

TABLE TALK

Official Publication of the LMS-USA
...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



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Apostles' Creed: *I believe. . . in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was **conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary...***

Nicene Creed: *I believe... 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 **in-carnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man...***

The Incarnation

We have just gone through another Christmas season, and one of the things that the season brings to mind is one of the, if not the, most central doctrine of the Christian faith. Namely, the doctrine of the Incarnation. We speak of the Incarnation... and in it we have another of those terms used in the church that is no where to be found in Scripture. It is teaching central to the faith, but the term is not found in the Bible.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines incarnation as "1) the act of incarnating : the state of being incarnate 2: a particular physical form or state." If one "googles" incarnation, you will find it defined as 1) a person who embodies in the flesh a deity, spirit, or abstract quality. 2) (with respect to reincarnation) one of a series of lifetimes that a person spends on earth." But the meaning of incarnation in Christian doctrine

speaks to something particular, "God became flesh... God assumed a human nature and became a man in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity. Christ was and is truly God and truly man."

The word incarnation means "the act of being made flesh." It comes from the Latin version of John 1:14, which in English reads, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." But how are we to understand what it means that the "Word became flesh"? Is the incarnation the same thing as metamorphosis? Metamorphosis is "a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means." One day a caterpillar stops eating, and hanging upside down from a wig or leaf, spins itself a silky cocoon, or motts into a shiny chrysa-

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lis. Then, within its protective casting the caterpillar is radically transformed and emerges as a butterfly or moth.

We read John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." That sounds like metamorphosis, does it not? The "Word" was transformed into human flesh? What was, is now something else? But no... the teaching of Scripture with regard to the incarnation of our Lord is that while He was the Word spoken of in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" ...and while He "took on," or was "made flesh" (John 1:14)... He at the same time, remained God.



The angel Gabriel was sent to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you will conceive and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be called the Son of the Most High. Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. (Luke 1:26-35)

In other words... the incarnated Word was, at the same time, God and man. The incarnated Word was at the same time the Son of God and the Son of Man. Quite different from metamorphosis. The Word, Jesus, was, and is, true God and true man.

It is interesting to consider the apostle Paul in connection with the incarnation of our Lord. Paul, earlier as Saul of Tarsus, was a Pharisee... and as such he thought about Jesus from a purely human standpoint. He makes mention of this in 2 Corin-

thians 5:16, "Though we once regarded Christ in this way [from a worldly point of view], we do so no longer." After his Damascus Road experience, Paul learned to know Christ through faith.

Thus, in Galatians 4, Paul speaks of Jesus' virgin birth: "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4,5). Notice Paul speaks of God's Son... "born of a woman." Paul makes clear that Jesus was born a true human. Notice also, He was not born of a man and a woman... but only of a woman, i.e. born of a virgin.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul addresses the issue of the two natures (divine and human) of our Lord. He writes of the Gospel God called him to teach and preach, "the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." Here we have it. Jesus exists in two natures. He is at the same time completely human and completely divine.

It is worth looking also at Paul's letter to the Philippians (see Philippians 2:5-8). Paul here speaks of our Lord before His incarnation - He had the "very nature of God." But He took the form of a servant and in so doing He surrendered the full use of His divine characteristics in order that in taking on the "nature of a servant," He might "appear as a man". There is no question but that as the Son of God, our Lord had the right to use His divine power and author-

ity, but at the same time He could, and He did, as the Son of man, relinquish His right to do so. We know, as the gospel accounts give ample evidence of, that at times our Lord performed and at times abstained from the doing of miracles.

There is ample Biblical support for Jesus' humanity. In the Gospels we can read of Jesus' human needs including sleep (Luke 8:23), food (Matthew 4:2; 21:18), and physical protection (Matthew 2:13-15; John 10:39). We see evidence also of His humanity in that He perspired (Luke 22:43-44) and bled (John 19:34). We also find Jesus expressing emotions such as joy (John 15:11), sorrow (Matthew 26:37), and anger (Mark 3:5). During His life, Jesus referred to Himself as a man (John 8:40), and after His resurrection His humanity was still recognized (Acts 2:22).

