

“God Comes Near”—*Incarnation: One of Two Central Christian Mysteries, Part 2*

ECO Essential Tenets Study for BYF - July 26, 2026

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1. Announcements and Prayer

2. Review of July 19 Lesson on “God Is—*Trinity: One of Two Central Christian Mysteries, Part 2*”

- The astounding claim being made about Jesus: 100% God and 100% human at the same time
- The evidence in Scripture and in the life of Jesus for this claim

3. Today’s Lesson on the Incarnation:

- The problems many people and faiths/philosophies/perspectives have with the Incarnation
- The major heresies (and how they keep showing up today)

4. Section II.B, “Incarnation,” *Trinity and Incarnation: The Two Central Christian Mysteries*, ECO Essential Tenets

This is the second great mystery of the Christian faith, affirmed by all Christians everywhere: that **Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human**. As to His divinity, He is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father; as to His humanity, He is like us in every way but sin, of one substance with us, like us in having both a human soul and a human body. As to His divinity, He is eternally begotten of the Father; as to His humanity, He is born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. As to His divinity, His glory fills heaven and earth; as to His humanity, His glory is shown in the form of a suffering servant, most clearly when He is lifted up on the cross in our place.

We confess the mystery of His two natures, divine and human, in one person. We reject any understanding of the communication of attributes that must result in a blending of the two natures such that Jesus Christ is neither truly God nor truly human. We insist upon sufficient distinction between the two natures to preserve the truth of the incarnation, that Jesus Christ is indeed Immanuel, God-with-us, not one who used to be God, nor one who has merely been sent from God. Rather, in His coming we have seen God’s glory, for Jesus is the exact imprint of God’s very being and in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. **The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.** This is a mystery that we cannot explain, but we affirm it with joy and confidence.

This mystery of the incarnation is ongoing, for the risen **Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human**. He is bodily present at the right hand of the Father. When we are promised that one day we will see Him face to face, we acknowledge that it is the face of Jesus of Nazareth we will someday see. The one who, for us and for our salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless when He ascended into heaven, but would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit as a comforter and advocate. **We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.** He comes to us as He came to the gathered disciples at Pentecost: to kindle our faith, to embolden our witness, and to accompany us in mission.

5. The Problems People Have with the Incarnation

- “Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human.” (Essential Tenets above), raising the following complaints:
 - How can a human atone for the sin of the world?
 - How can God die? How can God rise from the dead?
 - How can a human rise from the dead?
 - How can God have two natures and yet be one integrated person?
 - How can we believe something we can’t fully explain?
 - How can we believe something we can’t fully prove?
 - We don’t know of anything else like this!
- So there must be other options...

6. The Other Options Offered for the Incarnation

- Jesus is divine but not human (Docetism: from Greek word “to seem,” so Jesus only seems to be human, but he’s really not; borrowed from Gnosticism: spirit is eternal, good, holy, while physical is temporal, weak, evil)
*****Much evangelicalism today focuses on the divinity of Jesus but struggles with the humanity**
- Jesus is human but not divine and first/best of creation (Arianism: so Jesus not co-eternal, fully divine, creator, etc; sort of quasi-divine, so “Son of God” means the very best of God’s creation with a special spark or touch of God)
*****Most theologically liberal schools of thought today are here in some fashion with Jesus as Example or Teacher; so also are the Latter-Day Saints, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Islam (but all for different reasons)**
*****Big player today: “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” as identified and coined by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, with little need for Jesus as Lord and Savior because things are set up this way:**
 1. A God exists who created & ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and world religions.
 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
 4. God does not need to be involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
 5. Good people go to heaven when they die.
- Jesus is human but not divine, but adopted by God in some fashion because of his sinlessness and devotion to God (Adoptionism in several forms; usually adoption takes place at baptism because of God’s language to Jesus there)
*****LDS gets a mention here too because Jesus is born human of the Heavenly Father and Mother and “grows” into the Son because of his holiness and work**
- Jesus is two distinct persons, remembering language of “person” is philosophical and not practical (Nestorianism: one human person and one divine person, so that Mary is the mother of the human person but not the divine person, and the divine person takes priority over the human person... it’s complicated)
- Jesus is human and divine, but fused into one nature, so you have to divide out what is what (Monophysitism: his mind is the divine Logos of Greek philosophy, but his emotions are human)

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *In your day to day life, how does Jesus being 100% God make an impact on you? What does it say to you about God? What does it say to you about you?*
- *In your day to day life, how does Jesus being 100% human make an impact on you? What does it say to you about God? What does it say to you about you?*
- *Of the heresies covered, which one makes the most sense to you? (Don’t worry, we’re not saying you’re a heretic for doing this, but you can see why others believe it.) Why do you think it has had such appeal over the years?*
- *Put the Incarnation into words that you think might explain it to a 16-year-old student. Or a South Asian neighbor? Or a graduate student in physics?*

8. Closing Prayer and Next Week

August 2	“God Saves”	<i>God’s Grace in Christ</i>
August 9	“God Chooses/Sends”	<i>Election for Salvation and Service</i>
August 16	“God Gathers”	<i>Covenant Life in the Church</i>
August 23	“God Entrusts”	<i>Faithful Stewardship of All of Life</i>
August 30	“God Forms”	<i>Living in Obedience to the Word of God</i>
September 6	Stand-Alone Bible Study	(Labor Day weekend) TBD