

## **I believe in... The Incarnation**

Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2011

In Jewish writing, the most important part of a book wasn't the end, but the middle.

In Mark chapter 8, right in the middle – the most important part of the Book, there is an account of a time when Jesus took His followers to a place called Caesarea Philippi in the north of Israel.

This was a cliff face with a spring of water flowing from underneath it and it had been a religious place for a long time.

The place had been called Paneas, after the Greek god Pan, and it was said in the stories that Pan used to appear there, disguised as a human, and would then reveal himself to people who would then 'panic.'

And then, in 14AD the place had been named Caesarea after the Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar, who was a man who people worshipped as a god.

And right there, in the place that remembered a god pretending to be human and a human who was worshipped as a god, Jesus asked His followers these questions;

'Who do people say I am?'

'Who do you say I am?'

This question is still one of the most important we could ever try to answer.

This week I have spent time with a devout Muslim man I met, the leader of the Gurdwara across the road and a woman from a Spiritualist church that would call herself a Christian, but probably isn't. Each of these said something along the lines of "We're all the same" or "It's the same god."

We all meet people from different faiths on a weekly basis and in amongst all the beliefs in Birmingham, it's so important that we know what we believe.

This isn't just an exercise in being clever and knowing more, and it's not primarily so we can get into big arguments with our friends, but it is vitally important we know the Truth.

So for the next few weeks around Easter we'll be looking at a few of the core beliefs at the centre of Christianity.

Our prayer is that we won't just know more as a result of this, but that we'll be more securely rooted in our faith and will encounter Jesus and that as we turn our hearts and our minds towards Him, we will be full of worship, and as we know the Truth, it will set us free.

The aim is that we will look at what the Bible teaches; what we believe; why we believe it and what difference it makes to us.

It's not about knowing more about Him; it's about knowing Him more.

So today I want to start off by looking at who Jesus is - specifically the Incarnation.

What this means is that Jesus – God the Son, 'became flesh'.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Through the years people have believed different, wrong things about Jesus, which have confused them and undermined their faith.

Some people have believed that Jesus was just a man, who was maybe a prophet and an example, but at the end of the day, just a man. Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses would be amongst these people.

Some people have said that Jesus was a man, but became God at His Baptism, or had the mind or spirit of God.

Others have said that He was a cross between men and God, but not quite either – a bit less than fully God and a bit more than just a man.

Others have said that He was God, but not really a man, so He couldn't sin, so He was never really tempted.

Each of these is less than what the Bible teaches and if we believe one of these things about Jesus, it will lead us away from the Truth that the Bible reveals about Jesus, and ultimately it leads us to something that is not Biblical Christianity.

And that can lead us into danger in what we believe: In a few steps we can move away from believing what God has revealed in the Bible, to believing lies that do not come from God:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: **Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God**, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge **Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh**, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. **Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God**; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. (2 John 1:7-10)

For John, who was writing this, and had known and touched Jesus – he was the disciple who had rested his head on Jesus at the Last Supper; the importance of both these truths was vital – Jesus is the Christ, and He came in the flesh.

And in amongst the false teachings that were around as the New Testament was being written and the young Church was expanding, he was very strong on this, repeating the fact that acknowledging both these things is very important.

When I have prayed with people to get them free from demonic problems, I have seen evil spirits be unable to acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

## **So what does the Bible teach?**

- Jesus is God the Son, part of the Godhead – Eternal; Creator.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

- His mother Mary was a virgin.

This is important because through His mother He had a human lineage and entered the world like every other person.

But Joseph wasn't His biological father; God is.

So Jesus was able to be called both the Son of God and the Son of Man (which was the title He often used for Himself)

Often we think about the Incarnation at Christmastime – remembering Jesus' Birth, but the importance of the Incarnation is not limited to Christmas.

In a few weeks we will be looking at the Story of Easter.

