

Littlebourne Chapel – 10 December 2023 – Incarnation 2 – Peter Hollander

Last week we looked at the incarnation of Jesus and how the early church came to a decision at the Council of Nicaea 325 AD to define the nature of Jesus. As Jonathan mentioned there were divisions as to whether Christ was fully human and fully God – particularly whether he was any different when on earth from when he is in heaven. In the second century the Gnostics made this distinction, believing only a select few would have the knowledge imparted by God, and that Jesus on earth was human and only divine in heaven. This heresy was believed by the Cathars in southern Europe until rooted out by the Albigensian crusade led by Simon de Montfort – father of the English Simon de Monfort who led the Barons' revolt against Henry III. A form of Gnosticism is still prevalent among those who claim Jesus was a good man but not God. The agnostics claim that they don't know what or who Jesus really is, while the Gnostics claim they do know what and who Jesus is, but are in error by ignoring the Scriptures they don't agree with!

Later in the third century the Arians believed Christ was a created being, and not divine. They claimed he was not around before he was born, while we all know, because the Scriptures inspired by Holy Spirit tell us that God, Jesus and Holy Spirit have existed for ever. Athanasius, a respected theologian from Alexandria in Egypt drafted the Nicene creed and the debate got a little heated as St Nicholas bishop of Myra in what is now southern Turkey, punched Arius, bishop of Alexandria in Egypt in the face to emphasise his heretical view was unacceptable! This creed begins:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten; that is, of the same essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father By whom all things were made both in heaven and on earth; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man...

There are five points to be made:

Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, who has eternally shared the one, undivided divine nature with the Father and Holy Spirit, and is thus fully God. Jesus is the Word of God, who was at the beginning and is at the end – Alpha and Omega. Jesus says in John 8:58 “*Very truly I tell you before Abraham was born, I am.*” You cannot make it clearer than that. Isaiah saw Jesus – chapter 6 v 9 “*Woe to me! I cried. I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.*” No man can see the face of God and live so it must have been Jesus. Daniel 7 9 “*As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.*” Revelation 1 : 13-18 ... *and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest. ¹⁴ The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.* Jesus was alive before being born of Mary and is alive after being slain on the cross.

Our reading was from John 14:9-13 where *Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* Again, the words of Jesus say that he is in the Father and the Father is in him, living in him. The Holy Spirit of God has been dwelling in Jesus from conception to crucifixion while he was on earth as a human being, and he is one with the Father and the Spirit today as he was from the beginning. On Thursday lunchtime in the “Dwelling in His presence” discussion, the question was raised about miracles not happening, and it was suggested that few were teaching what Jesus says his disciples can do – which is that Jesus will do whatever you ask in his name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. The church would have a greater impact on society if miracles happened. They do happen but are not publicised nor often accepted as miracles. If God is not given the glory and if he is ignored when He does something miraculous, then without repentance, those miracles are unlikely to reoccur.

The Church affirmed at Nicaea that there are three divine persons who fully share one undivided divine nature and that the one divine nature wholly subsists in each of the three persons so that each person is fully and equally God. The triune God that we all believe in.

Jesus is God the Son incarnate Jesus has an additional nature to his divine nature, which is that he had a human body and soul. Philippians 2:6-8 *who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!* This is amazing! Jesus went through a childhood like other Jewish boys, experiencing the same emotions as us, the same problems we may have and yet was without sin. Adam was without sin until the fall, living in daily communion with God. Jesus the perfect man also lived in daily communion with God because he was without sin. Another heresy, Nestorianism asserted that Christ was two persons – one human and one divine that operated independently! This was denounced at the Council of Ephesus 431 AD.

The human nature assumed by the divine Son was unfallen and sinless. Jesus had all the human attributes that we have. Two heresies were around in the early church to claim this wasn't true. One was Docetism which claimed he only appeared to be human and the other Apollinarianism which claimed his human nature was incomplete and that Jesus didn't have a soul. What was problematic for these early church theologians was that Christ could be God and human at the same time. They, like so many today, have a problem with all things supernatural which because they are supernatural, do not fit into the natural order of things. Man has a fallen nature, and sin dwells in each of us, no matter how hard we try to resist it. Adam and Eve before the Fall were sinless, because they did not have knowledge of good and evil. For some theologians, it was hard to see Jesus as a second Adam, without sin, yet with the knowledge of good and evil. Christ represents humanity as it was first intended to be, not fallen humanity as it exists today. Sin is rebellion against God. Jesus never rebelled against God and couldn't as he obeyed his father's will at all times. Jesus was tempted by the devil, yet didn't sin. Jesus felt hunger, pain, sorrow, affection, disappointment in the same way that we do, yet when hungry and tempted to turn stones into bread, he refused. When tempted with the offer of world domination, he refused. Jesus did not sin because of his reliance on the Holy Spirit at work in him from conception onwards. As a sinless man, his sacrifice as a sinless offering on the cross, was the way for fallen man to be redeemed. He demonstrated in his life as a human, what God intends our lives to be like. To be without sin is impossible for us, but it was possible for Jesus because he was so close to the father, one with the father, that all temptations to sin were able to be resisted.

1 Corinthians 15: 44b-49 *If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.*

The quote so it is written is from Genesis 2:7 *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and **the man became a living being.*** The word "man" in Hebrew is "Adam", so the quote is "the man – that is Adam – became a living being".

Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to tell us that Jesus is the second Adam, the heavenly man, able to breathe in us the Holy Spirit of God.

The Son acted through his human nature as well as through his divine nature as he has done for eternity Having experienced human joys and sorrows, hunger and thirst, weakness and strength, death and resurrection, Jesus is able to know what we feel and experience. At the same time he is able to act as God the Son eternally without diminishing his human or godly natures.

Jesus is the first man of the new creation, our mediator who is able to forgive sins The incarnation has reversed the work of the first man – who sinned – and became our Lord and Saviour. As a divine son he uses his judgment over sinful human beings who should ideally live perfectly in obedience of God, Jesus and Holy Spirit. As an incarnate son he identifies with us as our representative and substitute. Hebrews 5:1-4 *Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. ³ This is why he*

has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

The payment or punishment for our sin and our restoration as God's image bearers is only accomplished by Christ alone. He was needed to reveal God's nature to mankind, to reveal God's righteousness to mankind, and to reveal God's love and mercy.

Romans 3:21-26 *But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in ¹⁰ Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished ²⁶ – he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

- 1 Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, who has eternally shared the one, undivided divine nature with the Father and Holy Spirit, and is thus fully God.** Jesus was with the Father always.
- 2 Jesus is God the Son incarnate** Jesus became a child born of a human mother and grew as a man full of the Holy Spirit from birth.
- 3 The human nature assumed by the divine Son was unfallen and sinless** Jesus cannot sin and did not sin while on earth.
- 4 The Son acted through his human nature as well as through his divine nature as he has done for eternity** Jesus knew what an earthly man was like and was the perfect man
- 5 Jesus is the first man of the new creation, our mediator who is able to forgive sins** Man is made in the image of God and is created to have relationship with God, which is possible when man's fallen nature has been rectified so that he can come before God without sin needing to be dealt with. Jesus the sinless man took the punishment for sin and enabled us to be forgiven. God created man because love needs to be shared.