



# WORKSHOP HANDOUT



## SIMPLE DEFINITION: The Doctrine of the Incarnation

The word **incarnation** simply means that in Jesus, the \_\_\_\_\_, took on human \_\_\_\_\_  
- being miraculously conceived and born of a virgin.

As the God-Man, He \_\_\_\_\_ God to humans;  
as the Man-God, He \_\_\_\_\_ humans to God.

## SOME CLARIFICATIONS

### A. The Doctrine of the Trinity:

God eternally exists as three distinct \_\_\_\_\_ of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the one  
\_\_\_\_\_ of God.

Being is different to Person. Being (or Substance) has to do with **WHAT** something is or its existence.  
Person has to do with **WHO** something is.

### B. The Subject of the Incarnation

The incarnation is the 'in-fleshing' of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Trinity - God the Son. It does  
**NOT** mean that God the Father or God the Holy Spirit became a man.



## 1. WONDER: GOD'S STORY

We're going to briefly consider how the incarnation fits into the Bible's big story and gaze in wonder at it as part of God's story of redemption.

### 1A. THE INCARNATION IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

#### i. FULFILLMENT: Old Testament Prophecy

There are many Old Testament (OT) passages of prophecy that talk about Jesus's coming. In fact, this was the explicit aim of the birth narrative in Matthew's Gospel - to show how Jesus's birth fulfilled OT prophecy.

##### *3 Biblical themes Jesus fulfills in Matthew:*

- He brings Israel into the promised land: Jesus is the Greek for Joshua.
- As Immanuel, he embodies God's presence with his people.
- As the new David, he is the messiah born at Bethlehem.

##### *Jesus interprets the OT in light of His coming:*

- Isaiah 'saw his glory and spoke of him' (John 12:41; Isa. 6).
- Jesus, not the manna, was the heavenly bread which fed Israel in the wilderness (John 6:31ff., 47ff.).
- Abraham 'saw his day' (John 8:56f.).

## ii. FORESHADOWING: The OT in the NT

### Connection with the OT Feasts

The Jewish Rabbis taught that the prophet \_\_\_\_\_ would appear at Passover to declare who the Messiah would be. John the Baptist is born around the time of Passover, and Jesus calls John the 'Elijah who was to come' in *Matthew 11:13-15*.

Jesus was probably born around the time of the Feast of \_\_\_\_\_ and John starts his Gospel by saying that the Word became flesh and, literally 'tabernacled' among us (*John 1:14*).

The Feast of Tabernacles celebrated the fact that God came to dwell with the Israelites in the wilderness. *Now, in Jesus, God comes to dwell with us.*

### Born to Die

Some speculate that perhaps the 'swaddling cloths' used in *Luke 2:7 & 12* may have been the burial cloths travellers would carry.

In *Matthew 2:11*, one of the gifts the Magi bring is \_\_\_\_\_, which was a spice and was used in embalming. Myrrh symbolizes bitterness, suffering, and affliction.

Consider the powerful imagery: Jesus is born, the Lamb of God who would die for the sins of the world, as a baby wrapped in burial cloths and gifted with an embalming spice - myrrh. The foreshadows of his redemptive death are seen even at his birth!

## iii. FULLNESS: John and the NT Letters

### John's writings:

Teaches Jesus' God-man status and also his preexistent "glory" (*John 1:1-18*), and the oneness between Jesus and God the Father (*10:29, 30; 14:8-11; 1 John 2:23*). John also includes Jesus's "I Am" statements - a title taken from the OT title for Yahweh (*John 6:35-51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7-14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; cf. Exod. 3:14*).

### Paul's Letters:

In *Galatians 4:4*, the incarnation came "in the fullness of time" to "redeem those who were under the law."

In *Colossians 1:19*, Paul says that all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in Christ.

In *Romans 5:12-19* and *1 Corinthians 15:45-47* Paul described Christ as a Second Adam, who fulfills and attains what Adam had forsaken and failed.

### Hebrews & Revelation:

The opening hymn (*1:2b-4*) accents Christ's exalted status as "the very stamp" of God's image. Christ is superior to the angels (*1:4-9*), yet he became a man in order to suffer for human salvation (*2:9; 5:7-9*).

Hebrews shows His real temptation (*2:18; 4:15*) combined with his sinlessness (*4:15; 5:9; 7:26*).

The book of Revelation has imagery of Jesus's birth in Revelation 12, and throughout the rest of the book it shows us His coming in the fullness of His glory.

