



CHRIST FELLOWSHIP

Paul and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father, & the Lord Jesus Christ:

from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 We are bound to thank God alwayes for you, brethren, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity which you all have towards each other.

4 So that we are proud of you in the churches, for your patience and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, and towards us.

5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, for which ye also suffer; because ye have done that which is just, and have patiently suffered for the same.

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you:

7 And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of

11 Wherefore also we pray for you, that our God will make you worthy of this grace, and will perform in you all the good pleasure of his will, and the work of faith.

12 That the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, according to the grace of our God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER

1 He willeth them to continue in the truth received, 3 sheweth a departure from the truth, the very of Antichrist, before he come. 15 And then he referreth to the former exhortation, and

Now we beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Father, that ye be in love together.

That ye be in love, that ye be in peace, and be troubled in nothing, nor by word, nor by knowledge, as that the day of Christ will come.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall come as a thief in the night, in which the man of sin shall be revealed.

4 Who opposeth himselfe above all that is worshipped: so that he will sit in the temple of God, saying that he is God.

5 Remember ye not that I was yet with you, and that I have foretold these things?

OF CHRIST the MEDIATOR

ADVENT REFLECTIONS ON THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

Of Christ the Mediator:  
ADVENT REFLECTIONS ON THE  
1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

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# Introduction

The Incarnation is perhaps the most astounding event in our Bibles. And while the profundity of this event is beyond searching out entirely, the Bible gives all that we need to know about it, so that we might think rightly about its significance and its meaning in our lives. Indeed, the more we ponder the Incarnation, the more our hearts and minds ought to wonder in astonishment at God's grandiosity as well as his nearness to us. And in God's kindness, we aren't meant to ponder with uncertainty about the Incarnation and its implications, for he has given us specific truths and defined doctrine so that we might rightly understand (as much as we are humanly capable) the magnitude of what it means for God to become a man for us and for our salvation.

The hope of this year's Advent devotional is to help you think more deeply and more accurately about this momentous event that we spend a month of our year celebrating. While advent calendars and boxwood wreaths and decorated Douglas firs are wonderfully sentimental, the best things about Christmas are theological. As such, the aim of this devotional is to help you ground your celebration of Christmas in the theological, even while you appropriately appreciate the sentimental. We hope that this devotional helps you to gaze in wonder at God's great gift, which lay on a bed of straw under the Bethlehem sky over 2,000 years ago. We hope that you are helped to marvel at the precision with which God fulfilled his every promise to his people by sending his Son, born of a virgin. We pray that as your mind mulls over the beautiful truths of the Word of the Father now in flesh appearing, that you would likewise treasure up these things in your heart and overflow with praise and thanksgiving to God. And we hope that you are humbled by the truth that the second person of the Trinity, who upholds all things by the word of his power, would humble himself to the point of being held in the arms human beings he created, and eventually have his arms nailed to a cross, so that he might become the only mediator between God and man.

To reach those ends, we are using the direction provided by the historic Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. It aims to articulate succinctly the summation of the Bible's doctrinal teaching on various topics, ranging from the Scriptures themselves, to the doctrine of justification, to the Lord's Supper, to the last judgment. Our focus will be on Chapter 8 of the 1689 Confession, which is titled "Of Christ the Mediator." Even more specifically, we are paying attention to the second paragraph of that chapter. Each entry of this year's devotional will take a phrase from that paragraph (which is included in full on every page) and then use the Bible and teaching from church history to explain its theological and practical significance.

# What is the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*?

Some insist against such historical creeds and confessions, insisting, “We have no creed but the Bible!” That is to suggest, in other words, that we don’t need some man-made confessional statement when we have the divinely inspired Word of God. To be sure, the Bible trumps all creeds and confessions, regardless of what significant period of church history that they emerge from. The Bible alone (and not alongside any historic confessional statement) is the ultimate ground for the Christian’s faith and practice. But any confession that is worth our time will be based strictly upon the Bible. More so, the goal of any confessional statement like the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is to summarize the doctrinal teachings of the Bible on various subjects to help the church to understand and articulate the truths that the Bible presents.

Of course, all confessions arise out of particular moments in history. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is no different. Though called the 1689 Baptist Confession, it was actually written in 1677, during a period in which Protestant churches in England and Scotland were under significant persecution. However, in 1689 came the Act of Toleration, which allowed for greater religious freedom for Protestant churches. In light of lessening restrictions, the confession took on a more public role, and was published and circulated as the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. This confession draws heavily on the Westminster Confession of Faith (written in 1646), at times finding no way to improve whatsoever the precise wording of the Westminster Confession. With great respect for their Presbyterian brothers who formed that confession, a group of Reformed church leaders sought to produce a similar expression of their Christian faith, just from a more Baptist perspective.

We think the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 is a fine summary of the Bible’s teachings that it seeks to outline. That is not to say that everyone must agree with everything that this confession proposes. In addition, there are certain historical issues that the confession seeks to speak to that are simply not primary issues today. As a result, there are some things in the confession that, to our modern ears, seem like unnecessary additions to such a foundational document. What is to be remembered is that they were necessary issues to address then, though they are not necessarily debated now. All that said, the portion of the 1689 Confession that we will focus on in this devotion is of primary significance to the Christian faith. This is one portion of the Confession that virtually every Christian can agree on—indeed, must agree on—in order to hold to the orthodox teachings about the person of Christ. This specific paragraph (Chapter 8.2) is not historically conditioned to address some issue arising in the late 1600s, but simply a faithful articulation of significance and inner workings of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

# How to Use this Devotional

The entire paragraph of Chapter 8.2 (Of Christ the Mediator) from the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith will be included at the top of every entry. We recommend that each day, you read through that paragraph entirely, not just glossing over it and moving to the entry below.

Then, each day will include a biblical exposition of a phrase from that paragraph. We have broken the paragraph into twenty-four entries, to use every day of December leading up to Christmas.

The first eight entries will focus primarily on the deity of Jesus Christ. We want to dig deeply into the Biblical truths that Jesus of Nazareth, born in the little town of Bethlehem was fully God. The second eight entries will shift our attention to the humanity of Jesus. We want to wrestle with the astonishing reality that the God of the universe, who cannot be contained, became a fully functioning human being contained in skin and skeleton. The last eight entries will focus on how, according to the promises of the Scriptures, these two natures of Jesus are perfectly and uniquely united in one person. Jesus is fully God. Jesus is fully man. And he alone is the Christ.

We hope this leads you to think more deeply about the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Perhaps it will cause you to wrestle with things that have never occurred to you before. Perhaps you'll learn something that will help you engage with those among your family and friends who don't share the same thoughts about Jesus as you do. Perhaps you'll be led to marvel at the mind of God. Perhaps at times, holding these truths together might make your brain hurt. And perhaps this will give you a better understanding of the meaning of Christmas.

**The Son of God**, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

It may come as a surprise that Jesus is not the first person or group referred to as "son of God" in the Bible. Beginning at the Exodus and reinforced elsewhere in the Pentateuch, Israel as a nation is "*my [God's] firstborn Son*" (Ex. 4:22-23). God tells David of his offspring that, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" (2 Sam. 7:14). Even stretching farther back, Luke says at the end of his genealogy of Jesus that Adam is "the son of God" (Lk. 3:38).

It's pretty clear in all of these examples that being "son of God" is not a reference to biology, as we often think of sonship. Instead, these biblical examples show that Adam, Israel, and David's offspring should have a relational affinity to God. "The apple does not fall far from the tree," and while God is not in any sense their biological father, these "sons" should bear a resemblance to God.

Moving into the New Testament, these Old Testament examples should bear weight in our own thinking about what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God. In continuity with the examples above, Jesus as the Son of God is intended to be an image, an icon, of God. We'll spend more

time on this idea in the coming days, but suffice it to say that while Adam, Israel, and David's offspring up to this point were intended to have some semblance of God, they all failed. But Jesus is the Son of God who comes to perfectly reveal God to humankind. That's how John can write, "*We know the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true*" (1 Jn. 5:20).

But Jesus is the Son of God in a way that is also completely distinct from these Old Testament figures, which is why John can call Jesus the *only* Son (Jn. 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn. 4:9). Jesus is not *declared* Son of God like those Old Testament patterns. He is instead *by his very nature* the one and only Son of God from all eternity. "He is the eternal Son.... He is distinguished from other sons (angels and men) in that he alone is eternal and uncreated."<sup>1</sup>

Lest we think that Jesus' unique sonship is a small point of unimportant doctrine, think about how this shows us the depths of God's love for his people displayed in the Incarnation, and ultimately at Calvary. Listen to how theologian Donald Macleod describes the unique bond between the Father and the Son, and how incredible that makes the gift of Jesus: "There was a unique bond between the Father and the Son, arising from the fact that the Son was uniquely lovable and the Father was uniquely affectionate. God could not have made a greater sacrifice. His love is astonishing precisely because at this point he put the world before his Son. The statement, 'God gave the world for his Son' would evoke no wonder. The statement, 'God gave his Son for the world' borders on the incredible."<sup>2</sup>

God gave his Son for the world. His one and only, uniquely loved Son came for us. And perhaps most incredible of all, Jesus now brings others into his family. He is the Son by virtue of his nature; we can now be sons and daughters of God by virtue of adoption (Gal. 3:26). So, today, thank God that His Son Jesus came to make you and me his brothers and sisters (Rom. 8:29) to the praise of his glory and grace!