We know Jesus was a real human being in this also, that he physically died. In order for a human body to physically die, it needs to be physically alive. His death was not a result of sin like the rest of us because He didn't have any sin. He died because He chose to die—for us. He said this about his life, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (John 10:18). Jesus physically became a part of this world, and He physically died as a part of this world.

But the purpose of the Incarnation was not that Jesus might taste food or to feel sorrow. Jesus, the Son of God, came in the flesh in order to be the Savior of humankind. First, it was necessary that He be born "under the law" (Galatians 4:4). Jesus needed to be fully man so He could obey the Law in our place. Our sinfulness prevents us from being able to perfectly follow the Law as God requires. Jesus was the only Person to have ever lived without violating God's Law, earning eternal life for us. Jesus also had to be man to take our sin and guilt upon Himself and suffer the pain and agony of death

on the cross as our perfect substitute. Christ came in the flesh, under the Law, to fulfill the Law on our behalf (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 4:5).

In the second place, it was necessary for Jesus as Savior to shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). A blood sacrifice requires a body of flesh and blood. And this was God's plan for the Incarnation: "When Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering [under the Old Covenant] you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me'" (Hebrews 10:5). Without the Incarnation, Christ could not really die, and the cross would be meaningless.

Jesus needed to be fully God so His single life and death could substitute for the sinful lives and deaths of every human who has ever lived or ever will live ("No man can redeem the life of another," Ps. 49:7—see also verse 15). If Jesus was only a human, then living a perfect life would have only meant eternal life for Himself. But because Jesus was God, His righteous life was able to cover the unrighteous lives of all people, and His suffering was able to pay for the punishment of the sins of all people. As the apostle Peter says, "It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Christ's blood was able to pay for the sins of the whole world because it wasn't just the blood of a normal human being—it was the precious blood of a man who was also true God.

The Incarnation means that God saw our hopeless situation as humans plagued by sin and death, so He Himself became a human to fix it all. The Son of God became a human being to fulfill God's law for us and to suffer the consequences of the sin we committed. And He did it all because of the love He has for us. Jesus Christ, our Savior, was true God and true human being because He had to be... for us.

Why Must Jesus Be God and Man?

by Jeff Londgren

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:1, 14).

Winston Churchill once described Russia as “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” One could use the same phrase to describe the how and why of the dual nature of Jesus—God and man in one person.

“True God and true man” is a teaching that has been a challenge to human logic for generations. One example: When Jesus died on the cross, did God die? The answer: When Jesus died, it was the true God and true man—the one person—Jesus, who died. Thus the Good Friday hymn states, “O sorrow dread! Our God is dead” (ELH 332:2).

But why is the incarnation, “the Word becomes flesh,” essential for our redemption? God’s Word states: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death... For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:14, 17).

Simply put, Christ had to be truly human to be a valid substitute for the payment of sin and a righteous life. Jesus had to be truly God to make this payment and righteous life supernaturally cover all mankind from creation to Judgment Day.

The Bible gives us another reason for Christ’s dual nature: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). We have someone who understands us and can truly give us real answers to our real problems because

He really is one of us.

The following story (in a different version) was made famous by radio personality Paul Harvey and drives home this need to be the man/God that makes Jesus our perfect Savior.

There was a man who didn’t believe in God. One Christmas Eve, the little church his wife and daughter attended was having a special program. “Daddy, won’t you please celebrate Christmas with us?” his daughter begged. “Sorry, little one, I’m busy,” he responded. Watching them leave, he thought, “Why would God leave heaven and become human? Christmas and God don’t make sense.” He turned on the TV. The weatherman announced that a snow storm was hitting their county. A few hours passed and he heard a noise—a pecking on the window pane. Small birds were hitting the glass, trying to escape the snow and extreme cold. The man was moved with compassion. He thought about how he could help the little birds. He knew his barn would be warm, and the birds could ride out the storm in the barn. Quickly, he put on his coat and made his way to the barn. He opened the huge barn doors and began to try to shoo the birds from the window into the barn. He tried and he tried, but the birds flew back to the window. He thought, “If only I could become a bird, then I could lead them into the barn and out of harm’s way. We are like the birds. So you became like us to save us. Now I understand.”

