

# **Incarnation - Theology 101**

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Why this class? What is the importance of language and having a common understanding, especially as it relates to our faith?

## **What is theology?**

- Theology is the systematic study of the nature of the divine and, more broadly, of religious belief.

## **Why Start with Incarnation?**

- Christian doctrine of the Incarnation affirms that the eternal Son of God took flesh from his human mother and that the historical Christ is at once both fully God and fully human.
  - Was not a transitory appearance or theophany
  - Abiding union in the Person of Christ and of the God head without either nature being compromised or diminished
  - Occurs in history

## **Doctrine took shape under the controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries**

- Formally defined at the Council of Chalcedon (451) One of Seven Ecumenical councils from Nicaea in 325 - 2nd Council Nicaea in 787.
  - Born out of the diversity of traditions from Antioch (humanity) and Alexandria (divinity), on which stressed the human aspects of the incarnate Christ, the other his Divinity.
  - Danger with over emphasis on the humanity tends to almost become inspiration
  - Danger with insisting on the full Divinity could lead to a careless approximation of the incarnation which could make its theophany. Council of Chalcedon attempted to keep these in balance
- Definition didn't solve anything, just drew the lines for the limited to orthodoxy
  - Orthodox theologians held that it entailed a duality of wills
  - Middle Ages there was a dispute about whether the Incarnation would have taken place had there not been a fall?
    - Thomist theologians thought fall was required
    - Scotist maintained the opposite
  - Reformation: Both Calvin and Luther laid stressed the wonder of the Incarnation
  - Other doctrines of grace and sacraments flow from this central doctrine
  - Impacts our notion of the theology of history
  - God's involvement in contingency
  - Kenosis and vulnerability
  - Doctrine raises question of the relation of time and eternity
  - Finitude and infinity
  - Religious expression of the principle of immanence, the essential relatedness of God and humanity

- Incarnation vs Atonement. — Christmas vs Easter People

### **Biblical Roots:**

- How does the Christian Doctrine vary from Inspiration or the presence of the Spirit in Scriptures before Christ?
- Hebrew Scriptures saw Holy Wisdom as a Manifestation of God not separate
- Did Jesus see himself in this way?
- Doctrine of the Incarnation must be a consequence of the resurrection
- Did the earliest Christians see this as central to their identity? If not, why does it become more important?

### **Incarnation Christology in Philippians 2:1-11**

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,  
 did not regard equality with God  
 as something to be exploited,  
<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,  
 taking the form of a slave,  
 being born in human likeness.  
 And being found in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself  
 and became obedient to the point of death—  
 even death on a cross.  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him  
 and gave him the name  
 that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus  
 every knee should bend,  
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess  
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
 to the glory of God the Father.

### **Gospel of John:**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15(John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."' ) 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

- Ultimately a doctrine evolved when previous explanations seemed insufficient to describe what had happened in the revelation of God through Jesus

"Let us rejoice and give thanks, not only that we have become Christians, but that we have become Christ! Do you understand the enormous grace God has given us? Stand in awe and rejoice — We have become CHRIST!" St. Augustine of Hippo

### **On the mystery of the Incarnation**

It's when we face for a moment  
the worst our kind can do, and shudder to know  
the taint in our own selves, that awe  
cracks the mind's shell and enters the heart:  
not to a flower, not to a dolphin,  
to no innocent form  
but to this creature vainly sure  
it and no other is god-like, God  
(out of compassion for our ugly  
failure to evolve) entrusts,  
as guest, as brother,  
the Word.

-Denise Levertov

## **Before Jesus - Mary, the Protopriest of the New Covenant**

*Alla Renée Bozarth - one of the "Philadelphia Eleven," ordained in 1974*

Before Jesus  
was his mother.

Before supper  
in the upper room,  
breakfast in the barn.

Before the Passover Feast,  
a feeding trough.  
And here, the altar  
of Earth, fair linens  
of hay and seed.

Before his cry,  
her cry.  
Before his sweat  
of blood,  
her bleeding  
and tears.  
Before his offering,  
hers.

Before the breaking  
of bread and death,  
the breaking of her  
body in birth.

Before the offering  
of the cup,  
the offering of her  
breast.  
Before his blood,  
her blood.

And by her body and blood  
alone, his body and blood  
and whole human being.

The wise ones knelt  
to hear the woman's word  
in wonder.

Holding up her sacred child,  
her spark of God in the form of a babe,  
she said:

“Receive and let  
your hearts be healed  
and your lives be filled

with love, for  
This is my body,  
This is my blood.”

### **Implications for Our Daily Lives**

- Must confront the reality of God present in all others
- Must treat our own selves with the respect required of God
- Tells us something about God’s willingness to limit Godself for Love
- Generosity of God
- Sacredness of our Lives and the Responsibility that comes with that
- God is present with us now
  - In us
  - In others
  - Between us
  - In community