

A Body You Have Prepared *for Me*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:1-3; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 1:8, 9; 5:7-9.*

Memory Text: “When He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me’” (*Hebrews 10:5, NKJV*).

About twenty-four hundred years ago, Euripides wrote *Alcestis*, in which Admetus, king of Thessaly, was fated to an early death unless he could find a substitute to die in his place. He approached his father, mother, other kin, and friends, all who refused; only his wife, Alcestis, agreed to offer herself. After her death, Admetus bemoaned her loss: “I shall wear mourning for you, O my wife, not for one year but all my days, abhorring the woman who bore me, hating my father—for they loved in words, not deeds.”

Euripides’s drama covers the theme of self-sacrifice—what it means to give of oneself for another. As Christians, we see here a faint example of the story of Jesus, who offered Himself not for one king but for a planet of unworthy beings. This week we look at Christ’s coming here in human flesh in order to offer His life for ours.

The Week at a Glance: What was Jesus prior to His incarnation? After His incarnation, was He both God and Man? How does the Bible depict His humanity? His divinity? How could He have both natures at once? How important to us are both His divinity and humanity?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 22.*

“Is the Universe Friendly?”

Even to begin to appreciate what Jesus Christ has done for us by taking upon Himself humanity, we first need to understand just who He is, where He came from, and what He was prior to His voyage into this world via the womb of Mary, His earthly mother. These themes aren't always easy to grasp, because the ideas behind them are so incredible. All we can do, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is marvel at what we can know and rejoice in the hope that this God-given knowledge offers to us.

Look up these texts: Micah 5:2, John 1:1-3, 6:62, 8:58. What do they tell us about where Jesus was and who He was prior to His coming to earth as a human being?

These texts (and others) relate a crucial theme, that of the preexistence of Jesus prior to His incarnation (His coming in human flesh). What they teach us, among other things, is that Jesus is God and existed before coming to this earth. He was not just some great man, a great teacher and spiritual guide. He was God, and as God, He existed before He became a human being. Indeed, He exists eternally. The deity of Christ is a theme that runs through the Bible. Jesus came from the Father (*John 16:28*), was one with the Father (*John 10:30*), and exists eternally with the Father (*John 1:2*). There was never a time when Jesus didn't exist; otherwise, He would be a created being, and the Bible does not teach that.

Read John 1:3. How does this verse shed light on the eternal preexistence of Jesus?

Think about what this great truth means, that Jesus, coeternal with the Father, became a human Being. Think how an understanding of this truth changes our perception, not only of ourselves but of our world, even of our whole existence. Someone once said that the crucial question facing humanity is, “Is the universe friendly?” Discuss with others how your understanding of the deity and preexistence of Christ helps answer that question.

Key Text: *Hebrews 5:7-9.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To present Jesus as the divine, eternally preexistent Son of God.
2. To encourage the class to reflect upon what Jesus' sinless humanity means personally to us.
3. To invite the class to accept Jesus as the Author of our eternal salvation.

Lesson Outline:

I. Jesus—God With Us (*Phil. 2:5-8*).

- A. Jesus was coeternal with God before He became a human being.
- B. Our culture, steeped in the scientific methods, has a difficult time accepting this fact as reasonable.
- C. Jesus, who was in very nature God, became a servant on our behalf.

II. Jesus Was Fully Human (*Luke 2:7, 52*).

- A. Jesus was born as a baby and suffered fatigue, hunger, and thirst as we do.
- B. Jesus was tempted in every respect as we are, but He did not sin.
- C. Faith enables us to accept what we cannot fully understand.

III. Jesus—the Source of Our Eternal Salvation (*Heb. 5:7-9*).

- A. Jesus needed to be both fully God and fully man in order for the plan of salvation to succeed.
- B. A true knowledge of Jesus is possible only through revelation.
- C. Jesus invites us to believe and to be saved.