How Jesus can be both the infinite God and finite man, how the eternal God can participate in Jesus’ death, how He who was dead now lives—these truly are mysteries inside an enigma. But these mysteries about Jesus are the central truths of our salvation. Jesus must be true God and Man to be our Mediator and our Savior.

Jeff Londgren is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Rogers City, MI

Luther On The Incarnation

by Rev. Jonathon T. Krenz

They are, perhaps, the most sublime words Dr. Luther ever penned, and maybe you've even memorized them: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord." [1]

If justification is the article upon which the Church stands or falls, the incarnation, that God be-



came man in the person of Jesus, is foundational. Our Lord Jesus has two natures, divine and human, in one undivided person. He is fully divine, the eternally begotten Son of God, and fully man, born of the Virgin Mary. And for our justification to be accomplished, He must be both. He must be a man to suffer and die. He must be God for His death to count as payment for all the sins of all people. Luther puts it this way:

"We Christians should know that if God is not in the scale to give it weight, we, on our side, sink to the ground. I mean it this way: if it cannot be said that God died for us, but only a man, we are lost; but if God's death and a dead God lie in the balance, His side goes down and ours goes up like a light and empty scale. Yet He can also readily go up again, or leap out of the scale! But He could not sit on the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death. For God in His own nature

cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies who is one substance or one person with God." [2]

Christmas brings the good tidings that God is on the scale for us in this Child born of Mary. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11-12).

In Luther's Christmas preaching, he delights in the ordinariness and humility of the Savior's birth, and finds great comfort in it. The humanity of Jesus makes God accessible.



"Are you affrighted?" Luther asks, "Then come to him, lying in the lap of the fairest and sweetest maid. You will see how great is

the divine goodness, which seeks above all else that you should not despair. Trust him! Trust him! Here is the Child in whom is salvation. To me there is no greater consolation given to mankind than this, that Christ became man, a child, a babe, playing in the lap and at the breasts of his most gracious mother. Who is there whom this sight would not comfort? Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to judge this gurgling Babe and believe that he is

come, not to judge you, but to save.”[3]

God clothes Himself in flesh to place Himself in the balance over against our sin, thus we are justified. But there is also this great comfort. God clothes Himself in flesh that we may approach Him without fear, in faith that this little Babe is the God of heaven and earth, and is our Savior who loves us and is one of us.

This is what it means to believe and confess this eternally begotten Son of the Father, born in time of the Virgin Mary, to be “my Lord.” To have a Lord, Luther says, is to believe that “He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil.”[4] To have the Christ-Child as Lord is to have the God who puts His skin in the game to save you, a flesh and blood God who dies the accursed death of the cross and is risen, bodily, from the dead on the Third Day; who has ascended



— into heaven, bodily, and bodily sits at the right hand of the Father, living and reigning with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. To have the Christ-Child as Lord means that you are reconciled to God who loves you and bids you call upon Him as “Father,” who hears your prayers and answers for Jesus’ sake, who provides for all your needs and

delivers you in the day of trouble.

Indeed, for Luther, “The manger and the cross are never far apart.”[5]



This Babe is born to die, for you. He is born into our misery and helplessness to redeem us from it. He is born in our flesh to redeem us for Himself. He is born to bridge the gap between sinful man and God. He is born the Son of Mary, that by His suffering and death and resurrection, we may be sons of God. Our God is a man who steps into the scale and dies. And so we live.

Footnotes:

[1] *Luther’s Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986).

[2] *On the Councils and the Church, quoted in the Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration VIII:44*, Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, McCain et al., Eds. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005, 2006) pp. 588-89

[3] Roland H. Bainton, Ed., *Martin Luther’s Christmas Book* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1948) Kindle Location 275 of 593.

[4] LC II:27, McCain, p. 401.

[5] Bainton, Kindle Location 59 of 593.

