

GOD WITH US: THE INCARNATION

INTRODUCTION

We have talked about the sovereignty of God and the incarnation of Christ. We've talked about our need for God to take on human flesh. We've talked about the Old Testament covenants, which are the blueprints of the incarnation. We've talked about the genealogies of the incarnation and the way that the Incarnation of the Son of God provided redemption for us.

And now we come to Christmas Eve, and it's time to talk about Emmanuel – God with us. The incarnation matters so very much because it describes the moment when God Himself came to dwell with us.

Let's make sure we have a solid foundation and begin by clearly identifying God. The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 does this very well.

WHO IS GOD?

The London Baptist Confession serves as our doctrinal statement at One Hope Fellowship. It backs up all that it says with Scripture. I'm not going to read the cross references this morning. If you would like to study the cross-references, please feel free to grab one of the copies of the confession on the bookshelf.

Chapter Two Section One says:

- The Lord our God is one, the only living and true God.
- He is self-existent and infinite in being and perfection.
- His essence cannot be understood by anyone but Him.
- He is a perfectly pure spirit.

- He is invisible and has no body, parts, or changeable emotions.
- He alone has immortality, dwelling in light that no one can approach.
- He is unchangeable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, in every way infinite, absolutely holy, perfectly wise, wholly free, completely absolute.
- He works all things according to the counsel of His own unchangeable and completely righteous will for His own glory.
- He is most loving, gracious, merciful, and patient.
- He overflows with goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.
- He rewards those who seek Him diligently.
- At the same time, He is perfectly just and terrifying in His judgments.
- He hates all sin and will certainly not clear the guilty.

Chapter Two Section Two says:

- God has all life, glory, goodness, and blessedness in and of himself; He alone is all-sufficient in himself.
- He does not need any creature He has made nor does He derive any glory from them.
- Instead, He demonstrates His own glory in them, by them, to them, and upon them.
- He alone is the source of all being, and everything is from Him, through Him, and to Him.
- He has absolute sovereign rule over all creatures, to act through them, for them, or upon them as He pleases.
- In His sight everything is open and visible.
- His knowledge is infinite and infallible.
- It does not depend upon any creature, so for Him nothing is contingent or uncertain.
- He is absolutely holy in all His plans, in all His works, and in all His commands.
- Angels and human beings owe to Him all the worship, service, or obedience that creatures owe to the Creator and whatever else He is pleased to require

of them.

And, Chapter Two Section Three says:

- This divine and infinite Being consists of three real persons: the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- These three have the same substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence without this essence being divided.
- The Father is not derived from anyone, neither begotten nor proceeding.
- The Son is eternally begotten of the Father.
- The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
- All three are infinite and without beginning and are therefore only one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being.
- Yet these three are distinguished by several distinctive characteristics and personal relations.
- This truth of the Trinity is the foundation of all of our fellowship with God and of our comforting dependence on Him.

THE PROBLEM

The problem, simply enough, is this: how can *we* have anything to do with *God*?

How can **creatures of flesh and blood** ever know or comprehend God, who is pure Spirit, invisible, without parts or emotions, who dwells in unapproachable light, who by His very nature is incomprehensible?

How can **sinners** ever approach God, who is holy?

How can **hostile rebels** ever love God or want to know or worship Him?

There are a variety of human answers to this, all of which deny Him as He is.

Some make God nothing more than a bigger, more advanced version of man. Some make God distant, apathetic, and uncaring. And, of course, many deny that God exists at all.

Moses prayed, “Show me Your glory!” Yahweh answered Him, “No one can see My face and live.” (Exodus 33:18-20).

Do you see the problem? Left on our own, no one wants to know God as He is. And even those to whom He first spoke could not see Him as He truly is and survive the experience.

But Yahweh had a purpose in mind. The impossibility and frustration would not be answered by creating the perfect religion – the perfect list of does and don’ts – but by Yahweh Himself invading creation and becoming a man to reveal Himself to mankind.

GOD’S SOLUTION: INCARNATION

God’s self-revelation took place in three stages.

The first stage was creation itself. The heavens are tell of the glory of God, and the expanse is declaring the work of His hands (Psalm 19:1). Since the creation of the world God’s invisible attributes – specifically His eternal power and His divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made. (Romans 1:20) Just as every artist reveals something about himself or herself in what they make, God reveals some fundamental truths about Himself in what He created.

Johann Sebastian Bach is generally considered the most confident and peaceful of the classical composers; his music revealed his faith. He was a profoundly committed Christian – his personal Bible reveals page after page of notes written as

he studied – who viewed music as a gift from God and best expressed his faith through his music. About three-quarters of his works were written for the church. During one three-year period, Bach wrote cantatas for each church service of the year – and there were seventy each year, with the result that he wrote 210 pieces of music in three years. Through the words of those cantatas, Bach preached the Gospel. Bach's music reveals his faith and deepest thoughts.

In just that way, creation reveals the eternal power and divine nature of God in such a perfect and sufficient way that people are without excuse when they fail to worship Him as God.

The second stage of God's revelation is Scripture. Hebrews 1:1 summarizes it this way: Long ago, God spoke (a) to the fathers, (b) in the prophets, (c) in many portions, and (d) in many ways. This means God spoke in history through chosen representatives, in many different episodes, and by various means. Throughout this time of revelation, God spoke with the same consistent voice. The same tone of voice, the same truth, the same mercy, the same righteousness, the same kindness, the same warnings of judgment, the same promises of grace.

But speaking through creation wasn't enough. Neither was speaking through prophets. God had more to say.

