

Of the Incarnation of Christ.

by John Gill

John Gill's sermon on the Incarnation of Christ explores its profound significance and theological implications within the Christian faith.

Scripture: Luke 2:10, John 1:14

Topics: "Divine Revelation", "Incarnation of Christ"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the profound mystery and significance of the incarnation of Christ, asserting that it is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. He explains that the eternal Son of God took on human flesh, born of a virgin, to fulfill God's promise of salvation and to reconcile humanity to Himself. Gill highlights that this act was not only a divine revelation but also a necessary condition for Christ to serve as the perfect mediator and sacrifice for sin. The sermon underscores the importance of recognizing Jesus as both fully God and fully man, a truth essential for true Christian belief. Through this incarnation, God demonstrated His love and grace towards humanity, making it possible for believers to receive eternal life.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 5--Chapter 1

OF THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

Having treated, in the preceding Book, of the exhibition of the covenant of grace, both under the Old and New Testament dispensations, and of the law and gospel, as held forth in both; and of the latter only in a general way; I shall now proceed to consider, the particular, special, and important doctrines of the gospel, which express the grace of Christ, and the blessings of grace by him; and shall begin with the incarnation of the Son of God. This is a very considerable part of the glad tidings of the gospel, and which give it that name: when the angels related to the shepherds the birth of Christ, he said unto them; "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy", &c. (Luke 2:10,11).

The whole gospel is a mystery; the various doctrines of it are the mysteries of the kingdom; the knowledge of which is given to some, and not to others; it is the mystery of godliness, and, without controversy, great; and this stands the first and principal article of it; "God manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). This is the basis of the Christian religion; a fundamental article of it; and without the belief of it no man can be a Christian;

"Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God;" born of God, and belongs to him, and is on the side of God and truth; "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God" (1 John 4:2,3).

The incarnation of Christ is a most extraordinary and amazing affair; it is wonderful indeed, that the eternal Son of God should become man; that he should be born of a pure virgin, without any concern of man in it; that this should be brought about by the power of the Holy Ghost, in a way unseen, imperceptible and unknown, signified by his overshadowing; and all this in order to effect the most wonderful work that ever was done in the world, the redemption and salvation of men: it is a most mysterious thing, incomprehensible by men, and not to be accounted for upon the principles of natural reason; and is only to be believed and embraced upon the credit of divine revelation, to which it solely belongs.

The heathens had some faint notions of it; at least say some things similar to it. The Brachmanes among the Indians, asserted, that Wistnavius, the second person of the trine-une god with them, had nine times assumed a body, and sometimes an human one; and would once more do the same again; and that he was once born of a virgin.[1] Confucius, the famous Chinese philosopher, who lived almost five hundred years before Christ, it is said,[2] foresaw that the Word would be made flesh; and foretold the year in which it would be; and which was the very year in which Christ was born: but this seems to savour too much of the tale of a Christian in later times.

However, several of the deities and heroes of the heathens, Greeks and Romans, are represented as having no father.[3] Now whatever notion the heathens had of an incarnate God, or of a divine Person born of a virgin, in whatsoever manner expressed; this was not owing to any discoveries made by the light of nature, but what was traditionally handed down to them, and was the broken remains of a revelation their ancestors were acquainted with. Otherwise the incarnation of the Son of God, is a doctrine of pure revelation; in treating of which I shall consider, 1.

First, The subject of the incarnation, or the divine Person that became incarnate. The evangelist John says it was the Word, the essential Word of God; "The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). And therefore not the Father; for he is distinguished from the "Word", in the order of the Trinity (1 John 5:7). And, he is said to be the "Word with God;" that is, with God the Father; and therefore must be distinct from him (Rev. 19:13; Acts 20:32; John 1:1). Besides, the Father never so much as appeared in an human form; and much less took real flesh; nay, never was seen in any shape by the Jews (John 5:37).

And though their ancestor heard a voice, and a terrible one at Sinai, they saw no similitude (Deut. 4:12). And wherever we read of any visible appearance of a divine Person in the Old Testament, it is always to be understood, not of the first, but of the second Person. And it may be further observed, that the Father prepared a body, an human nature in his purpose, council and covenant, for another, and not for himself, even for his Son, as he acknowledges; "A body hast thou prepared me;" (Heb. 10:5).

To which may be added, that that divine Person who came in the flesh, or became incarnate, is always distinguished from the Father, as being sent by him; "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3). And again; "God sent forth his Son made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4), that is, God the Father, in both passages; as appears from the relation of the Person to him, sent in the flesh, his Son. Once more, if the Father had been incarnate, he must have suffered and died; for that is the end of the incarnation, that the Person incarnate, might obey, suffer, and die, in the room of sinners; so Christ suffered in the flesh, and was put to death in the flesh.

There were a set of men in ancient times, who embraced the Sabellian folly, and were called Patripassians, because they held that the Father suffered; and, indeed, if there is but one Person in the Deity, and Father, Son, and Spirit are only so many names and manifestations of that one Person; then it must be equally true of the Father as of the Son, that he became incarnate, obeyed, suffered, and died. But this notion continued not long, but was soon rejected, as it must be by all that read their Bible with any care.

Nor is it the Holy Spirit that became incarnate, for the same reasons that the Father cannot be thought to be so: and besides, he had a peculiar hand, and a special agency, in the formation of the human nature, and in its conception and birth: when the Virgin hesitated about what was told her by the angel, she was assured by him, that the Holy Ghost should come upon her, and the power of the Highest should overshadow her; and accordingly the birth of Christ was on this wise, when Joseph and Mary were espoused, before they came together, "she was found with child of the Holy Ghost;" and Joseph was told, in order to encourage him to take her to wife, that what was "conceived in her, was of the Holy Ghost;" and therefore he himself was not incarnate; (see Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:18,20).