The Rev. Jonathon T. Krenz is pastor of Messiah Lutheran, Moscow Mission (soon to be Augustana Lutheran Church) in Moscow, Idaho.

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Pastor Zell wrote the following Bible Study which can be found published in, *Forward in Christ*, Vol. 106, No. 12 © 2019. It is reprinted here with permission. It can be found online at: <https://forwardinchrist.net/bible-study-the-incarnation-of-our-lord/>

Paul Zell is pastor at Living Savior, Hendersonville and Asheville, NC.

The Study is reprinted here without answers. It is reprinted once again starting on page 9 with answers.

The Incarnation of our Lord



For many congregations, the Gospel of the Day is the keynote for each worship service. The Gospel for Christmas Day is John 1:1-4. Based on that reading, the heading for the service might be “the Incarnation of our Lord” as the evangelist declares that God’s one and only Son, the eternal Word, became flesh. (The word “incarnation” draws from the Latin for “the act of being made flesh.”)

The identity of Jesus Christ is of critical importance to all who call on his name. It comes as no surprise, then, when the devil prompts false teachers to attack it. Believers must be prepared to proclaim the truth and defend it.

Only seemed to be a man?

For instance, some have taught that Jesus Christ only seemed to be a man. They will say that his body was that of a phantom, that his suffering was more theater than reality.

Read Hebrews 2:14-18.

- Which phrases indicate that God’s Son truly and fully became a human being?
- Christian doctrine is always practical. The writer mentions at least four practical outcomes of the Son of God’s incarnation. Underline them in your Bible.

- Recall at least three instances in the ministry of Jesus that give evidence to his being fully God.
- Recall at least three instances in the ministry of Jesus that give evidence to his being fully human.

A symbolic testimony?

Some scholars have asserted that a virgin birth is biologically impossible. It would not pass the test of scientific inquiry, and it must be regarded as a “symbolic” testimony to the Christian message.

Read both Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38.

- Which verses proclaim the virgin birth of Jesus as real fact?
- What Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled by this event?
- How do Joseph’s and Mary’s reactions to the angel’s words set the tone for the way God’s people today will respond to the doctrine of the virgin birth?
- What announcements elsewhere in Scripture refute the allegation that certain statements in the Bible are impossible because they do not adhere to the laws of nature?

Only God?

The church at Colosse came under attack from false teachers who felt that all matter is evil. Since the Son of God is good, they said, he could not have become an actual flesh-and-blood human being.

Read Colossians 1:15-20 and 2:9-12.

- The fact that Jesus is fully God could not be more obvious. Where, however, does the apostle also point to his human nature?
- What is one of the practical outcomes of this God-man’s work?
- Colossians 2:9 is a brief and bold statement of the two natures of Christ. Glance through what follows. By what means have you been joined to him and his bodily resurrection from the dead?

As true man, Jesus lived under the demands of God’s law without sinning. As true man, he shed his blood and died, redeeming sinners from death and hell. As true God, his obedience to God’s law and his substitutionary death count for all human beings. It’s no wonder that angels mark the incarnation of the Son of God with reverent and joyful worship. As do we. “Glory to God in the highest!”

*For me, kind Jesus,
was Thine incarnation,
Thy mortal sorrow,
and Thy life's oblation;
Thy death of anguish
and Thy bitter Passion,
For my salvation.*

Bible Study with answers

The Incarnation of our Lord

by Pastor Paul Zell

For many congregations, the Gospel of the Day is the keynote for each worship service. The Gospel for Christmas Day is John 1:1-4. Based on that reading, the heading for the service might be “the Incarnation of our Lord” as the evangelist declares that God’s one and only Son, the eternal Word, became flesh. (The word “incarnation” draws from the Latin for “the act of being made flesh.”)

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For instance, some have taught that Jesus Christ only seemed to be a man. They will say that his body was that of a phantom, that his suffering was more theater than reality.

Read Hebrews 2:14-18.

