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God Became Man

The first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell the most amazing story ever told. They reveal to us how God became man. They say that Jesus Christ, God's Son, entered this world as a man, died for our sins, and brought—for those who would receive it—salvation, or forgiveness of our sins, and eternal life.

The New Testament is not so much a history book as it is a study of salvation, the heart of which is how the divine Son of God became one of us in order to save us. Therefore, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not just studies of the Lord's life. They are more like missionary messages. They give us "selective history," telling us the key events that relate to the bringing of salvation to man. John 21:25 says, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written."

What are some of these major events that we are

told about in the New Testament regarding Jesus' providing salvation for us? What is the truth concerning Jesus Christ?

JESUS WAS/IS GOD

The first truth that we must accept about Jesus is that He was and is God.

Was His birth His beginning? No. Our Lord's birth in Bethlehem was not the beginning of His existence. His birth was only His taking a physical body and becoming man.

"God" is somewhat like a family name. Your family name is what identifies you with the other members of your family. It is the link that joins individual family members into a single family unit. In a similar way, "God" is a family name. In the Scriptures we see God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. The second member of this Godhead, Jesus, became man for us.

One passage that clearly declares that Jesus is God eternal is John 1:1–5.¹ John said that Jesus is God and has always been God.

In the beginning was the Word,² and the Word

¹John begins his Gospel before history. He begins with God in eternity.

²"Philo of Alexandria has much to say about the *Logos*, which in his system was an intermediary principle between God and man, but he denied the possibility of the *Logos* becoming flesh. When John says that the *Logos* did become flesh he is clearly presenting a different kind of *Logos* from Philo. For all his great [learning], Philo could not present a *Logos* capable of dwelling among men, who could move men into action and give power to men to become sons of God. This was a new element in the contemporary Greek world" (Donald Guthrie, *A Shorter Life of Christ* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1970], 73).

was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

We need to think about four great truths that come out of this passage:

(1) We see that Jesus was not a creation. How could Jesus become a man without a previous existence? In regard to no other person can we see the difference between birth and beginning or say that his life did not begin when he was conceived, but we can say it concerning Jesus. He did not become God's Son at His birth or when He arose from the dead. He is God, supreme and without beginning. He has always been and will always be.

He spoke of the glory that He had with the Father before the world existed (John 17:5). He said, ". . . I came forth from the Father. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; . . ." (John 16:27, 28). He also said, "For You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24b). Every other person has entered life through physical birth, but Jesus knew neither beginning of days nor end of life (Hebrews 7:3). He is fully eternal and fully God.

Unlike us, He chose to be born and to enter the experience of life. During His earthly life, He did not set aside His deity, but He laid aside only the voluntary use of His characteristics as God. At any time, He could have drawn upon any of His divine powers or exercised the divine choices that He had (Philippians 2:6).

(2) We see that God created the world through Jesus. He is the true Lord of the universe. First Corinthians 8:6 says it: "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." Colossians 1:16 says it also: "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him."

(3) We see that Jesus gives life to the living, and He can revive the dead (see John 11:25). He is the author of life.

(4) We must conclude that He is the Lord of life and death. He made all things and takes care of all things, giving life and ruling over death.

Can we understand everything about our Lord's earthly life? Obviously, we cannot. How can man fully understand God? One does not have to understand a truth to believe it. I do not understand how God created the earth, but I believe that He did. I do not understand how Jesus arose from the dead, but I believe that He did. Likewise, I do not understand how God, Jesus Christ, could become man, but I believe that He did.

JESUS, GOD'S SON, BECAME MAN

The next truth about Jesus that we need to think about is that He became man fully. Let us allow this truth to enter into our minds: Jesus, God's Son, was clothed with flesh! Jesus was, is, and always will be the Son of God; but at His birth He became the Son of Man.

Paul described how Jesus gave up heaven to come to earth (Philippians 2:5–8). Notice how Jesus came down from heaven to become one of us.

First, He left heaven. He left the rich love of His Father's presence. He walked away from a place where no hatred existed—a place that was free from envy, jealousy, and suspicion. He left the beautiful harmony of heaven—a place without discord, conflicts, or arguments, a place without misunderstandings or confusion. He left the abundant resources of heaven. He chose to leave a place where there could be no lack of funds, where no one was poverty-stricken, and where no one was ever hungry or thirsty.

Second, He became man. His birth did not mark His origin, but only His appearance as a man on the stage of time. Jesus was the meeting place of eternity and time, the perfect blending of deity and humanity, the junction of heaven and earth. He consented not only to be born, but to be fully human so that He could die. As God, He became man. He was the Son of God, but He became the Son of Man.³

This is the great truth of Christianity. If you can believe this truth, then you can believe every other truth within Christianity. Yes, the staggering truth of Christianity is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made into man—that He took on humanity without loss of deity, so that He was as truly and fully God as He was human. One who can believe this part of Christianity

³“Not God indwelling a man. Of such there have been many. Not a man Deified. Of such there have been none save in the myths of pagan systems of thought; but God and man, combining in one Personality the two natures, a perpetual enigma and mystery, baffling the possibility of explanation” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Crises of the Christ* [Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1936], 79).

will have no trouble believing the rest of it.

