

Advent Meditation Week 2: Jesus Fully God and Fully Human

Tim Keller

For our next advent devotional, we're looking at the next part of Matthew 1. Very famous passage again. They're all famous, of course, because we listen to them every year at Christmas. Verse 18, I'll start.

This is how the birth the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet, the virgin will conceive and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

That's Matthew 1:18-23. What obviously is being said here is that Jesus Christ is both divine and human. He has a human mother, Mary, so he's biologically on his mother's side a human being. On the other hand, he has a divine father and what is in her is conceived by the Holy Spirit and his name is Emmanuel, God with us. God, he's divine. Us, he's human. God with us, he is divine and human at once. That's the doctrine of the incarnation. And that's what we celebrate every year at Christmas. But what does that mean to us? And I just very briefly like to lay out four practical implications of the doctrine of the incarnation, that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. Four practical implications.

The first one is, **because he's God, there is no middle ground when it comes to Jesus Christ.** There's no middle way. You're either completely for him or you're completely against him. You see, if he had just claimed to be a great man or a man with high God consciousness or something along those lines, then you might listen to him and say, "Well, I don't know whether I should follow him or not. I'll have to decide. I'll weigh things up." But when he claims to be God, then you either have to fall down at his feet and give him your entire life or you need to really run away from him in anger or fear. And that's exactly what you see in the Bible. Because of his claims, his astounding claims to have been, to be God, you never see anybody listening to a sermon and afterwards saying, "Nice sermon, preacher. I'll go home and think about it." People either threw themselves down at his feet or they tried to stone him or they ran away shrieking. And we live in a world, we live in a society in which most people who name the name of Christ clearly do not really understand this.

They don't understand his claim because there is no such thing as being moderately Christian. You either have to throw yourself at his feet and do everything in your life centered on him or you shouldn't have anything to do with him at all. Anything else is completely inconsistent. And yet most people in this country, I would say, who name the name of Christ, they are in the middle. And yet that's not taking the doctrine of the incarnation seriously. Number one. So, **number one is because he's God there's no middle ground.**

Number two, **because he's God there's no fearing of the future.** You see the God that Jesus Christ is is not the God of dualism. Dualism is a dualistic religions, dualistic philosophies and worldviews believed that there were two principles out there. A good principle and a bad principle. You even get that in Star Wars a little bit where they talk about the dark side of the force and the good side of the force. And the idea there is that you have good and evil locked in a kind of endless battle because they're equally powerful, but that's not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is omnipotent. The God of the Bible is completely in charge. Nothing can stand against Him. And if the Lord of love, Jesus Christ is God, that means, you know, who cares whether there's life after death? What we care is, is there love after death? And there will be. And will all evil and suffering finally be over? If the Lord of love is God, yes, eventually it will all be over. And that means this world, there's hope for it. And that means that you and I, with all of our flaws, there's infinite hope for us too. So, **because he's God, there's all the hope in the world. Because he's God, there is no middle ground.**

But here's two more. Because he's human, first of all, **because he's human, he understands.** You can go to him. That's what the book of Hebrews is all about. He's not like a God who looks down and says, why can't you get your act together? Of course, he calls for obedience, but he knows what it's like to be rejected. He knows what it's like to be hungry. He knows what it's like to be in pain. He knows what it's like to be the victim of injustice. He knows what it's like, whatever you're going through. He knows what it's like. He understands. You can draw near to Him and get mercy and help in time of need. But lastly, **because He's human, we can be saved.** Think of it like this.

Why did Jesus Christ become human? If Jesus Christ was a completely holy God and not loving, at all. Why in the world would he have emptied himself of his glory and come to earth and experienced all this? If he was just a holy, just God, but not a loving God, he never would have become human. But if he was only a loving God who says, "Oh, I accept everybody," then there would have been no need for him to come down either. He just accepts everybody. But only a holy God who says, "Sin must be punished," and a loving God who says, "But I need to punish sin in such a way that I can still love and forgive my people." Only a God like that, who's both holy and loving, would have become human. And that's why he did it. So that a holy God could satisfy justice at the same time, open his arms to us. If he wasn't human, we just couldn't be saved.

Let me just end with his little story. They say, by the way, that Dorothy Sayers who wrote the Peter Wimsey novels, they say that she looked into her novels, saw this guy, Peter Wimsey was an aristocrat, he was smart, brilliant, a great detective, but lonely, unmarried, and what's interesting is she writes eventually into the novels and into the short stories a woman named Harriet Vane.

