

# A Body You Have Prepared *for Me*



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## 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?**

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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?**

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**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.**

## 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?**

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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?**

## 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?**

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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?**

## The Divinity of Christ

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

*John 8:58*

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*John 20:28*

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*Hebrews 1:8, 9*

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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?**

## 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?

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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?**

**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:

- 1 Why does it sometimes take suffering in order to get us to obey?
- 2 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.

## The Wind Called Them

by Sebastian Tirtirau

The San people of the Kalahari (sometimes called the Bushmen) live in the harsh semi-desert climate of southern Africa. They live off the land, hunting and gathering what they can find.

The chief of Nama Pan village on the Kalahari is a wise old man called N!kau (pronounce the ! as a click of the tongue). He is famous among the San people for his knowledge of San stories from the beginning of time. Today he enjoys telling a much more recent story, one of whispering winds and an encounter with God.

“My village was located at the base of the Aha Hills, an area where there is no water and no wildlife. Even birds do not come to Aha Hills, for there are no plants and few insects to feed them. The area is totally silent, and the people were often hungry.

“One day a soft wind blew across the hills. I felt it and knew that it was a wind from the Spirit of God. I asked the wind why he comes our way, and the wind told me that we should move from this place to a place that God has appointed for us. There we would find more food and better times. We would be happier there.

“I told the people what the wind had told me, and they agreed to move. We are the the people of the wind, and we recognize the gentle wind that comes from God. We picked up our few belongings and moved to where God had prepared a place for us. We are very happy now, because God is providing good food for us, but even more important, He has made Himself known to us through His Word.”

In 2001 Sebastian Tirtirau visited Nama Pan village. He introduced the people to Jesus, the Son of God and their Savior. Because they believe in God and His leading in their lives, they gladly accepted the news of Jesus, and every adult in the village is now an Adventist.

They were baptized in a broken down inflatable swimming pool that Tirtirau had carried on his car to the village. To nurture the new Christians, they listen to God’s Word in their own ancient language on cassette tapes.

These people realize that if they had stayed in their former isolated village in the Aha Hills, the chances are slim that they would have heard the message of the saving grace of Jesus. But today the village of Nama Pan rings with the happy sounds of beautiful people who have learned to love God and worship Him.

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