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1. Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 73.

2. . Macleod, 73.

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From the point of an outside observer, Christianity can appear to have a lot in common with other religions. In particular, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are often lumped together as the monotheistic religions in contrast to the polytheistic religions of Hinduism, paganism, or many other religions.

But this ignores one of the most important doctrines that we hold to as Christians. In fact, this doctrine of the Trinity is the very first thing that we state we believe in our church's statement of faith: "We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another." It's here at the very outset that we say clearly that while we worship one God, He is not the same God claimed by other religions.

And this truth of God as Trinity is not something that we would come up with on our own. We'd often love a "simpler" doctrine, something that we can easily package into words or metaphors as we teach our children or evangelize a coworker. But this is the God who has revealed himself to us. Perhaps most vividly, we see the Trinity revealed at the

baptism of Jesus, as the Son is baptized, the Spirit comes to rest on Him, and the Father speaks from heaven. It is here that we see “God in three persons, blessed Trinity.”

To speak of Jesus as the “second” person of the Trinity is not to say that he is less important, that he is some sort of substitute when “the big man upstairs” is too busy. It’s simply a way of acknowledging his Sonship. The Father, the first person of the Trinity, is the first who shows up on the scene of Scripture, creating the world, covenanting with Israel, making promises of a coming redeemer. As the story unfolds and we meet Jesus, he is not treated simply as a great prophet or a wandering teacher. The New Testament is clear that he is God (more on that in the coming days), the second person of the Trinity, one with God, but also distinct. Following them both, we see the Holy Spirit revered as God himself by Christ, poured out at Pentecost, and worshiped as God by the church. Not three gods, but one God. “God in three persons, blessed Trinity!”

For all the difficulty of explaining the Trinity well, it is a supremely good thing that we worship a God who is Tri-une. Think, for example, what that means about the nature of love. “In the triune God we do not have a God who is essentially lonely, essentially loveless. Quite the opposite: the God revealed in Jesus has been eternally loving. In John 17:24, Jesus said to his Father, ‘Father... you loved me before the foundation of the world,’ and that changes everything.... There has always been love with this God; it is at the root of who he is.”<sup>3</sup>

Love is not a part of the fabric of the universe, but in fact existed before time began, before atoms and molecules, mountains and molehills. Love is more than simple neurochemistry or evolutionary necessity. For all of eternity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have been in loving relationship with each other as one God. Love is of God because in the Trinity there has been an eternal loving relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit. And when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he, as the second person of the Trinity, was coming to usher us into that love. “God in three persons, blessed Trinity!”

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3. Michael Reeves, “Why a Triune God Is Better Than Any Other,” *Credo* Vol. 3, no. 2 (2013): 36.

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There is an infinite gulf that exists between the belief that Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity, and the belief that Jesus is some sort of created being who *became* a god. The latter belief has roots in the early fourth century, when Arius, a priest in the city of Alexandria, made the claim that "there was a time when the Son was not."<sup>4</sup> This heresy has made its way down to the modern day in religious sects like the Jehovah's Witnesses, who claim, "[Jesus] was God's first creation, and he helped in the creation of all other things. He is the only one created directly by Jehovah and is thus called God's 'only-begotten' Son."<sup>5</sup>

There is, however, a major problem with those who hold that Jesus either became a god or was merely elevated to god-like status by his followers: they ignore the biblical witness itself!

In particular, the Gospel of John is full of references to the deity of Christ. At the outset, John is very clear: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (Jn.

1:1). If that's unclear or if the accusation is made that this is only John's opinion on the matter, we have in the very words of Jesus a few chapters later a confession: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am*" (Jn. 8:58). This is more than a delusional claim from a madman who thinks that his birthday was several thousand years ago. It is a claim to share with God himself the very name "I am," used by God to identify himself in Exodus 3:14 to Moses. Upon hearing this, the Jews listening to him picked up stones to get ready to stone him, for they understood with this claim that Jesus was equating himself with God. One more example towards the end of the book is in Thomas's confession. After finally having his doubts answered by seeing and touching the risen Christ, Thomas bursts out, "*My Lord and my God!*" (Jn. 20:28). This is the perfect time for Jesus to deflect such praise! It's the opportunity for Jesus to say, "No, silly Thomas. You have it all wrong. I'm not God, just a man who was *made* like God." But there is no such deflection. Jesus embraces this title and even blesses those of us who believe this confession without seeing or touching him (Jn. 20:29).

As we've said the past two days, there is more at stake here than an obscure theological argument. This has drastic ramifications for the gospel itself. The Heidelberg Catechism says that he must be true God, "So that, by the power of His divinity, He might bear the weight of God's anger in His humanity and earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life."<sup>6</sup> In other words, only God in flesh could live a life of perfect righteousness. Only God in flesh could withstand and satisfy the wrath of God against the sins of all of his people. Only God in flesh could be vindicated three days later in his resurrection. Only God in flesh could present us before God clothed in his own righteousness. We need God in flesh, and praise God, that is exactly who we have in Jesus Christ!

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4. "Socrates and Sozomenus Ecclesiastical Histories," *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, accessed November 14, 2018, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.iv.v.html>.

5. "Who Is Jesus Christ? | Learn From God's Word," *JW.ORG*, accessed November 13, 2018, <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/magazines/wp20110301/who-is-jesus-christ/>.

6. Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), 40.

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In Exodus 34 after coming down from speaking with God at Mount Sinai, we get this pretty strange detail about Moses's face. "*Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God*" (Ex. 34:29). The shining face of Moses actually frightened the Israelites so much that Moses ended up covering his face with a veil. "*Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him*" (Ex. 34:34-35). His bright, shining face is a tangible sign that he had been in the presence of God, as if just the fringe of God's glory stuck around.

But that glow, just the smallest sliver of God's glorious presence, was all that anybody could handle. Moses himself had asked God to show him his glory (Ex. 33:18). God graciously responded, "*You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.... Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will*

*put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen” (Ex. 33:21-23).*

As humans, we have no hope of seeing God in the fullness of His glory. Moses’ little glimpse at the back of God was enough to make his face shine. Had sinful Moses (or sinful us) stood fully in the presence of God and “seen his face,” he could not have stood it. Holiness and glory are beautiful and attractive, but for those in their sin, they are deadly as well.

So it is not without reverence and awe that John tells us, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:14, 18). For thousands of years, the best anyone had ever done is a hidden glance at the back of God. But when Jesus bursts on the scene, we see the glory of God in flesh! *“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature”* (Hebrews 1:3).

A full-on view of the glory of God in the Old Testament was lethal, a power strong enough to kill even faithful Moses. In Jesus Christ, we have seen this very same glory. And most miraculous of all, we have seen this glory and lived! The sin that would have led to our disintegration in the face of God’s holiness has been taken away from us. When the Israelites saw Moses’ face, they rightly trembled with fear and had to have the brightness veiled. But when John sees the risen, glorious, shining Son of God himself, he is told, *“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades”* (Rev. 1:17-18). Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory, the brightness of God himself, and because he came, died, and lives again, we can in Christ see the very glory of God and live. *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”* (Lk. 2:14).

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, **of one substance** and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

When faced with two friends arguing for different points of view or perspectives, I think it's common for us to attempt to find a middle way. We don't want to disappoint, and we know that there can sometimes be wisdom in the way of compromise.

Compromise can certainly be a good thing in the right setting, but there are instances when the compromise is still simply wrong. Such is the case in the fourth century as theologians discussed and discerned the truth concerning the person of Jesus and His divinity.

On one side was the group that claimed Jesus was distinct from God. They believed He was a creature that was adopted into godhood, a created being that was exalted, but decidedly not God. On the other side were those who said that Jesus was indeed "very and eternal God" (as we talked about a few days ago). And then we have those peacemaking friends who step in and say, "Hey, maybe there's a middle way here. Maybe he's not God, but he's not totally unlike God either. Let's just say that Jesus is *like* God. They are *similar* in substance (or essence), but not of the *same* substance."

Thankfully, the Council of Nicea in 325 and the Council of Constantinople in 381 both stood firm on the biblical ground that Jesus is not merely like God, but is indeed of the same substance, in his very essence God. “We believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ... God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

What’s at stake in this seemingly technical debate? For one, Scripture again asserts clearly that Jesus is no mere mortal, and to say that he is like God undermines his full deity. “*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*” (Col. 2:9). Once we abandon that Jesus is truly God, we have slipped of the firm foundation that we have laid in God’s Word.

