

The Incarnation of Christ

by John Wright

The Incarnation of Christ refers to the act of God becoming human, manifesting himself in the flesh, as seen in the pre-incarnate manifestations of Christ in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament.

Duration: 48:37

Scripture: Genesis 16:7-13, Genesis 18:1-3, Genesis 22:11-12, Exodus 3:2, Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6, Micah 5:2, John 1:14, Philippians 2:7-8, 1 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "Incarnation", "The Incarnation", "The Mystery of Godliness"

Description

John Wright emphasizes the significance of the Incarnation of Christ, explaining how it is foundational to the Christian faith. He reflects on the pre-incarnate manifestations of Christ in the Old Testament, such as the angel of the Lord appearing to figures like Hagar, Abraham, and Jacob, illustrating God's continuous presence and interest in humanity. Wright highlights the mystery of godliness as expressed in 1 Timothy 3:16, affirming that God was manifest in the flesh through Jesus Christ. He connects Old Testament prophecies to their fulfillment in the New Testament, particularly focusing on the virgin birth and the divine nature of Christ. The sermon concludes with a call to recognize the profound mystery of God becoming man and the implications for believers today.

Transcript

It's nice to be with you this Tuesday evening, for the welcome, for the invitation, and for the welcome for this, your weekly Tuesday ministry meeting. Brother Stephen Owen, to ask if I would come, he said we are taking up some subjects and would you be free to speak on the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a deep subject, it's a very tender subject, it's one which is the foundations of our faith.

Those of us who are a wee bit older would remember our brother Tom Richardson, Evangelist, spoke at a conference here, I think it was in Fife, whether it was their own or not I'm not sure, but I always remember what he said as perhaps his opening remarks but nothing else, when he said, if the first rung on the ladder of our faith is rotten, where do you stand? And of course those of us who walked on ladders were always glad when the rungs were not rotten. I've walked on ladders where they were rotten. What we want to do this evening is think about the Lord Jesus Christ as his protégé for us in Holy Scripture.

One verse I want to read and that is found in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse number 16. We want to look at other verses but just want to read this verse at this time. 1 Timothy 3.16 And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness.

God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. Amen. It's the first expression in the six little statements that's made that we want to think about in the context of this subject of the incarnation.

God was manifest in the flesh. One has said that the future incarnation is intimated in the theophanies, or appearances of God in human form, and distinctly predicted in the promises connected with rejection and with the Davidic covenant. And that has to do with Old Testament scriptures.

And before we come into the new, I want to think with you of that which used to be often spoken about but very seldom now, the theophanies, or some of them, of the Old Testament scriptures. There are three expressions found in the Old Testament that bring to us this truth. And one is entitled the angel of the Lord, the other is entitled the angel of his presence, and the third is entitled the angel of the covenant.

And when we look at scriptures where these expressions come, and they're found in the Old Testament, we find that there is a divine person that's manifested in human form for a brief moment of time. And it has been called a theophany, a divine person in a human form. The pre-incarnate manifestations of Christ.

And in our Old Testament scriptures, there are many of them. And the first one that I want to think with you about is a manifestation to a woman. And that woman was an Egyptian.

And that woman was a handmaid of Sarah. Her name was Hagar. And Hagar, she's found by the fountain of water in the wilderness in the book of Genesis in chapter 16.

And she is freed from her mistress. And the Bible says at verse 16, And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. Now, you look at your Bible, and you'll see that the word Lord is spelt with capital letters.

That in our English translation that we use, parochialized, I mean, it's always translated and printed with capitals, L-O-R-D. Often other times, it's spelt with a capital L and a small o-r-d, the common lower case. Which means our English translators of 1611 noticed that there were different words in the original, which had the same English word, but in order to distinguish them, they distinguished them by the capitals or with the common letters O-R-D.

Jehovah. The angel of Jehovah. The angel of the Lord.

And we ask ourselves the question, is this a normal, ordinary angel? Or is this a special manifestation of the Lord Himself? And there to Hagar, as she's in the wilderness, by the way of a fountain in the way to Shur, the Lord appears to Hagar. And he advises Hagar to go back to her mistress. Come down through Genesis and you come to chapter 18.

And we read these words in chapter 18. The Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre, and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. This he, or the him, refers to Abraham.

And Abraham, who had been called of God to leave his country, or of the Chaldeans, to go to a land that he would inherit, is walking through, to and forth through that land, and there comes a moment here in his life experience, recorded in chapter 18, that he's sitting in his tent in the heat of the day. And we would try to visualize what a tent would look like, but he sees three men coming to him as he sits in his tent on that hot day. And as Abraham entertains those three men, he recognizes that they were angelic men.

Later on, down in the chapter, we discover this. That two leave, and one remains. And we discover that Abraham recognizes it is the Lord that has spoken to him in the heat of the day at his tent door.

