

Editorial: Knowing, Adoring, and Proclaiming God the Son Incarnate.

Stephen J. Wellum

In this issue of *SBJT* we continue our year-long focus on the theme: Knowing our Triune God. Our attention now turns to “God the Son” with everything in some way contributing to thinking about, wrestling with, and coming to know and adore our great Redeemer more. There are many glorious truths in Christian theology but certainly the most profound one is the nature of the Incarnation and the glory of God the Son incarnate. To introduce this issue I want to make a few summary

remarks to remind us about the wonder of our incarnate Lord.

The word “incarnation” is derived from the Latin which literally means “in the flesh.” When used in theology, the term refers to the supernatural act of God, effected by the Holy Spirit, whereby the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Triune Godhead, in the fullness of time, took into union with himself a complete human nature apart

from sin and thus, as a result of that action, has now become God the Son incarnate forever (John 1:1, 14; Rom 1:3-4; 8:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:6-11; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:5-18).

The means whereby the Incarnation came about is the virgin conception—the miraculous action of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary—so that what was conceived was nothing less than the Lord Jesus who is fully God and fully man in one person forever (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). He did this in order to become the Redeemer of the church, our prophet, priest, and king, and thus to save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21). By becoming one with us, the Lord of Glory, is not only able to share our sorrows and burdens, but he is also able to secure our redemption by bearing our sin on the cross as our substitute and being raised for our justification (see Heb 2:17-18; 4:14-16; Rom 4:25; 1 Pet 3:18).

Biblical evidence for the full deity and humanity of Christ is abundant. In regard to his humanity, Jesus is presented as a Jewish man who was born, underwent the normal process of develop-

STEPHEN J. WELLUM is Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In addition to his role on the faculty, Dr. Wellum serves as editor of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*. He received the Ph.D. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and he is the author of numerous essays and articles, as well as the co-author of *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Crossway, 2012).

ment (Luke 2:52), who experienced a full range of human experiences (e.g. Matt 8:10, 24; 9:36; Luke 22:44; John 19:28) including growth in knowledge (Mark 13:32) and the experience of death. Apart from his sinlessness, which Scripture unequivocally affirms (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 1:19), he is one with us in every way. However, Scripture also affirms that the *man* Christ Jesus is also the eternal Son and thus God equal with the Father and Spirit. From the opening pages of the NT, Jesus is identified and presented as the Lord: the one who establishes the divine rule and who inaugurates the new covenant era in fulfillment of OT expectation—something only God can do (e.g. Isa 9:6-7; 11:1-10; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 34). That is why his miracles are not merely human acts empowered by the Spirit; rather they are demonstrations of his own divine authority as the one who inaugurates the kingdom, over creation (e.g. Matt 8:23-27; 14:22-23), Satan and his hosts (Matt 12:27-28), and all things (Eph 1:9-10, 19-23). That is why Jesus has the authority to forgive sin (Mark 2:3-12), to view the Scripture as that which is fulfilled in him (Matt 5:17-19), to view his relationship with the Father as one of equality and reciprocity (Matt 11:25-27; John 5:16-30; 10:14-30), and to do the very works of God in creation, providence and redemption (John 1:1-18; Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:6-11; Heb 1:1-3).

Later church reflection on this biblical data, especially at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, correctly affirmed that we cannot do justice to the Scripture without confessing that Jesus was fully God and man and that God the Son, who gave personal identity to the human nature he had assumed, did so without putting aside or compromising his divine nature. As a result, our Lord Jesus must be confessed as one person, namely, the divine Son, who now subsists in two natures. Additionally, Chalcedon affirmed that the Incarnation did not involve a change in the attributes of each nature so some kind of blending resulted, rather that the attributes of each nature were fully preserved.

This affirmation entails at least two important points. First, *the man* Jesus from the moment of conception was personal by virtue of the union of the human nature in the person of the divine Son. At no point were there two persons or active subjects. That is why in our Lord Jesus we come face to face with God. We meet him, not subsumed under human flesh, not merely associated with it, but in undiminished moral splendor. The deity and humanity coincide, not because the human has grown into the divine, but because the divine Son has taken to himself a human nature for our salvation. It is he, as the Son, who subsists in two natures, who has lived his life for us as our representative head, died our death as our substitute, and been raised for our eternal salvation. This is why the Lord Jesus is utterly unique and without parallel and thus the only Lord and Savior. Second, since the “who” of the Incarnation is the eternal Son, and since he has taken to himself a human nature alongside his divine nature, the Son can now live a fully human life yet not be totally confined or limited to that human nature. That is why Scripture affirms that even as the Incarnate One, the divine Son continued to uphold and sustain the universe (Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:1-3) while simultaneously living his life on earth, as a man, in dependence upon the Father and by the power of the Spirit (John 5:19-27; Acts 10:38).

Our affirmation of the biblical Jesus is beyond our full comprehension, yet it is only he who can meet our every need. Apart from him we do not have a Redeemer who can stand on our behalf as a man, let alone satisfy God’s own righteous demand upon us due to our sin, for after all, it is only God who can save and God alone. By becoming one with us, our Lord not only becomes our sympathetic Savior, he also accomplishes a work that saves us fully, completely, and finally. Hallelujah! what a Savior.