Summary: Our salvation is made available through Jesus. He “emptied Himself” and took “the form of a servant” (*Phil. 2:7, RSV*). Ellen White calls this a “wondrous combination of man and God!”—*Review and Herald*, Sept. 4, 1900. He lived a sinless life on earth and gave His life to purchase our salvation. Although we cannot fully understand this mystery of God's grace, we are invited to accept it by faith and personally claim the salvation He offers.

COMMENTARY

A Body You Have Prepared for Me.

Introduction. Christ took our human nature to save us from sin. Without confusion or crossover, He became fully human and remained fully divine in His essential nature. He was simultaneously our Substitute and Example, our Sacrifice and Mediator. He stands as our Representative to redeem and restore us and to give us power to overcome Satan and sin in the great controversy between good and evil. By His incarnation He was perfectly adapted to carry out the great plan of redemption without compromise, duplicity, unfair

In the Form of God and Man

To the modern mind, the idea of Christ's preexistence and then His incarnation into human flesh are all too far-fetched to be taken seriously. These are tales that belong to a prescientific, prerational age. For a world raised on the scientific method, where truth is viewed only as that which can be understood in a lab or by scientific inquiry, the incarnation of Jesus simply is not something that *reasonable* people can still accept, because it exists outside the common scientific and modern tools of inquiry and examination. This would be fine if all truth existed only within those parameters; but because it doesn't, these methods will never bring us to the truth we really need to know. Instead, we learn these truths, because we have been told them.

Read **Philippians 2:5-8.** **What is God telling us in these verses? What do they tell us about who Jesus was and what He became in order to save us? In what ways do these texts reveal the divine and human aspect of Jesus?**

In verse 6, Paul says that Jesus was “in the form of God” but that He “emptied Himself” (vs. 7, *NASB*) and took the “form of a servant.” What’s interesting is that the word translated “form” (He was in the “*form of God*” [vs. 6], and the “*form of a servant*” [vs. 7]) comes from the same Greek word, *morphe*, which means the essential and basic characteristics of something, as opposed to merely incidental or changing characteristics. In other words, a circle might be green or red or made out of rocks; these are elements of the circle that are not essential to its being a circle, for they can all change and the circle remains a circle. In contrast, the roundness of the circle, its *morphe*, its form, can never change; it’s what it is in order to be a circle. This is what Paul is telling us here about Jesus: He was truly God, in that He had the essential characteristics of God; and then He humbled Himself and took on the essential characteristics of a human, a servant, and became fully human, as well. He was as truly God as He was truly a man.

Why is the great truth about Jesus’ divinity and humanity something that science or any other human inquiry can never teach us? What other important truths exist outside the realm of science and philosophy? What should this tell us about the limits of these disciplines in revealing to us crucial truth?

advantage, or the least lowering of the divine standard of righteousness. His coming to make complete provision for the salvation of all who accept Him in God's appointed way is the supreme gift of the ages.

I. Is the Universe Friendly?

Christ's eternal preexistence is a fundamental Bible teaching, as demonstrated in the texts that appear in Sunday's lesson. Failure to recognize Christ's coequality with the Father (*John 10:30, Phil. 2:5-11, Heb. 1:1-8*) can only stultify our concept of God's glory and of the plan of salvation.

II. In the Form of God and Man.

Much fruitless debate has swirled about the topic of Christ's humanity and divinity. When contemplating this subject, we are on holy ground. While we cannot decipher the fullness of this divine mystery, it is profitable to study the purpose of Christ's coming in so unique a nature (*see Rom. 1:3, 4; 8:1-4; Heb. 1:1-3; 2:9-14; 1 John 3:5-9*).

Christ became one with us in every vital and needful way, to open the gates of salvation. As the Second Adam, He gained victory where our first parents failed and where all have failed since. He has made it possible for us to become partakers of the divine nature and victorious over all sin and temptation through faith in His atoning blood. If we receive Him with the simplicity and humility of a little child, we will be saved (*Matt. 11:25, 18:1-3*).

III. The Humanity of Christ.

"It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49; see also p. 117.