He recognized the Lord. Again, we come down to chapter 22. And in chapter 22, he's no longer sitting in the tent door, but Abraham is upon a mount, Mount Moriah.

He has heard God saying to him, Take thou thy son, thine only Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into a mountain that I will show thee. And so Abraham prepared to take his son with the wood, with the fire, and his young men with the ashes. And eventually, he leaves the young men with the stuff, and Isaac and him go up the mountain, Mount Moriah.

And turning up Mount Moriah, that question that so often has been asked, Where is a lamb for a burnt offering? Behold the wood, the fire. Where is the lamb? And Abraham had said, God will provide for him self a lamb out of heaven. So in verse number 12, we learn in that chapter 22, that the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham.

And he said, Here am I. Now in verse 15, he called to him a second time. So what do we learn in these pre-incarnate manifestations of Christ? That he's interested in a Heber, and he's interested in an Abraham. He's interested in a Heber who is fleeing, and he's interested in an Abraham who is obeying.

And there's an interest by the pre-incarnate Christ in these men. We come down to Jacob. And there is chapter 31.

Jacob, he is in the house of Laban, his uncle. Down yonder in Haran, in Mesopotamia, where Jacob had cheated his brother, and Jacob had fled, and at his mother's instigation, he had gone back to Uncle Laban's house, her brother's house. And we know how prosperous he becomes in the house of Laban, his uncle.

And there becomes a bit of a jealousy between his uncle and his sons, and the nephew Jacob. And there is that animosity right there in Haran, in Mesopotamia. And we read, The angel of God speaketh unto me in a plain saying, Jacob, and I say, Here am I. And so God is speaking.

The angel of God. And so we learn again of a manifestation of Christ speaking to Jacob and telling him to return and go back and face his brother Esau. Take his two wives and his children that he has gotten in Haran, in Mesopotamia and go back home.

Later on, we read that Jacob is at the side of a brook. A brook called Teniel. And he's left alone.

He's taken his wives and his children, his sons, and sent them over the brook. And he remained on the other side. This is what scripture says.

Jacob was left alone. And there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of day. A man! Yes! In the pre-incarnate form of a man.

Just as Abram had welcomed the three at a tent door. And here is Jacob welcoming a man. Wrestling with him.

What does the man say? The man says this. Jacob, and he raised his finger upon his thigh. Jacob was a different man from that man.

He halted, leaning upon his staff. And God speaks to him. He says, I have seen, Jacob says, I have seen God face to face.

And my life is preserved. Now how do we know it was an angel? Have we got to go down to the Bible until we come to the book of Hosea? And in the book of Hosea, in chapter 12, in verse number 4, this is what Hosea says. This is what the Spirit of God says.

Yea, he had power over the man. No. Yea, he had power over the angel.

And prevailed. He wept, and made supplication unto him. He found him in Bethel, and therefore spake with us.

So we learn that these in Exodus and in Genesis had the experience of seeing and speaking and knowing the angel of the Lord. Let's come over to Exodus. Right at the very beginning of the book of Exodus, we learn that there is another man.

He has fled from the face of a pharaoh. He has gone away miles out into the desert. He is watching sheep.

He is no longer a prince in a palace, but a shepherd watching sheep. And he sees something. He saw a bush burning and was not consumed.

And he says, I'll turn aside and see this great sight that a bush would burn and not be consumed. When I think of this, I think of a day in Sandy Grande. A day of walking past the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

There are four churches in Scotland in Trinidad, and there is one in Sandy Grande. And a big place. A wooden building.

I don't know how old it is. I just went and had a look at the notice board. One day.

Because there was something on it that I couldn't make out from the pavement. So I went a bit closer, and it was a symbol. It was a symbol of the bush burning and not being consumed.

That's a Presbyterian symbol. You'll find it right here in Scotland. You might find it here in Buckheim, in the Kirk.

And you might even find it right here in Lord Meadow. But they had it painted on the notice board. And Moses drew near.

And he hears a voice. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush. And he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire and was not consumed.

What did the Lord say? Take off my shoes and off my feet. For the ground whereon thou standest is holy ground. A pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ.

He came to Moses. Again. To Israel.

And they've been redeemed as a nation out of Egypt's bondage. And they've gone out with a high hand out from Egypt. And they make their way towards the wilderness.

And when we come to Exodus 14 and at verse number 19, this is what it says. And the angel of God which went before the camp of Israel removed and went behind them. And the angel of the cloud and the pillar of

the cloud went from before their faces and stood behind them.

Again. One of those manifestations. One of those theophanies.

We come to the book of Numbers. And we discover in the book of Numbers there's a man there called Balaam. And Balaam was hired to curse Israel on their journey through the wilderness.

And Balaam had hired him. He was a hireling. He was in for the money.

