



# Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Incarnation—the Meaning, Not Myth, or Metaphor

Bible Reading: John 1:1-2, 11-14, 18; John 3:16-17

[Watch LIVESTREAM at 10am](#)

### SUMMARY:

Incarnation is ridiculed as an outdated myth or mere metaphor. Yet, it's an essential tenet of Christian Faith. Our salvation depends on it. John's Gospel proclaims, "The Word became flesh." 'The Word' (*Logos*) is not personified, but a person. God the eternal Son, while retaining his divine nature, assumed a human nature (via Virgin Mary) becoming *one person with two natures*. 'Bethlehem's Babe' was the pre-existing *Logos*, the Trinity's Second Person. Since '*only God can save us*,' Jesus Christ must be God. Since, '*the un-assumed is not healed*,' he must be fully human to thoroughly save us. Scripture affirms 'both poles'—Christ's Person is God's pre-existing Son (with the divine nature) "sent by the Father, came down from heaven above," as Jesus repeatedly declared. Plus, incarnation adds a 2nd 'personalized' human nature, to God's immortal Son, so he could die a human death for our salvation, enabling believers to become God's children.

## Incarnation—the Meaning, the Myth, or the Metaphor?

### A. Incarnation—the Meaning

- "In talking of the incarnation ...*I do not mean... incarnation as 'symbol,' 'myth,' or 'metaphor.'*" —Ivor Davidson
- Incarnation means "God the Son, without abandoning his divine properties, acquired a human nature, i.e., a human body, and...a human way of experiencing, thinking, willing & acting."—Richard Swinburne

### B. Incarnation—the culmination of 100-year progressive development towards 'Divinization'?

### C. Incarnation—an outdated notion?

### D. Incarnation—the Myth?

- "A myth is a story...[that's] not literally true...*That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true.*"—John Hick

- “Jesus of Nazareth... a man attested...by God with miracles, wonders, & signs that God did...through him.” (Acts 2:22)

#### E. Incarnation—the Metaphor?

#### F. The Word (*Logos*) is not personified, but a Person (1:1-2, 14)

- “The Logos...*is a person...not an abstract philosophical concept. It is not a category of religious experience. Nor is it speculative religious mythology. It is person, in-fleshed, living, historical person.*” –Robert Kysar

## Incarnation—Defined & Explained

### A. Incarnation Defined

### B. Incarnation Explained: The divine person—the Word/Son assumed a human nature, in addition to his divine nature

- “Jesus isn’t merely divine & human in some sense. He’s God the Son who has become human...to save us.”—D. Fairbairn
  - “Christ has to be who he is to do what he does to give us the kind of salvation that we have” –Donald Fairbairn
1. What is a ‘Nature’? “Nature is a ‘what’; Person is a ‘who’.”
  2. Incarnation—“The Word became flesh”—is not just taking a human body

### C. Why was Incarnation Necessary? Why must Jesus be God? Why must Jesus also be Human?

#### 1. Essentials of Incarnation:

- One Person; Two Natures: “Jesus Christ is one person possessing two distinct natures: a fully divine nature & a fully human nature...Jesus of Nazareth is therefore the God-man.”— Kenneth Samples
2. “Why Must Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, be God’s Son, one of the Trinity? (Jn. 1:1-2, 11-14, 18 CSB)
  3. Christ must be God, because “God alone can save us.” (Jn. 3:16-17)
  4. Christ must be human, because “what is not assumed is not healed”–Gregory
  5. Why must God’s Son partake of human nature? (Heb. 2:14)
  6. The Virgin Birth’ (conception)—the God-ordained Means of Incarnation (Is. 7:14; Mt. 1:23; Lk. 1:27)
  7. Incarnation is an addition—the ‘assumption’ of a human nature
  8. The Son didn’t unite with a human *person*, but with human *nature*
  9. Incarnation did not change the Son’s Person
    - “The crucial point is that he [Christ] be the same person who has always been the eternal Son of God...the Word before the incarnation & Jesus afterwards are the same person. He who once was merely God is now God & human as well, but he is still the same person [God’s Son, the 2nd Person of the Trinity].” –Donald Fairbairn
    - “The main point...is not whether Christ is 1 person with 2 natures, but who that one person is.”–Donald Fairbairn

## The Preexistence of Jesus Christ

### A. Among the 4 Gospels, John emphasizes Christ’s pre-existence

### B. Christ’s Pre-existence in time—before creation, his eternal Pre-existence (‘before all time’) (Jn. 1:1-3)

1. Christ’s Pre-existence in time (1:30; 5:58)
2. Christ’s eternal Pre-existence (1:1-3)

### C. Real, Personal Preexistence versus ‘Ideal Preexistence’ in God’s Mind & Plan (e.g. Jer. 1:5)

### D. Pre-existence *not* of Jesus’ humanity/human nature, but of God’s Son/the Word

## Jesus affirmations of his Pre-existence in the 4th Gospel, John

### A. Jesus’ affirmations of his Pre-existence

1. Jesus affirms that he was sent by God the Father (3:17; 5:23; 7:28-9; 10:36)
2. Jesus affirms that he “came down from Heaven (above)” (3:31; 6:41, 51, 58; 8:23)
3. God the Son came all the way down to save us (3:16-17)
  - “The crucial...saving truth—for us to be saved, God had to come down to save us...Who is Jesus? He is God’s eternal, beloved Son who has become human *while remaining who he already was*, in order to accomplish our salvation.” - Donald Fairbairn
4. Jesus’ consciousness of his pre-incarnate state & relations

### B. False Narrative of “progressive development” Refuted:

- Both Paul & John declare that the Pre-existent Son was sent by God the Father (Jn. 3:17; Gal. 4:4)
- C. The Logos/Son to be identified with Jesus Christ
- D. Personal continuity between the preexistent Logos & the historical Jesus
- E. Who is Jesus?
- F. God alone can save us. *Only if Christ was God the Son in person can we be saved.*
  - We're not "affirming *merely* that Christ has 2 natures united into 1 person...[We] affirm that [this] *person...is the eternal 2nd person of the Trinity, the Son of God. Only if Christ was God the Son as a person could he give us a share in his eternal, personal relationship to God the Father.*" –Donald Fairbairn

## The Incarnation of the Word, God's Son, the 2nd Person of the Trinity (1:14)

- A. The distinction between 'person' & 'nature'
  - "Person & nature answer 2 different questions. If we're aware...there's something in a room, we ask: 'What is it?' If we... it's a human being...we ask: 'Who is it?' 'What?' asks about the nature, 'Who?'...about the person."–Frank Sheed
- B. The Second of Trinity was 'expanded' by the human nature
- C. The One Person of the incarnate Christ is the Person of God the Son, the 2nd Person of the Trinity
  - "*The person who [said 'before Abraham was, I am,'] is] the person of Christ, is the Person of God the Son, [is] the 2nd Person of the Trinity.*"– Stephen Wellum
- D. In Jesus there is no human person, no human ego
- E. Yet, Jesus is fully human
- F. Natures do not act; Persons do
  - "*Classical Christology holds...that natures do not act. Persons act by means of, or through, their natures.* In the case of Christ, the *Logos* acts in & through the...human nature." –Kevin Chiarot

## Trinity in John's Prologue

- "The Gospel of John...has all the makings of a Trinitarian theology, even if it remains implicit."–Harold Attridge