It remains, that it is the second Person, the Son of God, who is meant by "the Word that was made flesh", or became incarnate; and, indeed, it is explained of him in the same passage; for it follows; "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father," And it is easy to observe, that the same divine Person that bears the name of the Word, in the order of the Trinity, in one place, has that of the Son in another; by which it appears they are the same; (compare 1 John 5:7 with Matthew 28:19).

When this mystery of the incarnation is expressed by the phrase, "God manifest in the flesh;" not God the Father, nor the Holy Spirit, but God the Son is meant, as it is explained (1 John 3:8), for "this purpose the Son of God was manifested;" that is, in the flesh; and as before observed, it was the Son of God that was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, and in the fulness of time was sent forth, made of a woman (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4). He, therefore, is the subject of the incarnation, or the divine Person that became incarnate.

Now the Logos, the Word and Son of God, who is made flesh or become incarnate, is not to be understood of the human soul of Christ; for this Word was "in the beginning with God;" that is, was with him from all eternity; (see Prov. 8:22-30), whereas the human soul of Christ is one of the souls that God has made; a creature, a creature of time, as all creatures are; time is an inseparable adjunct and concomitant of a creature; a creature before time, is a contradiction: besides, this Word "was" God, a divine Person, distinct from the Father, though with him, the one God; which cannot be said of the human soul.

Likewise, to it is ascribed the creation of all things; "All things were made by him;" not as an instrument, but as the efficient cause; "And without him was not anything made that was made;" and since the human soul is what is made, being a creature; if that is the Word and Son of God, it must be the maker of itself, seeing nothing that is made is made without it; which is too great an absurdity to be admitted. So the creation of all things is elsewhere ascribed to the Son of God, who therefore cannot be a creature; (see Heb. 1:1,2,10; Col. 1:16,17).

To which may be added, that the human soul of Christ is a part of the human nature assumed by him; it is included in the word "flesh", the Word, or Son of God, is said to be made, as will be shown presently; it is a part of that nature of the seed of Abraham, in distinction from the nature of angels, which the Word, or Son of God, a divine Person, took upon him, and into union with him, and therefore cannot be the assumer; the

assumer and the assumed cannot be the same, but must be distinct from each other; (see Heb. 2:14,16).

Nor by the Logos, or Word, made flesh, are we to understand the divine nature, essentially considered, or the essence of God, as common to the three divine Persons, Father, Son and Spirit; for then it would be equally true of the Father and the Spirit, that they are made flesh, or become incarnate, as of the Son; as it must needs be, if the divine nature, so considered, was incarnated; or the human nature was united to it as such: such phrases are therefore unsound, unsafe, and dangerous; as that the man Christ stands in the divine nature; and that the human nature is united to Deity: this is not the truth of things; the human nature is not united to Deity absolutely considered: but as that in a distinct mode of subsisting, is in the second Person, the Son of God; it was the Son of God, by whom God made the world, and by him speaks to men, in these last days, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; the Creator of angels, and the object of their worship and adoration; and who upholds all things by the word of his power, who partook of the same flesh and blood with the children, and has taken upon him, and assumed to him, not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham; he who was in the form of God, of the same nature with him, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, is he that took upon him the form of a servant, the nature of man in a servile state, was made in the likeness of man, and found in fashion as a man, or really became man.

I proceed, 2. Secondly, To observe, in what sense the Word, or Son of God, was "made flesh", became a partaker "of flesh and blood, came in the flesh", and was "manifest in the flesh": all which phrases are made use of to express his incarnation (John 1:14; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 4:2,3; 1 Tim. 3:16), and signify, that he who is truly God really became man, or assumed the whole human nature, as will be seen presently, into union with his divine person. Socinus is so bold as to say,[4] that if any passages of scripture could be found, in which it is expressly said that God was made man, or put on and assumed human flesh, the words must be taken otherwise than as they sound, this being repugnant to the majesty of God.

The contrary to this will soon appear; and though this is not to be found in scripture just syllabically, the sense clearly is, as in the scriptures referred to. But there is no dealing with such a man who will talk at this rate; and who elsewhere[5] says, on another account, that the greatest force must be used with the words of the apostle Paul, rather than such a sense be admitted, which yet is obvious. It will be proper to inquire, both what is meant by flesh, and what by being made flesh. 2a.

First, What is meant by flesh, in the phrases and passages referred to. And by it is meant, not a part of the human body, as that may be distinguished from other parts, as the bones, &c. nor the whole human body, as that may be distinguished from the soul or spirit of a man; as in Matthew 26:41 but a whole individual of human nature, consisting of soul and body; as when it is said, "There shall no flesh be justified in his sight": and again, "That no flesh should glory in his presence" (Rom. 3:20; 1 Cor. 1:29) with many other passages; (see Gen. 6:12; Luke 3:6), for such acts as being justified and glorying, can never be said of the flesh or body, abstractly considered; but of the whole man, or of individuals of human nature, consisting of soul and body; and in this sense are we to understand it, when it is used of the incarnation of the Son of God, who took upon him the whole nature of man, assumed a true body and a reasonable soul, being in all things made like unto his brethren; so his flesh signifies his human nature, as distinct from the Spirit, his divine nature (Rom. 1:3,4 1; Pet. 3:18). 2a1.

He took a true body, not a mere phantom, spectre, or apparition, the appearance of a body, and not a real one; as some fancied, and that very early, even in the times of the apostle John, and afterward; and who imagined, that what Christ was, and did, and suffered, were only seeming, and in appearance, and not in

reality; and hence they were called "Docetae": and this they argued from his being sent in the "likeness" of sinful flesh; and being found in fashion as a man; and from the appearances of Christ before his coming; of which same kind they supposed his appearance was when he came.

