is Biblical. Christ is our penal substitute. That is he took the penalty of our sin upon himself, became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21), and died in our place. Christ suffered the judicially imposed punishment of mankind's sin.

This is why Christ is spoken of as a lamb without blemish led to the slaughter (Acts 8:32; 1 Pt 1:19; Rev 5:12) in the same way that lambs were killed in the Levitical offerings for the sins of the people.

Propitiation

'Propitiation' means to turn away wrath; appeasement. Some don't like this term either preferring expiation ('turn away sin'); but God's word tells us that Jesus is our propitiation (Rm 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 Jn 2:2, 4:10).

God is angry with sin and sinners all the time (Ps 7:11; this is unpopular but undeniable). His wrath is fully directed at sinners at the end. Jesus took this wrath for us, fully experiencing the anger of God against sin, and bore it for us. He turned away wrath from us and carried it himself.

Inclusivity

The death of Christ is for all the elect and no more. There is no universal salvation. Christ died for his people, his sheep, the church, the called, the elect.

He will save His people from their sins. Matt 1:21

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. Jn 10:11

¹⁹ Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p339.

You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him [the elect]. Jn 17:2

The flock ... the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

The called of Jesus Christ; ... beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Rm 1:6-7

Whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. Rm 8:30

Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. Eph 5:25

Summary

The sufferings of Christ during his life on Earth and in his passion is a huge subject that I can only scratch the surface of. The point is that Jesus constantly suffered as a holy man in a sinful world.

We must emphasise this; Jesus suffered as a man. He did not mitigate his sufferings in his divine nature, he did not die on the cross in his divine nature; he died as a man. Jesus suffered more than any man has ever suffered – and he did it for you and me. If that is not a cause of worship, then nothing is.

The incarnation is a cardinal doctrine

For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. 2 Jn 1:7-11

The incarnation is the bedrock of salvation.

Martin Luther said that justification by faith was the bedrock of salvation, and from our perspective it is the foundation. But justification rests upon redemption and redemption rests upon the incarnation. If your doctrine of the incarnation is faulty, then there is no salvation.

This is why the Devil plagued the early church with multiple attacks on the doctrine of the incarnation in Gnosticism, Docetism, Modalism, Arianism, Monophysitism, Apollinarianism and other heresies. He knew that if this foundation was destroyed, then all of Christianity was ruined. To counter this God raised up great men to fight the doctrinal battle for decades, such as Ignatius, Tertullian, Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers. Through their efforts the early ecumenical church councils established orthodoxy, especially in the creeds of Nicea (325), the Apostle's Creed, the Athanasian Creed and Chalcedon (451).

Because this doctrine is so important, John issues a very stark warning. If people do not accept that Jesus came in the flesh as a normal human being, then they are deceived, they are in antichrist, do not have God, and cannot fellowship with true believers. John wrote this because Gnostic Docetism was already plaguing the church.

I say again, if someone does not believe in the Biblical doctrine of the incarnation, then they are not a Christian and cannot fellowship with saints.

The following beliefs would count as cardinal heresy:

- Christ is a man with a supreme God consciousness. [E.g. Schleiermacher. A form of reverse Apollinarianism.]²⁰
- Christ is a man with the divine in his sub-consciousness. [E.g. Sanday; similar to above.]
- Christ is a man with the value of a God. [Ritschl.]
- Christ did not have a real human nature but a heavenly construct. [Docetism.]
- The Second Person of the Trinity did not die on the cross. [Docetism.]
- Christ only had one nature. [Monophysitism.]
- Christ had a new kind of composite nature. [Eutychianism.]
- Christ is the God-Man but his miracles were performed in the divine nature.
- Christ had a human nature but could not sin because he is God. He used his divinity to resist temptation.

Those who are genuinely elect will believe the truth because they are guided by the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised. They may be confused for a time, but will always find the truth as they apply themselves.

It is not hard to accept the true doctrine. Jesus is God but he is also man. Jesus is single in his Person but has two natures, one human and one divine. These natures are not combined, mixed or confused. Jesus is thus one Person with two natures. This is cardinal doctrine. To deny this is major heresy.

We may not fully understand the mechanics of one person in two natures, just as we cannot fully understand the Trinity; but the facts of it are very clear.

Conclusion

We need to apply ourselves to seriously consider what it meant for Jesus, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, to become a real man. This is too often just glibly accepted and sung about in hymns without any real consideration. This is why many Christians have erroneous views on this subject.

Yet wrong views on the incarnation are deal-breaking matters. Wrong views on the incarnation are of antichrist and lead to damnation (2 Jn 1:7-11). You cannot claim to be a Christian and hold to errors about the incarnation. This is a serious issue.

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²⁰ The Logos only assumed a human body and a sensual soul, not the spirit. The Logos took the place of the human spirit. Jesus was not a proper man. It is a sort of Docetism.