The final state of God's revelation was through Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's own Son. He is the Second Person of the Trinity, the One eternally begotten by the Father. In these last days, Hebrews 1:2-3 says, God spoke to us in His Son, whom the Father appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature, and He upholds all things by the word of HIS power.

John opens his Gospel with words that call us back to the first words of Genesis. Genesis 1:1 gives us a when, a who, and a what.

- The *when* is "In the beginning."

- The *who* is “God.”
- The *what* is “created the heavens and the earth.”

John 1:1-3 also gives us a when, a who, and a what.

- The *when* is “In the beginning.”
- The *who* is “the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; He was in the beginning with God.”
- And the *what* is “All things came into being through the Word, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

So, **the Word is eternal**; He was in the beginning with God.

The Word is in perfect fellowship with God; He was *with* God, a phrase that implies face-to-face intimacy and equality.

And **the Word is God by nature**. John clearly states this – “and the Word was God.” And John 1:3 leaves us no other option: “All things came into being through the Word, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” The Word is not a created thing. He is co-eternal and co-equal with God.

We speak all the time, and our words are just sounds reverberating through the air and landing on someone else’s eardrums. But God’s perfect, full, complete expression of Himself is Himself, the Living Word. The Father is the speaker, and the Son is the One who is spoken.

And then the Word did something that we really can’t understand. Look at John 1:14.

THE INCARNATE WORD

14 And the *Word* became *flesh*,

and *dwelt* among us,
and *we beheld His glory*,
glory as of the only begotten from the Father,
full of grace and truth!
(John 1:14, 2022 LSB)

The Eternal Word became a man. It was the late first century when John wrote his Gospel and other letters (and the book of Revelation). Gnosticism had become widespread. The word *gnostic* comes from the Greek word for knowledge. Gnosticism emphasized personal knowledge and experience over authoritative teachings. They also dismissed material existence as flawed and saw only the spiritual as having value. Gnostics *loved* the idea of God being the *Word*, because, in their minds, it made them the ultimate interpreters of God.

But God refused to let sinful men interpret His Word any way they pleased. So His Word became flesh and blood and lived as a Man among the men, women, and children of Israel. In spite of being a Man, He displayed the glory that only the Only Begotten From The Father could display, the glory that is grace and truth.

Exodus 34:6 says,

6 Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and called out,
“Yahweh, Yahweh God,
compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger,
and **abounding in lovingkindness** [or *grace*] **and truth**”
(Exodus 34:6, 2022 LSB)

What a clear identification! The Word made flesh is God Himself in human flesh. He came to declare and explain God’s compassion, graciousness, patience, lovingkindness, and truth.

John opened his first letter with a tremendous claim to have physically

encountered the Eternal Word of God:

1 What was from the beginning,
what we have **heard**,
what we have **seen with our eyes**,
what we **beheld**
and **touched with our hands**,
concerning **the Word of Life**
(**1 John 1:1, 2022 LSB**)

The Word of Life, who was with God and was Himself God by nature, became *flesh*! *God* became a *man*! John and the other apostles, as well as thousands of others, *heard* the sound of the Word of Life that was manifested, *saw* Him with their own eyes, *beheld* Him, and *touched* Him.

So we can say that the name Emmanuel – which means “God With Us” – is not an honorary title but an actual description of who Jesus Christ is: the Eternal Word who took on human flesh to reveal the glory of God to us in the fullness of lovingkindness and truth.

John 1:18 perfectly encapsulates the problem and the solution. **No one has seen God at any time**. God is pure Spirit and invisible, so He can’t be seen. And we are sinners and unable to approach God, who is holy. And we are hostile rebels and don’t want to love or know Him. But **the only begotten God** – God who took on human flesh in Jesus Christ – **who is in the bosom of the Father** – a picture of Jesus’ intimacy with the Father – **He has explained Him** so that we who could never have known God come to know Him intimately.

Earlier, I summarized our problem this way:

How can **creatures of flesh and blood** ever know or comprehend God, who is pure Spirit, invisible, without parts or emotions, who dwells in unapproachable light, who by His very nature is incomprehensible?

How can **sinner**s ever approach God, who is holy?

How can **hostile rebels** ever love God or want to know or worship Him?

God's answer was for His Eternal Word – the perfect expression of all God is – to become a Man.

BRINGING IT HOME

Christians, we have been given the greatest gift ever given: the Son of God, the Eternal Word, made Flesh.

The disciple Philip asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it's enough for us.” (John 14:8).

That is what we were made for - to know God, to love Him, to worship Him, to understand Him as well as any creature can.

Sin ruined it all and made us enemies of God.

For the sake of His glory and love, Yahweh bent low and reached down to us, and taking on human flesh. Jesus lived in holiness, taught with perfection, loved with compassion, and comforted all who came to Him.

“Lord, show us the Father, and it's enough for us,” Philip said.

Jesus answered him, “Have I been with you so long and have you not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9).

If you want to know what God the Father is like, look at God the Son. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father,

He has explained Him.

Jesus showed us the Father as Exodus 34:6-7 describes Him: compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth, keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and yes, at the same time not leaving the guilty unpunished, not simply ignoring iniquity, transgression, and sin, but dealing with them in perfect justice and holiness.

The world hates Jesus Christ because He will one day stand in judgment of it, putting an end to all wickedness and condemning sinners for all eternity.

But for all who truly believe in Him and who confess Him as their Lord, Jesus Christ is the Savior who lived in perfect righteousness for us, who died as a perfect sacrifice for us, who rose from the dead and gives us His eternal, powerful, unending life.

We wait for Him now, but not as abandoned orphans. He comforts us in our grief and sorrow. He pities us and strengthens us in our weakness. He keeps us when we cannot keep ourselves.

Praise God for the gift of His Son!