Interestingly enough, in the novels, Harriet Vane is one of the first women who ever went to Oxford, by the way, like Dorothy Sayers. She happens to be a detective writer, like Dorothy Sayers, and of course in the books, in the stories, Peter Wimsey falls in love with her and in a certain sense she saves him from his loneliness, from the life he was living before. And somebody once wrote, and I've always thought about it, was that was that in a sense, Dorothy Sayers looked into the world she created and saw a man that she loved and she, in order to save him, she wrote herself into it. She entered the world, which only she as the author could do, and saved him. But that's what Jesus Christ did. He looked into the world. He saw us. He saw us dying. He saw us flailing. And he loved us so much that he wrote himself in and he became a human being, though he was God, and he saved us. Emmanuel. God with us. That's what it means.

Amen.

And now here's Tim and Kathy Keller for a short time of Q&A on today's meditation.

Kathy Keller

Okay, I'm going to put a challenge to you.

Tim Keller

Stump the preacher.

Kathy Keller

Stump the preacher. Well, no, but it's often stump the Christian because people all the time say, "There's not anywhere in the Bible that Jesus claimed to be God. That was just made up by other people. He never actually said, I am God. Show me a place where Jesus said, I am God." And I'll give you a minute to think about it. Not even a whole minute, but I mean, Lewis clearly in Mere Christianity said, well, if somebody says they're God, you either worship them or you lock them up as a lunatic on the same level as somebody who says he's a poached egg, or you revile them as somebody who has a devil. So, if Jesus didn't really claim to be God. Then we need to know about that, right?

Tim Keller

Oh, I'll say, yes.

Kathy Keller

So, the clock has started. Find me four, say four places where Jesus actually claimed to be God.

Tim Keller

Okay, three or four places. I will give you that and then I'll tell you a couple of other things just to think about. Well, for example, all the I am statements.

Kathy Keller

Sorry.

Tim Keller

All of the I am statements in the book of John where Jesus deliberately says ego eimi, which is unusual, by the way. You usually didn't, in Greek, didn't use the, you didn't actually need to use the first, the word ego eimi. But for example, at the end of the book of John, of James chapter 8 when he's saying, *Abraham rejoiced to see my day*, and the religious leaders are saying, *That's ridiculous. How could Abraham have rejoiced to see your day?* And then he says, *Before Abraham was, I am*. Doesn't say, Before Abraham was I am. He doesn't just say, Before Abraham was I was. That would be weird enough. I mean, to say that he's several thousand years old, right? Tell me why me. But he actually literally says, *I am*, which is a deliberate way of using the the divine name that God reveals to Moses in the burning bush, where he says, *who do you...* He says, what's your name? He says, *I am*. And so, Jesus is taking the divine name, and they try to stone him because they immediately know what he's talking about.

But a little earlier, by the way, in the book of John, John chapter 5, he actually says he is not a son of God, but he is the Son of God. He's the only Son of God. Now in that day, everybody knew that whatever... If you only had one son and one child, then the son inherited everything from the father, and that meant the son was equal to the father. And it actually says at the very end of John chapter five verse nine, they try to stone him when he said that because he made himself equal with God. But when he forgives sins, so in Mark chapter two he forgives the paralytic sins.

Kathy Keller

We're on to three, right?

Tim Keller

Yeah, already. He forgives the paralytic sins, and he says, *My son, your sins are forgiven*. Everybody says, *who can forgive sins but God alone?* And the whole point is, if you don't mind, you see if, (I should have mention Michael is my son) if Michael punches David, our son David in the nose, I can't say to Michael, "I forgive you for punching David in the nose,"

because of course only David can forgive Michael for punching David in the nose. However, if you're God, then all sins are against you. And that means for Him to be able to forgive was a claim to deity. And then, by the way, I'll give you just one more, and it's relatively simple.

And that is in Matthew chapter 11, he actually says, no one knows the Son but the Father and no one knows the Father but the Son. And every commentator I know, every commentator I know, including the more liberal ones, as you might say, say if he had said, no one knows the son but the father, okay, that's a lot. But to say, no one knows the Father but the Son, what they're saying is the father and the son's knowledge of each other is mutually exhaustive and it is a claim to be equal. And there are, there's so many of those claims that don't immediately jump off the page at you.

Kathy Keller

I thought you were gonna go to, *whoever has seen me has seen the Father*.

Tim Keller

He says that, he says that *I and the Father are one*.

Kathy Keller

Yes, *I and the Father are one*. I thought you were gonna go say to, *I am the Good Shepherd* because in the Old Testament, God says, *I am the Good Shepherd who watches his sheep*.

Tim Keller

But he also says, *I'm the bridegroom of my people*.

Kathy Keller

Yeah, that's what God calls himself in the Old Testament. I had a whole different list in my mind, but there's so many of them.

Tim Keller

There are so many. I would just like to point one thing out, is if you struggle with this at all, there's a book by John Stott called Basic Christianity. It's a very easy book to read and it's an old book. It's very basic. It's a basic book to believe. He's got an entire chapter in there on how do you see that Jesus is God and the number of ways in which he claims to be God directly and indirectly is overwhelming.

Kathy Keller

Okay.