

Incarnation

Introduction

Definition of Incarnation: lit "*Embodiment in flesh*"; in this context "*Christ, the eternal second person of the Trinity, being made human*"

Importance of

- Doctrine – central to anthropology, eschatology, soteriology, ministry
- Tension – holds incomprehensible within constraints of human models – hence role of heresy in this debate – more heresies around Christology than almost anything else! (Table of heresies) – *conversation about substitutional atonement* – like springs on a trampoline
- Simple faith – willing to speak of what we know rather than miss out on relationship... will be looking at a lot that is wrong which leads us to truth, key is to hold on (eg *veiled in flesh the Godhead see...*). Role of second naivety - vital

Biblical Basis

Who/what does the Bible tell us Jesus is?

- God – Phil 2⁵⁻⁶, Rom 9⁵, Acts 7⁵⁹⁻⁶⁰, 2 Cor 13¹⁴, Mt 28¹⁹.
- Man – Lk 3³⁸, Jn 8⁴⁰, Mk 13³².
- Embodied – Mt 26^{26, 28}, Lk 24³⁶⁻⁷.
- Human (experience and emotion) – Mt 9³⁶, Jn 11³⁵⁻³⁶, Mk 6⁶, Mt 14²³, Jn 4⁶, Mt 8²⁴, etc...
- Sinless - Jn 8⁴⁶, 2 Cor 5²¹, Heb 4¹⁵.
- Miracle worker - Mt 8²³⁻²⁷, 14²²⁻²³.
- Forgiver - Mt 9²⁻⁸, Mk 2³⁻¹².
- Lord - Phil 2⁵⁻¹¹.
- Messiah Lk 4¹⁸⁻¹⁹, Mk 8²⁹.
- Saviour – Acts 13²³, Eph 5²³.
- Lamb of God – Jn 1²⁹, Rev 14⁴.
- Word of God - Jn 1¹⁻¹⁴.
- Creator Jn 1, Col 1¹⁶⁻¹⁷, Heb 1
- Son of God - Mt 11²⁵⁻²⁷, Jn 5¹⁹⁻²³.
- Son of David - Mt 1⁶, Lk 2⁴.
- Son of Man (judge) – Mt 25³¹⁻⁴⁶, Jn 5²⁷⁻³⁰.

What are the key problems this raises?

1. The uniqueness of God – OT monotheism
2. The nature of Christ – God or man, both? How reconcile theology and scriptures

This is fine but doesn't stop there – implications for...

1. Covenant
2. Our salvation
3. Our present and future nature
4. The nature of ministry

Early Problems

Clear very early on that this was an issue which needed serious thought. Methodology of

- Heresy – exploration of ideas and working down to the truth (like sculpture)
- Schools – of theologians, two main ones in Alexandria and Antioch
- Councils – eg first council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) to sort out issue of circumcision, gentile Christianity

- **First Council of Nicaea (325)** repudiated Arianism and adopted the original Nicene Creed, fixed Easter date; recognized primacy of the sees of Rome, Alexandria and Antioch and granted the See of Jerusalem a position of honor.
- **First Council of Constantinople (381)** repudiated Arianism and Macedonianism (denying divinity of HS), revised the Nicene Creed in regard to the Holy Spirit
- **Council of Ephesus (431)** repudiated Nestorianism, proclaimed the Virgin Mary as the Theotokos ("Birth-giver to God", "God-bearer", "Mother of God"), repudiated Pelagianism, and reaffirmed the Nicene Creed.
- **Council of Chalcedon (451)** repudiated the Eutychian doctrine of monophysitism, adopted the Chalcedonian Creed, which described the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, human and divine.
- **Second Council of Constantinople (553)** repudiated the Three Chapters as Nestorian, condemned Origen of Alexandria, decreed Theopaschite Formula.
- **Third Council of Constantinople (680-681)** repudiated Monothelitism and Monoenergism.
- **Second Council of Nicaea (787)** restored the veneration of icons (condemned at the Council of Hieria, 754) and repudiated iconoclasm.
- Then everything split up – some disagreement as get to later councils

Two of earliest ideas that fitted this...

