

What Child Is This?

Jesus Is Man

Intro

Jesus is both God and man. This is what Christians have believed since the time of the Bible. However, there has often been some confusion about what it means that Jesus is both God and man. In our last series, "Say What", we saw that Jesus is God. In the first week of this series, "What Child Is This?", we are going to explore the humanity of Jesus. In this week's Digging Deeper we will try and figure out exactly what it means when the Bible says that Jesus is human and what the implications are for us.

The Divinity and Humanity of Jesus

Jesus, who was fully equal with God in every way, who was the very form of God, did not see that as something to keep in his grip, but emptied himself of that equal status and role to take the status and role of humanity. He who was and is God took the likeness of humanity.

Theologians capture the laying aside of the divine equality, the divine lifestyle, with the phrase *he laid aside the independent exercise of his divine attributes*. What this means is that he didn't continually exhibit these so-called incommunicable attributes such as his immortality, omniscience (that he knows everything), or omnipresence (that he is everywhere), except at the leading of the Holy Spirit. While Jesus did limit the use of his divine attributes he did not in any way cease to be fully God while on the earth, but rather as Philippians 2:5-11 shows, he humbly chose not to always take advantage of his divine attributes (Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Jesus*, Crossway, 36-37).

The two natures of Jesus are unified, meaning that they do not function independently. Jesus did not exercise his deity at times and his humanity at other times. His actions were always those of divinity-humanity. This is the key to understanding the functional limitations the humanity of Jesus imposed upon the divinity. For example, he still had the power to be everywhere (omnipresence). However, as an incarnate being, he was limited in the exercise of

**Digging
Deeper**

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*Your attitude should be the
same as that of Christ*

Jesus:

*Who, being in very nature
God, did not consider
equality with God
something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a
servant, being made in
human likeness. And being
found in appearance as a
man, he humbled himself
and became obedient to
death— even death on a
cross!*

Philippians 2:5-8

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available for download at
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that power by the possession of a human body. In the same way Jesus was always omniscient (knowing everything), but his knowledge was somewhat limited by his humanity. This is why he is unable to know the exact timing of his return (Mark 13:32).

Think of it like this. The world's fastest sprinter is entered in a three-legged race, where he must run with one of his legs tied to the leg of a partner. Although his physical capacity is not diminished, the conditions under which he exercises it are severely limiting. Even if his partner in the race is the world's second fastest sprinter, their time will be slower than if they competed separately; for that matter it will be slower than the time of almost any other person running unencumbered. In each of these cases, ability is not in essence diminished, but the conditions imposed on its exercise limit actual performance (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Baker, 752).

The Implications of Jesus' Humanity

1) The atoning death of Jesus can truly help us. It was not some outsider to the human race who died on the cross. He was one of us, and thus could truly offer a sacrifice on our behalf. Just like the Old Testament priest, Jesus was a human who offered a sacrifice on behalf of others. 2) Jesus can truly sympathize with and intercede for us. He has experienced all that we might undergo. When we are hungry, weary, lonely, he fully understands, for he has gone through it all himself (Heb. 4:15). 3) Jesus manifests the true nature of humanity. While we are sometimes inclined to draw our conclusions as to what humanity is from looking at ourselves and those around us, these are but imperfect instances of humanity. Jesus has not only told us what perfect humanity is, he has exhibited it. 4) Jesus can be our example. He is not some superhero, but one who has lived where we live. We can therefore look to him as a model of the Christian life. The biblical standards for human behavior which seem to us to be so hard to attain, are seen in him to be within human possibility. Of course, there must be full dependence upon the grace of God and the indwelling work of the Spirit to make this a reality. The fact that Jesus found it necessary to pray and depend upon the Father is an indication that we must be similarly reliant upon him (Erickson, 738).

The Example of Jesus

When the preexistent Jesus took on human form he identified himself with humans. The evidence for his full participation in humanity reaches back even before the time of his birth to his ancestral roots. Both Gospels with birth narratives contain a family tree (or genealogy) of Jesus through his birth by Mary as well as through the lineage of his adoptive stepfather Joseph.

The genealogy in Matthew is a perfectly structured family tree in the tradition of the time- except for one detail. In an otherwise all-male listing, it makes reference to four women of Old Testament times- all of them considered Gentiles and burdened with a doubtful past or victims of male injustice (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba). Matthew's inclusion of these four Gentile women shows Christ's complete identification, even before his birth, with all sinners, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, to whom he came to offer salvation. Whereas the genealogy in Matthew goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, the genealogy in Luke traces Jesus' ancestry all the way back through Abraham to Adam, the father of the whole human race to which he came to minister. In both Gospels, the structure of the genealogies of Jesus is intended to show that, although Jesus was born a Jew, he came into the world to minister to the whole human race and that as Savior he belongs to anyone who responds to him in faith...