Moreover, if Jesus is merely *like* God, it leaves open the possibility that perhaps we need someone even *more* like God to come and help us see Him clearly. Jesus would only show us in part what God is like, but not God in his fullness. But, “if God himself is incarnate in Jesus Christ, then this is the final Word. There is nothing further to be said.”<sup>7</sup>

Theologian Donald Macleod summarizes the problem that faces us if Christ is not of one substance and therefore in essence God: “If Christ were not God, he could not be the revelation of God. If Christ were not God, men had not been redeemed by God. If Christ were not God, believers were not united to God. Above all, if Christ were not God, Christians had no right to worship him. Indeed, if they did so, they were reverting to pagan superstition and idolatry.”<sup>8</sup>

Brothers and sisters, it is vitally important that the Jesus we worship is God. Our Bibles, our redemption, our salvation, our worship, all of this and more are utterly foolish and misdirected if we are simply seeing someone *like* God. But because Jesus came as God in flesh, God held in the hands of Mary and Joseph, God as a baby born in Bethlehem, our worship this Christmas is not in vain! “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity! Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel. Hark! The herald angels sing, ‘Glory to the newborn King!’”

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7. John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine, from the Bible to the Present*, 3rd ed (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 29.

8. Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 123.

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Every time we baptize someone at Christ Fellowship Church, we confess together in the words of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." It's one of the most basic Christian beliefs, a foundational truth that lies at the heart of God's power and authority in the world. God as our Creator is one of the first things our children learn. And that's simply a reflection of the shape of our Bible, as the first thing we learn of God in the pages of Scripture is that "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*" (Gen. 1:1).

It's good and right that our confessions and creeds attribute creation to God the Father. But the Bible in its fullness shows us that Creation was not simply an act by the Father apart from the Son and the Spirit. Even there in the next verse, we are told, "*The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*" (Gen. 1:2). Even there in the beginning, the Spirit is present as God speaks forth the world and everything in it.

When Paul reflects on the exalted Jesus in Colossians 1, he is explicit

in pointing out the Son's role at Creation. *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him"* (Col. 1:16). Jesus is himself present and active in the creation of the world. It is by him, through him, that the creation came into being.

But perhaps the most important phrase in this passage is that all things were created for him. Think of it. Paul with his Jewish background, with his intimate familiarity with his Old Testament, he knew that Creation sang the praises of God alone: *"Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created"* (Ps. 148:3-5). And yet here in Colossians 1, Paul is saying that the praise of all creation is directed to Jesus! That's blasphemy of the highest order unless Paul has come to the truth that *Jesus is Creator!*

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is no mere being, not some aspect of the creation. Like a child cries out for their parents when in distress, so all creation is longing for Him, groaning for redemption by the hand of Christ (Rom. 8:22) because it is only through Him, our great Creator and Redeemer, that we can know freedom. That's why we sing this Christmas, "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices!" Him through whom the world came into being, the Son of God, has come into the world to buy it back for Himself.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, **who upholdeth** and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

What is keeping you going? What is holding your life together right now, whether you are in the midst of triumph or tragedy? Maybe you think it's the strength of your own willpower, the determination that you make every single day to keep going. Maybe you think it's your family and the way they encourage you to continue on or help strengthen you in the midst of weariness.

Or maybe there's someone else at work.

The Bible makes very clear that there is a sustaining power at work in the world that is outside our strength, outside the laws of nature, outside what is common to human reason. Better, there is a sustaining person at work in the world to sustain and uphold it. Paul gets at this in Colossians 1:17, where he says that in Christ, "*all things hold together.*" The text from the London confession is taken from Hebrews 1:3: "*He upholds the universe by the word of His power.*"

Imagine that you are at your friend's side when they are terribly

wounded. You know that to stop the bleeding, you have to put pressure on the wound. There are times when such measures are life-saving, where if you had chosen to do otherwise, if you would have removed your hand and just watched, your friend might have died.

Now, take that small example and expand it to the whole world. That is the power of Jesus that is pictured in this verse. In the beginning, God spoke all of creation into existence by his powerful word. So now, Jesus is by the word of his power now upholding that same creation. John Calvin in his commentary on Hebrews says the author “intimates that all things would instantly come to nothing, were they not sustained by his [Jesus’] power.”<sup>9</sup>

This profound truth should be a great comfort to us. “Jesus Christ is seen at the centre of the continuing stability of the universe. There is no place here for the deist’s idea of God as a watchmaker who, having made a watch, leaves it to run on its own mechanism.”<sup>10</sup> Do you ever wonder if God has abandoned you, that he has left you to your own devices, maybe even packed up and decided to call it quits with this whole world? There’s no room for that in Christ. If you wake up and see a new day, that is a new morning mercy, a sign that Jesus has not removed his sustaining word from his Creation yet. Every breath we take, every beat of our heart, these things are gifts from our Lord. Every day is a new gift from the Lord, a chance to celebrate His faithfulness and goodness. “*This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it*” (Ps. 118:24).

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9. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King; Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847).

10. Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 6; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 71.

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In the fell clutch of circumstance  
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
 Under the bludgeonings of chance  
 My head is bloody, but unbowed....  
 It matters not how strait the gate,  
 How charged with punishments the scroll,  
 I am the master of my fate,  
 I am the captain of my soul. <sup>11</sup>

In this excerpt from his poem "Invictus," poet William Ernest Henley pictures his life as under the cruel hand of fate. It is "circumstance" or "chance" who beats him around the ears, trying to wear him down, grab him in its clutches, and wrestle him to the ground. But the author believes that he has gotten the better of fate. While fate may try to beat him into submission, at the end of the poem and the end of the day, the author claims defiantly that *he* is the master of his fate, the captain of his soul.

Although written over a century ago, this poem in many ways captures the spirit of the age we live in today. For all who are naturalists or reject the idea of God as a crutch, the only thing left to control the world is fate. And fate can be a cruel master or mistress. So, the only hope that we have, the only king to whom we can bow to help us out of fate's cruel clutches is ourselves. We set the course of our lives. We make or break ourselves. We bow to no one.

But being master of your own soul is a tiring task. We are not the kind, compassionate lords we'd like to be. We are more often cruel tyrants or apathetic cynics, eventually giving into the despair that maybe there is nobody who can rule over us well.

Brothers and sisters, we don't have to be our own tyrants. Jesus came to inaugurate a gracious rule and reign over his creation and his people in love. We have no need to fear wickedness or injustice in him, for "the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of [his] kingdom" (Heb. 1:8). If fate is governing the universe, then we have reason to be afraid. If we are the masters of ourselves, we have reason to be disappointed. But if King Jesus is on the throne and he rules and reigns, we have reason to hope. This King has come to his own. So our theme this Christmas is not a defiant claim that we are in charge. Instead, with the words of "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus," we celebrate that Jesus came as King over us.

Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child, and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

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11. "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley, Poetry Foundation, November 16, 2018, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51642/invictus>.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, **did, when the fullness of time was come,** take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

This phrase, which seeks to explain to us the precise and providential timing of the incarnation, is drawn straight out of the Bible, from Galatians 4:4. Paul writes, "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.*" But what are we to understand from this phrase "the fullness of time"? Let us think about it on both a practical and a providential level.

Practically, the historical moment in which Jesus came into the world was an opportune one. Listen to how John Stott describes this. "Why is the period of Christ's coming termed 'the fullness of time'? Various factors combined to make it such. For instance, it was the time when Rome had conquered and subdued the known inhabited earth, when Roman roads had been built to facilitate travel and Roman legions had been stationed to guard them. It was also the time when the Greek language and culture had given a certain cohesion to society. At the same time, the old mythological gods of Greece and Rome were losing their hold on the common people, so that the hearts and minds of men everywhere were hungry for a religion that was real and satisfying. Further,

it was the time when the law of Moses had done its work of preparing men for Christ, holding them under its tutelage and in its prison, so that they longed ardently for the freedom with which Christ could make them free.”<sup>12</sup> Stott’s point is that practically, the world was primed both logistically and spiritually for the gospel of Jesus Christ to enter in. In part, “the fullness of time” means this sort of practical preparation.

But beyond the practical is the providential. Don’t miss the significance of who is clearly in charge in Galatians 4:4 – But *when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son*. It is God who had providentially determined this precise timing. It is God who had providentially allowed Rome to spread its kingdom and its “peace” around the world. It is God who had providentially caused the Greek language to become the getting-around language of the known world at that time. The practicalities of Jesus’ coming at the right time should be understood as being sovereignly ordained in God’s providence. God has always been doing this. Before God created time, he knew precisely when “the fullness of time” would come. Just as he and Jesus had determined that the Son would be the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), the Father had determined just when to send him. After centuries of God’s promises and prophecies, after generations of the people’s waiting amidst God’s apparent silence, the clock of salvation history chimed the hour. Planned from time eternal, the Father sent the Son, in the fullness of his perfect timing, to usher in the next stage of salvation history.

The fullness of time is significant, even as we look to the future. God wastes no moments, no events. He never loses track of time. But at the right time, he first sent Jesus for us and for our salvation. And if God had always known precisely when was the right time for Christ to come, does he not also know precisely when the fullness of time will come to send Christ to return again for his people? As our spiritual Jewish ancestors cried out “How long?” for the Messiah, and as our fellow Christians in heaven, martyred for their faith cry the same in Revelation 6:10, so we join with them in their longing for Christ’s second coming. But even as we wait, we trust in the fullness of God’s timing.

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12. John Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way, Bible Speaks Today* (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester: 1986), pp.105-106.