As for the text in Romans 8:3 "likeness" there, is not to be connected with the word "flesh", but with the word "sinful;" he was sent in real flesh, but that flesh looked as if it was sinful: it might seem so to some, because he took flesh of a sinful woman, was attended with griefs and sorrows, the effects of sin; had the sins of his people imputed to him, and which he bore in his own body on the tree; all which made his flesh appear as if it was sinful, though it was not; and hindered not its being real flesh.

As to Philippians 2:7,8 the as there is not a note of similitude, but of certainty; as in Matthew 14:5 and signifies, that Christ was really a man, as John was accounted a real prophet, and not merely like one; and which is evident by his being obedient unto death, as follows: and as for the appearances of Christ in an human form, before his coming in the flesh, the Scriptures speak of; admitting they were only appearances, and not real, it does not follow, that therefore his coming in the flesh, in the fulness of time, was of the same kind; but rather the contrary follows; and since these were preludes of his incarnation, that must be real; though some of these previous appearances were not merely appearances, but realities: real bodies were formed and animated, and made use of for a time, and then laid aside; as seems to be the case of the three men that appeared to Abraham, two of which were angels, and the other the Lord, Jehovah, the Son of God; who were clothed with bodies, capable of walking and travelling, of talking and conversing, of eating and drinking in; so the man that wrestled with Jacob, who was no other than the Angel of the covenant, the promised Messiah; the body he appeared in was not a mere phantom, spectre, and apparition, but palpable flesh, that was felt and handled, and grasped, and held fast, by Jacob; and which he would not let go till he had received the blessing.

However, it is certain that Christ partook of the same flesh and blood as his children and people do; and therefore, if theirs is real, his must be so. Likewise, his body is called the body of his flesh, his fleshly body (Col. 1:22), to distinguish it from the token of his body in the supper; and from his mystical and spiritual body, the church: all his actions, and what is said of him from his birth to his death, and in and after it, show it was a true body that he assumed; he was born and brought into the world as other men are; and when born, his body grew and increased in stature, as other human bodies do: the Son of man came eating and drinking; he traveled through Judea and Galilee; he slept in the ship with his disciples; he was seen, and heard, and handled by them; he was buffeted, scourged, bruised, wounded, and crucified by men; his body, when dead, was asked of the governor by Joseph, was taken down from the cross by him, and laid in his tomb; and the same identical body, with the prints of the nails and spear in it, was raised from the dead, and seen and handled by his disciples; to whom it was demonstrated, that he had flesh and bones, a spirit has not: yea, the very infirmities that attended him, though sinless, were proofs of his body being a true and real one; such as his fatigue and weariness in travelling (John 4:6), his tears at the grave of Lazarus, and over Jerusalem; and his sweat in the garden (John 11:35; Luke 19:41; 22:44).

In short, it was through weakness of the flesh that he was crucified; which was not in appearance, but in reality. The body he assumed was mortal, as it was proper it should be, since the end of his assumption of it was to suffer death in it; but being raised from the dead, it is become immortal, and will never die more, but will remain, as the pledge and pattern of the resurrection of the bodies of the saints, which will be fashioned like to his glorious body; and which will be the object of the corporal vision of the saints after their resurrection, with joy and pleasure, to all eternity. 2a2.

Christ assumed a reasonable soul, with his true body, which make up the nature he took upon him, and are included in the flesh he was made, as has been seen; and is the flesh and blood he partook of; which is sometimes understood of an individual of human nature, as flesh is; (see Matthew 16:17; Gal. 1:16) The Arians deny that Christ has an human soul; they say, that the Logos, or the divine nature in him, such a one as it is, supplied the place of an human soul. This nature, they say, is not the same, but like to the nature of God; that it was created by him; which they ground on Proverbs 8:22 and read, "He created me;" and they make this the first and principal creature God made, and by which he created others; that it is a superangelic spirit, and is in the room of an human soul to Christ.

But Christ asserts, that he had a soul; and which, he says, was exceeding sorrowful; and which was an immaterial and immortal spirit; and which, when his body died, and was separated from it, he commended into the hands of his divine Father (Matthew 26:38; Luke 23:46). Had he not an human soul, he would not be a perfect man; and could not be called, as he is, the man Christ Jesus: the integral parts of man, and which constitute one, are soul and body; and without which he cannot be called a man; these distinguish him from other creatures: on the one hand he is distinguished from angels, immaterial and immortal spirits, with which his soul has a cognition, by having a body, or by being an embodied spirit; whereas they are incorporeal: so, on the other hand, he is distinguished from mere animals, who have bodies as well as he, by his having a rational and immortal soul: and if Christ was without one, he could not be in all things like unto us; being deficient in that which is the most excellent and most noble part of man.

But that he is possessed of an human soul, is evident from his having an human understanding, will, and affections; he had an human understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, in which he is said to grow, and which in some things were deficient and imperfect (Luke 2:52; Mark 13:32). He had an human will, distinct from the divine will, though not opposite, but in subjection to it (John 6:38; Luke 22:42). And he had human affections, as love (Mark 10:21; John 13:23). And joy (Luke 10:21).

Yea, even those infirmities, though sinless passions, prove the truth of his human soul; as sorrow, grief, anger, amazement, and consternation (Matthew 26:38; Mark 3:5 14:33). Besides, if he had not had an human soul, he could not have been tempted in all points like as we are (Heb. 4:15), since the temptations of Satan chiefly respect the soul, the mind, and the thoughts of it, and affect and distress that: nor could he have bore the wrath of God, nor have had a sensation of that; which it is certain he had, when the weight of the sins of his people lay on him, and pressed him sore; (see Ps. 89:38; Matthew 26:38).