Not only did Christ assume human nature but he also became a servant among humans. He devoted himself to meet the needs of others- precisely what a servant does. In his own words, borrowed from the predictions of the ancient prophets, he described himself as preaching good news to the poor, releasing captives, giving sight to the blind, setting free the oppressed, and proclaiming God's acceptance of sinners (Luke 4:18-19). Even more pointedly, he declared that he

had come into this world not to be served, which would have been his legitimate right, but to serve and to give his life for many (Mark 10:45) (Gilbert Bilezikian, *Christianity 101*, Zondervan, 63, 66).

The empowerment of Jesus through God the Holy Spirit is repeatedly stressed in the Gospel of Luke. There we find that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and given the title "Christ," which means anointed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his own baptism. In the remainder of Luke's Gospel we discover that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit," "led by the Spirit," and came "in the power of the Spirit." Luke also tells us Jesus "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." Jesus serves as a supreme example to us of what is possible when totally depend on the Spirit of God (Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church*, Crossway, 18-19).

What Did Jesus Look Like?

We don't really know what Jesus looked like. While ancient Greeks and Romans left statues and images depicting their great leaders, Jew never made sculptures of humans since it was against their religion. The fear of falling into idolatry prevented them from making any graphic representations of persons. Therefore, we are not even sure what the average Jewish man or woman may have looked like in Jesus' day.

The Bible tells us nothing of his appearance. Only that he seems to have been a pretty ordinary person from a working class family. By trade he was a carpenter, which in those days was essentially an outdoors job. It required physical strength and multiple skills such as masonry, stonework, timber work, and woodwork. Undoubtedly, Jesus' hands would have become thick and calloused by the use of heavy materials and rough tools. Since he was a manual worker, he probably had the physique of a laborer with broad shoulders and strong arms. His face was tanned and furrowed by exposure to sun and wind, strain and pain.

The Bible confirms the impression of a physically strong person. He seems to be an imposing figure- if through the strength of his personality as well as his physical appearance. The crowds of people often identified him with some of the most intense, overwhelming, and influential figures in their history- Elijah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist, prophets who had stood alone in the face of opposition when they had called the nation to repentance (Matt. 16:13-14). Jesus also drove out the moneychangers and the people buying and selling in the temple area (Matt. 21:12). Many other times people wanted to arrest or kill him and he evaded them: either through intimidation or simply by tearing his way out of their hands.

Popular art, educational materials, and especially dismal portrayals in Christian films often represent Jesus as a wimpy, slow-moving, long-haired dreamer, an anorexic blond model disguised as a guru with a beard and a sad face. Obviously, Jesus was much different. He was a forceful, intense, fast-moving man of action, who commended the respect of friend or foe by the sheer strength of his presence (Bilezikian, 54-55).

The Humanity of Jesus in Church History

In A.D. 451, the Council of Chalcedon met to wrestle with the confusion that surrounded the divinity and humanity of Jesus. They issued the Chalcedonian Creed, which cleared up many heresies that wrongly defined the humanity and divinity of Jesus. In sum, the creed declared that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures (human and divine) who is both fully God and fully man. Theologically, the term for the union of both natures in Jesus Christ is *hypostatic union*, which is taken from the Greek word *hypostasis* for "person." The Chalcedonian summary of the

incarnation is the position held by all of Christendom, including Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians.

In keeping with the biblical position of Chalcedon, we must retain both the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus Christ. To accomplish this, we must conclude that when Jesus became a man, he did not change his identity as God but rather changed his role. According to the church father Augustine, "Christ added to himself which he was not, he did not lose what he was" (Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Jesus*, 36).

Final Thoughts

We have seen that Jesus' humanity means that Jesus was a real person, just like us, but without sin. He started as a little child and grew up into adulthood. He had emotions and feelings like any of us. Yet at the same time, the Bible affirms that Jesus is and has always been God. He did not give up his deity to become human. Rather, he added something to his deity. He did this in order to rescue us from the penalty of death which our sins have earned for us. Also, Jesus serves as an example to us. He totally depended on the Spirit of God throughout his life. And we too, as people who have put our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, have the Spirit of God in us. As a result, we can strive to live our lives like Jesus, dependent on the Spirit, doing the kinds of things Jesus did on earth.

Home Group Questions

1. Why do you think many of the pictures of Jesus (artwork, movies, etc.) are so inaccurate?
2. Think of some stories in the Gospels that reveal Jesus' personality. What do these stories tell us about Jesus' personality? Is this different from how Jesus is portrayed in popular culture? How?
3. What role did the Holy Spirit play in the life of Jesus?
4. Read Philippians 2:5-11. What does this passage teach us about how Jesus came to earth as a man?
5. What are some incorrect ways that people think of Jesus' humanity and deity?
6. How does Jesus serve as our example? What parts to Jesus' life were unique as the Son of God?

Personal Application

7. What areas of your life need to look more like Jesus' example? Take some time this week to reflect on where you can work on becoming more like Jesus.