

A thick black L-shaped frame surrounds the text. The vertical bar is on the left, the horizontal bar is at the top, and another vertical bar is on the right. The bottom horizontal bar is also present, completing the frame.

THE INCARNATION AND THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory
as of the only-begotten Son from the Father.”

-John 1:14

O ineffable Creator, true source of light and wisdom, origin of all things, be pleased to cast a beam of your radiance upon the darkness of my mind.

Take from me the double darkness of sin and ignorance in which I was born. Give me quickness of understanding, a retentive memory, the ability to grasp things correctly and fundamentally, and abundant grace of expression.

Order the beginning, direct the progress and perfect the achievement of my work. You who are true God and true Man and who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

The Incarnation

- The Incarnation is the act of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity assuming human nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary and being born into the world as a true man.
 - *Literally means “to take flesh”*
- To say it another way, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity added human nature (body and soul) to His own divine nature 2000 years ago and was called Jesus
- Or again, that the historical man known as Jesus is “the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father.” (Nicene Creed)

The Incarnation

- This is a BIG deal. Let's allow this to sink in....
- God – eternal and almighty – became human
 - *This boggles the mind*
 - *It has historically been (and continues to be) a major stumbling block to faith throughout the centuries*
 - *Yet it remains central to the great Christian proclamation*

The Incarnation

- It was not a shell or a “human garment” he temporarily put on, nor the illusion of becoming human
- God became human – entering human history (time) and uniting himself totally (and permanently) to humanity
- When we understand the infinite grandeur, omnipotence, greatness and holiness of God vs. the insignificance and sinfulness of humanity, the Incarnation becomes an event of incalculable wonder
 - *Before this mystery, we bow (literally) during the Creed when we profess belief in the Incarnation*
- It was the turning point in human history

The Incarnation – Why?

- To save us
 - *To redeem us from sin and its consequences – eternal separation from God “by reconciling us with God, who ‘loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation (atonement) for our sins.’” (1 Jn 4:10; CCC 457)*
 - *In other words, he came to die, to “give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk 10:45)*
- To reveal his love
 - *So that we might know him and his love for us*
 - *He did not have to do it at all, nor did he have to do it this way (God doesn’t have to do anything)*
 - *He could have redeemed us with a thought and restored us to grace without the need to take flesh*
 - *He took flesh simply because of his love, because of his desire that we know him, and because it pleased him to do it. (Just look at a crucifix...)*

The Incarnation – Why?

- To be our model of holiness
 - *To show us – not just tell us (as he had in the Mosaic Law) what is the purpose of our life and what kind of a person he made us to be.*
 - *In his Incarnation, God reveals himself to us as holy and calls us to imitate him*
 - *He also reveals man to himself and the great destiny to which he is called.*

- To make us partakers of the divine nature
 - *“The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods.” --St. Thomas*
 - *Through our baptism, we become children of God (not by nature, but by adoption) and we gain “a real share in the life of the only Son.” (CCC 654)*

Jesus Christ – true God and true Man

- As man, He loses none of his divinity but rather chooses to cloak it, or as St. Paul says, he “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7).
- *“The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man...”*

-CCC 464

Jesus Christ – true God and true Man

- The standard definitions of Christ's nature were formulated at the Councils of Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451).
- The traditional formula is that Christ is one Person with two Natures, one human and one divine.
- He is neither part-God, part-man, nor is his manhood lost in his divinity, nor did his divinity come upon him later in life and take up his humanity.
- He is fully-God and fully-man from the first moment of his conception in the womb of Mary and remains so even now at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus Christ – true God and true Man

- He is both Son of God (thus divine) and Son of Man (thus human)
- He has a divine Father from eternity and a human mother in time: “Son of the Father in his divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity.” (CCC 503)
- The Virgin birth of Christ demonstrates both natures, for he was conceived “by the Holy Spirit” and “incarnate of the Virgin Mary.”
- This, of course, means that Joseph was not Jesus’ father, as the Gospels made very clear (See Mt 1:18; 1:20; 1:23; 1:25; Lk 1:35)

Jesus Christ – true God and true Man

- *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be...and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1-14)*

Hypostatic Union

- The theological term used to describe the union of Christ's divinity and humanity in a single individual existence.
- Certain actions and sayings of Christ reflect one or the other of the two natures
 - *when Christ says he is thirsty or hungry, this clearly reflects his human nature while his saying that he is "one with the Father" reflects his divine nature*
 - *the natures are joined in such a way that whatever Christ did by virtue of his divinity is also asserted of his humanity and what he does by virtue of his humanity is also asserted of his divinity*

Hypostatic Union

- Christ is God, it is right to say that God worked as a carpenter in Nazareth 2,000 years ago or to say that God died on the Cross.
- Likewise, because Christ is also man, it is right to say that a man atoned for sin and rightfully receives divine worship.
- All he does, he does as the God-Man by virtue of the hypostatic union.
- While we can intellectually distinguish between his humanity and divinity, we cannot separate them.
 - *By analogy, we can distinguish between the light and heat of a candle, but we cannot separate them*

Heresies about the Incarnation

- All heretical beliefs about the Incarnation of Jesus fall into two camps: either they deny his humanity, or they deny his divinity
- The Docetists, while acknowledging Jesus as God, denied that He was also true man (i.e., that he had “come in the flesh”) and believed that he only *appeared* to be a man.
 - *It is important to note that the human nature was not absorbed by the divine (the error many sects influenced by the New Age movement make today).*
- The Monophysites thought the humanity of Christ was absorbed by his divinity, like a drop of water is lost in the sea.
 - *This, too, is false: Christ retained His manhood and still retains it even now*

Heresies about the Incarnation

- Arianism denied that Christ was truly God in the same way as God the Father, and instead posited Him as a lesser being, a sort of demi-God who was created.
 - *“There was a time when the Son was not” was the creed of the Arians.*
 - *In other words, they believed that the Son was ‘made’ or ‘created’ by the Father and not co-eternal and consubstantial with him.*
 - *This view was condemned by the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople*

- Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons and some Protestant denominations assert a kind of modified Arianism in which the divinity of Christ and his equality in nature with the Father are denied.