IV. The Divinity of Christ.

"Christ had not exchanged His divinity for humanity; but He had clothed His divinity in humanity."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Oct. 29, 1895. "But although Christ's divine glory was for a time veiled and eclipsed by His assuming humanity, yet He did not cease to be God when He became man. The human did not take the place of the divine, nor the divine of the human. This is the mystery of godliness. The two expressions 'human' and 'divine' were, in Christ, closely and inseparably one, and yet they had a distinct

The Humanity of Christ

In the context of yesterday's study of Philippians 2, read the following from Ellen White: "Wondrous combination of man and God! He might have helped his human nature to withstand the inroads of disease by pouring from his divine nature vitality and undecaying vigor to the human. But he humbled himself to man's nature. He did this that the Scripture might be fulfilled; and the plan was entered into by the Son of God, knowing all the steps in his humiliation, that he must descend to make an expiation for the sins of a condemned, groaning world. What humility was this! It amazed angels. The tongue can never describe it; the imagination can not take it in. The eternal Word consented to be made flesh! God became man! It was a wonderful humility."—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 4, 1900.

Look up the following texts: Matthew 4:1,2; 8:24; 26:37; Mark 2:16; 3:5; Luke 2:7; John 4:6; 11:41; 19:28. How do they attest to the humanity of Christ?

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, however different their approaches to the life and death of Jesus, all in their own way testified to His humanity, for they depicted Him as one who ate, prayed, slept, and became thirsty, hungry, and tired. For them, His humanity never seems to be in doubt.

Yet, while testifying to His humanity, the Bible also makes it clear that Jesus never sinned, that in His human nature He never once succumbed to the temptations of the flesh and the wiles of the tempter. The epistle to the Hebrews states that Jesus "in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin" (*Heb. 4:15, NRSV*). Peter, who knew Jesus well, testified that He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (*1 Pet. 2:22*). John wrote that "in him is no sin" (*1 John 3:5*), and Paul said that Christ "knew no sin" (*2 Cor. 5:21*). Meanwhile, Christ's own words in the following verses (*John 8:29, 46; 15:10*) all reveal the fact that, though human, He never sinned.

It's not hard to understand why the humanity of Jesus is so important to us. After all, by taking upon Himself human nature, Christ linked Himself to the race in a remarkable way. Why, though, is His sinlessness so important?

individuality. Though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead was still His own.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1129.

“When Christ’s indwelling glory flashed forth, it was too intense for His pure and perfect humanity entirely to conceal.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1899.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *John 1:14, Philippians 2:6-8, Hebrews 5:7-9.*

- 1 If you have ever moved from one home to another, you know what it is like to settle into a new environment. Jesus left heaven and “made His dwelling among us” (*John 1:14, NIV*). Consider what it meant for Jesus, who was “full of grace and truth,” to live on earth. How have you allowed Him to “dwell” in your life?
- 2 One of the first wonders of nature we may discover as children is the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. What a wonderful mystery! But it pales in comparison to the transformation involved in the incarnation of Christ. Jesus, who was fully God, became fully Man. He took the “form of a servant” (*Phil. 2:7*) to meet our need. Discuss the evidences that Jesus was human (*see Matt. 8:24; Luke 2:7, 52; John 4:6*). How does His humanity make His sinless life even more profound?
- 3 Our secular world does not fully comprehend a God who would live among men, and thus it discounts His relevance to life. Discuss how the prevalence of such an attitude affects your neighbors’ understanding of Jesus. Plan some tangible, practical ways you might share Jesus with them.
- 4 A hose does not provide the water a garden needs unless it is attached to the water spigot outside the house. Paul tells us that Jesus is the “source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (*Heb. 5:9, NIV*). Why is it necessary to be connected to Jesus? Discuss why and how obedience is involved in our response to our Savior.
- 5 Jesus “has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (*Heb. 4:15, NIV*). He lived what He preached. He acts on the love He has for us. How can we have hope of following His example? Consider *Philippians 2:12, 13*. In what ways does knowing that Jesus understands our human journey make Him a more approachable Savior?