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In the first eight entries, we've said much about the divinity of Jesus. Review those first couple of lines from the confession above. He is the Son of God, which is to say that he is equal to God (see John 5:18). He is the second person in the Holy Trinity, which is not a statement of ranking but one proclaiming that he is an essential person of the Godhead. He is very God, of one substance with and equal to the Father. One of the ways that the Bible describes this is in Philippians 2:6, where Paul talks about the pre-incarnate Jesus being "in the form of God." What Paul means by being in the form of God is that Jesus has the exact and true nature of God, that he possesses all the qualities and characteristics of God.

But, Paul goes on to say in Philippians 2:7, that though in the form of God, Jesus takes on another form—the form of a servant—which is to say he took on humanity ("being born in the likeness of men"). Paul says in the same verse that when Jesus took on the flesh of man, he "made himself nothing." Some have taken that to mean that Jesus emptied himself of his divine attributes in order to become a man. The question is whether or not that is true. In the incarnation, was Jesus

emptied of his God-ness? When Jesus becomes a Jewish baby, does he cease to be the second person of the Trinity?

And the answer to those questions is *No*. The divine nature of Jesus is not compromised or changed in the Incarnation. Instead, human nature is added to his divine nature, so that the person of Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. His God-ness changes not. His man-ness is taken upon his God-ness. Jesus does not give up any divine attributes, but what he does give up (or chooses not to grasp, in Paul's words), are "all the privileges that were rightly his as king of the universe." He gives those up "to become an ordinary Jewish baby bound for the cross."<sup>13</sup>

This is the essence of the Incarnation. Jesus, when he takes on human nature, permanently unites that nature to his divine nature. Amazingly, after Jesus takes on humanity, he will never take off humanity. In his death and resurrection, Jesus did not stop being human. The ascension of the physical body of Jesus (Luke 24:50-51 & Acts 1:9-11) shows us that Jesus will never shed his humanity. Even as he sits in heaven now, he sits in a physical body. "He will be a man forever as he represents redeemed humanity for all of eternity."<sup>14</sup> And when he returns in the sky on a white horse (Rev. 19:11ff), he will do so embodied—still fully God, and still fully man.

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13. Sean M. McDonough, *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, Wheaton: 2005), Note on Philippians 2:7, p. 2283.

14. Erik Thoennes, *ESV Study Bible*, "Biblical Doctrine: An Overview" (Crossway, Wheaton: 2005), pp.2517.

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When we think of the incarnate Christ, we are to think of Jesus as fully a human being as you and I are. It does us no good to think of Jesus as kind of man, or some sort of superman whose human attributes are not like the rest of us. No, the author of Hebrews is clear in Hebrews 2:17: *“Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”* For Jesus to be our mediator, our high priest, and the propitiation for our sins, he must be made like us “in every respect.” Or as the 1689 Confession puts it, he must have all the essential properties of humanity. This means that Jesus must have the body of a man. Jesus was born just like every human baby in history, with blood, sweat, and tears. Like every human, Jesus had a place in a family tree (Matt. 1:1-16), and he likely bore the resemblance of his ancestors. Over time, his infant body grew in stature (Luke 2:52). He got tired (John 4:6). He grew hungry (Matt. 4:2). He was thirsty (John 19:28). He worked with his hands, the very same hands that would bear nail marks from the cross (Luke 24:39). Jesus's body was made of mere flesh and bones. His body was thoroughly and ordinarily human: red blood cells, joints, marrow, and mitochondria—just like every human who has ever lived. His appearance was plainly human. The Bible tells us that he wasn't specifically attractive (Is. 53:2). He simply had a normal human body, not spectacular in strength or appearance.

So Jesus had the actual body of a regular man. While having all the essential properties of humanity entails his physical composition, we must not view this in merely a physical sense. In addition to a body, Jesus also had the heart and soul of man. At times, Jesus' soul was troubled (John 12:27). The night before his crucifixion, Jesus proclaims that his "soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26:38). Perhaps the most relatable scene for us in Jesus' life is when his heart swells with grief so much so that his eyes overflow with tears at the tomb of his dead friend Lazarus (John 11:33-35). But Jesus felt more than sorrowful emotions. Jesus got angry, always over the things that righteously angered the heart of God (John 2:13-17). The Bible tells us that he rejoiced at times (Luke 10:21). He felt compassion for the harassed and helpless crowds (Matt. 9:36). He looked at the rich young ruler and, the text says, "loved him" (Mark 10:21). In his heart, Jesus felt the pain of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denials. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus felt profound loneliness. Jesus, having the heart and soul of man, was not exempt from the feelings and pains of mankind.

But thirdly, Jesus also had the mind of a man. In the one account we have of Jesus' life between his birth and his public ministry 30 years later, we're told that the boy Jesus "grew in wisdom" (Luke 2:52). This means that everything Jesus knew didn't come pre-programmed into his brain, but that he learned them, just like we learn to write our names or our multiplication tables. Amazingly, there were things Jesus did not know, such as the day or hour of his return, according to Mark 13:32. While it is hard for us to comprehend how this is so, what it should tell us more than anything is that Jesus had a human mind.

Jesus had a human body, a human soul, a human heart, and a human mind. And this is fitting, for Jesus himself would tell us that the first and most important commandment of the Bible is that "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). For every human, our most fundamental and egregious sin is our failure to obey this great commandment. So for Jesus to save us, he must be truly human in heart, soul, mind, and strength (body), and then he must love God wholly with all of those faculties, succeeding where we fail. The great commandment lies completely unfulfilled if Jesus does not come with "all the essential properties" of humanity. But if Jesus is fully man in every way that the law requires, then he is able to perfectly obey the law on our behalf.

The New City Catechism, Question 22 asks, "Why must the Redeemer be truly human?" And the answer: "That in human nature he might on our behalf perfectly obey the whole law and suffer the punishment for human sin; and also that he might sympathize with our weaknesses."

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties **and common infirmities thereof**, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

Jesus Christ took upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties (body, soul, and mind), as well as all the common infirmities thereof—minus sin. This means that Jesus, who had previously known the blissful perfection of heaven, with no needs or wants, voluntarily joined his created beings in a world rife with profound suffering and immense pain. And when he joined us in this world, he did not exempt himself from it, but endured it like we do. Put another way, Jesus willingly took upon himself all of the hardest and least enjoyable things about being a human.

As a man, Jesus took on the limitations of a man. Jesus, whose Father never grows tired or weary (Is 40:28) and who never slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121:4), felt the nagging of a persistent yawn. There were times when he couldn't hold his eyelids open any longer. His energy was limited; he got tired and had to sleep (John 4:6). Jesus had to eat, which means that he didn't just skate through the forty days of fasting in the wilderness in Matthew 4. He felt real hunger pains. His stomach growled. He needed sustenance. On the other side of the digestive system, Jesus had to use the bathroom (lest you think that is

too blasphemous to mention, this was something even Jesus himself spoke about in Matt. 15:17). And as a man with limitations, Jesus didn't multitask well—just ask Jairus, who was desperate to have Jesus heal his daughter, even though Jesus was stopping off to heal others along the way (Luke 8:40-48). Jesus didn't "use his deity to protect himself from the slowness and inefficiency of life."<sup>15</sup> Jesus embraced the limitations that came with his earthen frame.

As a man, Jesus endured the temptations of man. In the wilderness of Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus weathered the storm of Satan's schemes. Satan tempted Jesus to doubt God's loving provision, to put God to the test, and to take the path to glory that did not involve the obedience and agony of the cross. In the same way that the enemy plants lies in our minds, he wanted Jesus to question the truth: "Is God wise in his plans?" "Is God good, loving, and faithful?" "Is God worthy of obedience and allegiance?"<sup>16</sup> Jesus faced all these temptations as we do, but was victoriously without sin.

As a man, Jesus was subject to the obscurity of man. The second person of the Trinity was used to the angels of heaven doing his bidding. But as a man, Jesus spent thirty years of his life in relative obscurity, in a Roman occupied Israel that was a shell of what it once was. Jesus spent most of his life doing manual labor, putting food on the table, going to synagogue, and doing the ordinary spiritual disciplines of prayer and study of God's Word. In the same way that you repeatedly do monotonous, ordinary tasks that are basically overlooked by most everyone around you, the theme of heaven's praises did the same, for he was a man like us.

As a man, Jesus suffered the infirmities of man. Like us, Jesus intimately knew sickness, sorrow, pain, and death. Jesus knew sickness. We shouldn't imagine that, just because his ministry involved his healing others, that every time he got a scratchy throat, he just waved his healing finger and knocked it out. But instead, being made like us in every way, he endured sickness. And he endured sorrow. The Scriptures say that he was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3). In taking on flesh, he decided not to shield himself from the sorrow and sadness, or the pain and grief of the word. To be a real Savior, he would truly feel the pain that you and I acutely feel. As a man, he chose to

empathize with us in heart-wrenching pain, not to be immune to it. And as a man, Jesus would not excuse himself from death. Death was the ultimate curse upon humanity (Gen. 2:17; 3:19), the certainty and fear of which has crippled all of humanity (Heb. 2:15). But as a man, a true partaker of flesh in blood, Jesus subjected himself even to the worst of all enemies so that “through his death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14). As a man, he was made like us in every way, even to the point of dying a human death on a shameful cross.

