

Born of a Woman—Atonement *and the* Incarnation



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 1:18–25; 3:13–17; 4:1–11; 9:35; Mark 1:12, 13; John 1:1, 2, 14; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3.*

Memory Text: “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin” (*1 John 3:5, NIV*).

Key Thought: To show that in the person and work of Christ, God was bringing humans back to harmony with Him and with each other.

Scientists concede that no matter how much they are learning, the universe remains full of mystery. The Bible, too, is full of mystery—the greatest one being God’s work for our salvation. This week we will concentrate on a central theme of that work: the incarnation of the Son of God, possibly the greatest mystery in all the cosmos. That the Creator condescended to become a creature in a world of sin and death boggles the mind. How did that amazing event occur? Only the Godhead knows! One thing we do know, however, is that without the Incarnation there would not be forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. The incarnation of the Son of God into human flesh was an indispensable element in God’s plan for the salvation of the race.

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

Mystery of Incarnation

When told that she would bear a special child, Mary responded in wonderment. “‘How will this be . . . since I am a virgin?’” The angel then said, “‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you’” (*Luke 1:34, 35, NIV*). This Child came into our history through the creative power of the Spirit in the womb of Mary (*Matt. 1:18*). The verb *overshadow* reminds us of Exodus 40:35, where we find a description of the glory of the Lord on the cloud coming down to dwell among men in the tabernacle. The Lord was coming down in a mysterious way in order to be conceived in the womb of this woman.

The coming of Jesus into humanity is precisely about the union of the divine and the human. Although the two natures remain distinct, what took place was not simply the indwelling of the divine in the human but a *real* incarnation. That is, Christ is truly God and truly man. The Bible does not tell us what took place at the moment the two natures were united in the womb of Mary. In the Incarnation God became human, and the fullness of God dwelt in humanity. This is precisely what Paul says.

Read Colossians 2:9. What does it tell us about who Jesus is?

The point is that Jesus is fully God! Had one or several of the divine attributes been lost during the Incarnation, we would have had less than the incarnation of God. Paul states that the preincarnated Christ was “in very nature God” (*Phil. 2:6, NIV*), equal to God, but in the Incarnation He took “the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (*vs. 7, NIV*).

Though fully God, Jesus placed everything He had under the authority of the Father, but in doing that He did not divest Himself of any of His divine attributes. During the Incarnation there was a concealment of the divine in Jesus, yet Deity was always fully present. For the purpose of the atonement it was indispensable to have God in human flesh, because only God could save us.

Read Matthew 1:18–25. How many miraculous things occurred there, things that can’t be explained other than by the supernatural intervention of God? What should this tell us about just how limited we are, in and of ourselves, to understand the most important truths? Why, just because we can’t understand something, must we not automatically dismiss it as untrue?

God and Humanity Reunited

What evidence do we have that Christ was not only divine but also human? *Matt. 26:38, Luke 2:40, Gal. 4:4.*

Ancient Greek philosophy considered human flesh to be intrinsically evil, a prison for the soul. Accepting this view, some early Christians concluded that the Son of God could not have come in a material body but only seemed to have done so. The New Testament, however, makes it indisputably clear that Jesus was a real human being. He was born of a woman, grew and developed as a child, learned obedience (*Heb. 5:8*), and suffered and died (*Matt. 26:38, Luke 23:46*). The Bible also is clear that Jesus was divine, God in human flesh (*John 1:1, 2, 14; Heb. 1:3*). The reality of the union of the human and the divine in Christ is indispensable for the atonement.

Why? Because after the Fall, Adam and Eve and all of their descendants were separated from God, a separation that threatened their existence. Because it was impossible for humans by themselves to be reunited with God, the Lord took the initiative and reunited Himself with humans, and this He did with the Incarnation, when God became human. Christ became the “place” where the divine intersected the human in a permanent reunification. In the Incarnation, “divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 30, 1896. This unity was deeper than the unity that originally existed between God and humans.

How does Paul refer to Jesus (*1 Cor. 15:45*), and what does that mean?

In Jesus there was a new beginning for the human race, a “new” humanity that was united to God. He was the Creator and the Head of that new humanity; He was the new Adam from whom a new human race was coming into existence. Outside of Him there was, and still is, the old humanity, the one in fallen Adam, the one separated from God and heading to extinction (*1 Cor. 15:22*). The only hope for that humanity is the incarnated God, in whom the divine and the human were united in eternal bonds of love. Through Christ every human being who so wishes it can be brought into complete harmony with God.

Look up at the stars at night. Think about the incredible truth that the Power who created all those stars (and so much more) took upon Himself humanity and in that humanity died for your sins! How should this incredible truth change your life?

The Baptism of Jesus

Read Matthew 3:13–17. What important truths can we learn from the story of Jesus’ baptism by John?

The significance of Christ’s baptism cannot be overemphasized. First, by requesting baptism, Jesus was identifying Himself with sinners. He who was not in need of baptism requested it—not for Himself but for us, for our benefit, and by so doing He left an example for those who want to follow Him. But His baptism was more than an example; it made it possible for us to be joined to Him through our baptism and to receive the benefits of His at the hands of John.

Second, as Jesus was coming out of the water, He knelt down and prayed to the Father (*Luke 3:21, 22*). The Bible does not record the content of that prayer, but the answer given by the Father gives us an idea of its content. By declaring, “‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’ ” (*vs. 22, NIV*), God was telling Him that His prayer was heard. More so, “To every one of us they are words of hope and mercy. Through faith in the provision God has made in the behalf of man, you are accepted in the Beloved—accepted through the merits of Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, Nov. 12, 1894.

What great hope can you find for yourself in those words by Ellen White?

Third, the Godhead was involved and present in the baptism of Jesus. The Father’s voice was heard from heaven, and the Holy Spirit made Himself visible through the symbol of a dove. God’s love was flowing down to His Son as a member of the human race, accepting Him as its Representative. Humans were no longer separated from the love of God, because in Christ a channel through which divine love could reach them was found.

What is the essential message to us from today’s lesson about how we, though fallen, can have acceptance with God? Is that acceptance found in ourselves, in how well we perform or keep the commandments, or in Jesus? Why must we always keep that answer before us, especially on “bad days”?

Temptations of Jesus

Summarize the three temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness after His baptism. *Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13.*

The temptations of Jesus reveal some contrasting parallels with those of Adam and Eve. First, the fact that Adam was tempted while in the Garden of Eden, in an environment free from the corrupting reality of sin; Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, in an environment under the influence of evil powers. Second, Adam had an abundance of food, while Jesus was deprived of food. Third, Adam was not fasting; Jesus was. Fourth, both Adam and Jesus were tempted to satisfy their desire for food apart from the will of God; Adam accepted the food, Jesus didn't. Fifth, Adam was tempted to question what God had said and showed a lack of trust in God's word. Jesus also was tempted to question the trustworthiness of the word of God, but He rejected the temptation. Sixth, Adam openly went against the Lord and joined Satan in his rebellion against God and His government. Jesus was offered the kingdoms of this world if He would only worship and join Satan in his struggle against the kingdom of God. Jesus, however, remained loyal to the Father.

By overcoming Satan on the fundamental points in which Adam failed, Jesus was undoing Adam's failure and making His (Christ's) victory available to those who will put their faith in Him. The new humanity will not receive from the Head of the race a spirit of disobedience and rebellion, as the old humanity did from Adam, but one of humble submission to God's will.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. What does Jesus' victory over all sin mean for us and for the process of atonement?

That deep bond of unity between the Father and the Son was not broken through the temptations and attacks that Satan launched against the Son of God. He overcame every one and remained totally dependent on the Father. No other human being has been, is, or will be exactly like Him. He was by nature and by personal election sinless. It is there that we find the very ground of His capacity to save us. The Sinless One became sin for us in order for us to receive by faith the righteousness that was not ours but His. The perfect sacrificial Lamb took on Himself our sin in order to restore us to unity and harmony with the Creator.

Ministry of Healing

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (*Matt. 9:35*).

Through His healing ministry Jesus was overcoming the incursion of death in the fabric of suffering humanity. His future victory over the very kingdom of death was anticipated in His daily healing works. The power of death that came into the world from sin was being defeated. This was particularly illustrated in cases of the various resurrections, including the resurrection of one who had been dead for four days (*Mark 5:35–43, Luke 7:11–17, John 11:38–44*).

His miracles also served to break down social barriers. The leper felt accepted by Him (*Mark 1:41*), the Samaritan came back to give thanks (*Luke 17:11–17*), and the Syro-Phoenician woman’s daughter was healed (*Mark 7:29, 30*). The alienation of humans from each other created by sin was being broken down through Jesus’ reconciling ministry. He was creating a new humanity at peace with one another.

But His miracles also served to restore people to harmony and communion with the Father. Very often His victory over the powers of death led people to believe in Him (*John 4:53; 20:30, 31*).

