

WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

JESUS: GOD AND MAN. SO WHAT?

“The incarnation is about God joining us in our lostness. He waits until we come to the necessary recognition of our condition and then slowly he helps us to find a different way.”

It is important to be careful what we mean by this and what we *don’t* mean.

First, we *don't* mean that God became a human being in such a way as to cease to be God. He didn't *turn into* a human being. No, he took humanity up into himself in the person of Jesus. He took *on* a nature -he didn't put *off* his own.

He assumed all that it means to be human - he did not leave behind any of what it means to be divine. He added the whole essence of humanity - he did not subtract any of the essence of divinity.

When we say that the Word became *flesh* we do not mean that he took on human sinews alone. We don't mean that Jesus was some sort of hybrid, comprising a human body and the divine mind. No. He was a complete human being, with a human mind and human emotions and a human psyche and a human subconscious as well as a human body. He had everything that pertains to humanity and everything that pertains to Divinity. He was and is fully divine and fully human.

Physicists estimate that the universe is approximately fourteen billion years old: how can three decades two millennia ago be of ultimate significance? Only if those three decades saw God living a human life. And if that is the case then they are 30 years of profound and manifold significance.

**The incarnation is the centrepoint of history.**

All other times are relative to this birth, all other events are relative to this one event. In this simple concentrated event all times fall before the one time, which is God's time with us. We can be grasped by the fact that God has become part of his world. He has always been present within it of course, but not as *part of it* before. Something new and dramatic and eternal has happened.

**The incarnation shows us what God is like.**

“If you want to see the Father, look at me.” Christmas is therefore a festival of protest - the Christmas miracle initiates perpetual protest against inhuman gods; it spells the end of idols. We all project our fears and fantasies on to God - we are all idolaters at heart - but we need to replace our invented godlets with the grandeur and goodness of the Christlike God.

Jesus corrects and enlarges our view of God firstly by teaching us about the *humility* of God - we would not have guessed that God is humble. The incarnation does not happen despite God’s transcendent greatness, but because of his inheritent humility. It's not a temporary exception to his greatness but a permanent demonstration of it. The greatness is glimpsed in the lowliness.

The incarnation changes our understanding of God by showing us the extent of his commitment to his world. He is not only committed to his world but he is *internally* committed to it. He has entered into it and it has entered into him.

We do not really know what “God” means - how could we? But the incarnation says begin with Jesus. He is the one we have some sort of handle on, because he has lived a human life. We should start with him and let the sort of person he is and the sort of life he lived and the sort of death he died shape and inform our understanding of God.

**The incarnation shows us what it is to be human.**

For example, Jesus lays humility before us as an essential characteristic of a fully human mind set.

He shows he is a human being who is committed to and involved in the world, not passionlessly detached from it.

God becoming man demonstrates and bestows dignity on humanity.

People sometimes say that they feel ennobled to belong to the same species as Shakespeare or Mozart or Gandhi: to belong to the same species as the one through whom all things were made is to have unassailable significance.

**The incarnation effects transformation of our creaturely plight.**

Christmas does not simply give us new knowledge but it changes all reality, for in this man humanity is both remade and given new possibilities. In his birth is our birth: our wasted ways are restored, our endless capacity to undo our own lives is itself undone. It doesn't just reveal God to us, it brings God to us and unites us to Him.

**The incarnation means that only Jesus can reconcile us to God.**

To reconcile us to God he had to be fully *human*. The early church used to say what is not *assumed* is not healed. In other words, unless God took on himself the whole of human nature then the whole of human nature is not healed. If part of what it means to be a human being is left out of Jesus, then part of what it means to be a human being is not put right. If Jesus is not fully human, then our full humanity is still cut off from God.

To reconcile us to God he had to be fully *divine*. To be united with a fellow creature would not give us complete union with God. But if Jesus is fully divine then to be united with him is to be united with God. If he is God then he can raise us up to participate in the life of God. That is why the church has always stood firm on the divinity of Jesus. Because a church that lets go of the divinity of Jesus has no gospel. Indeed a church that lets go of the divinity of Jesus has ceased to be a church. For it can no longer of access to the father.

**The incarnation guarantees that the more godly we become, the more human we become.**

Many people fear that there is some sort of a choice to be made between godliness and humanity. They feel that the further they go down the godliness road the more they will have to leave behind their humanity. God’s nature is such that, far from overwhelming everything else, He enables everything to be fully itself. When we contribute to something, we limit it; when God contributes to something, he liberates it. God, being infinite, restricts us in no way and enables us to be fully ourselves, so when he relates in this special way with Mary, his contribution doesn't stop Mary's contribution from being fully itself. And the child that is born to her has both his divine nature and her human nature in their totality, and is no hybrid, mixture or compromise.

**The incarnation gives us a pattern for balanced Christian living.**

Serving God does not mean abandoning our humanity, ignoring it or downplaying it. Some people say you shouldn't take out an insurance policy. Compare this with Nehemiah, who when the walls of Jerusalem were under threat of an attack “prayed to God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.” In a properly incarnational mindset the divine and human belong together, with prayer and preparation not squeezing each other out.

The fanatic tends to say, “God told me to…” as if that makes their course of action immune from questioning. On the incarnational model however, prayer and prophecy do not dispense with the need for the whole messy, human business of weighing up the alternatives, getting advice, listening to one's own heart and so on. The divine does not swamp the human.

**The incarnation is the model for our pastoral care and prayer.**

The Gospel tells us that the Son of God is to be found on the wrong side of human systems of religion, law and public opinion. He is our great priest because he has been the victim, and that is where his followers are called to be. People in the caring professions are sometimes told that they mustn't get emotionally involved. But that is both impossible, and if we look to Christ as a model, undesirable.

**Questions**

What is not assumed is not healed. Why not?

A church that lets go of the divinity of Jesus has no gospel. Why not?

Do you feel that becoming more godly will mean having to leave bits of your humanity behind?

God enables everything to be fully itself. How can we help others to see God not as a threat, but as liberation?