Nor could he have been a perfect sacrifice for their sins; which required his soul as well as his body (Isa. 53:10; Heb. 10:10), nor have been the Saviour of their souls; as he is both of body and soul, giving life for life, body for body, soul for soul (1 Pet. 1:9). 2b. Secondly, In what sense the Word, or Son of God, was "made" flesh, and so became incarnate; the Word could not be made at all, that is, created, since he is the Maker and Creator of all things; and therefore he himself could not be made or created: nor was he, nor could be, made, converted, and changed into flesh; the divine nature in Christ could not be changed into human nature; for he is the Lord, that changes not; he is the same in the "yesterday" of eternity, in the day of time, and "for ever" to all eternity.

By the incarnation nothing is added to, nor altered in the divine nature and personality of Christ. The human nature adds nothing to either of them; they remain the same they ever were; Christ was as much a divine Person before his incarnation as he is since; the union of the human nature to the divine nature, is to it as subsisting in the Person of the Son of God; so it is always to be understood, whenever we speak of the union of the human nature to the divine nature; for it is not united to the divine nature, simply

considered; or as that is common to the three Persons; for then each would be incarnate; but as it has a peculiar subsistence in the Person of the Son of God: and so the human nature has its subsistence in his Person, and has a glory and excellency given it; but that gives nothing at all to the nature and person of the divine Word and Son of God.

But, as other scriptures explain it, God the Word, or Son, was made and became "manifest in the flesh;" the Son that was in the bosom of the Father, the Word of life, that was with him from all eternity, was manifested in the flesh in time, to the sons of men; and that in order to take away sin, and destroy the works of the devil (1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 1:1,2; 3:5,8). And the incarnation of the Word or Son of God, is expressed and explained by his partaking of flesh and blood; and by a taking on him the nature of man; or by an assumption of the human nature into union with his divine Person; so that both natures, divine and human, are united in one Person; and there is but one Lord, and one Mediator between God and man.

The Nestorians so divided and separated these natures, as to make them distinct and separate Persons; which they are not, but one. And the Eutychians, running rate the other extreme, mixed and confounded the natures together; interpreting the phrase, "the Word was made flesh", of the divine nature being changed into the human nature; and the human nature into the divine nature; and so blended together as to make a third; just as two sort of liquors, mixed together, make a third different from both.

But this is to make Christ neither truly God, nor truly man; the one nature being confounded with and swallowed up in the other. But this union of natures is such, that though they are closely united, and not divided, yet they retain their distinct properties and operations; as the divine nature to be uncreated, infinite, omnipresent, impassible, &c. the human nature to be created, finite, in some certain place, passible, &c. at least the latter, before the resurrection of Christ.

But of this union, and the nature of it, more hereafter. 2c. Thirdly, The causes of the incarnation, efficient and moving, or to whom and what it is to be ascribed; and the final cause, for the sake of whom, and what. 2c1. The efficient cause of it, God, Father, Son, and Spirit; all the three Persons have a concern in it, it being a work "ad extra," The Father prepared a body for the Son in his purpose, and proposed it to him in council and covenant to assume it; and he sent him forth in the fulness of time, made of a woman, in the likeness of sinful flesh (Heb. 10:5; Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3).

The Son having agreed to it, being sent, came in the flesh, by the assumption of it; he took upon him the nature of the children, and partook of the same flesh and blood with them; he took upon him the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man (Heb. 2:14,16; Phil. 2:7,8). The Holy Ghost had a very great concern in this affair; for that which was conceived in the Virgin was of "the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:20), not of his substance, nature, and essence; for then he would have been the Father of it, which he is never said to be; Christ, as man, was "without Father", and so a proper antitype of Melchizedec (Heb. 7:3).

Besides, the body of Christ would have been not human, but spiritual: but it was of him as the efficient cause of it; it was through his overshadowing power and influence that it was conceived and formed (Luke 1:35). Now, though all the three Persons in the Deity had an hand in the wondrous incarnation, yet only one of them became incarnate; only the Son assumed the human nature, and took it into union with his divine Person; it is the Word only that was made flesh. Some have illustrated this, by three virgins concerned in working a garment; when only one of them puts it on and wears it. 2c2.

The moving cause of the incarnation of Christ, is the love of the Father, and of the Son, to mankind. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son to become man, obey, suffer, and die for sinners;

herein is love, and this love manifested, that God sent his Son in human nature to be the propitiation for the sins of his people, and save them from death (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9,10). And such was the love and condescending grace of the Son, that though he was in the form of God, of the same nature with him, and equal to him; yet he took upon him the form and nature of man in a servile condition, humbled himself, and died in it.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is well known; who, though rich in his divine Person, became poor in human nature, to make his people rich (Phil. 2:6-8; 2 Cor. 8:9). 2c3. The final cause, or for whose sake, and for what the Son of God became incarnate. It was for the sake of the elect of God; "To us", or "for us", for our sakes, "a Child is born; a Son is given": it was "unto all people;" or rather, "unto all the people;" for the sake of the whole people of God among Jews and Gentiles, that Christ was born a Saviour, or to be a Saviour of them; for which reason, as soon as he was born, his name was called Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins; for which end he was born and came into the world.

But of this more hereafter; (see Isa. 9:6; Luke 2:10,11; Matthew 1:21). 2d. Fourthly, The parts of the incarnation are next to be considered, conception and nativity. 2d1. First, Conception; this is a most wonderful, abstruse, and mysterious affair; and which to speak of is very difficult. 2d1a. This conception was by a virgin; it was a virgin that conceived the human body of Christ, as was foretold it should; which was very wonderful, and therefore introduced with a note of admiration; "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son!"