The Sacrifice of Christ

- “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ”
 - *Romans 6:23*
- Original Sin (and subsequent sins) caused a catastrophic rupture in the relationship between God and humanity
 - *Nothing sinful can abide with God, who is all-holy*
 - *Sin (and the rupture caused by sin) meant eternal separation from God*
 - *Humanity could not forgive its own sins – only the one who was offended can forgive*
 - *That is, only God could forgive our sins...and he did so in a most extraordinary way*

The Sacrifice of Christ

- Instead of simply forgiving sins, God chose to lay the punishment for sin (death and separation from God) upon his only begotten Son
- Having become one of us through his Incarnation, Christ took the sin of all humanity upon himself
 - *All sins ever committed – past, present or future*
 - *He became the ‘sacrificial lamb of God,’ whose death took away the sins of the world*
- He offered himself in sacrifice as a perfect man, becoming ‘obedient unto death, even death on a cross’ (Phil 2:8), saying, ‘not my will but yours’ in direct contrast to Adam. Thus, Adam’s sin (and all subsequent sin) is canceled out.

The Sacrifice of Christ

- As man, Jesus suffered man's punishment for sin (death)
- As God, Jesus could bear the weight of all sin, heal the rupture with the Father, and regain supernatural life for us
- Said another way...
 - *Only a man could offer a sacrifice to God because man was the offending party*
 - *But only God could be the perfect sacrifice and the perfect priest offering the sacrifice because only God is holy (spotless, without blemish)*
 - *Jesus Christ – true God and true man – is both. A more infinite atonement is not conceivable.*

The Sacrifice of Christ

- “You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers (sinfulness), with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (1 Pt 1:18)
- “For our sake, he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become righteous.” (2 Cor 5:21)
- “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8)
- “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.” (1 Jn 4:10)
- “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk10:45)

The Sacrifice of Christ

- The Church, following the teaching of the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all people without exception
 - *“There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer.” (CCC 605)*
- But we must believe in Jesus Christ and manifest that belief in works...
 - *“This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life...” (John 6:40)*
- By believing in him, and by ratifying that belief through baptism and faith, we are saved by Christ’s sacrificial death. This is sometimes referred to as ‘justification.’

Incorrect views of justification

- Judaizers (1st century)
 - *We are saved by keeping the ceremonial prescriptions of the Law in the Old Testament*
- Catholic belief
 - *While the moral principles of the old law are still binding, the ritual aspects of it were only meant for the Jews of the Old Testament.*
- Pelagianism
 - *We can save ourselves by being good. Good people go to heaven regardless of the merits of Christ.*
- Catholic belief
 - *Salvation apart from the grace of God is not possible. Our good deeds are made meritorious by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ.*
 - *All who are saved receive that salvation only through Jesus Christ.*
 - *“There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven by which we are to be saved.” (Acts 4:12)*
 - *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (Jn 14:6)*

Incorrect views of justification

■ Sola Fide

- *It is faith in Christ alone that saves us; it is not necessary to do good deeds or even to give up sin. Faith alone suffices.*

■ Catholic belief

- *Faith in the Christ plus persevering in charity and abiding in hope save us. This faith is put into action by obeying the commands of Christ and the teaching of the Church.*

■ Superstition

- *You can be saved just by going through the external rituals of the Church (baptism, etc.) without the necessity of faith or good works.*

■ Catholic belief

- *The sacraments of the Church are of little or no profit if not accompanied by the necessary interior dispositions.*

Incorrect views of justification

- Luther:

- *Justification does not actually make us holy; it is just a judicial declaration by God saying we are holy. In reality, we will always be totally corrupt (dung covered in snow). Justification is a legal fiction.*

- Catholic belief

- *Justification truly brings about our sanctification and makes us holy not just in name but in fact.*

- Calvinism

- *Christ did not die for all, but only for the Elect.*

- Catholic belief

- *Christ died for all, regardless of where their eternal destiny is.*

In summary...

- What did God do to undo original sin and forgive all our actual sins?
 - *He died. Christ's death on the cross brought about the forgiveness of sins*
 - *God became man through the Incarnation in order to suffer what we deserved*
 - *Through his total obedience to his Father's will, even unto death, Jesus reversed the sin and disobedience of Adam*
- Jesus really did die
 - *It wasn't just a show; he didn't almost die or slip into a coma*
 - *If he did not die, then he did not rise*
 - *If he did not die, then he did not pay for our sins and he was not totally obedient to the Father's will*

What must we do to receive forgiveness of sins?

■ Repent

- *Repent of sin, reject the way of the world, turn around and seek God*
- *Say and mean it: "Your will, not mine, be done"*

■ Believe

- *Believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who died for you*
- *Accept the forgiveness and salvation he offers you as a free gift*
- *Choose Christ sincerely, follow him, be baptized and become a disciple, commit yourself to him and his Gospel*

■ Live in Charity (Love)

- *Live the new life Christ gives you through baptism, namely by loving God above all things and your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:36-40)*

Next Week...

- The Resurrection of Christ
- The Founding of the Church and the Great Commission

Sources: Catechism of the Catholic Church, Documents of Vatican II, Catholic Catechism by Peter J. Kreeft, NABRE, unamsanctamcatholicam.org

- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.