The Divinity of Christ

Read the following texts. After them, write how each one expresses the divinity of Jesus:

John 8:58

John 20:28

Hebrews 1:8, 9

While the Bible certainly makes plain the humanity of Christ, it's also clear on His divinity. The God who existed prior to His assumption of humanity remained the same God, even though now He was clothed in humanity, a concept that is, indeed, hard for us to understand.

Of course, the fact that we can't understand something hardly militates against its being true. There are all sorts of things, even in the *secular* world, that are believed to be true though hard to understand. Quantum theory teaches that subatomic particles don't really exist until someone looks at them. General relativity teaches that matter bends space and time. The very process of life itself is full of mysteries that we don't understand, even though we know life is real. In short, all around us are mysteries, things that we can't fully understand. Why, then, should we be surprised that we face them in our religion, as well? No wonder the Scriptures tell us to consider the mystery of God, even Christ (*Col. 2:2, 3*); no wonder, too, that Jesus tells us that a true knowledge of Him is possible only through revelation (*Matt. 11:25-27, 16:17*).

What other things, whether in the secular or spiritual world, do we believe that are true yet find hard, if not impossible, to understand? How should this fact (that there's much we believe that we don't understand) help us grasp, by faith, the great truth about Jesus being both God and Man? In other words, why should we not reject out of hand something that we cannot understand?

V. Author of Eternal Salvation.

We will be able to best appreciate the glories and wonders of Christ's incarnation by keeping constantly in view His purpose in adopting human nature—to save us from sin. In order to achieve this goal, He suffered intensely from Satan, who strove with all his power and cunning to thwart Christ's mission and bring it to shameful ruin. Jesus also suffered from the very ones He came to save, humans whose deeply entrenched love of sin made them recoil from the righteousness they saw in Christ and lash out to discourage and ultimately destroy Him. A body was prepared for Christ not to be shielded from trial and suffering but to shoulder the weight of the world's need. In that body He resolutely did God's will, not in His

Witnessing

Just how *do* we explain His “foreverness” to those who are beginning to learn about Him?

Quite simply, Jesus Christ has always *been*, and He will always be. His existence is without end—before the beginning—and eternal always. Yet, why is it so important for nonbelievers to accept His “existence without interruption”? Our lesson this week addresses these fundamental issues pertaining to Christ's supreme sacrifice—forsaking the pure world of heaven to take on the responsibility of ensuring salvation to all who inhabit planet Earth.

To get a better idea of the impact of Christ's transformation from eternal Lord into a humble human while still retaining His divinity, take a moment to do a quick word association exercise: Look at each word listed on the left then write down its opposite.

High _____

Best _____

First _____

Major _____

Exalted _____

This list describes Jesus' experience in transitioning from *first to last, exalted to reviled, high to low*. Only His complete humility permitted such an adjustment for the King of kings.

Jesus, for all His humanity, never sinned. Never confused for a moment right and wrong, truth and untruth. He avoided what many today find so hard to do—to separate truth from lies.

Christ's impact, manifested through you, can be profound and life enabling; touching hearts and lives on a daily basis. Never lose sight of the fact you are witnessing, consciously and unconsciously, at all times, about the preexistent One to those with whom you come in daily contact. His preexistence is actually a promise of power—for His eternal beingness means we serve One who never tires of aiding our efforts to touch lives.

Author of Eternal Salvation

Fortunately, we don't need to know all the intricacies regarding the nature of Christ in order to benefit from what He accomplished for us. God has revealed enough for us to be saved.

Read carefully Hebrews 5:7-9. How is the humanity of Christ portrayed there? In what ways does our experience parallel His? At the same time, what did He accomplish for us that we never could have accomplished for ourselves?