This was a "new thing;" unheard of and astonishing; which God "created in the earth", in the lower parts of the earth, in the virgin's womb; "A woman compassed", or conceived, "a man", without the knowledge of man (Isa. 7:14; Jer 31:22). This was not natural, but supernatural; though Mela[6] the geographer, speaks of some women in a certain island who conceived without copulation with men; but that is all romance; Plutarch[7] asserts, such a thing was never known. This conception was made "in" the virgin, and not without her; for so says the text; "That which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost;" this I observe to meet with, and confute the heretical illapse, as it is sometimes called; it was a notion of some of the ancient heretics, the Valentinians,[8] and of late, the Mennonites,[9] that the human nature of Christ was formed in heaven, and came down from thence into the virgin, and passed through her as water through a pipe, as their expression was; so that, according to them, he was not conceived in her, nor took flesh of her: to countenance this, it is observed, that the "second man" is said to be "the Lord from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47).

But the words are not to be understood of the descent of the human nature of Christ from heaven; but of his divine Person from thence; not by change of place, but by assumption of the human nature into union with him; by virtue of which union the man Christ has the name of the "Lord from heaven;" and not because of the original and descent of the human nature from thence; and in this sense, and in this sense only, are we to understand the words of Christ, when he says, "I came down from heaven" (John 6:38), namely, that he descended in and by the human nature; not by bringing it down from thence, but by taking it into union with his divine Person. 2d1b.

This conception was through the power and influence of the Holy Ghost, overshadowing the virgin. His operations in this affair may be considered in this manner, and after this order; He first took a part and portion of the virgin, of her semen, or blood, and conveyed it to a proper place; and purified and sanctified it, or separated it, not from any moral impurity, which it was not capable of, being an unformed mass; but from a natural indisposition in it, which, had it not been removed, might hereafter have occasioned sin; to

prevent which this was done; and then he impregnated it with a fructifying virtue, and formed the members of the human body, in order, at once, and in a fitness (being properly organized) to receive the human soul; for to consider its immediate formation in such a state, is much more agreeable to the formation of the first man, more becoming the workmanship of the Holy Ghost, and more suitable to the dignity of the Son of God to assume it into union with himself, than to suppose it an unformed and unshapen embryo.

Yet this is to be understood, not as if it was in such a state as not to admit of a future increase, both before and after birth; nor to contradict its continuance in the womb of the virgin the usual time of every man. Now though this affair has been spoken of as in various processes, yet must be understood as all instantaneously done by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit: in the same instant the human body was thus conceived, formed, and organized, the human soul of Christ was created and united to it, by him who "forms the spirit of man within him;" and in that very instant the body was conceived and formed, and the soul united to it, did the Son of God assume the whole human nature at once, and take it into union with his divine Person, and gave it a subsistence in it; so that the human nature of Christ never had a subsistence of itself; but from the moment of its conception, formation, and creation, it subsisted in the Person of the Son of God: and hence the human nature of Christ is not a person; a person is that which subsists of itself: but that the human nature of Christ never did; therefore, 2d1c.

It was a nature, and not a person, that Christ assumed so early as at its conception; it is called "the holy Thing", and not a person; "The seed of Abraham", or the nature of the seed of Abraham; the "form" and "fashion" of a man, that is, the nature of man; as "the form of God", in the same passage, signifies the nature of God; (see Luke 1:35; Heb. 2:16; Phil. 2:6-8). The Nestorians asserted the human nature of Christ to be a person; and so made two persons in Christ, one human and one divine; and of course four persons in the Deity, contrary to 1 John 5:7 but there is but one Person of the Son, one Son of God, one Lord of all, one Mediator between God and man: if the two natures in Christ were two distinct separate persons, the works and actions done in each nature could not be said of the same Person; the righteousness wrought out by Christ in the human nature, could not be called the righteousness of God: nor the blood shed in the human nature the blood of the Son of God; nor God be said to purchase the church with his blood; nor the Lord of life and glory to be crucified; nor the Son of man to be in heaven, when he was here on earth: all which phrases can only be accounted for, upon the footing of the personal union of the human nature to the Son of God, and his having but one Person; of which these various things are predicated.

Besides, if the human nature of Christ was a person of itself, what it did and suffered could have been of no avail, nor of any benefit to any other but itself; the salvation wrought out in it, and by it, would not have been the common salvation, or common to elect men; but peculiar to that individual human person; and the righteousness he is the author of, he would only have had the benefit of it, being justified by it, and accepted with God in it; whereas, it being wrought out in the human nature, as in personal union with the Son of God, this gives it an enlarged virtue, and spread; and so it comes to be "unto all, and upon all them that believe," I treat of the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the person of the Son of God, under the article of conception, and before the birth of Christ, as it certainly was; hence when Mary paid a visit to her cousin Elizabeth, before the birth of Christ, and just upon the conception of him, she was saluted by her thus; "Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?" (Luke 1:43).

Wherefore, before I proceed to consider the second part of the incarnation, the nativity of Christ, I shall further observe some things concerning the union, which took place at the conception; and of the effects

of it. 1. Of the union itself; concerning which let it be observed, 1a. That though Christ, by assuming the human nature, united it to his divine Person; yet there is a difference between assumption and union assumption is only of one nature; union is of both: Christ only assumed the human nature to his divine Person; but both natures, human and divine, are united in his Person: that he has two distinct natures is evident; in that, according to the flesh, or human nature, he is the Son of David; and according to the Spirit of holiness, or the divine nature, he is the Son of God: he was of the father's, according to the flesh, or human nature; but, according to the divine nature, God over all, blessed for ever: he was put to death in the flesh, in the human nature; but quickened in or by the Spirit, the divine nature (Rom. 1:3,4; 9:5; 1 Pet. 1:18), yet but one Person. 1b.

This union is hypostatical, or personal; but not an union of persons: the union of Father, Son, and Spirit in the Deity, is an union of three Persons in one God; but this is not an union of two persons; but of two natures in one person. 1c. This an union of natures; but not a communication of one nature to another; not of the divine nature, and the essential properties of it, to the human nature; for though "the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily" in Christ (Col. 2:9), that is, substantially and really, not in shadow and type; yet the perfections of the Godhead are not communicated to the manhood, as to make that uncreated, infinite, immense, and to be everywhere, &c. the properties of each nature remain distinct, notwithstanding this union. 1d.

