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Is Jesus God?

The Christian Church has since its inception been rocked by controversy about the nature of Jesus Christ. Was Jesus God? Was he human? What is he *now*?

by James McBride

Jesus Christ has been described as the most noble of mankind, the greatest teacher ever, a moral giant. Most Christians, however, get hot under the collar if He is described as anything less than "forever God"! History has seen mutual excommunications - even executions wielded by all sides in the dispute. The first four centuries of the Church seethed with numerous dissenting views on the nature of Jesus Christ.

Jesus - God or Man?

Few will deny that Jesus Christ was unique. But controversy has raged as to His real nature. Was He God dwelling in a shell of human flesh? Was He an ordinary man mightily used by God? Was He an angel? A "phantasm"? Was He created - or eternal? Is He different now from what He was while on earth? All have been proposed, fought over, died for!

Let's look at what *the Bible* teaches!

The mystery of God's nature is not one for contention or argument! We seek here to present what we perceive is the Bible evidence concerning Christ's nature while He sojourned among us on earth.

It's not within the scope of this article to demonstrate that Jesus had a life before His human conception, or in what manner He existed. Our position is that *He did indeed pre-exist as a part of the Godhead*, and future articles will give the detailed evidence.

Was Jesus during His time on earth, then, God? Or man? Or a combination of God and man? Or a spirit with an apparent body, as some claim?

The Word Became Flesh

When we seek the origins of Jesus Christ in Scripture we are drawn at once to John's account of His conception. He tells us "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And *the Word became flesh* and [nine months later] dwelt among us" (John 1:1,14). In context, the apostle is referring to Jesus of

Nazareth. Whatever His prior role, He left it and "became flesh".

Let's examine more closely what that means. Most Christians gloss over what actually happened!

"The Word became flesh". When? Clearly, at His conception, when one of Mary's ova was miraculously fertilized by a single physical sperm, as in every human conception.

"The Word became flesh". *How* could this happen? Matthew gives us further background. He writes "Before [Joseph and Mary] came together [i.e. in a sexual relationship] she was found *with child of the Holy Spirit*" (ch 1:18). In other words, the Word - who existed in the realm of Spirit before creation (John 1:3) - was transformed by divine fiat into human sperm, twenty-three chromosomes of a single one of which united with those of an ovum in Mary's womb to form the embryo which became Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem. Matthew emphasizes this transformation: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is *God with us*'" (Matthew 1:22-23).

What love the Godhead had for mankind! "God so loved the world that *He gave His only begotten son*" (John 3:16). At that precise moment of conception the everlasting God beget a Son!

Paul tells us that "from the beginning [i.e. in His eternal pre-existence] he had the *nature of God*. Yet he did not regard equality with God as something at which he should grasp. No, *he stripped himself of his glory* ["emptied himself" - KJV] and took on him the nature of a bondservant by *becoming a man like other men* [cp Hebrews 2:17]. And being recognized as *truly human*, he humbled himself and even stooped to die" (Philippians 2:5-8).

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Did you grasp that? In the counsels of heaven, and knowing all the risks of failure, the uncreated Word who “had the nature of God” determined to take on the nature of created mankind, to become “lower than the angels”. He determined to die for us - even before mankind was created (I Peter 1:20)! And He divested himself of divine power - He gave up his status as a part of the Godhead - to *become human flesh*.

Titanic Struggle

Thus miraculously conceived, Jesus was born in an insignificant village in Palestine. He grew in stature and strength like any other lad. The evangelist Luke summed up His youth: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). As a youngster He knew nothing of His prior existence as the Word. He knew nothing of the heavenly counsels and discussion that had led to His voluntary assumption of human flesh. Only through the unfolding enlightenment of the Holy Spirit as He searched the Scriptures did Jesus come to understand His true origin and mission.

Having “emptied himself”, as a human being Jesus *did not know* whether He would successfully fulfill His mission. He had no idea that He would be able to resist every temptation, conquer every sin. During His life on earth this knowledge simply was not revealed to Jesus. Throughout His life he had - just like you and me - to contest Satan and battle His human nature in the power of the Holy Spirit. But always *He* was triumphantly successful! Throughout His life He had - just like you and me - to struggle to overcome “the world, the flesh and the devil”.

Speaking of the risen Christ, Paul proclaims, We have not a High Priest who is unable to feel for us in our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in every respect just as we are tempted, and yet did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He was “made inferior to the angels for a little while” (ch 2:9) - for the thirty-odd years of his human existence.

Yes - until His resurrection Jesus was *fully human!*

A Unique Person

But in the context of His humanity He was, of course, *unique*. He was unique in the physical protection afforded to Him as the channel of God’s mercy for all humankind. Angels ensured His physical preservation from life-threatening accident and illness (see Psalm 91) to ensure His real - spiritual - work could be completed. Though spiritual, that work required His suffering and death. It was such excruciating suffering and such a horrific death that it far eclipses any illness or suffering we might encounter in our three score years and tens!

And Jesus was unique in His close and perfect association with the Father. So close, indeed, that He could claim “I and my Father *are one*” (John 10:31).

Even as a youngster Jesus had an unparalleled understanding of the Father, and of His own mission! Luke records (ch 2:40ff): “And the child grew and became strong and full of wisdom, and the grace of God rested

upon him”. He then tells us that at age twelve Jesus went to a Festival in Jerusalem where He was found “in the Temple sitting among the rabbis, both listening to them and asking them questions [Jesus had things to learn!], while all who heard him were astonished at his intelligence and at the answers he gave”. His response to the worried reaction of His parents was “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s House?” (v.49).

