



The Incarnation of Jesus

The Incarnation is one of the central truths of the Catholic faith. But it is also one that is easy to take for granted. This is especially true for those who have been Catholics their entire lives, taught since they were little that Jesus is both God and man.

When we really pause to think about it, we realize how incredibly deep and beautiful the teaching on the Incarnation really is. God became man. The infinite, all-powerful, immortal God became one of us! Christ is at the same time both fully human without losing his divinity and fully divine without losing his humanity. What an incredible thought! The Incarnation is a mystery that we cannot possibly understand fully. However, it is a teaching that is of utmost importance to the Catholic faith.

In the early centuries of the Church, several heresies regarding the nature of Christ attracted many followers. Among the more prominent heresies were Arianism, which denied the divinity of Christ and held him to be simply a great man, and Docetism, which denied Christ's humanity and claimed that his physical body and crucifixion were merely an illusion. The Church fought these heresies by proclaiming the truth, which was affirmed by the early bishops, saints, and Church councils. This solidified truth has been clearly stated in the Catechism: The Incarnation "does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man" (CCC 464).

This understanding of the two natures of Christ is essential to the belief that our salvation comes from his Passion and Resurrection. If Christ were not fully human, he could not have offered his sacrifice on the Cross on behalf of humanity. If he were not divine, his sacrifice could not have been perfect. Only in light of the proper understanding of Christ as both fully man and fully God does the Crucifixion really become the "acceptable sacrifice" that can save us from our sin.

While these ideas are probably not new to most Catholics, they are nevertheless good to remember as we celebrate Christ's Incarnation. Christ shared fully in our humanity, and he provides a model for us to follow in every situation of our lives. Furthermore, he understands what we are going through, no matter how difficult. The Scriptures record Jesus in times of hunger, thirst, exhaustion, joy, grief and anger. Christ knew the full range of the human experience. We are reminded that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

This knowledge should bring us comfort as we remember that we are never alone. Not only did Christ show us the way to heaven, he offers us the strength to follow him along that path. He comes down to us in our weakened human state and lifts us up with his grace. What a truly amazing gift! As you prepare for Christmas, take some time to reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation and thank God for his great love.