

“IN THE BEGINNING
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(JOHN 1:1, 14).

JESUS CHRIST— GOD INCARNATE

BY HANK HANEGRAFF

Every year as we near the Christmas season, serious concerns are voiced regarding the validity of celebrating Christmas. In response, we should acknowledge that when Christmas was originally instituted, December 25th was indeed a pagan festival commemorating the birthday of a false god. While this is a historical fact, what is frequently overlooked is that the church’s choice of December 25th was intentional. Instead of Christianizing a pagan festival, the church established a rival celebration. While the world has all

but forgotten the Greco-Roman gods of antiquity, they are annually reminded that two thousand years ago Christ, the hope of humanity, invaded time and space.

The reason we rejoice at Christmas is that the baby born to Mary and Joseph on that very first Christmas was no ordinary child. As Matthew records, this baby was the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of Immanuel—“God with us” (see Matthew 1:22-23). The ultimate self-revelation of God to humankind, Jesus the Christ was and eternally is God incarnate (literally, “in flesh”).

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doctrine of the Incarnation is aptly summed up in John's introduction: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). The clear testimony of Scripture is that, in the Incarnation, Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man; that is, he existed as the perfect unity in the one person of a divine and a human nature.

Paul eloquently expressed the profound truth of the Incarnation in his letter to the Colossians "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or

Incarnation, such as the precise modes of interaction between Christ's divine nature and his human nature, may transcend our human understanding, the doctrine of the Incarnation does not transgress the laws of logic.

To understand the logical coherence of the Incarnation, one must first consider the *imago Dei* (image of God). Because God created humanity in his own image (Genesis 1:27), the essential properties of human nature (rationality, will, moral character and the like) are not inconsistent with his divine nature. Though the notion of God becoming a clam would be absurd, the reality that God became a man is not.

Furthermore, it is crucial to point out that though the God-Man is *fully* human, he is not *merely* human.¹ Though he took on all the essential properties of

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things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:15, 19-20).

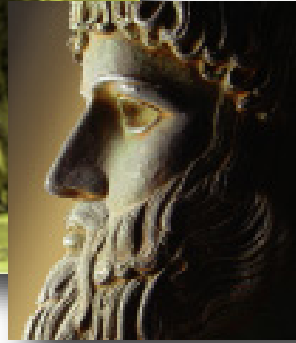
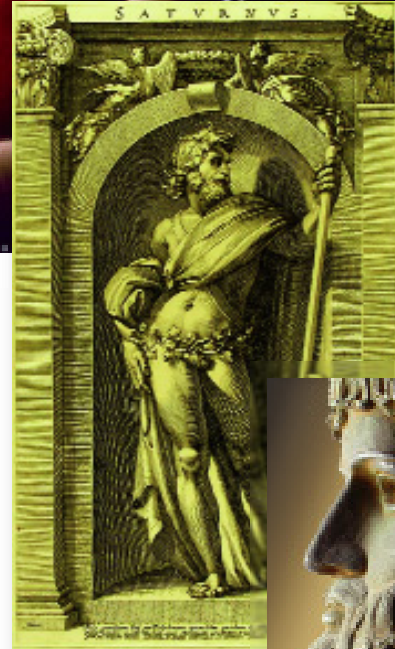
As *Theanthropos* ("God-Man"), the spotless "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) lived a perfectly sinless human life and died a sinner's death to sufficiently atone, once for all, for the sins of humanity (Romans 5:1-21; Hebrews 10:11-18).

Like the Trinity, the doctrine of the Incarnation is often considered to be logically incoherent. While many issues surrounding the

human nature, he did not take on that which is non-essential (e.g., sinful inclinations).

Indeed, as Adam was created without a proclivity toward sin, so the Second Adam was untainted by original sin. As with his moral perfection, Jesus' other divine attributes (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence and so forth) were not undermined in the Incarnation.

Finally, while Jesus Christ voluntarily refrained from exercising certain attributes of



deity, he did not divest himself of a single divine attribute (John 1:14, Philippians 2:1-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 2:14-18). With respect to his omniscience, for example, his human nature may have served as a filter limiting his knowledge as a man (e.g., Mark 13:32). Nonetheless, Jesus' divine omniscience was ever accessible at the will of the Father.

In sum, there is no incoherence in the biblical teaching that Jesus became and will forever remain one person with two distinct natures—neither co-mingling his natures nor becoming two persons. It is this miraculous Incarnation of God that you and I along with Christians around the world celebrate each Christmas. □

1. For further discussion of this distinction, see Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 84-91. For the technical philosophical treatment on which Nash's discussion relies, see Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

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