John wrote that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14a). In other words, God became man; the divine Son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do any more than lie in His bed, stare, wriggle, and make noises. He needed to be fed, to have His clothes changed, and to be taught to talk like any other child. This was not an illusion or a deception; the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality. The more you think about it, the more amazing it becomes. It is because of their misbelief—or at least inadequate belief—about the incarnation that people have difficulties with other truths in the gospel story. Once the incarnation is grasped as a reality, the other difficulties pass away.⁴

Third, He became a servant of men. He did not live as a king in a palace, but as a servant in poverty. He came not to be served, but to serve. He came to show us what God is like and what true manhood is like (Mark 10:45).

Fourth, He submitted to death. Without submitting to death, He could not have been fully human. He identified completely with man. He submitted to the worst kind of death, even death on a cross. I want to die in my sleep. How about you? In this sense, we are not like Jesus. He submitted to a torturous, painful death—willingly, voluntarily, and without coercion.

HE LIVED AMONG US AS THE GOD-MAN

Another truth concerning Jesus that we need to

⁴J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 46.

think about is that He lived among us as the God-Man.

We would expect the earthly life of the God-Man to be very unusual. The God-Man would be different from all other people. We should not be surprised to find that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John present His earthly life as being superior to any other human who has ever lived.

If God became man, a special birth would be necessary. He had such a birth: The Gospels of Matthew and Luke tell of His being born of a virgin named Mary. He had an earthly mother, but no earthly father, for He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20).

We would also expect His life to be perfect, marked by divine teachings that could not have come from mortal man. No wonder we read that no one had ever spoken the way He spoke (John 7:46). The people who met Him and heard Him teach were amazed at His life and His messages.

If He was God in the flesh, why should we be surprised that He manifested power beyond human ability by working miracles and wonders? We are told that He worked obvious miracles which even His enemies regarded as being above and beyond the laws of nature. He raised the dead (John 11:43, 44), healed the blind (Mark 8), and multiplied bread and fish (John 6). The fact that He had such power should not seem strange to us. After all, He created all things and sustains all things.

Would we not expect His death to be one of a kind in the history of the world? For God to die on a cross would have to be the most astonishing event of all time. The Gospels show that this was the case. At Jesus' death, the sky turned black, the earth quaked,

the veil of the temple was torn, and tombs opened. Many godly people rose from their graves and appeared alive in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 27:50–53). When the God-Man died, a special event took place—an event which had been planned from the foundation of the world.

Would we not also expect the God-Man to have power over death? Indeed, He arose from the dead. This truth is one of the clearest truths told us about His life. All four Gospel writers described His resurrection in great detail. He gave Himself for our sins, but He arose from the dead so that we might know that He was truly divine.

CONCLUSION

Here, then, are three truths about Jesus that we must never forget: He was and is God, He became man, and He lived among us as the God-Man.

These three truths about Jesus can encourage us in two ways. First, they remind us that our Savior is not a helpless man, but God—the almighty, eternal, creating, and sustaining God.

Second, we see in the preexistence of Jesus the truth of His love for all mankind. His coming to earth and His dying for our sins provided our only hope for salvation. Jesus was willing to come and give us that hope. He gave Himself for our salvation, but would the people of the earth receive that message and be saved? Would Jesus be giving up everything for only a small response? Jesus was willing to take that risk for us. He became our Savior. No one else could save us. If He had not come, we would have no hope.

Can you imagine becoming an ant? You would have to lay aside many of your assets as a human

being, such as your human body, your strength, and your talents. You would have to live under the limitations of an ant. Jesus did not become an ant, but His descending from His lofty state in heaven to being a man in Palestine was a far greater act of humility than that of a man becoming an ant. Yes, Jesus became Man so that we might become children of God.⁵

Let us rejoice in what Jesus did for us and resolve right now that we will obey Him and follow Him.

STUDY QUESTIONS

(answers on page 262)

1. What do the first four books of the New Testament reveal?
2. Was Jesus' birth His beginning?
3. List four great truths that come out of John 1:1-5.
4. What were the four descending steps Jesus took as He became one of us?
5. What truth is so central to Christianity that if you believe it you can believe every other truth?
6. How was Jesus' birth a special birth?
7. What three truths about Jesus must never be forgotten?
8. How was Jesus' becoming a man a far greater step down than a man's becoming an ant?

⁵"The Eternal Being who knows everything and who created the whole universe became not only a man but (before that) a baby, and before that a [fetus] inside a Woman's body. If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or a crab" (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952], 155).

WORD HELPS

incarnation—the appearance of the Son of God in a human body; Jesus' coming to earth to live as a human man.

indwell—to live within, as the Holy Spirit dwells, or lives, within Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

preexistence—having been alive before the world was created. This nature belongs only to the Godhead (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit). Jesus existed before becoming man. He is an eternal being who always has been, is, and always will be. (See John 1:1–11.)

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