Docetism – the idea that Christ's body was not real, but only appeared to be so (from Gk *dokein* – 'to seem') – at least 3 motivations

- God could not suffer (hence later problem with *patripassionism*) – so Eternal Christ did not suffer, only man in which appeared
- Gnostic desire to separate flesh and spirit
- Greek dualism – good and bad, strong and weak – matter is evil

See tendency in much early teaching, particularly of theology from Alexandria; Irenaeus "Christ's body is a shade of the glory of God covering him". Clement and Origen – divine logos indwelling, permeating body of man Jesus

Opposed by

- Ignatius of Antioch (not of Loyala) early 2C – Bishop of Antioch - '*Jesus Christ was of the race of David, the child of Mary, who was truly born, ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate*'
- Tertullian – Christ's was a thoroughly human condition.
- Irenaeus – bishop of Lugdunum – opposed Gnosticism
- Antiochene School strongly anti-docetic (note two great schools – return to later)
- 1 John 4², 5⁶

Ebionitism – know less about this – less early textual evidence, but seems to have two roots:

A Jewish sect which affirmed humanity of Christ, but denied His divinity – still exists today

Quote from Ebionite Manifesto "*Yeshua is not a god, not a sacrifice for sin, or savior. Such beliefs go against God. God's commandments have not been "done away with" or "nailed to the cross" but instead make up the single testament and Instructions for life to mankind.*" (<http://ebionite.org/>)

And a gnostic belief, again that man cannot be God, thus Jesus was not... although he was human (bizarrely contradicting previous heresy, but desire to separate flesh and spirit)

Largely opposed to Paul – seem to believe that he founded Christianity and lead people away from the way of the prophet Jesus.

Opposed by

- Irenaeus
- Hippolytus
- Tertullian
- John 1¹; John 20²⁸; Hebrews 13⁸

Arius / Arianism

Arius priest in Alexandria – only three of his letters survive, so have to work hard to be fair to him, but main concern was self subsistence of God. Only One God (monotheism), from whom all things derive.

We acknowledge One God, alone unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone unbegun, alone true, alone having immortality, alone wise, alone good, alone sovereign... God is before all things as the Being Monad and Beginning of all. (Quoted from Arius' defence of his position to his bishop, Alexander)

Looks fine, but problem is that it had implications for Arius' view of Jesus, the Son.

And God, being the cause of all things, is Unbegun and altogether Sole, but the Son being begotten apart from time by the Father, and being created and founded before ages, was not before His generation, but being begotten apart from time before all things, alone was made to subsist by the Father. For He is not eternal or co-eternal or co-unoriginate with the Father, nor has He His being together with the Father, as some speak of relations, introducing two ingenerate beginnings, but God is before all things as being Monad and Beginning of all. Wherefore also He is before the Son; as we have learned also from thy preaching in the midst of the Church. (Letter of Arius (excerpt quoted by Athanasius, De Synodis, Part II, Chapter 16))

'God was not always a Father;' but 'once God was alone, and not yet a Father, but afterwards He became a Father.' *'The Son was not always;' for, whereas all things were made out of nothing, and all existing creatures and works were made, so the Word of God Himself was 'made out of nothing,' and 'once He was not,' and 'He was not before His origination,' but He as others 'had an origin of creation.'* *'For God,' he says, 'was alone, and the Word as yet was not, nor the Wisdom. Then, wishing to form us, thereupon He made a certain one, and named Him Word and Wisdom and Son, that He might form us by means of Him.'* *Accordingly, he says that there are two wisdoms, first, the attribute co-existent with God, and next, that in this wisdom the Son was originated, and was only named Wisdom and Word as partaking of it. (Athanasius in his 'Against the Arians')*

If the Father begat the Son, He that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident that there was when the Son was not. (Arius before Alexander)

Key points

- The Father exists before the Son
- The Father alone is unbegotten; the Son is neither con-substantial nor co-eternal
- The Son is a creature
- The Son is, however, a distinct and superior creature "a perfect creature, yet not as one among other creatures; a begotten being, yet not as one among other begotten beings."
- The Father is unknowable; thus the Son cannot know the Father
- The Son is mutable, the Father immutable. The Son is open to sin, the Father is not.
- John's gospel major focus of Biblical discussion
 - John 3³⁵ – *all things in Son's hands*
 - John 10³⁰ – *I and the Father are one*
 - John 12²⁷ – *Prayer to the Father*
 - John 14¹⁰ – *I am in the Father and the Father is in me – Father living in me doing His work...*
 - John 17³ – *Know God and Jesus Christ...*
 - John 17¹¹ – *We are one...*
- In response Arius argues that sonship...
 - Derives from the will of God
 - Is an honorific metaphor not an assertion that Father and Son share the same substance
 - Is a consequence of the Father's will not the nature of the Son.