It is hard to imagine a God who would become so low. At times, if we think too long about the humanity of Jesus, we start to feel a little blasphemous. But, according to God, it’s not. It’s precisely how he designed it. Listen to how Russell Moore explains it:

“It just doesn’t seem right to us to imagine Jesus feverish or vomiting. But that’s precisely the scandal. It didn’t seem right to many to imagine Jesus as really flesh and bone, filled with blood and intestines and urine. Somehow that seemed to detract from his deity. It surely didn’t seem right to many to imagine the only begotten of the Father twisting in pain on a crucifixion stake, screaming as he drowned in his own blood. This was humiliating, undignified. That’s just the point. Jesus joined us in our humiliation, in our indignity.”<sup>17</sup>

God made low. And now highly exalted. Praise the One who saved us.

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15. Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*, (NavPress, Colorado Springs: 2009) p.46.

16. These three questions come from a sermon *On Matthew 4:1-11* preached by Bart Box at Christ Fellowship Church on February 28, 2016.

17. Russell Moore, “Did Jesus Ever Get a Stomach Virus?”, posted December 12, 2010, <https://www.russellmoore.com/2010/12/12/did-jesus-ever-get-a-stomach-virus/>.

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*Hebrews 4:15 – For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

The sinlessness of Christ is among the most important doctrines for the sake of our salvation. If the man Jesus Christ is not without sin, we are without hope, without a mediator, and without salvation. But when you think about your propensity to sin on a daily, even hourly basis, is it not astounding that the man Jesus was without even the slightest trace of sin? Like when you read through the gospel accounts and observe how Jesus interacts with every single person, isn't it remarkable that he never once sins against another person? He never says anything the wrong way. He never uses a person for his advantage. He is never moody and he never flies off the handle. He is never impatient or unkind. He is never governed by envy and never guilty of boasting. He is never arrogant or rude. He never insists selfishly on his own way (yet won't let people go their own way when their own way leads to destruction). He is never irritable (though people around him were certainly annoying), and he is never resentful (though he was wronged more than any of us

ever have been). He never rejoices at wrongdoing (never jeopardizes truth at the expense of grace), but he always rejoices with the truth.

That's just on the horizontal, interpersonal plane. Vertically, in relation to God, Jesus also never sinned. He never put any other god before his Father. He never supplanted God with an idol. He never misused God's name. He never loved the Father with anything less than his whole heart, his whole soul, and his whole strength. He never distrusted, never dishonored, and never disobeyed his Father.

All of this makes you start to think, "Could he really have been human, then?" And the answer is absolutely yes. The man Jesus Christ is showing us what it's like to be truly human, what we were actually created to be. We think, could he really be human if he never sinned? But that question betrays our fallen nature more than it does our human nature. Listen to what the Ligonier Statement on Christology says in its Article 7: "We deny that sin is inherent to true humanity or that Jesus' sinlessness is incompatible with His being truly human." In other words, sin is an intruder. True humanity once existed without sin. To err is human on this side of Genesis 3, but it has not always been so. Jesus comes to show us what humanity was created to be like. We are a broken humanity. But Jesus is true humanity.

And then in his true humanity—his sinless humanity—Jesus is able to serve as a substitute for us. This is significant in two ways. First of all Jesus substitutes himself and takes the punishment that we deserve. Our sin deserves the full and eternal wrath of God. But Jesus, who never sinned and who did not deserve that wrath in any way, chose to stand in our place and take our punishment as the propitiation for our sins (Heb. 2:17). Simultaneously, the Father was pleased to take the sinless perfection of Jesus and credit that to our accounts. In Adam, all were made to be sinners, and we have perpetuated his disobedience countless times. But through "*the one man's [Jesus] obedience the many will be made righteous*" (Rom. 5:19). This doctrine has been called penal substitutionary atonement. Which is a fancy way to say precisely what the great hymn, "Before the Throne of God Above," says:

“Because the sinless Savior died  
My sinful soul is counted free  
For God the just is satisfied  
To look on him and pardon me” <sup>18</sup>

Because Jesus was without sin, we can be considered so in God’s sight, provided we place our faith in his death and resurrection. This is the essence of the gospel. And this is the gift of Christmas.

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18. Vikki Cook & Charitie Lees Bancroft, “Before the Throne,” 1863.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; **being conceived by the Holy Spirit** in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

Virtually every parent knows that at some point, their child is going to ask with great curiosity that arresting question, "Where do babies come from?" And every parent of a pre-teen who is coming of age is aware of their need to have "the talk" with their son or daughter. The mother is typically tasked with helping a daughter understand the female's role in human reproduction. And the father generally makes a son aware of a man's role in the process. This is how humans enter the world. It takes father and mother, their respective bodies and gametes to produce human life. Such has always been the case for every human being ever born, with one exception.

When Joseph discovered that his bride-to-be was found to be with child in Matthew 1, the alarm bells went off in his head. He knew the science. His Jewish father, likewise, had told him where babies come from. But Joseph, being a righteous man, knew that he had no part in producing the child growing inside what he had thought was his virgin fiancé. No doubt hurt by this scandalous revelation, Joseph's mind reeled. He determined to make plans for a quiet divorce, until an angel appeared to him in a dream. This angel also had a revelation for Joseph. This baby

in his betrothed's belly was not put there by the actions of a man, but by the Holy Spirit of God (Matt. 1:20). To use Matthew's exact words, the words that are likewise picked up by the 1689 Confession, the angel says, "*that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*" Joseph, probably feeling a little revelationed-out at this point, took these things to heart. He obeyed the angel and cared for his wife, not knowing her in an intimate sense, until God's Son was born. Even the wording here is intentional: God's Son, not Joseph's.

The Son of God was conceived by the Holy Spirit. In other words, what had always been true about Jesus for all eternity, that he was the Son of the Father, would still be true even as Jesus became a man. No man would produce the God-Man; God himself would do that, by the power of his Holy Spirit. But why is this particularly significant?

Ever since Genesis 3, mankind's fallen nature has been passed on to every son of Adam and daughter of Eve. As David proclaims in Psalm 51:5, "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" That is not a statement about David's mother's sexual indiscretion. Instead, it's a statement about the sin nature that is passed on from Adam to every man or woman who has ever been born since Adam—every human, except for the one, whose conception comes not from man, but from God on high. Romans 5:12 tells us that "*just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men.*" Death spread through Adam to all. And in order to stop the spread of death, when the God-Man comes, Adam is taken out of the equation. Which is to say, the sin nature that has been perpetually passed on to every human through human procreation is not passed on to Jesus. As a man, he was made like us in every way, but as conceived by the Spirit, he is made without sin (Heb. 4:15).

In the same way that the first man Adam was not conceived by a man, but created by God in the garden, so too the second Adam was not conceived by a man, but by God himself. The first Adam fell, and brought sin, death, and destruction to all who came after him. But the Second Adam, conceived by the Holy Spirit, was faithful, and through his own death brings righteousness, life, and peace to all who trust him.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit **in the womb of the Virgin Mary**, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

The virgin birth's necessary counterpart comes from the statement discussed in the previous entry—that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. To have the virgin birth (to have a mother bear a child without the prerequisite activity necessary for producing a child), you must have a supernatural conception. But to a natural world that does not accept the things of the Spirit of God that are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14), this whole arrangement sounds too fantastical to be true. Indeed, just a few decades ago, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ was among the most debated truth claims about Christianity. The veracity of such a claim was a stumbling block and a bridge too far for those who insisted upon naturalizing the supernatural aspects of the Christian faith. But that is not the only scandal here.

In a day like ours, virginity itself is something of a surprising scandal. In an upsidedown way, the world mocks the sexually inexperienced. But in a day like Mary's, the world could hardly tolerate such a scandal as a young woman being found pregnant out of wedlock. For a woman like Mary, betrothed to a godly man like Joseph, to suddenly appear pregnant long before their wedding day was an impropriety that would

have brought much disgrace upon her, upon her family, and upon her fiancé. But despite the shame regarding these circumstances (which were unusual to say the least and disgraceful to say the worst), the miraculous circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth have significant theological ramifications.

It was not just that the second person of the Trinity was looking for a creative way to enter the world. The virgin birth, according to theologian Wayne Grudem, tells us three very important things.<sup>19</sup> First of all, the virgin birth of Christ teaches us that salvation must come from the Lord. Our salvation, which comes to us in Jesus, cannot be achieved by man's efforts, but must come from God alone. The virgin birth, which goes out of its way to accentuate the fact that God—and no man whatsoever—is miraculously responsible for the conception of Jesus. Secondly, the virgin birth is the clearest means whereby the two natures of Christ—full deity and full humanity—could be so clearly united in one person. In the conception given by the Holy Spirit and the birth by a human mother, we are given a wonderful picture of the full deity and full humanity of Jesus. And third, the virgin birth makes possible Jesus' ability to be truly human without the problem of inheriting sin. Jesus' virgin birth and his conception by the Holy Spirit were and are necessary so that Jesus would enter the world “holy, innocent, unstained, [and] separated from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). With the Holy Spirit as the progenitor, God saw to it that sin is neither transmitted from human father or mother to Jesus. This is not to say that Mary herself was sinless (that would go against a good deal of Biblical doctrine), but that as God's willing servant, she was the blessed vehicle through which God would send his perfect Son into the world.