## 1B. THE NECESSITY OF THE INCARNATION

Anselm of Canterbury (died 1109) famously asked, *Cur Deus Homo?* (“Why Did God Become Man?”) Anselm determined that God became man in Christ because only one who was both God and man could achieve our salvation.

### i. RENEWAL: a perfect example of true humanity

Because Jesus Christ is the divine, perfect, second Person of the Trinity - in human nature, he serves as an example of what the perfect life lived out in human form would be. The NT repeatedly calls us to imitate Christ (*1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6; Ephesians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 11:1*).

*Have you lost your faith in humanity?* Have you seen all the ways in which our race has been marred and distorted by the effects of sin? The incarnation shows us God’s plan of renewal for us - for we are united with Christ in His death, and also in his resurrection to newness of life!

### ii. RELATIONSHIP: The incarnation helps us know God

Without the incarnation, the invisible and transcendent God would remain largely unknown to us. Jesus perfectly images to us what God is like (*Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3*). Jesus says to Philip, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (*John 14:9*). The incarnation makes God relatable to us.

*We are created for relationship* - with each other and ultimately with our Creator. The incarnation shows that God has provided the way to reconcile that vertical relationship so that all our other relationships can be made right as well!

### iii. REDEMPTION: God pays the price we couldn’t

Only one who is truly God could redeem us from the wages of sin - which is death. Only God, who is life in himself could conquer death. Only one who is truly human could represent us - feel our sorrows, bear our sins, and be an appropriate substitute. See *1 Corinthians 15:21; Romans 5:19*.

*Do you need redemption?* Do you feel the weight of your moral failure and the punishment you rightly deserve as a transgressor of God’s perfect Law? Jesus shows us God’s costly redemption for us!

### iv. RESCUE: We’re hopeless unless God came down to us

All of humanity had fallen in Adam. We’re born sinners with a sinful nature - we are by nature children of wrath (*Ephesians 2:3-5*), unable to keep the commands of God perfectly. We’re enslaved to sin (*John 8:34*). So, in love and mercy, God sends His Son to rescue us and set us free (*Romans 6:18*).

*Do you need rescue?* Are you weighed down by the weight of your sins or brokenness? The incarnation shows us God is the God who rescues us!



## 2. WORSHIP: ORTHODOXY & HERESY

What we believe about Jesus as the God-Man is tremendously important because if we get the wrong Christ, we're worshipping the wrong God.

### 2A. THE INCARNATION IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

#### i. The Hypostatic Union

We must first define a few terms before we talk about the Hypostatic Union.

##### NATURE

The term "nature" denotes the sum-total of all the essential qualities of a thing, that which makes it what it is. It is the qualities possessed in common for a given substance.

##### PERSON

The term "person" denotes a complete substance/thing endowed with reason/consciousness, and, consequently, a responsible subject of its own actions. Person refers to the "who" of a thing.

When we talk about the Hypostatic Union, we mean that Jesus Christ has 2 \_\_\_\_\_: a human and a divine nature that are distinct and unmixed, and One Person - who is, the Second Person of the Trinity - God the Son.

#### ii. The Humanity of Jesus

- Jesus referred to Himself as a man (John 8:40).
- The genealogies show His natural human descent (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-37).
- Jesus attributed to Himself human elements as body and soul (Matt. 26:26, 28, 38).
- He grew and developed in normal human development (Luke 2:40).
- He experienced fatigue (John 4:6); His body required sleep (Matt. 8:24), food (Matt. 4:2; 21:18), and water (John 19:28).
- Human emotional characteristics: Jesus expressed joy (John 15:11) and sorrow (Matt. 26:37); He showed compassion (Matt. 9:36) and love (John 11:5); and He was moved to righteous indignation (Mark 3:5).
- He prayed for emotional and physical strength. He perspired under great physical strain (Luke 22:43-44).
- He died a real death (Mark 15:37; John 19:30).
- When a spear was thrust into His side, blood and water poured out (John 19:34).

#### iii. The Deity of Jesus

- "All the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him" (Col. 1:19; John 20:28; Titus 2:13).
- Jesus was aware of His divine status (John 10:30; 12:44-45; 14:9).
- Jesus was God (John 6:51; 8:58; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).
- His preexistence (John 1:1-2; 1:15; 8:58; 17:5; Phil. 2:5-11).
- Jesus did things and claimed authority ascribed God: He forgave sins (Matt. 9:6) and has all authority (Matt. 28:18-20).
- He is worthy of worship due only to God (John 5:23; Heb. 1:6; Phil. 2:10-11; Rev. 5:12).
- He is the Agent of creation (John 1:3) and sustains it (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).
- He raised the dead (John 11:43-44), healed the sick (John 9:6-7), and vanquished demons (Mark 5:13).
- He will resurrect all humanity to judgment or to life (Matt. 25:31-32; John 5:27-29).
- The titles ascribed to Jesus: "LORD" (Phil 2:11), "LORD of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15), "the LORD of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8), "the mediator" (Heb. 12:24), and "who is God over all, blessed forever" (Rom. 9:5).
- The name "God" is coupled with Jesus (John 1:18; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; 2 Thess. 1:12; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 5:20).

