

## What is the doctrine of the Incarnation?

Before we leap into answering this question, we must first clarify what the basic meaning of the word "incarnation" is. The word, derived from the Latin, means "enfleshing", that is, putting into bodily form.

But here we must start answering the question of the above title by saying what the doctrine does NOT mean. It does not mean that God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, was merely placed (or placed himself) into a human body, as if God attached a solely material object to himself, despite the word "Incarnation" only referring to flesh in itself. If this were the case, Jesus would have had the Divine Nature in place of a human mind/soul. This is the heresy of Appolinarianism.

No, God the Son took upon himself a full human nature, body and soul, making it entirely his own self. Nevertheless, in saying this we must guard against another error that the word could imply to some, and that is the error that says He had to lose something of his Divinity to do this, that the Incarnation changed the Divine Nature or partly removed it from the Son. While Jesus did "empty himself" (Philippians 2:7) in the sense of humbling himself and hiding his Divine attributes from us to become human, he remained and remains fully Divine nonetheless.

Another misconception, and one that prevents people from believing or affirming the doctrine, is the idea that the Incarnation is about a man becoming God or a god. If we try to imagine how a human can be or become God we will be led astray. Indeed, instead of asking whether a man can be God, we must ask whether God is capable of taking on a human nature for

himself. Then it becomes clearer, because God is omnipotent (all-powerful), that He is quite capable of doing this.

Finally, to guard against another misconception, we must recognise that the relationship between the Divine and human natures of Christ is not one of conversion, but of a special kind of addition. Divinity does not become humanity, nor does humanity convert into divinity. Each nature has its own attributes and integrity. That is why the Athanasian Creed say He is "Perfect God, perfect man ... One [Person], however, not by conversion of Godhead into flesh, but by taking of Manhood into God" This "taking" is, as I said, a special kind of addition because the two "parts" added are not equal or even on the same plane of reality, obviously. But also because one "part" creates and then takes the other "part" to inhabit it, rather than the two being added together from the outside. This relates to a theological concept known as "enhypostasis", which I leave the readers to explore further for themselves!

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