This union lies in a communication of, or rather in making the personality of the Word, common to the human nature; or giving it a subsistence in the Person of the Word or Son of God; hence because of this union and community of person, it has the same name with the Word; and is called, "the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). And hence it appears, that the human nature of Christ is no loser, but a gainer, and is not inferior, but superior to other individuals of human nature, by its not being a person, subsisting of itself; because it has a better subsistence in the Person of the Son of God, than it could have had of itself; or than any creature has, angel or man. 1e.

This union is indissoluble: though death dissolved the union between the body and soul of Christ, it did not, and could not, dissolve the union between the human nature and person of Christ; wherefore, in consequence of this union, he raised up the temple of his body, when destroyed, the third day, and thereby declared himself to be the Son of God with power (John 2:19; Rom. 1:4). 2. The effects of this union, both with respect to the human nature, and to the Person of Christ.

With respect to the human nature; 2a. Preeminence to all other individuals of human nature; it is chosen and preferred to the grace of union with the Son of God, above them all; it has a better subsistence than they have, and has obtained a more excellent name than they, and even than the angels; and is possessed of glory, blessings, and privileges above all creatures; as will appear from what will be further observed. All which is not of any merit in it, but of the free grace of God. 2b.

Perfect holiness and impeccability: it is called, "the holy Thing;" it is eminently and perfectly so; without original sin, or any actual transgression; it is not conscious of any sin, never committed any, nor is it possible it should. 2c. A communication of habitual grace to it in the greatest degree; it is, in this respect, fairer and more beautiful than any of the sons of men; grace being poured into it in great plenty; it is anointed with the oil of gladness above its fellows; that is, with the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit; it has the Spirit given unto it, but not by measure; the Spirit of God rests upon it, in his several gifts and graces, in a most glorious and perfect manner (Ps. 45:2,7; John 3:34; Isa. 11:2).

And should it be asked, if the same graces were in it, and exercised by it, as love, faith, and hope, in the saints? it may be answered, they were, and were exercised by it in its state of humiliation, as its circumstances required: Christ trusted and hoped in God, when upon his mother's breasts (Ps. 22:9,10). When in suffering circumstances, he exercised faith on him, that he would justify, help, and deliver him (Isa. 50:7-9). When the time of his death drew nigh, he expressed his love to God by a readiness to submit to his will, and obey his command (John 14:31).

And when his body lay in the grave, he rested in hope of the resurrection of it (Ps. 16:10). 2d. A very high and glorious exaltation of it, after his death and resurrection from the dead: it was highly exalted by being united to the Person of the Son of God; and though it came into a state of humiliation in it, yet being raised from the dead, is highly exalted, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and above every name that is named in this world or in that to come; it is set down at the right hand of God, where angels are never bid to come; and where angels, authorities, and powers, are made subject to it (Eph. 1:20,21; Phil. 2:9,10; Heb. 1:13; 1 Pet. 3:22). 3.

With respect to the Person of Christ, the effects of this union are, 3a. A communication of idioms, or properties, as the ancients express it; that is, of the properties of each nature; which are, in common, predicated of the Person of Christ, by virtue of the union of natures in it; for though each nature retains its peculiar properties, and does not communicate them to each other; yet they may be predicated of the Person of Christ: yea, he may be denominated in one nature, from a property which belongs to another; thus in his divine nature he is God, the Son of God, the Lord of glory; and yet in this nature is described by a property which belongs to the human nature, which is to be passible, and suffer; hence we read of God purchasing the church with his blood; and of the blood of the Son of God cleansing from all sin; and of the Lord of glory being crucified (Acts 20:28; 1 John 1:7; 1 Cor. 2:8).

And on the other hand, in his human nature he is called the Son of man; and yet as such, is described by a property which belongs to the divine nature, which is to be omnipresent, to be everywhere. So it is said; "No man hath ascended to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven" (John 3:13), who was in heaven at the same time he was here on earth; which was true of his Person, though denominated from his human nature; and thus what cannot be said of Christ in the abstract, is true of him in the concrete, by virtue of this union; it cannot be said, that the Deity of Christ suffered; or that the humanity of Christ is everywhere: but it may be said, that God, the Son of God suffered; and that the Son of man was in heaven when on earth, or everywhere.

It cannot be said, that the Deity is humanity; nor the humanity Deity, nor equal to God: but it may be said, that God the Word is man, and the man Christ is God, Jehovah's Fellow; because these names respect the Person of Christ, which includes both natures. 3b. A communion of office, and of power and authority to exercise it in both natures: thus by Virtue of this union Christ bears the office of a Mediator, and exercises it in both natures; there is "one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), but he is not Mediator only in his human nature, and only exercises it in that; he took upon him, and was invested with this office before his assumption of human nature; and could and did exercise some parts of it without it, as has been shown in its proper place; but there were others that required his human nature; and when, and not before it was requisite, he assumed it; and in it, as united to his divine Person, he is God-man, is Prophet, Priest, and King, Judge, Lawgiver, and Saviour; and has power over all flesh, to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given him; and upon his resurrection, had all power in heaven and earth given him, to appoint ordinances, and commission men to administer them; and had authority also to execute judgment, both in the world and in the church; because he is the Son of man

(Matthew 28:18; John 17:2 5:27). 3c.

A communion of operations in both natures, to the perfecting of the same work; which, therefore, may be called "theandric", or the work of the God-man; there being a concurrence of both natures in the performance of it; which, when done, is ascribed to his Person: thus, for instance, the sacrifice of himself, as the propitiation for the sins of men; as God-man and Mediator, he is the Priest that offers; his human nature, consisting of soul and body, is the Sacrifice; and his divine nature is the altar which sanctifies it, and gives it its atoning virtue, his blood was shed in the human nature, to cleanse from sin; but it is owing to its union with the Son of God that such an effect is produced by it.

