

Chapter 3 – Jesus, Through the Eyes of Faith

“And you,” Jesus said to them, “Who do you say that I am?”

“You are the Messiah,” Simon Peter answered, “the Son of the living God!” (Matthew 16:15-16, NIV).

“But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4). That woman was of course Mary of Nazareth, engaged to Joseph, a descendant of David. Mary, like Abraham, gave God the “yes,” the cooperation He so desired, for bringing humanity back into the blessing of the Life of the Trinity (Gen.22:18). With Mary’s consent, “the Word became flesh and dwelt [literally “tabernacled”] among us” (John 1:14). The angelic announcement in Luke’s Gospel also contains Tabernacle/Temple imagery, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you/ and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;/ therefore, the child to be born will be called holy,/ the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). This was the same language used to describe God coming to dwell in the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34) and the Temple (1 Kings 8:10). God Himself came to dwell in Mary and became her Son! And He did this without a male’s contribution; Jesus is the prophesied “seed of the woman” (Gen.3:15). Notice too in the angel’s message, the revelation of the entire Trinity (i.e., Holy Spirit, Most High, Son).

We have already seen how man and woman were created to reflect the Son’s receiving of Himself and giving of Himself to the Father (in the Spirit). He became a human being so that humanity, in His Person, could finally do what it was created to do – enter into the exchange of Love within the Trinity!

True God and True Man

What does it mean to say that God the Son *became* a man? First, Christianity is *not* saying that the Son surrendered His divinity. The doctrine of the “incarnation” says that Jesus is true God and true man, simultaneously. The two natures are not mixed together in some type of divine-human jumble. Quite the contrary, they remain unconfused. Jesus’ humanity is not swallowed up by His divinity; as a man He is not spared any of the fatigue, exertion, etc. that you or I are. His human mind is finite, has a limit. He has a human will that makes decisions. To meet the man Jesus, however, is to

meet God Himself. That human nature, that union of body and soul, is His – is fused to His Person forever. The words and actions are the *human words and actions of God the Son*.

The *only* difference between Jesus and other men and women is in the soul. You and I are born with that gaping hole, the absence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' human nature, the human nature of the Word, is filled with the Spirit. He is what we were created to be; not only does He show us God, but He shows us ourselves. His soul was not damaged, His passions not out of balance, but He still took upon Himself the effects of the Fall, our subjection to physical suffering and death.

There are a lot of things about Jesus' life, simple things, we fail to recognize. His relationship with Mary and Joseph is a perfect example. They were His *parents*; He was completely dependent on them. If Mary and Joseph didn't feed Him, He would have starved! They changed His diapers and potty-trained Him. He may have been the Word of the Father in His divine nature, but in His human nature it was Mary and Joseph who took him from babbling to conversation. While it is obvious that Jesus received knowledge supernaturally during His public ministry, we have to recognize that a great deal entered His human mind through Mary and Joseph's words and example, His own reading of Scripture and daily experiences.¹⁷ Even though Joseph was not His biological father, he was still His dad – His protector, provider and guide; and when he died, it would have been Jesus' duty to wash his body and prepare it for burial. I can only begin to understand how difficult that had to be for Him. In a culture where women could not work outside of the home, it would have then fallen to Jesus to provide his mother's daily bread. He knew what it was to work and be depended upon to make a living, and the work he did was manual. It took time and sweat, and if His customers didn't like it, He didn't get paid.

Jesus lived as His neighbors did; He was a country boy from Nazareth. No one expected anything different from Him; the Gospels tell us they were shocked when He began preaching. Growing up in Galilee, Jews closer to Jerusalem would have thought He had an accent. When we recall

¹⁷ Remember how when He was 12, His parents found Him in the Temple asking questions of the teachers (Luke 2:46-47)?

His preaching, we do not hear it with a “twang,” but the odds are decent that that was how it was delivered.

It is easy to forget that, within Judaism, Jesus was a layperson. He, being a descendant of David, was of the Tribe of Judah, and priests came only from the Tribe of Levi. God the Son didn’t have the religious “credentials” to enter the Holy of Holies!

Jesus shared in the same good, healthy human desires we all do. He cherished His friends. Like all of us He also needed time to be alone, to turn to His Father in prayer, and “recharge His batteries.” Jesus was a young man; he was able to look at a young woman and appreciate her beauty (both inner and outer).¹⁸ When all of His friends started courting and getting married He didn’t; He had to feel like a “third wheel” at times. Jesus, God the Son, knew what it was to be a “nobody” – to live over 90% of His life in a small town, work hard to put food on the table, and *appear* to have absolutely no effect on the world going on around Him.

The Anointed One, The Christ

When Jesus was around thirty, John the Baptist appeared in the desert, announcing that God’s long-awaited Kingdom was about to arrive. John described himself as the forerunner to the one who would “baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will...gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matt.3:11-12). How could John have meant anyone other than the Messiah?

John had to be a sore spot for the Temple establishment. He, the son of a priest, had turned his back on that ministry. Instead of pointing to the Law as the *end* of God’s revelation, John pointed forward to a new order established when the Messiah poured out the gift of the Spirit. He called the Jewish people, not to more fervent participation in the life of the Temple, but to a radical repentance from sin as preparation for the Kingdom’s arrival. The sign of their desire to repent was to accept baptism from John.

¹⁸ There shouldn’t be anything shocking about that. Jesus was a man, and God created men with an appreciation for women. Because we live in a fallen world, though, we are used to seeing this God-given orientation tainted by lust. When Jesus looked at a woman there was nothing self-seeking in His gaze; He saw her for the priceless, beautiful work of God she was.

At that point in Jewish history, however, it was a shocking thing to do. Baptism was the way a *Gentile*, an outsider, entered God's Covenant People. For someone born a Jew, circumcised, and living under the Law, receiving John's baptism was an incredible act of humility. It was equivalent to saying, "Up until now I have barely understood what it means to be one of the Lord's People. I confess my sin, my unworthiness, and want to begin anew."

The penitential nature of John's baptism is what makes Jesus' reception of it so initially confusing. What sin did God the Son need to repent of? Personally, none; but there was a history in Israel of leaders, representatives of the people, praying for forgiveness in the name of the nation, even when they personally did not bear the guilt. By being baptized Jesus tells us something very important: He has come to act in the name of *humanity*. Our first parents made a decision that wounded and brought death to us all. When God the Son became part of the human family, He joined Himself in some way to each member; and took it upon Himself to act in the name of all. Because the human family needed to repent, as its representative before the Father He did just that.¹⁹ Jesus said He was baptized "to fulfill *all righteousness*" (Matt.3:15).

I'm utterly fascinated by Jesus' baptism and the events it set in motion:

And when [Jesus] came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending on him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." The Spirit immediately *drove* him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan" (Mark 1:10-13).

Jesus relived the history of Israel in miniature - forty days in the desert as opposed to years. Unlike Israel, though, He didn't give in to temptation. The Adversary was extremely cunning; all of the things he set before Jesus were *good* in and of themselves: satiating His hunger, showing forth God's Power, governing the kingdoms of the world (Matt.4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). They were all magnificent things, things Jesus knew to be part of the Fa-

¹⁹ "For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19)