## 2B. THE INCARNATION IN HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

Many people and groups have gotten these things wrong and fallen into heresies from since the earliest times. These early heresies are still around today, so it is good to learn how the church responded to them.

### i. Heresies and Councils

#### **GNOSTICISM & MARCIONISM: denying the true \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus**

The Gnostics and Marcionites in the 2nd century denied that Jesus was truly human. They believed Christ to be a quasi-spiritual being who merely appeared human.

#### **ARIANISM AND KENOSIS: denying the true \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus**

Arianism held that Christ the “Logos” was no longer fully God. It taught, like modern cults such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons, that Jesus was a created being or creature—it denied the Son’s eternal divinity. Kenosis heresy asserts that the eternal Son of God ‘emptied’ himself of his divine attributes. This heretical view is still taught today by some popular churches and pastors.

Against Arianism, **The Council of Nicaea (325 AD)** asserted that the Son was homoousios of one substance with the Father. Jesus was fully divine. Against Kenosis heresy, a careful reading of Philippians 2 shows that what Christ ‘empties’ or lays aside is his pre-incarnate glory by taking the form of a servant in human form, becoming obedient to death.

#### **OTHER HERESIES: confusion over the natures and person of Jesus**

Apollinarius (310?–390?) taught that only the body of Jesus was human, but he didn’t have a human soul. Nestorius (after 381–451) taught that the union of the human and divine in Jesus was like a marriage and equated to two persons in Christ. Eutyches (378–456) denied that Jesus had two natures and mixed them into one demi-god nature.

Against these heresies, the **Councils of Constantinople (381 AD), Ephesus (431 AD), and Chalcedon (451 AD)** defended the Biblical doctrine of Christ’s 2 natures and One Person.

### ii. The Chalcedonian Creed (451 AD)

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood;

**Truly God and truly man**, of a *reasonable soul and body*; consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; *begotten before all ages* of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the virgin Mary, the mother of God, according to the manhood;

One and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in **two natures**, *inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably*; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved,

And concurring in **one Person** and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.



# 3. WITNESS: GOD SENDS CHRIST, JESUS SENDS US

## 3A. HOW THE INCARNATION EQUIPS US FOR WITNESS

### i. AN EXAMPLE

In *John 17:18* and *John 20:21* Jesus says that ‘as the Father has sent him, so he sends us.’

- The incarnation shows us that God stoops low, humbles himself and becomes one of us in order to bring salvation to us. Likewise, our outreach and evangelistic efforts must be ‘incarnational’.
- Paul says in *1 Corinthians 9:19-23*, he had ‘become all things to all people so that by all means I might save some.’ What does this mean when you’re reaching out to people who are different or marginalized?
- The incarnation meant that Jesus put aside what was rightfully his for the sake of others (*Philippians 2:5-8*). How does that challenge us to do nothing from selfish ambition but rather count others’ needs more significant than ourselves?
- The incarnation shows us that it was incredibly costly to God to show his love and bring salvation. How does that challenge us to be willing to extend sacrificial giving of ourselves in seeking to reach the lost?

### ii. AN APOLOGETIC

We have studied the doctrine of the incarnation and saw how many various cults and groups get the doctrine of Christ wrong. If you have the wrong Christ, you have the wrong Saviour. A Jesus who is not truly God and truly man cannot be your substitute to save you from your sins. So, this doctrine equips us apologetically to help others understand the need for a Mediator between God and Man: Jesus represents us to God. May this doctrine help inform and deepen our evangelistic conversations!

## 3B. RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Here are a few resources you can check out for further study:

- **Knowing Christ** by Mark Jones
- **Who is Jesus?** (Crucial Questions Book 1) by R.C. Sproul
- **Who is Jesus?** by Greg Gilbert
- **An Even Better Christmas** by Matt Chandler
- **A Very Different Christmas** by Rico Tice
- **Love Came Down at Christmas (Advent Devotional)** by Sinclair Ferguson