Through His divinely endowed intelligence, His perfect genetic inheritance from God (perhaps, as the “last Adam”, a replica of Adam’s genetic make-up), the instruction from righteous Mary and Joseph and His extended family, the understanding that He had of the Holy Scriptures, His unceasing communion with His heavenly Father and direct revelations and “words of knowledge” from His Father, Jesus soon came to understand that He was the long awaited Messiah - and the very first begotten Son of God.

In sum, Jesus had a unique origin, a unique genetic inheritance, unique divine protection, unique intellect, gifts, a unique relationship with the Father. But until His resurrection He was what Paul described as “the man Jesus” (I Timothy 2:5), fully man and subject to every human temptation.

After The Resurrection

During His life-time, then, Jesus the Messiah was subject to human limitation - though He exercised perfect faith. He was subject to controlled human emotion (He became angry, for example). He tired and had to rest and sleep. He became hungry and thirsty and had to eat and drink. When wounded He bled and suffered pain. He was, in fact, tempted in every respect just as we are.

But when, because He never sinned, death could not contain Him Jesus had new powers. After the resurrection He could at will assume a body of flesh and bone - yet He could walk through solid walls. He walked with His friends - but could instantly disappear. He appeared in different forms. He could ascend to the throne of God and return faster than the speed of light. He could appear shining as the sun in full strength, His eyes like flames of fire. Jesus Christ is *alive for evermore* (Rev 1:18). And He has all authority in heaven and earth given into His hands (Man 28:18)

A Renewed Relationship

In short, after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ *fully* resumed His partnership with the Father as a part of the divine Family.

Now *Jesus is pre-eminent*. He has a name above every name. Christ is “high above all government and authority power and dominion, and every title of sovereignty used either in this age or the age to come” (Ephesians 1:21-22). To John He said: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13).

Let no-one doubt that He who saved us through His suffering and death on the stake *is now at the right hand of God*. It is recorded in Hebrews “...we see Jesus, who was

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made inferior to the angels for a little while, crowned with glory and honor” (ch 2:9).

Jesus Christ now has renewed His relationship with the Father: “And now, O Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had with you before the world was” (John 17:5). What a concept! That bright effulgence of glory which surrounds the Godhead, which once enveloped Jesus in His prior existence as the Word, which was too glorious for human eye to behold, once again adorns the resurrected Savior of mankind! As the apostle Paul wrote: “In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

The Family Of God

For a short thirty-four years the Word who was with God from the beginning took upon Himself to become *wholly human*. As a young lad he battled with peer pressures and was undoubtedly ridiculed for His rejection of the worldly ways of His young friends. He constantly battled His human nature - and *won* each battle over sin. At thirty He set out on His public mission - a mission that led to His agonizing death on a Roman stake.

Now resurrected to unending life, as the heir of God He sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high and controls and upholds the vastness of the Universe, exercising all the power of the Godhead. As our High Priest He pleads constantly for His brothers and sisters who are themselves heirs of the same reward (Romans 8:17).

Jesus Christ has claimed His rightful inheritance as elder brother in the divine Family.

God is *Father*. Jesus Christ is God's *Son*. Christians are His *brothers and sisters*, and *sons and daughters* of the Lord Almighty. And by analogy we will be the Bride of Christ, and are “members of the *household* of God” (Ephesians 2:19). *The Family of God indeed*, as these terms indicate! [The Christian's relationship to God's Family is explained in the earlier article *After The Resurrection*. Write for a copy if you haven't read it.]

Let's not allow our thinking to be limited by the outmoded pre-Christian notion that God is in some way limited. Many Christians bind themselves in an unbiblical trinitarian strait-jacket. They are blind to the magnificent vision revealed in Scripture that God's plan is *to enlarge His Family!* The concept of “God” which He has revealed in His Word far eclipses the puny probings of the human mind.

God in a very real way and like any family is “reproducing” Himself after His own kind - the “God kind”! He graciously is making man “in His own image”. *Now* we are but “clay” - a muddied reflection of the glorious divine image. But as Paul wrote: “we...are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory” (1 Cor 3:18).

Soon, Jesus Christ will return to this earth with all the power of the Godhead. This time He comes as King of all earthly kings to subdue all rebellion to the Eternal God and His Laws. With Him, to reign with Him as kings, will be all the people of God who throughout the millennia remained faithful to Him in face of trials, persecutions, even death.

God All In in All

What then? Wrote the apostle Paul: “Then comes the end, when He will turn the Kingdom over to His Father, when He will have put an end to all other government, authority and power; for He must continue to be King until He puts all enemies under His feet.... And when everything has been put in subjection to Him, then the Son Himself will also become subject to Him [the Father] who has put everything in subjection to Him [Jesus Christ] so that *God may be everything in everyone*” (I Cor 15:24-28).

At that time, then, after the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings. After His millennial reign. After the great judgment. After the earth is finally cleansed of all unrighteousness. After the full working out of this majestic divine plan - then the people of God, the sons and daughters of God, together with our elder Brother Jesus Christ, will all be part of the one divine Family. And - as wrote the apostle Peter - *partakers of the divine nature* (II Peter 1:4).

All of those who overcome will be united in the Godhead. God will indeed be *everything in everyone!*

The Word of God willingly abandoned His place in the Godhead to become *fully human* as Jesus the Messiah so that sinful mankind could share in His glorious inheritance as the divine heir of God!

Published by:

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
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Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
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