He had been good in the Commons, in the House of Lords, you know. He was in for what he could get. Look what it says.

To Balaam, God's anger was kindled because he went. And the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against them. So not only do we have the angel of the Lord being for people, but in this case of Balaam, he stands against them.

So I selected these. There are others. There is Manoah.

There is Joshua that comes to mind. That they experienced the divine visitation in their lives. When for that moment God as the angel of the Lord visited them for special purpose.

As we said, a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ. When we come over to the book of Isaiah in chapter 69, it's not the angel of the Lord that we read about, but we read of the angel of his presence. Isaiah is not speaking of something in history, but he's speaking of something in their history.

And he says this, in all their affliction. He was afflicted. And the angel of his presence saved them.

In his love and in his pity, he redeemed them. And he bared them and carried them all the days of old. What is Isaiah speaking about? Distressing from that day that we've left them as they were on the other side of the Red Sea.

They came through the Red Sea. They went through the wilderness until God brought them over the Jordan and into the land. Isaiah describes the angel as the angel of his presence.

Do you know that? That they knew the presence of the Lord. How did they know that? Do you remember that we saw there at the sea, that by high hearth that the cloud went from before them and went behind them and stood between them and the Egyptians. That cloud was a pillar of cloud by day and was a pillar of fire by night.

The angel of his presence was with them in the cloud by day and by night. When we come over to Malachi that's where we have the third expression in chapter 3. He's called the angel of the covenant and it's the only time that we get this expression not in our authorised version. Our authorised version says the messenger of the covenant.

Mr. Darby takes the word messenger just as we have in the new testament and gives us the other word and Mr. Darby in this translation says this Therefore the Lord behold I send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come into his temple and the angel of the covenant our authorised says the messenger. Mr. Darby the angel of the covenant in whom ye doubt behold he cometh saith the Lord of hosts. So there is a covenant and we thank God that we have this assurance.

Now there's other verses in the old testament and they speak to us of a sign that was given of a son that was promised. There was a very wicked man upon the throne of Israel his name was Ahaz that wicked king on the throne had a very wicked wife as well and Isaiah was sent to him one day and he was sent to him to ask a sign an old wicked Ahaz with his equally wicked Jezebel of a wife Ahaz would not request a sign but the Lord said I'll give you a sign this is how Isaiah puts it in chapter 7 in verse 14 therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

We rejoice in that verse of scripture don't we? We love to quote it we love to think about it we love to memorize it we like to meditate upon it what does it really mean? Interesting Israel does not take out of that verse what you and I take out of that for be denied it has anything to do with the Jesus of Nazareth a virgin shall conceive and bear a son wonderful isn't it? that God should place on record six centuries before it was fulfilled that the sign would be given to a wicked Ahaz a virgin shall conceive and I was reading about Manoah I was reading about his wife and Manoah's wife was old, she was born she had no child and she got a promise and the promise was this to an old woman an old wife who had never had a child you'll conceive and bear a son now that expression only occurs three times in the bible it occurs in the book of Judges in relation to Manoah's wife it occurs in this verse that we read in Isaiah chapter 7 and 14 and in its fulfillment in Luke's gospel in the New Testament and God says to a born person you'll conceive and bear then we turn over to Isaiah chapter 9 we learn unto us a child is born unto us a son is given I'm not going further down the verses, it has other truths that we're not quite touching tonight a child born a son given and so those Old Testament manifestations that was given how God is bringing some of the focus even more intense and he says there's going to be a child born and there's going to be a son that's given was it last week you had the teaching on the eternal sonship of Christ that this is the son that's to be given who is the child that will be born and so as Isaiah speaks of these things we come over the scriptures, we come down the years a bit further and we come into the book of Micah and Micah says in chapter 5 and at verse number 2 but thou Bethlehem Ephrathah lo, thou be little among the thousands of Judah get out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel and it's this expression whose goings forth have been from old from everlasting it's an interesting expression the one who is going to be born the son of the virgin the son that's going to be given the one that's coming forth from God born into this world his goings forth have been from old from everlasting you may look at the corner of the margin of your bible and see another expression there from the days of eternity the days of eternity, so the one that's coming in incarnation the one who's had manifestations the one who's from all eternity is the child that will be born and the son that will be given and he will be from everlasting so we come over into the new testament and we learn this I came across a quote by F.W.