While we have a whole Bible to help us understand and explain the significance of this, do you think Mary was given much opportunity to explain that to people? It even took an actual angel to convince her own fiancé that this was the case. Mary, the pure virgin, would endure looks of judgment for nine long months. Mary, the favored one whom the Lord was with (Luke 1:28), would be looked down upon as one who had perversely broken God's laws. Little pregnant Mary, full of grace, was considered by many to be a disgrace. But as is the way of the gospel, from supposed disgrace comes grace in its most amazing form. Though Mary may have known the promise made long ago in Isaiah

7:14 (*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*), how could she ever have dreamed that she'd be called up into God's plan in such a way? So even as we learn of doctrine from Mary and her role in bringing Jesus into the world, let us also learn of discipleship from our Lord's mother, and may we say alongside her as we follow our God, "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38).

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19. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids: 1994), p. 530.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, **the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman** of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

The words that form this portion of the 1689 Confession come straight out of Luke 1:35. They are offered by the angel that visits Mary, who gives her the news about the baby she would bear. And they are the answer to a question. In Luke 1:34, Mary asks, *“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”* To which the angel answered 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 called holy—the Son of God.”*

And as we look at the angel's answer, what we are to see here is how the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are involved in the act of the Incarnation. It is the Spirit coming down upon Mary and bringing conception, through the power of the Most High Father, to make the Son, the second person of the Trinity, into a man. What's being stated here is that in this moment, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all conspiring together to make humanity an essential part of the Trinity. In the same way that Mary, biologically dumbfounded, asks, “how can this be?”, we too should be asking, theologically dumbfounded, “how can this be?”

This is, as J.I. Packer noted, “the supreme mystery with which the gospel confronts us.” He writes,

“[This mystery] lies not in the Good Friday message of atonement, nor in the Easter message of resurrection but in the Christmas message of Incarnation. The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man—that the second person of the Godhead became the ‘second man’ (1 Cor. 15:47), determining human destiny, the second representative head of the race, and that he took humanity without loss of deity, so that Jesus of Nazareth was as truly and fully divine as he was human.

Here are two mysteries for the price of one—the plurality of persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus. It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie. ‘The Word became flesh’ (John 1:14); God became man; the Divine Son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. And there was no illusion or deception in this: the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation.”<sup>20</sup>

Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this. And our salvation is entirely dependent on this event. So let this reality stagger you this Christmas. Let it astound you. Let it perplex you. Let it humble you. The God who cannot be contained by the universe was contained in a uterus. God was made a man in the means that all men are made, through the body of a woman. How can it be?

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20. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove: 1973), 53.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman **of the tribe of Judah**, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

The next three days' entries are about the genealogy of Jesus. We'll discuss three men who were Jesus' biblical and biological ancestors. The first of which, who also happens to be the least prominent in the Old Testament's narrative, is Judah. Judah is one of Abraham's great-grandsons. And we meet Judah in Scripture in Genesis 29, on his birthday. He is born the fourth son of Jacob, to his mother Leah. Now Leah was her husband Jacob's first wife, but also his least preferred wife. Jacob had an agreement with a man named Laban to marry his daughter Rachel. But Laban, being crafty, swindled Jacob into marrying Leah, and then Rachel. This practice of marrying multiple women is never endorsed in the Bible, and the proof of God's design against it is in the family turmoil that it produces. Judah was in the thick of that family turmoil, and did his share to add to it.

When the bunch of Jacob's sons devise a plan to rid themselves of their favored younger brother Joseph, it is Judah who suggests that they make some money off of Joseph by selling him into slavery, rather than merely murdering him (Genesis 37:26-27). If that weren't enough, in the very next chapter of Genesis 38, we get a glimpse into the personal

life of Judah. And it is an ugly one. The short of it is that Judah one day unknowingly impregnated his widowed daughter-in-law, thinking that he was sleeping with a prostitute. And when his daughter-in-law is found to be pregnant, Judah is hypocritically indignant at her sexual immorality. But when proof is made public that Judah is actually the one who impregnated her, Judah is put in his place. Shortly thereafter, Judah's daughter-in-law, named Tamar, delivers a set of twin boys to Judah, her father-in-law and babies' daddy. It's a shameful chapter of the Bible.

But in God's amazing grace, Judah is the avenue through which God's promised blessings continue to flow. Just before his father Jacob dies, Judah receives a blessing from his father in Genesis 49:10, which states,

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him;  
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*

Of all Jacob's sons, Judah is the one given this kind of honor. The blessing flows not through Joseph, the favored son of Jacob and the hero of the latter part of the book of Genesis. The blessing flows not through Levi, the one who's family would become the ministers and holy priests of God. The blessing flows through Judah, an incestuous, human trafficker.

Through Judah's line would come the great king David. Moreover, through Judah's line would come great David's greater Son. Micah would make this promise about this special descendant from Judah:

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days. (Micah 5:2)*

And the apostle John would call this great descendant "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5).

So when Matthew tells us how the genealogy of Jesus includes names like Judah and Tamar, what are we to make of it? Two things. First of all, Jesus comes to us in accordance with a promise. A promise is made to Abraham, and then perpetuated by a seemingly inconsequential deathbed blessing to a guy with too many brothers. And each fulfillment of the promise gets us a step closer to the Promised One, even when the promise looks to be in jeopardy due to the sin of the bearers of the promise. But it's actually sin that makes us realize the second thing we are to make of the presence of a man like Judah in the bloodline of Jesus. Jesus comes to redeem the broken sinfulness of the world. And to do so, he would come through a family tree that was full of individuals with questionable character. Indeed, Jesus would be numbered among the transgressors so that he could come to make intercession for the transgressors (Is. 53:12)—including Judah, and including you.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, **of the seed of Abraham** and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

One of the very first things that the gospel-writer Matthew wants his readers to know is the connection of Jesus of Nazareth to Abraham from Ur of the Chaldeans. In the first verse of the first chapter of his gospel account, Matthew writes, "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar...*" (Matthew 1:1-3). To Matthew, it's a big deal that his readers immediately understand that Jesus is related to Abraham. In part, that is to show Jesus' Jewishness. He is a son of father Abraham. He is one of the many promised innumerable descendants, like the innumerable grains of sand on the seashore (Heb. 11:12). Jesus is one of the stars in the night sky that God told Abraham to count on the night that he confirmed his covenant with his servant in Genesis 15.

But Jesus is not merely one of those stars. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16). So of all the stars that Abraham was to look up and see, there was one that would outshine the rest. And there was one that was more significant than all the rest because

this star—this descendant—would be the lynchpin of the promises made to Abraham. Recall how in Genesis 12, God in his sovereign grace, puts his love on an old man named Abram (whose name he would change to Abraham, which literally means “father of a multitude”). And in his love, God made Abraham this specific promise: *“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen. 12:1-3).

It’s that last phrase, that last part of that final sentence that whispers the name of Jesus. Yes, Abraham and the nation of Israel over which he is the great patriarch would grow to the point of being a blessing to the world. That was their intended function. But as the story of the Old Testament unfolds, Israel does not always continue on the path of blessing the world and showing them the nature of God. So as you read through the Old Testament narrative, you start to wonder whether or not this promise would really be true. In all of Israel’s sin, had they jeopardized the promise and forfeited the opportunity of blessing the world? Especially by the time they are exiled and reduced to slaves of foreign nations—surely this old promise to an old man couldn’t still be true!

And that is precisely why Matthew wants us to know how Jesus is connected to Abraham. Jesus is the very focal point of God’s promises to Abraham! When God promised to make Abraham great, he was promising Jesus. When God promised to bless all the families of the earth in Abraham, he was promising Jesus. When God promised offspring like the stars of heaven, he was promising Jesus and all those that Jesus would save. When God promised to Abraham that kings would come from him (Gen. 17:6), he was promising Jesus, the King of Kings.

Matthew opens his gospel with a connection to Abraham. And then he closes his gospel with a continuation of the promise made to Abraham, what we know as the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 – *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Here Jesus, the One whose death and resurrection is the news that will bless the world, sends out his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations with the message of salvation. The message of Jesus would and will bring blessing to all nations—sounds a lot like Genesis 12:3, doesn't it?

*He comes to make his blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found. <sup>21</sup>*

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*21. Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World,” (1719)*

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham **and David according to the Scriptures**; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

In 1 Samuel 8:5, the people of Israel are tired of their current political situation. They were supposed to be a holy nation, a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:5-6) whose God ruled over them in such a unique way that the nations were all to take notice and observe the character and Kingship of God. But they didn't care much for that anymore. Instead, they wanted to be like the nations around them. They wanted a human king to reign over them, like everyone else. So they tell the prophet Samuel, "*Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations.*" They are tired of measly priests and wimpy judges leading them. Now they "want a king on a throne full of power with a sword in his fist." <sup>22</sup> God knew that his people would one day make this request (see Deuteronomy 17:14ff), and so he put some parameters on what their kings should look like.

