A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)
Lesson 6.3 – The Doctrine of Jesus, Son of God, Messiah (Christology)

He Who Has Always Been God Became Man – Incarnation

Since Jesus is God, He is eternal, just as His Father is eternal. Therefore, we must say that Jesus as God was begotten of the Father from eternity. There was no time when there was no Jesus as Son of God. But there was a definite beginning to Jesus as human – as a man. There was no human Jesus until He was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. About nine months later the Son of God was born of the virgin Mary. Thus, He who has always been God became man at a definite point of time in history and is now the God-man, Jesus, the Christ. He was always God, but He became human. His becoming human is called the incarnation.

All of the facts of the above paragraph are spelled out clearly in Scripture. The incarnation is most clearly taught in the first chapter of John's Gospel. We are introduced to the eternal Son of God in the first verses: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God"** (John 1:1-2). Then later in the chapter John tell us: **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"** (John 1:14). The Word's becoming flesh is the incarnation.

The details of Jesus' incarnation are presented in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The first chapter of Luke tells us that God sent His angel Gabriel to tell the virgin girl Mary of Nazareth that she was God's choice to be the mother of the Son of God: **"You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest"** (Luke 1:31-32). Moreover, Gabriel told her that this boy would not have a human father. Instead He would have a unique conception: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God… For with God nothing will be impossible"** (Luke 1:35,37).

Even though Jesus had no human father, God provided a husband for Mary in the person of Joseph, a carpenter to whom Mary had been promised through a betrothal. But the marriage was not consummated by a sexual union until after Jesus was born. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that when Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant even though he had not been with her, he **"was minded to put her away secretly"** (Matthew 1:19). He felt he could not take her as his wife since this child to be born of her was obviously not his. But God revealed to him the truth about this baby's conception and instructed him in a dream: **"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:20-21).

Thus, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary were both present. The actual birth of Jesus is described in very few words: **"So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn"** (Luke 2:6-7). He who had always been God was now also fully human – true God and true man in one person. The birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies, such as Genesis 3:15, Genesis 22:18, Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7, Micah 5:2, and Jeremiah 23:5.

There are two genealogies, or lists of Jesus' human ancestors: one in the Gospels of Matthew and one in the Gospel of Luke. These two differ from each other. The most likely explanation is that Matthew presents Jesus' legal ancestry through Joseph, while Luke traces Jesus' physical ancestry through His mother Mary. Matthew begins with Abraham and ends with Joseph, Jesus' legal father. Joseph was the legal descendant of King David. Luke, on the other hand, goes all the way back to God and Adam and traces Jesus' physical ancestry through His mother Mary. Mary was also of the family of David. It seems the best way to understand Luke 3:23 is as follows: **"Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, (being as was supposed the son of Joseph)** [but in reality] **the son of Heli."** In other words, Jesus was not the physical son of Joseph, but He was the physical son of Heli, who was the father of Mary, not the father of Joseph. The father of Joseph was Jacob, according to Matthew 1:16. We can rightly say that the humanity of Jesus was created by God when God created Adam in the beginning, because all of humanity was created when God created Adam, the father of us all. And remember: Eve also came from Adam.

There are other references to Jesus' incarnation in the writings of the apostles. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that God's Son Jesus Christ our Lord **"was born of the seed of David according to the flesh"** (Romans 1:3). Likewise, in speaking of the Israelites, Paul says: **"From whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God"** (Romans 9:5). Thus, Jesus is eternal God, but His humanity came from God through the Israelites. Jesus was born a Jew – an Israelite.

In writing to the Galatian Christians, Paul summed up the miracle of the incarnation in these few words: **"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman"** (Galatians 4:4). The letter to the Hebrews tells us not only that the Son of God became true man, but also gives the reason for He became man, namely, that He might die and thus defeat Satan: **"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"** (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Since Jesus was a true human being, He experienced in His being the same things we experience. But there was one major difference between Jesus and us. The apostle John wrote: **"He is pure… In Him there is no sin"** (1 John 3:3, 5). The apostle Peter wrote that Jesus **"committed no sin"** (1 Peter 2:22), and that we were redeemed **"with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"** (1 Peter 1:19). At the same time, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus was tempted to sin but did not sin: **"In that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (**Hebrews 2:18). **"We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"** (Hebrews 4:15). So, Jesus **"is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"** (Hebrews 7:26).

When Jesus was tempted by Satan at the beginning of His ministry, He fended off all these temptations by using the weapons God provides in His Word (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). He was the **"Holy One"** (Luke 1:35) already in Mary's womb, and He remained the Holy One throughout His life and death. He challenged His enemies to find Him guilty of sin, but they were unable to do so. Jesus asked them, **"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"** (John 8:46), but no one came forward to convict Him. Even when He was on trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin and before Pontius Pilate, no one came forward to charge Him with any real sin. He remained untainted by sin throughout His life. When He suffered and died, this was not because of His own sin, but because our sin was transferred to Him. **"For He** (God) **made Him** (Jesus) **to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

There have been false teachers who deny that Jesus is true God. There have been false teachers who deny that Jesus is true man. In the early days of the church, the Gnostics taught that physical matter is evil, and that therefore, the holy God could not become human or share His being in any way with the evil matter of humanity. The Docetists taught that the body of Jesus was not real, but only a phantom, and they taught that certainly anyone who is truly God could not possibly suffer or die.

Questions

1. What does the term incarnation mean?
2. In what sense can we say that Jesus had no beginning?
3. In what sense can we say that Jesus was of a certain age?
4. What did Gabriel tell Mary about the baby that was to be born of her?
5. What did the angel tell Joseph about Mary's baby?
6. What was Joseph's role in the birth of Jesus?
7. Why is it important to teach that Jesus was born of a virgin?
8. What is the difference between Jesus' genealogies in Matthew and Luke?
9. Why is it important to teach that Jesus was born as a Jew?
10. Why did Jesus have to become human in order to save us?
11. What was the main way that Jesus' life on earth was different from ours?
12. What did Satan attempt to do at the beginning of Jesus' ministry?
13. If Jesus had no sin, why did He die?