

Incarnation

(*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

[Definition] *Incarnation* -- central Christian doctrine that God became flesh, that God assumed a human nature and became a man in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity. Christ was truly God and truly man. The doctrine maintains that the divine and human natures of Jesus do not exist beside one another in an unconnected way but rather are joined in him in a personal unity that has traditionally been referred to as the hypostatic union. The union of the two natures has not resulted in their diminution or mixture; rather, the identity of each is believed to have been preserved. [*See also two natures of Christ.*]

The word “Incarnation” (from the Latin *caro*, “flesh”) may refer to the moment when this union of the divine nature of the second person of the Trinity with the human nature became operative in the womb of the Virgin Mary or to the permanent reality of that union in the person of Jesus. The term may be most closely related to the claim in the prologue of the Gospel According to John that the Word became flesh – that is, assumed human nature. (See *logos*.) The essence of the doctrine of the Incarnation is that the preexistent Word has been embodied in the man Jesus of Nazareth, who is presented in the Gospel According to John as being in close personal union with the Father, whose words Jesus is speaking when he preaches the gospel.

Belief in the preexistence of Christ is indicated in various letters of the New Testament but particularly in the Letter of Paul to the Philippians, in which the Incarnation is presented as the emptying of Christ Jesus, who was by nature God and equal to God (i.e., the Father) but who took on the nature of a slave (i.e., a human) and was later glorified by God.

The development of a more refined theology of the Incarnation resulted from the response of the early church to various misinterpretations concerning the question of the divinity of Jesus and the relationship of the divine and human natures of Jesus. The First Council of Nicaea (325 ce) determined that Christ was “begotten, not made” and that he was therefore not creature but Creator. The basis for this claim was the doctrine that he was “of the same substance as the Father.” The doctrine was further defined by the Council of Chalcedon (451 ce), at which it was declared that Jesus was perfect in deity and in humanity and that the identity of each nature was preserved in the person of Jesus Christ. The affirmation of the oneness of Christ with God and with humanity was made while maintaining the oneness of his person.

Subsequent theology has worked out the implications of this definition, although there have been various tendencies emphasizing either the divinity or the humanity of Jesus throughout the history of Christian thought, at times within the parameters set by Nicaea and Chalcedon, at times not. It has commonly been accepted that the union of the human nature of Christ with his divine nature had significant consequences for his human nature—for example, the grace of great sanctity. The union of the two natures has been viewed by theologians as a gift for other humans, both in terms of its benefit for their redemption from sin and in terms of the appreciation of the potential goodness inherent in human activity that can be derived from the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The Creed of Chalcedon (451 AD)

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

Athanasian Creed (early 6th century)

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ ...

Augsburg Confession (1530, Lutheran)

Article 3. Concerning the Son of God

Likewise, it is taught that God the Son became a human being, born of the pure Virgin Mary, and that the two natures, the divine and the human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ. He is true God and true human being who truly “was born, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried” in order both to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to conciliate God’s wrath. Moreover, the same Christ “descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, is sitting at the right hand of God” in order to rule and reign forever over all creatures, so that through the Holy Spirit he may make holy, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, also distribute to them life and various gifts and benefits, and shield and protect them against the devil and sin. Finally, the same Lord Christ “will come” in full view of all “to judge the living and the dead ...”, according to the Apostles’ Creed. Rejected are all heresies that are opposed to this article.

The 39 Articles of the Church of England (1571, Anglican)

Article 2 Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man.

The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, of her substance: so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt but also for all actual sins of men.

Westminster Shorter Catechism (1643, Puritan, Reformed & Presbyterian)

(Q.21) The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, according to the covenant made between them both, to be the mediator between God and man; the prophet, priest, and king; head and savior of the church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world; unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

Benjamin B. Warfield *The Gospel of the Incarnation*

[Two sermons preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary by B. B. Warfield. Dedicated to the students of Princeton Seminary: for whom they were prepared, to whom they were preached, and on whose request they are now printed.]

1. The End [that is, the purpose] of the Incarnation 2. The Example of the Incarnation

<https://theologue.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/thegospeloftheincarnation-bbwarfield.pdf>

[These 2 sermons are based on the following passages from John and Paul]

For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me; and this is the will of Him that sent me, that of all that He hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. **John 6:38-39**

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. **Php. 2:5-8**