The redemption of men is by the ransom price of the life and blood of Christ; but it is the divine nature, to which the human is united, in the Person of the Son of God, that makes it a sufficient one. The mission of the Spirit, by Christ, is owing both to his intercession in the human nature, and to his power and authority in the divine nature, according to the economy of things settled between the divine Persons. 3d. The adoration of the Person of Christ, having both natures united in him, is another effect of this union.

The human nature of Christ is not the formal object of worship; it is a creature, and not to be worshipped as such; nor is worship given for the sake of it, or as singly considered; but then the divine Person of Christ having that nature in union with him, is the object of worship; the flesh of Christ is not worshipped, but the incarnate God is; a whole Christ is worshipped, but not the whole of Christ. "When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world", which was at the time of the incarnation, "he saith, let all the angels of God worship him" (Heb. 1:6).

And upon his resurrection from the dead, God has "given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus should bow;" that is, in a way of religious (Phil. 2:9,10), and though Christ, as man, is not the object of such adoration; yet what he has done in the human nature, is a motive and argument why blessing and honour should be given to his Person, having both natures united in him; "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power", &c. (Rev. 5:12,13). 2d2.

Secondly, The birth, or nativity of Christ, the other part of the incarnation, is next to be considered. 2d2a. Of whom born; of a virgin, of the house of David, and of the tribe of Judah. 2d2a1. Of a virgin: this was hinted at in the first promise of "the seed of the woman;" and is fully expressed by Isaiah; "A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son;" to fulfil which prophecy, before Joseph and Mary cohabited as man and wife, and so, while she was a virgin, "she was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:18-23).

And it was brought about in this manner, that the human nature of Christ might be clear of original sin, which it otherwise must have been infected with, had it been conceived and born in the ordinary and natural way of generation; for "whatsoever is born of the flesh, is flesh", carnal and corrupt; but being produced in this extraordinary and supernatural way, but the power of the Holy Ghost, that which was born of the virgin is "the holy Thing;" free from all spot and blemish of sin.

This is most surprisingly accounted for, by the more modern philosophy respecting generation, that every man is born of an animalcule; which agrees with the sacred philosophy^[10] in Job 25:6 and that all the animalcula from which millions of men spring in all ages, were originally formed by the great Creator in the first man; which, as it accounts for the guilt and pollution of all men in him; so for the purity of Christ's human nature, since that was not born of an animalcule, as other men are; nor was it of man, nor of the seed of man;^[11] but was according to the first promise, the pure seed of the woman; nor was it ever in Adam, in the first man; no, not in "animalculo", as the rest of the individuals of human nature, according to

this hypothesis, and so was not represented by him; nor did he stand related to it, as a covenant head; nor did it descend from him by ordinary generation; but was conceived in the virgin through the power of the Holy Ghost; and did not exist in any respect before; no, not in "animalculo;" which lies strongly against the preexistence of Christ's human nature in any sense whatever; and so, being free from sin, was fit to be a sacrifice for sin, since it could be offered up to God without spot, by the eternal Spirit.

Moreover, so it was, that as the ruin of men came by means of a virgin; for the fall of Adam was before he knew his wife; so the Saviour of men from that ruin, came into the world by a virgin: and so it was ordered by the wisdom of God, that Christ should appear to have but one Father, having none as man, and so be but one Person; whereas, had he had two fathers, there must have been two persons. 2d2a2. Christ was born of a virgin of the house of David; as in Luke 1:27 for the phrase of the house of David, is equally true of the virgin, as of Joseph, and may be connected with her.

God promised to David, that the Messiah should be of his seed; and accordingly, of his seed he raised up unto Israel, a Saviour Jesus, who is therefore called the Son of David; and is both "the root and offspring of David;" the root of David, as God, and David's Lord; and the offspring of David, as man, descending from him (Acts 13:23; Rev. 22:16). 2d2a3. He was born of a virgin of the tribe of Judah; as she must be, since she was of the house of David, which was of that tribe; and it is manifest, as the apostle says, that our Lord sprung out of the tribe of Judah, as it was foretold he should (Gen. 49:10; Heb. 7:14). 2d2b.

The birth of Christ, or his coming into the world, was after the manner of other men; his generation and conception were extraordinary; but his birth was in the usual manner; he came into the world after he had lain the common time in his mother's womb; for it is said, "the days were accomplished that she should be delivered;" she went her full time with him, and brought forth him, her firstborn Son, as other women do; and no doubt with pains and sorrow, as every daughter of Eve does: and presented, him to the Lord when the days of her purification were ended, according to the law, as it is written, "Every male that openeth the womb, shall be called holy to the Lord" (Luke 2:6,22,23).

So that in these respects Christ was made in all things like unto his brethren. 2d2c. The place of his birth was Bethlehem, according to the prophecy in Micah 5:2 here it was expected he would be born; and this was so well known to the Jews, that when Herod inquired of the chief priests and Scribes where Christ should be born; they, without any hesitation, immediately reply, in "Bethlehem of Judea", and quote the above prophecy in proof of it (Matthew 2:4-6), yea, this was known by the common people (John 7:42), and so it was wonderfully brought about in providence; that though Joseph and Mary lived in Galilee, yet through a decree of Caesar Augustus to tax the whole empire, they were both obliged to come to the city of Bethlehem, the city of David, to be taxed, being of the lineage and house of David; and while they were on that business there, the virgin was delivered of her Son (Luke 2:1-7).