Grant this is what Mr. Grant said in Christ the human and divine have been inseparably united together and there cannot be the least discordance between the two so that which we've been thinking about as far as the old testament is concerned the angel of the lord, the angel of his presence, the angel of the covenant that which we see as it were through a glass darkly is going now to be seen in clear light that he who was God manifests in the flesh as far as we are going to see now is the one who is manifesting himself to those patriarchs of old in a very small way now what do we read? the first thing we come to the book of Matthew and in Matthew chapter one in that first chapter at 23 we learn behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and he shall call his name Emmanuel which is being interpreted as God with us to whom is that said? that was said to Joseph and God speaks to Joseph in a dream because remember Joseph was a good man a righteous man, a just man Joseph had a espoused wife one who was engaged to him to be married and she is found with child of the Holy Ghost Joseph said no Lord all

Joseph could see that Mary was with child and he was thinking about this and meditating on it contemplating I won't make her a public example I'll put her away privately privately is her authorized while he thought upon these things God says fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost for it is written behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel is being interpreted God with us that's not all remember Luke has something to tell us Luke says in chapter 1 verse 35 as the angel answered and said unto Mary and to her the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee therefore also that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God Mary is going to be with child she says behold the handmaid of the Lord Mary says how can this then be seeing I don't know a man I know not a man she is thinking along natural lines how can it be and so the angel answers her the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee therefore that Holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Now John comes to that in his first chapter of his gospel and in chapter 1 in verse 14 John says very very simply yet profoundly pauses it down to a few words this is what John says and the word was made fresh the word became fresh and dwelt among us.

Chapter 1 in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God and the same was in the beginning with God and he comes down to verse 14 and he says the word was made fresh someone has calculated that it took Luke 2500 words to tell us about the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ it took John 4 words to tell us of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ what was made fresh it's a mystery and we grasp it by faith said John if I know ye the spirit of God every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God we live in a day when this is most doubted and denied that the one who we celebrate the one who came into time is none other than God manifest in the flesh he may have come to the patriarchs and the fathers of old in these pre-incarnate

days but he has come to us as a man born of a woman made under the law that's the wonder of it all so John would teach us and so would Paul and Paul says this as he wrote to these Corinthian believers in his second letter in chapter 6, chapter 8 for ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might become rich, he was rich eternally he became poor when he took upon himself the form of a servant that he might lift you and I who are poor and make us rich, again through being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God but being himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant was made in likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself he became obedient

unto death, even the death of the cross and no verses go further than that it tells us now of his exaltation at God's right hand but our thoughts tonight are on the incarnation that God became a man again intimacy the verse that we read great without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness God was manifest in the flesh, one of our dear servants of the Lord now with the Lord, an Irish brother who labored for the Lord in Africa for only 45 to 50 years wrote a book The Mystery Doctrines of the New Testament in which he lists 14 New Testament mysteries not mysterious it's that which God has hidden in past times and has now revealed to us in the scriptures and this is one of them great is the mystery of godliness God was manifest in flesh you might say well, there are some translations

that doesn't say that there are some translations that say who wasn't manifest in flesh and he refused to place the word God in that verse and he would say simply without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness who was manifest in flesh or he was manifest in flesh so almost a year ago I picked up a book in

a second-hand stall at the half-yearly missionary conferences over in the Hamilton College always have a scatter through the second-hand books, you never know what you can find what other have discarded becomes a treasure and it just happened to be one of Mr Newberry's books and let me glance through it the other evening he makes a comment on this particular verse dear brother Newberry so revered amongst us, says having studied the manuscripts in detail at length I am convinced

before the Lord that the word is God was manifest in flesh it's good to know that you come and you have the same thoughts as men of past generations that the person who was manifest in flesh was God just as was manifest in pre-incarnate days in the person of the Christ of God so we have the Christ of God today as he is manifest in flesh there are four little verses we would like to leave with you and here they come but we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man and again for it became him for whom are all things and by whom are all things in bringing many sons unto glory to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering and again for as much

then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood he also likewise took part of the same that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death that is the devil and again when he cometh into the world he said sacrifice and offering for sin thou wouldst not but a body hast thou prepared me.

I know that's different from Psalm 40 but that's the New Testament commentary on Psalm a body hast thou prepared me lo I come to do thy will oh my God the poet said arrayed in mortal flesh he like an angel made and holds the promises and pardon in his hands commissioned from the father's throne to make his place to mortals known so when we read in the Old Testament scriptures of the angel of the Lord the angel of his presence the angel or the messenger of the covenant who are we reading about? we are reading about the pre-incarnate Christ who in the days of his flesh was born of a woman was made under the law, who was God manifest in the flesh whom the virgin conceived and bore a son and called his name God with us our Father we do thank you for the word of God we thank you for the scriptures of truth that we might learn from them day by day we might peruse them we thank you again our Father that we have only touched a little but we remember again who the person is thy son, blessed for him immortal the one our Father who is from all eternity the Son who came into time our Father as we think of him that we might be drawn closer to the Saviour we may not see a theophany but one blessed day we will see him face to face whom we are a job of hope we will see for ourselves and not another and so Lord we commit ourselves to thee now as we give thee thanks in our Saviour's name

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