Which other methods did Jesus use in His ministry to restore harmony in society and with God? *Mark 2:15–17, John 4:39–42.*

The gulf of separation between God and humans was bridged not only in His own person—the human and divine Savior—but also through the power of Christ’s words of salvation. To those who received Him, “he gave the right to become children of God” (*John 1:12, NIV*). These individuals were born not of the will of the flesh but of God (*vs. 13*). Jesus Himself was gathering a new humanity reconciled to God, in and through Him. He sought to reconcile humans, not only with God but also with one another, and He did this by eating with them in open fellowship. Through these encounters Jesus was proclaiming that God accepts any person who comes to Him and that His followers should do likewise.

Take a look at your relationships and ask yourself, In what daily, practical ways is my reconciliation with God reflected in the way I treat and accept others?

Further Study: Purpose of the Incarnation: “Christ in counsel with His Father laid out the plan for His life on earth. . . . He clothed His divinity with the garb of humanity, that He might stand at the head of the human family, His humanity mingled with the humanity of the race fallen because of Adam’s disobedience.”—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work*, p. 85.

“Christ’s work was to reconcile man to God through His human nature, and God to man through His divine nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Confrontation*, p. 38.

Prayer at Baptism: “He received baptism at the hands of John, and in coming up out of the water he bowed upon Jordan’s banks, and offered up a prayer to Heaven. . . . Jesus was accepted of Heaven as a representative of the human race. With all our sin and weakness, we are not cast aside as worthless; we are accepted in the Beloved; for heaven has been opened to our petitions through the Son of God. The gates are ajar, and the light of heaven will shine upon all those whom Jesus came to save, if they will but come within the circle of the beams of the Sun of Righteousness; for ample provision has been made for the salvation of every soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, July 28, 1890.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Give as many possible answers as you can to this question: Why was the Incarnation indispensable in Christ’s work of atonement?
- ❷ Why is the humanity of Christ so important to us? Why is the divinity of Christ so important to us, as well?
- ❸ As we saw in Sunday’s lesson, there are many mysteries about the incarnation of Jesus. What other mysteries are there, such as in nature, and why should these other mysteries help us understand what it means to live by faith?
- ❹ What are ways that we can, as a church, as the body of Christ, follow Christ’s healing and reconciliation ministry? What does your local church do? What more can and should it do? Most important, how can you be more involved?

Summary: In the incarnation of Jesus we witness the only human Being who was born on this planet in complete and perfect union with God. Although tempted by the enemy in ways that no other human being has been or will be tempted, Jesus remained loyal to the Father and overcame where Adam failed, thus paving the way to bring salvation to all who surrender to Him in faith and obedience.

The Reluctant Student

by NELIDA ESPINOSA

I had just become an Adventist and wanted to share with my sister what I had learned. I visited my sister and her children and shared my testimony. But only my niece, Laura, wanted to know more. We studied the Bible together in the living room and invited other members of the family to join us if they wished. But they didn't respond.

Laura's brother, Sergio, was devoted to his family's church and found excuses not to join us for our Bible studies, so Laura and I prayed earnestly for the family, and especially Sergio. I knew that God could touch his heart even when I could not.

I returned home before Laura made a decision for Christ. But every day I prayed for the members of this family, committing them to God. And whenever I could, I visited to encourage them in their faith. During one of my visits I again invited Sergio to join Laura and me for our study, and this time he did. I asked him to pray for us, and he agreed. I rejoiced to see that God was working in Sergio's heart.

When Laura decided to be baptized, I invited her to come to my home church to be baptized so she could see that the Adventist Church is a large denomination. She invited Sergio to come with her, and he agreed. Laura and I knew that God was speaking to him. During the baptismal program the pastor invited those who would like to give their lives totally to God and prepare for baptism to stand. Sergio stood.

The next day as Sergio and Laura returned home, Sergio told Laura that he wished to be baptized into the Adventist Church. Laura studied the Bible with him, and a few months later Sergio was baptized. The next time I visited, I learned that Sergio was sharing his faith with his classmates and neighbors—everyone who would listen.

Sergio was taking night classes and faced difficulties with one teacher who refused to excuse him from class. Sergio knew he couldn't convince this teacher, so he explained the Sabbath to the head teacher, who agreed to help him. He arranged for Sergio to change his exams that fell on Friday night, and Sergio completed his studies.

Sergio loved playing soccer and was invited to play for a major team in Argentina. But he knew that God had other plans for his life. He turned down the lucrative offer that could have paid his way through college and worked instead to pay his tuition while attending the Adventist seminary to become a pastor.

Because of Sergio's and Laura's commitment to God, other members of their family have given their lives to Christ. Today Sergio is a pastor leading others to Christ.

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