Opposed by Athanasius – basically made three points:

- Unity of God – which is ironic as it is the main reason Arius developed his thinking
 - God is not eternally trinity
 - Thus He is not one
 - Thus Arius is virtually introducing polytheism.
- Salvation – only God can save. If Jesus is not God then there is no salvation.
 - Only God can break power of sin
 - Only creator can redeem creation
 - Bible is clear that Jesus is saviour
 - So Jesus is God (or there is no salvation)
 - John 1¹⁴ – *Word became flesh* – God broke into our world for the purpose of salvation
- Worship – Christians worship and pray to Jesus; either they are idolatrous or He is God
 - Matt 28¹⁹ – Baptism in name of Trinity
 - 2 Cor 13¹⁴ – ‘The Grace’

An attempted compromise position was attempted using term

- homoiousios – of **like** substance as opposed to
- homoousios – of **same** substance

But was eventually rejected at Nicea in 325 (restated in 381) which affirmed homoousios – impossible to overstate conflict that resulted – *never has there been so much energy spent over a single vowel*. But note that neither term is biblical.

Interesting side note: Constantine emperor in 324 – wanted unity – wrote to Alexander and Arius *‘the cause of your difference has not been any of the leading doctrines or precepts of the law, nor has any new heresy respecting the worship of God risen among you. You are one in truth and judgement.’* Demonstrably uncomprehending situation – letter had no effect.

So Constantine summoned council of Nicea 325 – church and politics intertwined...

This gave rise to Nicene Creed (note differences and ending)

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of all things.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on the earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became man, suffered, and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, and is coming to judge living and dead.

And in the Holy Spirit.

And those that say ‘There was when he was not,’ and, ‘Before he was begotten he was not,’ and that, ‘He came into being from what-is-not,’ or those that allege that the son of God is ‘Of another substance or essence’ or ‘created,’ or ‘changeable’ or ‘alterable, these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again

in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended in heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Nature, Person, and Substance of Christ

Already noticed reaction to Arius arising from Alexandria, around Athanasius – actually two schools, each with own tendencies

Alexandrian

Based in Alexandria, Egypt. People like Alexander, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Apollinarius

Basically God living and acting in human form

Main emphases

- Soteriology (study of salvation)
- Jesus as redeemer
- Redemption as 'being taken up into the life of God', 'deification'
- Thus Christ's incarnation ensures and enables redemption.
- Incarnation occurred when divine Logos assumed human flesh. Logos dwelt within humanity in OT prophets, but took human nature on self in Christ (Jn 1¹⁴)
- Tendency towards Apollinarianism – one nature ie that of the Logos. Christ had a human body, but a divine mind and soul. This was refuted though, within the school, on soteriological lines – '*The unassumed is the unhealed...*' (Gregory of Nazianzen)

Antiochene

Based in Antioch, Asia Minor (now Turkey). People like Diodore of Tarsus Theodore of Mopsuesta, Nestorius, John of Chrysostom

Basically a man in whom God fully lives and acts

Main emphases

- Moral not merely soteriological concern
- Less reliant on Greek Philosophy
- Literal or historical interpretation of Scripture – great exogetes
- Redemption on basis of new obedience of humanity
- Incarnation is uniting of divine and human in new relationship of obedience
- Fall leads humanity to state of corruption, incarnation reestablishes obedient humanity

*O wisest love! that flesh and blood,
which did in Adam fail,
should strive afresh against the foe,
should strive, and should prevail;*

*and that the highest gift of grace
should flesh and blood refine:
God's presence and his very self,
and essence all-divine.*

*O generous love! that he who smote
in man for man the foe,
the double agony in Man
for man should undergo. (JH Newman)*

- Vigorous defence of two natures of Christ – ‘perfect conjunction’ between human and divine natures – one person, two natures
Christ is indivisible in that He is Christ, but He is twofold in that He is both God and a human being. He is one in his Sonship, but is twofold in that which takes and that which is taken... For we do not acknowledge two Christs, or two Sons or 'only begottens' or Lords... but one and the same. (Nestorius)
- Thus Christ assumes specific human being (Alex: He assumes general human nature)
- Hypostasis – ‘union according to good pleasure’ – two natures exist in Christ without mingling or confusion – held in will of God.
- Tendencies to Nestorianism

Chalcedonian settlement. One person, two natures (or substances or essences) – not confused, but held in one person...