In reading Hebrews 5:7-9, we can see so clearly the humanity of Jesus: His flesh, His tears, His suffering, His obedience. In so many ways, this all sounds so human—a godly person suffering and struggling through the toils of life, clinging in faith and reverence to the Father. All this we see in Jesus (*read also Matt. 26:39, 27:46, Luke 22:42*).

Yet, at the same time, He is also God. As God, He originated the plan of salvation and implemented it in His human form. He is called the “author of eternal salvation” (*Heb. 5:9*). Otherwise, either as an angel or as only a good man, He never could have atoned for the sins of the world. A created being, no matter how lofty, exalted, or holy, would remain just that: a created being. Only He, God Himself, could provide what was needed in order to save the race from destruction. Thus, in His humanity He created a perfect, inseparable bond and link to us, giving us an example of faith, obedience, suffering; meanwhile, as God, He could provide the only offering that would suffice to pay for the sins of the world. In short, Christ needed to be both God and man in order for the plan of salvation to succeed.

Read again Hebrews 5:7-9. In what ways have you, in your own personal walk with the Lord, experienced some of the things expressed there? For example, how has suffering helped you learn obedience? And though the word *perfection* comes loaded with all sorts of ideas and controversies, in what ways have you experienced character changes for the good as a result of your sufferings, your prayers, and supplications? How do these verses, in their own way, reflect your own Christian experience?

own strength but in that of the Father, “by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (*Heb. 10:10; cf. Rom. 8:3, 4*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: What is your favorite kind of car, and why? (We will return to this question later in the lesson study!)

Verses for Group Focus: *Philippians 2:1-11*.

Thought Questions:

- 1 What qualities does Paul encourage in verses 1-4? Why do you think he encourages these qualities for the Philippians?
- 2 Verse 7 says that Jesus “made himself nothing” (*NIV*). The original language says, literally, that He emptied Himself. What steps do you see in verses 6-8 that describe the emptying process Jesus went through? Verses 9-11 also describe an emptying process. Who is to go through this process, and what are the steps?
- 3 Last week we studied about the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. What parallels do we find between Philippians 2:5-11 and Isaiah 53? What key characteristics of Jesus do verses 2:5-11 give us?

Application Questions:

- 1 How can we have the same attitude Jesus had (*see vs. 5*)? In what specific ways can we express this attitude?
- 2 In the end, God rewarded Jesus (*see vs. 9-11*). If we follow Jesus in emptying ourselves before the last judgment, what reward is there for us? *Mark 10:29, 30*.
- 3 What five factors does Paul use in Philippians 2:1 to motivate his readers? Discuss what each of these factors means. Which of these factors motivates you the most, and why?
- 4 How does your choice of a favorite car reveal the presence of, or the need for, the qualities Paul refers to in this passage? (Teachers: This question is quite self-revealing. If you are not comfortable leading off by answering it yourself with grace and humor, it might be best not to use it. However, if you do use it, you might find your group growing in intimacy and support of one another. Be sure to let the class know that one can answer this question only for themselves. You need to be sure no one tries to answer it for another class member.)

Further Study: “As one of us [Jesus] was to give an example of obedience. For this He took upon Himself our nature, and passed through our experiences. ‘In all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren.’ Heb. 2:17. If we had to bear anything which Jesus did not endure, then upon this point Satan would represent the power of God as insufficient for us. Therefore Jesus was ‘in all points tempted like as we are.’ Heb. 4:15. He endured every trial to which we are subject. And He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam. It was a revelation of ‘the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Rom. 16:25, R.V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”—Page 22.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why does it sometimes take suffering in order to get us to obey?
- ❷ Discuss the inherent paradox, or tension, regarding the divine-human nature of Christ. For instance, the One who upholds all things (*Heb. 1:3*) nevertheless grew in wisdom and stature (*Luke 2:52*); the One who was before Abraham (*John 8:58*) was born in a manger (*Luke 2:7*). What lessons can we learn from these points? How do they help us realize the limits of our understanding? Why is it important that we recognize these limits? In what ways is faith a recognition of the limits of knowledge? Discuss these issues in class.