So God gives them a king. Israel the monarchy starts off with a king from the tribe of Benjamin, a guy named Saul (2 Sam. 9-10). But, if you have been paying attention to the promises thus far—particularly the one made about the scepter not departing from the tribe of Judah—then you know that this Saul guy isn't going to work out in the long run. And that is precisely what happens. After some big failures, God ousts Saul, and sets up

the best king that Israel would ever know—a little shepherd boy from the tribe of Judah named David. David was the king nations dreamed of. He famously slew the giant who defied the armies of the living God. He became a warrior-king who wrote most of Israel’s hymnbook. Most profoundly for Israel’s sake, he was known as a man after God’s own heart who would do God’s will (Acts 13:22). God, pleased as he was with king David, made a significant promise to David—a promise on par with the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12. This promise, found in 2 Samuel 7, was enormous. God promised David, “*Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever*” (2 Samuel 7:16). David was being promised an everlasting dynasty. His bloodline would be enthroned before God forever. The scope of this promise really is unlimited.

Despite the grandiosity of the promise, David was not without sin. He sinned egregiously and brought incalculable devastation to his family and kingdom through that sin. But even that sin was not enough to unravel the promise made to David. There were times when it did look like it was unraveling, especially through a divided kingdom and through devastating exile. But God always had a plan. It didn’t always involve pomp and circumstance. But it did always involve God’s faithfulness.

So when we fast-forward to the New Testament, we find an Israel that is a shell of what it once was. We find them longing for God to revisit his promise to David and send a political Messiah who would come and defeat all of their enemies and re-establish God’s glorious kingdom of Israel. They want a new David. And a new David is what they get, but he’s not at all like what they expected. He comes with no royalty. He comes with what appears to be a far different agenda. And he comes with no real concern to set up his earthly throne. But he comes as God’s Davidic King, as the One who is the only true fulfillment of the promise made to David long ago.

Jesus came, the seed and son of David (Matt. 1:1), and he came specifically to die. He came not to defeat political enemies, but spiritual ones. He came not to banish Rome, but to banish death. He came not to defeat Caesar, but to defeat sin itself. He came not to slay his tens of thousands, but to slay one—Satan. He came not as a king full of power with a sword in his fist, but as a man beset by weakness and nails driven into his hands. He came as “*promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...*”

*descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:2-4).*

Since 1 Samuel 8, the people of God have always longed for a king. And only in Jesus Christ, descended from David, do we have the one we really need. In Jesus, we have a king that is not at all like the ones over all the other nations. Instead, this King is himself the ruler over all nations, the King of all kings (Rev. 17:14). David was a good king, but he is also a dead king. Jesus, unlike David, does not have that problem.

*Acts 2:29–35 – “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,  
“The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool.”*

In Jesus, the Maker of and descendant of David, we have the king we’ve always needed, and the one that our hearts truly want. This Jesus “rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love.”<sup>23</sup> Long live the King!

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<sup>22</sup>. Andrew Peterson, “So Long Moses,” *Behold the Lamb of God* (2004)

<sup>23</sup>. Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World” (1719)

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; **so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person**, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

Jesus got tired (John 4:6). Jesus grew hungry (Matt. 4:2). Jesus learned and grew taller (Luke 2:52). Jesus was tempted (Matt. 4:1-11). Jesus wept (John 11:35). Jesus took naps (Mark 4:38). Jesus admitted ignorance regarding His own return (Matt. 24:36). On the cross, Jesus prayed, yelled, screamed, and cried (Heb. 5:7). He was altogether and undeniably human.

Alongside all of that, Jesus forgave sin (Mark 2:5), knew the thoughts of men (Luke 6:8), commanded the seas (Mark 4:39), cast out demons (Mark 5:8), healed the sick (Mark 5:29), and raised the dead (Mark 5:42; Luke 7:15; John 11:44). Indeed, Thomas's resurrection-inspired confession is the only reasonable response to all that Christ said, did, and demonstrated: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

So, how do you put those together? Which "side" wins out, dominates, and overtakes the other? The human or the divine? Well, the right answer is and must be, "Neither." We say "is the right answer" because both natures are so clearly affirmed and taught in the Gospels. We say "must be the right answer" because only the God-man can save us. Only the Christ who represents His people can actually rescue His people.

Moreover, the joining of these two natures in one person is said to be inseparable, meaning that Christ is and will always be the God-man. The ascension of Christ was not linked to the discarding of his humanity, a return to his pre-incarnate state that cleared the way for a more spiritual existence. No, he remains the incarnate Lord. Even now, a human being sits at God's right hand. Not just any human being, of course, but the One whose humanity is joined with divinity. We have hope this Christmas because of this Christ—fully man and fully God, like us and for us!

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, **without conversion, composition, or confusion**; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

“Like a drop of wine in the sea.” That was the illustration given in the mid-5th century by a man named Eutyches regarding the incarnation of the Son of God. In the previous century, Christians had sought to understand more deeply and express more clearly the deity of Christ. That affirmation was good and right, but it did lead some in the church to an opposite error: a near-denial or downplaying of Jesus' humanity. And that's where Eutyches comes in. As a measure to safeguard Jesus' full deity, Eutyches argued that Christ's humanity was absorbed by Christ's divinity, “like a drop of wine in the sea.”

Thankfully, the church rejected the teaching of Eutyches and his almost “single-nature” understanding of Christ. At what is called the Council of Chalcedon, the church affirmed the following:

*He is one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation. At no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person.*

The person of Christ is not some strange, unholy composition or amalgamation of two natures. Nor is He a God merely masquerading as a human. No, He is both fully God and fully man. What difference does that make? Nicholas Needham explains the consequences this way:

“If Christ’s humanity was lost and swallowed up in His deity “like a drop of wine in the sea,” then once again, no real incarnation has taken place. Rather than God becoming man, we have man being annihilated in God. One can see how this would easily have lent itself to all manner of humanity-denying mysticism. After all, if Christ is our pattern, shouldn’t we too seek for our own humanity to be lost and swallowed up in deity like a drop of wine in the sea?”<sup>24</sup>

How profound! Wouldn’t it be ironic if the goal and the effect of the Incarnation was the loss of humanity. But it’s not! Christ did not come to annihilate humanity but to redeem it, renew it, and restore it. Today, could you thank God for Christ showing you what humanity actually looks like? Could you thank God for the genuine, Christ-wrought humanity you see in your brothers and sisters in Christ—patience, understanding, compassion, wisdom, and so on? And could you thank God that Christ’s humanity was not swallowed up in the sea like a drop of wine in the ocean but was, rather, inseparably joined to His divinity, making Him the only One who could both represent and rescue us?

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<sup>24</sup> *Nicholas Needham, cited from <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/truly-god-truly-man-council-chalcedon/>.*

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; **which person is very God and very man**, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

“Remaining what He was, He became what He was not.” There may not be a better slogan that captures the theological essence of the Incarnation than this one. Uttered by an early church father (by the way, how much we should thank God for departed saints who've loved us by loving truth!), the point is both simple and profound: the incarnation was not a matter of subtraction but addition.

For all of eternity past, God has existed in Triune perfection. He always has been, is, and always will be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet, somewhere around 2000 years ago the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, became incarnate. And not sort of incarnate, but fully incarnate. He was “very man,” sharing all our human indignities and infirmities. He would need to learn to crawl, talk, and control his bowels. He got cold in the winter and sweated in the summer sun. He had parents with rules (except he didn't roll his eyes at them) and less-than-inspiring government leaders. More importantly, he was tempted, he was subjected to scorn and persecution, and he was betrayed and rejected. All human and all-too-human experiences. He was very man.

Yet this fully human existence did not come at the price of His deity—  
“Remaining what He was.” Jesus did not cease being God, not even for  
a moment. And isn’t that what makes all of this worth reading about  
and singing about and preaching about and telling the world about!  
Not even for a moment! Better, *not even at that moment* on the cross!  
When Jesus of Nazareth stretched out His arms for the Roman soldiers  
on Calvary, those were the very arms of God. Indeed, the words of  
Isaiah find their fullest meaning in Christ, don’t they?

*“The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God”* (Is.  
52:10).

Do you see that salvation? Are you resting in it, hoping in it, and finding  
joy and comfort in it? The story of Christianity is unlike anything else.  
“Remaining what He was, He became what He was not.” For our sake,  
and for our salvation!

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, **yet one Christ**, the only mediator between God and man.

“Christ” is a loaded word in the Bible. It has its roots in the idea of anointing. As you may know, certain persons in the Old Testament were anointed. Priests were anointed. Prophets were anointed. And, most prominently, kings were anointed. And the anointing had a purpose. Specifically, the anointing had both a clarifying and representing purpose. Anointing clarified for the people that this person worked and ministered *on behalf of God*, and anointing served to set this person apart as one who worked and ministered *for the people of God*. In other words, their service was both credible and critical.