- Which phrases indicate that God’s Son truly and fully became a human being?
 - *“flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity”*(v. 14)
 - *“he had to be made like them, fully human in every way”*(v. 17)
 - *“he himself suffered”*(v. 18)

- Christian doctrine is always practical. The writer mentions at least four practical outcomes of the Son of God’s incarnation. Underline them in your Bible.
 - *“he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death”*(vv. 14,15)
 - *“in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God”*(v. 17)
 - *“that he might make atonement for the sins of the people”*(v. 17)
 - *“he is able to help those who are being tempted”*(v. 18)

- Recall at least three instances in the ministry of Jesus that give evidence to his being fully God.

- *Matthew 17—The transfiguration*

- *John 8:58—“Before Abraham was born, I am!” In the entire chapter, Jesus asserts that he is God come to earth.*

- *Mark 2:1-12—Jesus forgives and heals a paralyzed man. Jesus asserts his ability to forgive because he is God, and he proves it by healing this man.*

- Recall at least three instances in the ministry of Jesus that give evidence to his being fully human.

- *Jesus wept (John 11:35).*

- *Jesus was tired (John 4:6).*

- *Jesus bled and died (gospel accounts).*

A symbolic testimony?

Some scholars have asserted that a virgin birth is biologically impossible. It would not pass the test of scientific inquiry, and it must be regarded as a “symbolic” testimony to the Christian message.

Read both Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38.

- Which verses proclaim the virgin birth of Jesus as real fact?

- *“before they came together”(Matthew 1:18)*

- *“what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”(Matthew 1:20)*

- *“he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son”(Matthew 1:25)*

- *“a virgin”(Luke 1:27)*

- *“‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ (Luke 1:34)*

- *“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’ ” (Luke 1:35)*

- What Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled by this event?

- *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).*

- How do Joseph’s and Mary’s reactions to the angel’s words set the tone for the way God’s people today will respond to the doctrine of the virgin birth?

- *Joseph responded by believing what God revealed to him. He obeyed when he took Mary as his wife. Mary humbly accepted the word of Gabriel that she would have a son by a miracle.*
- What announcements elsewhere in Scripture refute the allegation that certain statements in the Bible are impossible because they do not adhere to the laws of nature?
 - *The Bible asserts throughout that God is almighty and can do whatever pleases him. Ordinarily he will work through the laws of nature, but he can suspend those laws and act outside them to accomplish his purpose if he so wills.*

Only God?

The church at Colosse came under attack from false teachers who felt that all matter is evil. Since the Son of God is good, they said, he could not have become an actual flesh-and-blood human being.

Read Colossians 1:15-20 and 2:9-12.

- The fact that Jesus is fully God could not be more obvious. Where, however, does the apostle also point to his human nature?
 - *“the firstborn”(1:15,18)*
 - *“blood, shed on the cross”(1:20)*
 - *“in bodily form”(2:9)*
- What is one of the practical outcomes of this God-man’s work?
 - *“through him to reconcile to himself all things”(1:20)*
 - *“you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead”(2:12)*
- Colossians 2:9 is a brief and bold statement of the two natures of Christ. Glance through what follows. By what means have you been joined to him and his bodily resurrection from the dead?
 - *In baptism (2:12)*

As true man, Jesus lived under the demands of God’s law without sinning. As true man, he shed his blood and died, redeeming sinners from death and hell. As true God, his obedience to God’s law and his substitutionary death count for all human beings. It’s no wonder that angels mark the incarnation of the Son of God with reverent and joyful worship. As do we. “Glory to God in the highest!”

Table Talk
P. O. Box 31
Chetek, WI 54728

The LMS-USA is Lutheran Church body describing itself as *Biblical, Confessional, Evangelical, Liturgical and Congregational*. It is a 'Forum' in which there is an on going discussion of theological issues and concerns among clergy and lay alike. The LMS-USA meets annually for a Theological Conference and this publication, besides carrying news of the Ministerium and Synod, functions also as a vehicle for this continuing dialogue.

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For information or to make
comment write:

President/Pastor, LMS-USA
12233 Waterview Circle
Indianapolis, IN 46229

Internet Contact:
revralphs@sglobal.net

To: