

## **TTS Foundations 2023/24:** **[S7] “Eternally Begotten of the Father” (P1/2)**

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## [1] Introducing the Doctrine of the Incarnation

As we've seen, Jesus' frames his own vocation and ministry using familiar titles and themes – but **it's never as simple as it appears.**

- Jesus frames himself as a Mosaic prophet, *but there's more to it.*
- Jesus comes as a Bridegroom to a Bride, *but there's more to it.*
- Jesus presents as the prophetic Shepherd, *but there's more to it.*
- Jesus describes himself as the Son of God + the Son of Man, *but there's more to it.*

### In this, the second of three sessions on Christology – a great mystery.

"Eternally begotten of the Father – God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man."

### [1A] Defining the Incarnation

- **Our focus this evening? The doctrine of the Incarnation.**
  - **DISCUSS:** What do we know about this?
    - The word itself derives from Latin – *In* (in) + *Carō* (the flesh). *Incarṅare* (to embody something; to make into flesh).
  - Let's define our terms, right from the beginning:
    - *The doctrine of the Incarnation refers to the second person of the Trinity (the eternal Son of God) adding to himself a human nature and entering his own creation, making himself known as Jesus of Nazareth.*
- **For most Christians, this doctrine is simple orthodoxy; something assumed and mentioned regularly.**
  - At Christmas:
    - "God of God, light of light / Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb / Very God, begotten, not created" [O Come All Ye Faithful]
    - "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see / Hail the Incarnate Deity" [Hark the Herald Angels Sing]
  - In Church:
    - *In Hymns:* e.g. "My life is hid with Christ on high, with Christ my Saviour and my God" [Before the Throne] / "Tis mystery all the Immortal dies" [And Can It Be] / "From heaven you came helpless babe, entered our world your glory veiled" [GK's Servant King]
    - *In Sermons:* "100% God, 100% man"
    - *Faith Statements:* an essential, 'closed hand' doctrine.
  - Even pop culture:
    - E.g. "This holiday is about humanity" / "You know, I thought it was about being born half-God, or something" [Rick + Morty]

**[1B] On the State of this Doctrine Today**

- **All this is good and well – until we remember two things.**
  - FIRST: the Church doesn’t understand this doctrine as well as she thinks she does.
    - Remember Ligonier’s *State of Theology* 2018 poll of UK evangelicals? (93% believe in the Trinity, but 74% - Jesus is “first + greatest of God’s creations”.)
  - SECOND: the enemies of the Gospel know what’s at stake here – hence they go for this doctrine as for the jugular.
    - Re: Islam / JWs / Bahai / Jews.
    - “There is a direct line of logical entailment from the premise that Jesus was God... to the conclusion that Christianity, and Christianity alone, was founded by God in person; and from all this to the conclusion that God must want all human children to be related to Him through this religion which He has Himself founded for us” [Hick, 1982, *God Has Many Names*]
- **Of all the doctrines of Christianity, this one cannot just be assumed – it confronts us, and it demands an answer.**
  - Indeed, over-familiarity is our greatest challenge here.
    - “But precisely this is the calamity, and for many an age has been the calamity in Christendom – namely, that Christ is neither the one nor the other, neither the person he was when he lived on earth nor the one he will be at his second coming... As this gradually became wisdom, all the vitality and energy was distilled out of Christianity; the paradox was slackened, one became a Christian without noticing it and without detecting the slightest possibility of offense. Christ’s teaching was taken, turned, and scaled down... Everything became as simple as pulling on one’s socks” [Kierkegaard – *The Halt*]

**“Come on, Nathan; you’re exaggerating. It’s not that important!”**

The Church spent five centuries in stubborn vigil – guarding the manger as the throne of God, defending the God-child from all-comers.

Indeed, the words of OCAYF were *literally* fought over – the NC is perhaps the single greatest achievement of the early Church.

## [2] The Doctrine of the Incarnation – OT Background

NEXT TIME: we will tell the story of the early Church.

TODAY: we're asking two questions, [a] how is the doctrine of the Incarnation taught in Scripture? And [b] why does it matter?

### [2A] The Disciples and the Shema

- **To get a sense of the task before us, consider the disciples – born and raised as faithful, religious Jews.**
  - **LOOK:** Deut 6:4-9
    - Daily prayer – morning and night.
    - Bookends life itself – re: Rabbi Akiva (who recited the Shema whilst being executed) + Roi Klein (a modern Israeli soldier who threw himself on an enemy grenade, citing the Shema).
    - Definitive of Israelite religion – against all others.
- **AND YET – what were they saying at the end of their lives?**
  - **LOOK:** 2 Pet 1:1 + 1 Cor 8:6
    - What on earth has happened?!
- **Jesus must have been like a nuclear explosion!**
  - Again, familiarity is our enemy here.
    - Difficult to feel the enormity of what was happening.
    - **LOOK:** Luke 2:17-18; 33; 47 – they were *amazed*.

### [2B] Christ's Presence in the Story of the OT

- **So, where shall we begin to understand this doctrine?**
  - **LOOK:** Matt 1:21-22 / Matt 8:16-17 / Luke 22:37.
    - **DISCUSS:** What do you notice about all these texts?
      - *"This was to fulfil..."*
- **We stumble upon this eerie consensus amongst first Xians.**
  - A reminder that the Bible can be strange sometimes!
    - Adam as a 'type' of Christ [Rom 5:12-15]
    - David spoke concerning Jesus in the Psalms [Acts 2:25ff – cf. Matt 22:43]
    - Moses and the Israelites drank from the 'spiritual rock', that is, Christ [1 Cor 10:1-5]
    - Moses chose to suffer for the Christ [Heb 11:26]
- **In other words – Christ was somehow present in the story of the patriarchs, in the ebbs & flow of sacred Israelite history.**
  - Re: Moberly + Stained Glass Window.
    - The disciples could finally see what previously they beheld, as through a glass darkly. (→→)
    - And what could they now see? *The promise and nature of Christ running throughout all the OT.*
- **BUT – where did they even get this idea from?**
  - **LOOK:** John 8:48-59 – **DISCUSS:** What strikes you here?
    - [1] Jesus is placing *himself* within the story of the patriarchs.
    - [2] Note the crowd's reaction – he clearly isn't saying something mundane! (E.g. pre-existent angel, mere figure of speech, etc.)
    - [3] Why do they react this way? *I AM* (more later!)

**KEY QUESTION:** Was Jesus’ teaching totally unprepared for?

The OT laid two important foundations.

**[2C] The OT’s ‘Ambiguous Monotheism’**

- **The LORD God is One – but the exact way in which the LORD God is one is at times mysterious and exciting.**
  - **LOOK:** Prov 8:22-31 – the role of Wisdom.
    - “With you is Wisdom, who knows your works and was present when you made the world” [Wisdom 9:9] / “Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by” [Sirach 51:26]
- **Contra Islamic / Jewish apologists – there’s much more going on in the OT than simplistic unitarianism.**
  - The OT prepares the way for thinking of God ‘with us’.
    - There Let’s look at a handful of examples.
  - Some instances will be well-known to us:
    - E.g. Gen 32:22-31 (Jacob’s wrestler) / Josh 5:13-15 (the warrior of the LORD).
  - Some are mysterious:
    - **LOOK:** Dan 3:24-26 / Ezek 8:1-2
  - Some deserve closer inspection:
    - **LOOK:** Gen 18:1-8 – the three angels.
    - [a] The framing of the narrator – Gen 18:1.
    - [b] Abraham’s reaction – Gen 18:2.
    - [c] The divine name – Gen 18:22ff, one stays w/Ab...
- **Christophany – the “it couldn’t be” moment!**
  - NOTE: they’re not necessarily ‘doctrine proper’.
    - BUT – received as gift & treasure by ancient Xians.<sup>1</sup>

**[2D] Second Temple Expectation – God Is Coming**

- **In addition to these mysterious ‘encounters with God’, the OT seems to prepare the way for God’s own appearance.**
  - In particular, Isa / Jer / Ezek / Dan – but esp Isaiah.
    - The ‘Fifth Gospel’ [John Sawyer].
    - “He should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet because he describes all the mysteries of Christ and the Church so clearly that you would think he is composing a history of what has already happened rather than prophesying about what is to come” [Jerome, *Prologue to Isaiah*]
- **Something’s coming – “I am about do a new thing...” [Isa 43:19]**
  - **LOOK:** Isa 2:2-4
    - The scene is set – God is about to act. In what way?
  - **LOOK:** Isa 7:10-14
    - God is going to act by sending an Immanuel child.
  - **LOOK:** Isa 30:19-20
    - Israel’s Teacher God won’t hide himself forever.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Justin Martyr in *Dialogue With Trypho* LXI, Origen in *De Principiis*, etc.

- *“No longer shall they teach each other... for they shall all know me” [Jer 31:34]*
- **LOOK:** Isa 31:4-5
  - Indeed, God’s rescue will come by his *own* hands.
- **LOOK:** Isa 40
  - VV1-2: So, comfort God’s people – why?
  - VV3-4: B/c God is coming – prepare the highways!
  - VV5: All the people shall see it!
- **LISTEN:**
  - *“For I know their works and their thoughts, and **I am coming** to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see my glory, and I will set a sign among them” [Isa 66:18-19]*

Then we come back to the NT, there’s excitement + anticipation again!

- **LOOK:** Matt 2:1-12 – What do the Magi do?
  - They **worship!** *Proskuneo* – re: Matt 4.
- **LOOK:** Isa 60:1-6 + Micah 5:2-4
  - Matthew builds his nativity narrative around this same prophetic expectation – **framing Christ’s birth as the glorious appearance of God Himself!**
    - “He comes without pomp, without violence, without money, without sword and muskets. He disregards the great and mighty cities, Jerusalem the most holy, Rome the most powerful, and others of the king, and chooses for his birthplace the poor and lowly Bethlehem, so that one might judge, from the very place of his birth, what a Governor he would be: poor and mean before the world, but rich in spirit and all heavenly gifts” [Luther – Festival of the Epiphany House Postil on Matt 2:1-12, Second Part]

### [3] The Doctrine of the Incarnation – NT Teaching

“O, that you would rend the heavens and come down...” [Isa 64:1]

This was the expectation – and when Jesus begins his ministry, he does three amazing things.

#### [3A] He alludes to (and imitates!) this prophetic expectation.

- “He will raise a signal for a nation far away, and whistle for a people at the ends of the earth” [Isa 5:26 – cf. 43:6]
  - →→ “Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth” [Mk 13:27]
- “The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind” [Isa 17:13 – cf. Ps 107:28-29]
  - →→ “He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be Still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm” [Mk 4:39]
- “A pleasant vineyard, sing about it! I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it. ... If it gives me thorns and briers, I will march to battle against it. I will burn it up” [Isa 27:1-4]
  - →→ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ... Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” [John 15:1+6]
- “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD ... I will bring to my holy mountain... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the LORD God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather to them besides those already gathered” [Isa 56:6-8]
  - →→ “I have sheep that do not belong to this fold...” [John 15:16]

#### [3B] He casts himself in the role of the LORD returning in glory.

- **LOOK:** Matt 5:27-28 – **Lawgiver**
- **LOOK:** Matt 25:31-33 – **Judge** (Ezek 34:17)
- **LOOK:** John 10:14-16 – **Shepherd** (cf. Ezek 34:11-12)

#### [3C] He describes himself in a manner proper of the LORD alone.

- **Sometimes in subtle ways:**
  - **LOOK:** Matt 26:18 – the Teacher of Isa 30
  - **LOOK:** John 2:19-21 – the Temple (cf. Ezek 43:6-9)
- **Sometimes in shockingly explicit ways:**
  - **LOOK:** Mark 2:1-5 – the Forgiver of Sin
  - **LOOK:** Mark 14:61-64 – the Son of Man (cf. Dan 7:14ff)
- **Then we come back to John 8:58 – the I AM sayings.**
  - **DISCUSS:** What other I AM sayings do we know?
    - In John: (1) Bread of Life [6:35-48]; (2) Light of the World [8:12]; (3) the Gate [10:7]; (4) Good Shepherd [10:11ff]; (5) Resurrection + Life [11:25]; (6) Way, Truth, Life [14:6]; (7) True Vine [15:1ff].
    - Raymond Brown: some synoptic examples, too.





## [4] The Significance of the Incarnation

It is one thing establishing this doctrine from the pages of Scripture and knowing it with our minds – it must also be established and known in the heart.

Quite simply, this truth must do a work in us.  
It should elicit wonder and amazement.