Bethlehem signifies the house of bread; a fit place for the Messiah to be born in, who is the bread that came down from heaven, and gives life unto the world. 2d2d. The time of his birth was as it was fixed in prophecy; before the sceptre, or civil government, departed from Judah: Herod was king in Judea when he was born; before the second temple was destroyed; for he often went into it, and taught in it: and it was at the time pointed at in Daniel's weeks; (see Gen. 49:10; Mal. 3:1; Hag. 2:6,7,9; Dan. 9:24), &c.

The exact year of the world in which he was born, is not agreed on by chronologers; but it was about, or a little before or after the four thousandth year of the world; nor can the season of the year, the month and day in which he was born, be ascertained. However, the vulgar account seems not probable; the

circumstance of the shepherds watching their flocks by night, agrees not with the winter season. It is more likely it was in autumn, sometime in the month of September, at the feast of tabernacles, which was typical of Christ's incarnation; and there seems to be some reference to it in John 1:14.

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt", or "tabernacled" among us; the temple of Solomon, a type of Christ's human nature, was dedicated at the feast of tabernacles: and as Christ, the passover, was sacrificed at the very time of the passover; and the Holy Ghost was given on the very day of Pentecost, typified by the firstfruits offered on that day; so it is most reasonable to suppose, that Christ was born at the very feast of tabernacles, a type of his incarnation; and which feast is put for the whole ministry of the word and ordinances, to be observed in gospel times (Zech. 14:16).

However, it was in the fulness of time, or when the time was fully up he was to come, that God sent him, and he came; and in due time, in the fittest and most proper time, infinite Wisdom saw meet he should come: God could have sent him sooner; but he did not think fit to do it; but he sent him at the most seasonable time; when the wickedness of men was at its height, both in Judea and in the Gentile world; and there appeared a necessity of a Saviour of men from it; and when the insufficiency of the light of nature, of the power of man's free will, which had been sufficiently tried among the philosophers; and of the law of Moses, and of the works and sacrifices of it, to take away sin, and save men from it, had been clearly evinced.

To conclude, it was in time, and not before time, that Christ became man. To talk of the human nature of Christ, either in whole or in part, as from eternity, is contrary both to scripture and reason; nor can that man, or human nature, be of any avail or benefit to us; but he that is the Seed of the woman, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, and the Son of Mary. 2e. Fifthly, The ends of Christ's incarnation are many; there is a cluster of them in the song of the angels at his birth; "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, good will towards men" (Luke 2:14). 2e1.

One end of Christ's incarnation was, to show forth the glory of God in it; the glory of his grace, kindness, and goodness to men, in the mission of his Son in this way; the glory of his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise of it; the glory of his power in the miraculous production of Christ's human nature; and the glory of his wisdom in bringing it into the world in such a manner as to be free from sin, and so fit for the purpose for which it was designed: and all this that God might be glorified in these his perfections; as he was by the angels, by Mary, by the father of John the Baptist, and by Simeon, at, or about, the time of Christ's birth; and as he has been by saints in all ages since. 2e2.

Another end of Christ's incarnation was, to make peace with God for men on earth; to make reconciliation for sin, was the work appointed him in covenant; and to do this, was the reason of his being made in all things like unto his brethren; and this end is answered; he has reconciled sinners to God by his death, and made peace for them by the blood of his cross. 2e3. Another end of Christ's incarnation was, not only to show the good will of God to men, but that they might receive the fruits of his good will and favour towards them; even all the blessings of grace, those spiritual blessings provided in covenant, and laid up in Christ; and which came by him our High Priest, and through his blood, called therefore, the blood of the everlasting covenant. 2e4.

Particularly, Christ became man that he might be our God, our near kinsman, and might appear to have a right to redeem us; and he was, in the fulness of time, made of a woman, to redeem men from the law, its curse and condemnation; and that they might receive the adoption of children, and every other blessing

included in or connected with redemption; as peace, pardon, and justification; for he was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, that by the sacrifice of himself for sin, he might condemn it in the flesh; and that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, as represented by him, and so be completely justified in him; (see Gal. 4:4,5; Rom. 8:3,4). 2e5.

Christ became man, that he might be a Mediator between God and men; and the better to perform each of the parts of his office as such, he took upon him the nature of man; that he might have something to offer as a Priest to be a Sacrifice for sin, and that he might make satisfaction for it in that nature that sinned; and that he might be a prophet like unto Moses, raised up, as he was, among his brethren; and having the Spirit of the Lord God upon him, might preach glad tidings to the meek; and that he might appear to be a King taken from among his brethren, as the kings of Israel were; and to be the Ruler, Noble, and Governor that proceeded from the midst of them, as was predicted he should (Jer 30:21), and so sit and reign upon the throne of his father David. ENDNOTES:

[1] Huet. Quaest. Alnetan. l. 2. c. 13. p. 234. & c. 15. p. 241. See Philosoph. Transact. abridged, vol. v. part 2. p. 168.

[2] Martin. Sinic. Hist. l. 4. p. 131, 132. Vid. Huet. ut supra, p. 235.

[3] Hesiod. Theogon. v. 927. Apollodor. de Deor. Orig. l. 1. p. 8. Vid. Huet. ut supra, c. 15, p. 237, 238.

[4] Opera, tom. 1. Deut. Christi Natura Disput. p. 784.

[5] Ibid. Ep. 2. ad Balcerovicium, p. 425.

[6] Deut. Situ Orbis, l. 3. c. 9.

[7] Conjugial Praecept. p. 145.

[8] Irenaeus Adv. Haeres. l. 1. c. 1. p. 29.

[9] Socini Disput. Adv. Mennonitas in Oper. tom. 2. p. 461.

[10] "Omnia nimirum animalia, etiam perfecta similiter ex vermiculo gigni", Harveus de Generat. Animal, Exercit. 18. p. 144.

[11] The animalcula are only "in semine masculino;" see the Philosophical Transactions abridged, vol. 2. p. 912, 913.

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