I don't think we can fully understand the Easter Story unless we remember the Christmas Story.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.” (Matthew 1:18-23)

I think that sometimes Christmas is too familiar for us so we miss the amazing impact of what we are remembering, but why Christmas is so amazing is exactly this; that God, The Word became flesh.

There is a Christmas carol that I have been singing all week as I’ve been preparing this talk, it’s quite old so some of the words aren’t exactly how we’d talk nowadays, but it’s amazing! – some of the words go like this:

Christ by highest heaven adored  
Christ the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold Him come  
Offspring of a Virgin's womb  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
Hail the incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with man to dwell  
Jesus, our Emmanuel  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings  
Risen with healing in His wings  
Mild He lays His glory by  
Born that man no more may die  
Born to raise the sons of earth  
Born to give them second birth  
Hark! The herald angels sing  
"Glory to the newborn King!"

So the Bible teaches us that Jesus is God the Creator, Eternal; and He was born of a virgin. And it announces the birth of Jesus by giving Him the title Immanuel, which means “God with us.”

- Immanuel: God with us

The Jews had just about got their heads around the idea of God living amongst them – in the Temple, although they found the idea mind-blowing. When Solomon had finished building the first Temple and was dedicating it, he said this:

“But will God really dwell on earth with men? The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! (2 Chronicles 6:18)

Someone told me recently that the well-known Atheist Richard Dawkins has said recently that he now believes that Jesus was a historical figure – he believes in the Man; but he can’t get past the idea of the Creator God bothering to come and dwell amongst humans. (I couldn’t find the exact quote, so am going on what someone else told me)

In a way, he is not too far away from understanding the Greatness of God and the Mystery of why He would humble Himself ***this much***.

And it would be utter pride and conceit from us humans to think that God would do this...except it is God who did it and has revealed this mystery through the Bible.

God chose the Name “Immanuel” for His Son – meaning God with us.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Literally in the original Greek version of the Bible, it says:

And the Word of God was born. And the Word flesh became and **tabernacled** among us, and we beheld the glory of Him, glory as of an only begotten from a father, full of grace and truth.

Obviously this is looking back to the Story of Moses and the Israelites in the Desert, where they made the Tabernacle – the Tent where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and where God’s Most Holy Place touched Earth.

The Tent was always pitched right in the centre of the Israelites as they camped.

So Jesus, in a fully human “tent” – His body, pitched His Tent, lived, amongst us – and John, writing this, got to see Him and know Him and was overwhelmed by the fact that Jesus was God in the midst of; amongst; rubbing shoulders with; dwelling with us!

And as He lived amongst us, He was a fully human Man

- **Fully Human**

He had emotions – He wept when His friend died; he expressed anger; he knew joy.

He had human limitations – He felt hunger; He got tired; He felt (and overcame) fear; There was a point when He lacked the strength to carry His own Cross.

He was tempted (although He never sinned)

He ate, drank, slept, got dirty feet, people touched Him, He bled, He died.

In Colossians it says this:

But now he has reconciled you by **Christ’s physical body** through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation (Colossians 1:22)

He had a physical, human body.

- **But He was also Fully God.**

John announces Him like this:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (v.1-3)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (v.14)

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (v.16-18)

This is John introducing Jesus as God the Son!

And Jesus identified Himself as the same:

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58)

And He did miracles that were signs pointing to who He is and said this:

Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." (John 10:37-38)

Resurrection

What does this mean for us?

**High Priest & Mediator → understands us**

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:14-15)

**Perfect revelation of God & demonstration of how much God wants to be known**

No other faith makes this claim – in every other faith god is unknowable and transcendent.

And God is.

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (John 1:18)

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

<sup>8</sup> Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (John 14:6-9)

Not because we have been holy enough, but because He took the initiative.

In the Incarnation, God came to make Himself knowable to people, without losing any of His "Godness".

Can we just know God at a distance because of His Holiness? No – God the Son has come near to us.

## Perfect Sacrifice

## Second Adam