### [4A] The Incarnate God of GIGAWAN

- **Let's be clear about what it is we're confessing to be true.**
  - NOT what we find in Eastern or Ancient religions.
    - I.e. the reincarnated deities of Hinduism, the enlightened ones of Buddhism, or one of the sordid visits of the Olympians.
  - **LOOK:** Job 37:1-5
    - **KEY POINT:** this is the God of GIGAWAN, and the God of GIGAWAN was in swaddling clothes.
    - At once entirely transcendent and totally unconditioned – but also completely helpless.
    - (That thing you're doing now – trying to find a way to 'fix' the paradox – *that's* the essence.)
- **This is something that has perplexed and captured the hearts of believers for two thousand years.**
  - A truth that has captured the best theological minds:
    - “[We] are lost in the deepest amazement that such a nature, pre-eminent above all others, should have divested itself of its condition of majesty and become man, and tabernacled amongst men... But of all the marvellous and mighty acts related of Him, this altogether surpasses human admiration, and is beyond the power of mortal frailness to understand or feel, how that mighty power of divine majesty, that very Word of the Father, and that very wisdom of God, in which were created all things, visible and invisible, can be believed to have existed within the limits of that man who appeared in Judea; nay, that the Wisdom of God can have entered the womb of a woman, and have been born an infant, and have uttered wailings like the cries of little children!” [Origen, c. 220sAD – *DP*, VI.1-2]
  - Often, it has been left to poets to express:
    - “The Christ child lay on Mary’s lap / His hair was like a light / O weary, weary were the world / But here is all aright [...] / The Christ-child stood at Mary’s knee / His hair was like a crown / And all the flowers looked up at him / And all the stars looked down” [Chesterton – A Christmas Carol]
    - “God, the God I love and worship, reigns in sorrow on the Tree / Broken, bleeding, but unconquered, very God of God to me. / In the life of one an outcast and a vagabond on earth / In the common things He valued, and proclaimed of priceless worth / And above all in the horror of the cruel death He died / Thou hast bid us seek Thy glory, in a criminal crucified.” [G.A. Studdert-Kennedy – The Unutterable Beauty]

- "Here the King of all the ages / Throned in light ere worlds could be / Robed in mortal flesh is dying / Crucified by sin for me / O mysterious condescending / O abandonment sublime / Very God himself is bearing / All the sufferings of time" [Stainer – *Cross of Jesus*]

#### [4B] The Incarnate Mission of God

- **By way of illustration, recall story of the bleeding woman.**
  - The bleeding woman touches Jesus.
    - He was "*immediately aware that the power had gone forth from him...*" [Mark 5:30].
  - What's my point?
    - Where the God-man makes contact, there is healing and restoration. That which he touches is beautified and dignified, even brought into its proper form.
  - This was a critical aspect of Nicene Christianity:
    - "[Let us] marvel that things divine have been revealed to us by such humble means ... **He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God.** He manifested Himself by means of a body in order that we might perceive the Mind of the unseen Father. **He endured shame from men that we might inherit immortality.** He Himself was unhurt by this, for He is impassable and incorruptible; but by His own impassability He kept and healed the suffering men on whose account He thus endured. ... [So] many are the Saviour's achievements that follow from His Incarnation, that to try to number them is like gazing at the open sea and trying to count the waves. ... [Everything] about it is marvellous, and wherever a man turns his gaze he sees the Godhead of the Word, and is smitten with awe." [Athanasius, *De Inc.* VIII.54]
- **With this in mind – what do we see the God-Man 'touch' by virtue of his Incarnation?**
  - Of course, our flesh.
    - "*He was hungry...*" [Matt 21:18] / "*I am thirsty*" [John 19:28] – re: women preparing the body.
  - Time and History.
  - Families and households.
  - Weddings and marriages.
  - Childhood and ageing.
  - Grief and loss.
  - Death and Resurrection.

"For the Creator of the world is truly the Word of God: and this is our Lord, who in the last times was made man, existing in this world, and who in an invisible manner contains all things created, and is inherent in the entire creation, since the Word of God governs and arranges all things; and therefore he came to his own in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon the tree, **that he might sum up all things in himself**" [Irenaeus – *Adv. Her.* V.XVIII.3]

**[4C] The Incarnation as the All-Surpassing Promise**

- **AND THAT'S WHEN WE SEE IT...**
  - The Incarnation wasn't an accident.
    - It was inevitable conclusion of God's eternal plan.
    - It was planned and prepared for, the whole time.
- **RECALL:** Gen 2:8 – God walks with us in the garden.
  - God's menacing, mysterious promise to Satan:
    - *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel"* [Gen 2:15]
- **LOOK:** Exo 29:45 – God's salvation plan = God With Us.
  - **LOOK:** Ezek 37:24-28

**THEN WHAT HAPPENS?**

*"Mary will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'. All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Immanuel'"* [Matt 1:21-22]

The eternal Son of God leaves the splendour of heaven.

The Creator of all things enters his own creation.

He adds to himself a human nature.

He tabernacles amongst us.

"And all the flowers looked up at him, and all the stars looked down" [Chesterton]