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance (homoousios) with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer (Theotokos); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.

Athanasian Creed:

*Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.
God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world.
Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.
Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.
Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ.
One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God.
One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.
For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ;*

Councils have established...

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| • Council of Nicaea (325) | Jesus Christ is truly God |
| • Council of Constantinople (381) | Jesus Christ is truly Man |
| • Council of Ephesus (431) | Jesus Christ, both God and Man, is one person |
| • Council of Chalcedon (451) | the One Lord, Jesus Christ, is both God and Man |

Work of Salvation

How are we saved? Restoration of humanity in proper relationship to God – cannot be by God visiting us – must be humanity into God-head – that is nature of incarnation – Bible promises

- Gen 3¹⁵ – promise of human saviour
- *I will be your God and you will be my people* – fundamental nature of OT cov't eg Lev 26¹², Jer 7²³
- Messianic promises eg Is 9⁶
- But only God can save... so incarnation

Christ as

- Example – of the call of God on human life (tempted but without sin Heb 4¹⁵)
- New Man – second Adam (1 Cor 15⁴⁵)
- Symbol – of God's presence in humanity (eg Matt 11²⁸, Come to me...)
- Mediator – the one who reconciles God and man in own body (Eph 2¹⁴⁻¹⁸)
- Sacrifice – paying the price, for all (2 Cor 5¹⁴)
- Spirit bearer – the one who brings the Spirit of God for all humanity (Jn 14¹⁵⁻¹⁸)
- Champion – the one who defeats death, sin devil for humanity (Heb 2¹⁴)
- Revelation – making God known (seen me, seen Father John 14⁹)

Nature of humanity

- Fallen but still in image of God
- To be redeemed
- Temple of HS
- Place of worship
- Locus of divine activity

Nature of heaven

- New heaven and new earth (Rev 21¹)
- New body (1 Cor 15^{35-end})
- Eternal life as intended with God (Rev 21²⁻⁴)

Shapes gospel ministry – ministry of incarnation or ministry of salvation – actually cannot separate the two – need both...

Work of ministry

Question raised for me thinking about stepping out in miraculous – following example of Christ, how far can we say *Christ ministered as a human – thus what He did we can do...*

One last heresy – but this time more modern Phil 2⁷ *Who being in very nature God emptied himself [and became human]...* Kenosis / Kenoticism

*He left His Father's throne above,
so free, so infinite His grace--
emptied Himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for, O my God, it found out me!*

Is this how incarnation happened – clearly no from Chalcedon – two natures, but argument more subtle – Lutheran debate of early 17C – no references in gospels to Christ using divine power (omniscience, omnipresence) why, how? – two possible responses

- Krypsis – did it in secret – Tübingen
- Kenosis – abstained from doing so – Giessen

But both agree has these powers. Kenoticism developed with Bierdermann, Zinzendorf, Schleiermacher, and in UK Charles Gore – abandoning aspects of divinity – thus emptying self...

So, for example

- Did baby Christ control movement of stars?
- Was Jesus omniscient?
- Was God only present in heaven in two persons from 0-33AD?
- When Jesus healed was He doing so as perfect human or as God?

Graham Twelftree – studies of exorcism - Jesus his own power-authority... divine conflict... Jesus brings liberation – followers do so in His name...

How then do we minister?

- In name of Christ – He is the power-authority
- In the coming of Kingdom, in part, but guaranteed in the very person of Christ – divine joining embodies the now and not yet, holds tension...
- Within the will of the Father

Conclusions

Jesus is

- Fully God
- Fully Man
- One
- One with God
- For our Salvation

Bibliography

Catherwood C	<i>Crash Course on Church History</i>	London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1998
Davie M	<i>The Unique Significance of Jesus Christ</i>	Synod, House of Bishops, 1998
Ferguson et al (Ed)	<i>New Dictionary of Theology</i>	Leicester, IVP, 1988
McGrath AE	<i>Christian Theology, An introduction</i>	Oxford, Blackwell, 1994
Stevenson J	<i>A New Eusebius</i>	London, SPCK, 1957
Twelftree GH	<i>Jesus the Exorcist</i>	Peabody, Hendrickson, 1993