When Jesus is called the Christ, all of that is included. He is the one who both comes from God and goes to God. Indeed, the confession precedes this affirmation of “one Christ” with the idea that he is “very God and very man.” In all of history, no one could minister on behalf of God like Jesus because, well, he was God in the flesh. Likewise, no one in all of human history could minister for the people of God like Jesus because no one so fully embodied humanity as Jesus. He is the God-man!

Why does all this matter? Well, theology is never meant to live in our heads alone. Done rightly, theology lodges in the heart and lives in our affections,

our desires, and our deeds. When we read the simple words, “one Christ,” the intention is not only that we get the right answer on our theology quiz but that we offer the right worship with all of our lives. Jesus is the Christ, meaning he is our representative and our God’s redeemer all rolled into one! Where we fail in our individual prophetic, priestly, and kingly tasks (like witnessing, praying, or working), we have One who is ever-faithful. Indeed, his faithfulness secures our forgiveness, as the God-one, the one Christ, has died in our place.

As Christmas Day draws nigh, take time to reflect on the astounding truths we confess. And, more than mere reflection, ask God to move you to wonder and praise. May our testimony and refrain be the same as the ancient song below: “Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Lord Most High!”

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence,  
And with fear and trembling stand;  
Ponder nothing earthly minded,  
For with blessing in His hand,  
Christ our God to earth descendeth,  
Our full homage to demand.*

*King of kings, yet born of Mary,  
As of old on earth He stood,  
Lord of lords, in human vesture,  
In the body and the blood;  
He will give to all the faithful  
His own self for heavenly food.*

*Rank on rank the host of Heaven  
Spreads its vanguard on the way,  
As the Light of light descendeth  
From the realms of endless day,  
That the powers of hell may vanish  
As the darkness clears away.*

*At His feet the six wingèd seraph,  
Cherubim with sleepless eye,  
Veil their faces to the presence,  
As with ceaseless voice they cry:  
Alleluia, Alleluia  
Alleluia, Lord Most High<sup>25</sup>*

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25. Gerard Moultrie, “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” (1864)

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, **the only mediator between God and man.**

Saved by God, from God. That formulation is a succinct distillation of the Christian message. The first part—saved by God—is not really controversial, even if it's not always believed. We can get behind the idea of a loving, compassionate God. More misunderstood is the notion that we must be saved *from* God. Sin, if it's believed in at all, is often discussed in terms of its horizontal or personal effects. So, horizontally (or relationally), sin alienates us from one another, harms others, misleads others, and so on. Likewise, sin is often understood to be personally or individually destructive—sin disappoints *us*, produces guilt in *us*, deceives *us*, hurts *us*, etc. And all of this is true. Tragically true. Sin leaves us both alone and empty. Sin kills.

But there is another effect of sin that is less often realized and even more often denied, and that effect is this: God is rightly offended and angered by our sin. The God of the Bible is not a grandfatherly type who sweeps our indiscretions under the rug. And we only need to pay attention to the Bible's language to learn this lesson. Consider the metaphors used to describe God's wrath and judgment: a storm in Jeremiah 30:20, an earthquake in Psalm 18:7, a fire in Nahum 1:6, and a sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence in Ezekiel 14:21. And lest we think that these are merely

outmoded and outdated Old Testament references, we should remember that John the Baptist, Paul, Peter, John, and, yes, Jesus himself spoke in similar language and invoked similar (if not identical) images. Judgment is real. Moreover, judgment by God is to be feared.

And surely this is the glory of Christmas, the glory of Christianity, the glory of Christ! We have everything to fear in light of our sin, but we have every reason to celebrate in light of our Savior. He has saved us from God's righteous wrath. There is coming a day on which "the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful" will hide themselves in the caves and the mountains, pleading with the rocks to fall upon and save them "from the face of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:15-16). Who will save us from God on that day? Well, only God can. Better stated, only the God-man can! We must have a mediator between God and ourselves, and Christ is that mediator.

*"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).*

We are saved by God's mercy from God's wrath—freely, finally, and forever. Praise God.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

It is our hope and prayer that walking through this year's Advent Devotional has helped you think more deeply about the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And as you have mulled over some important theological truths, our hope is that your heart is inspired to praise. After all, the end of theology is always doxology. So this Christmas Day, we invite you to ponder the lyrics from these Christmas hymns and songs. You might choose to use them in a time of family worship, or simply to meditate on or pray through. Either way, make time today to praise Jesus, the only mediator between God and man!

### **Once in Royal David's City**

Once in royal David's city  
 Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
 Where a mother laid her Baby  
 In a manger for His bed:  
 Mary was that mother mild,  
 Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from heaven,  
Who is God and Lord of all,  
And His shelter was a stable,  
And His cradle was a stall;  
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,  
Lived on earth our Savior holy.

For he is our childhood's pattern;  
Day by day, like us He grew;  
He was little, weak and helpless,  
Tears and smiles like us He knew;  
And He feeleth for our sadness,  
And He shareth in our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see Him,  
Through His own redeeming love;  
For that Child so dear and gentle  
Is our Lord in heaven above,  
And He leads His children on  
To the place where He is gone.

*-Cecil F. Alexander (1848)*

## **Who Would Have Dreamed**

On a starlit hillside, shepherds watched their sheep  
Slowly, David's city drifted off to sleep  
But to this little town of no great renown  
The Lord had a promise to keep

Prophets had foretold it, a mighty King would come  
Long awaited Ruler, God's Anointed One  
But the Sovereign of all looked helpless and small  
As God gave the world His own Son

Who would have dreamed or ever foreseen  
That we could hold God in our hands?

The Giver of Life is born in the night  
Revealing God's glorious plan  
To save the world

Wondrous gift of heaven: the Father sends the Son  
Planned from time eternal, moved by holy love  
He will carry our curse and death He'll reverse  
So we can be daughters and sons

Who would have dreamed or ever foreseen  
That we could hold God in our hands?  
The Giver of Life is born in the night  
Revealing God's glorious plan  
To save the world

*-Jason Hansen & Bob Kauflin (2014)*

## **Hark the Herald Angels Sing**

Hark the herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn king  
Peace on earth and mercy mild  
God and sinners reconciled  
Joyful all ye nations rise  
Join the triumph of the skies  
With angelic hosts proclaim  
Christ is born in Bethlehem  
Hark the herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn King

Christ by highest heav'n adored  
Christ the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold Him come  
Offspring of a virgin's womb  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
Hail the incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with man to dwell

Jesus, our Emmanuel  
Hark the herald angels sing  
“Glory to the newborn King!”

Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings!  
Ris’n with healing in His wings  
Mild He lays His glory by  
Born that man no more may die  
Born to raise the sons of earth  
Born to give them second birth  
Hark the herald angels sing  
“Glory to the newborn King!”

Come, Desire of nations come!  
Fix in us Thy humble home  
Rise, the woman’s conquering seed,  
Bruise in us the serpent’s head  
Adam’s likeness now efface  
Shine Thine image in its place.  
Second Adam from above,  
Reinstate us in Thy love.  
Hark the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!”

*-Charles Wesley (1739)*

## **Is He Worthy?**

Do you feel the world is broken? (We do)  
Do you feel the shadows deepen? (We do)  
But do you know that all the dark won’t stop the light from getting through?  
(We do)  
Do you wish that you could see it all made new? (We do)

Is all creation groaning? (It is)

Is a new creation coming? (It is)  
Is the glory of the Lord to be the light within our midst? (It is)  
Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? (It is)

Is anyone worthy?  
Is anyone whole?  
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?  
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave  
He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave  
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?  
Of all blessing and honor and glory  
Is He worthy of this?  
He is

Does the Father truly love us? (He does)  
Does the Spirit move among us? (He does)  
And does Jesus, our Messiah hold forever those He loves? (He does)  
Does our God intend to dwell again with us?(He does)

Is anyone worthy?  
Is anyone whole?  
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?  
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave  
He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave

From every people and tribe  
Every nation and tongue  
He has made us a kingdom and priests to God  
To reign with the Son  
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?  
Of all blessing and honor and glory  
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?  
Is He worthy of this?  
He is!

*-Andrew Peterson (2017)*



Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheus unto the church of the Thessalonians, in God our Father, & the Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Grace unto you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 We are bound to thank God alwayes for you, brethren, as we meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charitie which ye have one of you all towards each other:

4 So that we are proud of you in the churches by your patience and faith in tribulations and tribulations:

5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgement of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer;

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you:

7 And to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of

11 Wheretofore also for you, that our God be worthy of this and all the good pleasure and the work of faith.

12 That the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, according to the will of God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER

1 He willeth them to continue in the truth received, 3 sheweth a departure from the truth, the very of Antichrist, before he come. 15 And then he referreth to the former exhortation, and

**N**OW we beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Father, that ye be together

2 That ye be not troubled in minde, or be troubled nor by word, nor by lying, as that the day of Christ

3 Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall there come a falling away, in which man of sin be revealed in his own condemnation,

4 Who opposeth himselfe above all that is called God, so that he is worshipped: so that he will sit in the temple of God, saying that he is God.

5 Remember ye not that I was yet with you, and that I have said these things?