

The Unique Christ: The Unique Nature of Christ
By Jason Huff
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Luke 23:33-43; Philippians 2:5-11; John 1:1-5,9-14

Our final Scripture reading today is John 1:1-5 and 9-14. May God bless the reading of His perfect, holy, and sacred Word. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

What makes a car a car or a bird a bird? With a car, does everything with four wheels and an engine constitute a car? A truck enthusiast might have something to say about that. A bird has feathers, is warm-blooded, lays eggs, and has wings. We want to say that every bird can fly, but we know that's not true of penguins. We like to think that a house has four walls – but go to cultures with triangular or rounded homes and we find it's not so true.

We have a hard time understanding the nature of things, putting our finger on its unique qualities. And if it's true of birds and cars and houses, it's absolutely true of humanity. What are we as human beings? There are a lot of answers out there. Ask a scientific secularist and they'll tell you that humans are nothing more than bodies. All our thoughts, feelings, emotions, everything we are is physical, a tapestry of neurons and electrical synapses firing. When the body dies, nothing else remains; we simply cease to exist.

Most people have a difficult time accepting that – we have the sense that something of us lives on beyond death, that our bodies are not just all we are. Most religions have ideas about that. In Christianity, we have an understanding that there are three parts to a human being – a body, a spirit, and a soul. The body we understand. The spirit and soul are different from one another, and yet indelibly linked to each other and to the body.

Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is sharper than a double-edged sword, that pierces to divide the soul and spirit. We believe that we live on after we die, that somehow our soul continues to exist. And we believe in the eventual resurrection where these three things come together again through the grace of God on us. But we know that it's hard to put a finger on the nature of who we are as human beings. We are more than just the some of our knowledge and experiences, our feelings and thoughts. God made us in His image, which is a fearful and wonderful thing we barely understand.

In today's study, as we continue our Advent series on the uniqueness of Christ, I want to focus on the nature of Christ – who He was in the deepest sense. When we see the baby Jesus in a manger, we don't always think about all He is and all He represents. Only a few people knew who Jesus really was – and all of them had to be informed by angels or special signs in the skies. But when we understand the unique nature of Christ, we will come to appreciate Him far more. I promise, while we've got some details to cover, stick with me – when we pull it all together, it means everything for our salvation.

What is unique about Jesus' nature? The first thing we want to understand is this: *Jesus has a human nature*. One of the first heresies in the church, one of the first huge mistakes that some people made about Jesus, was to believe that Jesus wasn't actually human at all – that He was only divine and only had the appearance of being human. That sounds strange to us because many people today don't believe in God and dismiss all the biblical discussion of Jesus' miracles and healings and wonders.

But early believers had eyewitness testimony from those who had been restored by Jesus. They heard reports from the apostles themselves about all they witnessed. They could see for themselves a man born blind now seeing, a man whose leg was deformed now walking. The evidence was strong enough that very early on, believers thought Jesus was divine. The error came when they wanted to dismiss His humanity.

That came from the Greeks. Greek thought valued only the spirit. They saw the body as a necessary evil. They felt the body hindered the spirit. So you had two different points of view – hedonism, which says you could experience every bodily pleasure because the body doesn't matter, and aestheticism, which taught that you had to deny the body to grow spiritually. Some in the early church had been taught these things, and they believed that if the body was evil, Jesus couldn't possibly have been human. So they said Jesus only appeared to be human.

But throughout the New Testament, we get confirmations that Jesus was totally human. In Romans 1:3, Paul confirms that Jesus in His flesh, in His human nature, is a descendant of David. If Jesus wasn't fully human, He could not have been the messiah, because the messiah was promised to be from the line of King David. Two of the four gospels record Jesus' birth, both of which have records of Jesus' earthly genealogy. Jesus grows up and those in the village of Nazareth know Him.

Jesus eats and drinks like a normal person, enough so that the Pharisees try to condemn Him for not following their manmade rules on fasting. Jesus needs rest – He sleeps on a fishing boat. When the time comes for Him to give Himself into the hands of the authorities, He is physically wounded by them – by the crown of thorns, by the lash of a whip, the nails in his hands and feet, and the sword of a centurion.

And at His resurrection on the third day, while Jesus' appearance is different than what it was, having returned in His resurrection body, He is still embodied. As our reading today explained, Jesus did not come back as a ghost. He was resurrected into His perfected body which the disciples could touch and hug. Jesus goes so far as to eat some fish with them just to prove He is alive and has a body!

Why does this matter? Because we need a Savior who is fully human. Our Savior needs to be able to relate to us. In Hebrews 4, Jesus is called our great high priest. In verse 15, it says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet was without sin.”

Jesus is the second Adam. Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. He can save Adam’s race because He became a member of Adam’s race. When we believe in Jesus and become His disciples, we are no longer counted to be under Adam but under Jesus. We are not children of God’s wrath under Adam condemned by our sin, but children of God’s promise under Jesus saved by His perfect life and sacrificial death. To be our great high priest, to be in the line of David, to be our perfect sacrifice, Jesus has to be fully human. He has a human nature.

So Jesus has a human nature. Ancient believers weren’t so sure about that, but we are. What they had an easier time believing, and what we have a harder time with, is this: *Jesus also has a divine nature*. Jesus has always existed eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit. There has never been a point at which Jesus did not exist. That’s the point of John 1 – that the Word, existed before the creation of the universe, and in fact is the person of the Trinity through whom everything was made. Because Jesus is divine, He has life in Himself. As John 1 later says, “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” Jesus takes on a human nature; He becomes human; but He was always divine.

Our passage from Philippians 2 gets into this as well. It tells us that Jesus was in very nature God, that He had the form of God. Yet He takes on the nature, the form, of a servant, of a human being. He doesn’t take His equality with the Father something He must hold onto. He never stops being divine, but rather than to assert His rights, He takes on every last bit of our humanity in Himself.

The apostles and various followers of Jesus recognized His divinity. While other people in Israel’s history accomplished miracles, no one did the sheer number of miracles that Jesus did, not remotely close, and none of them did them of their own power like Jesus did. Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Peter and the other apostles give Jesus worship. If Jesus was not divine but received worship due to God alone, then He would have sinned. Unlike the disciples in Acts, when people fall at Jesus’ feet to worship Him, He doesn’t stop them.

In John 8, Jesus nearly gets Himself stoned when He tells a group of listeners that, “Before Abraham was, I am,” using God’s name for Himself in the Old Testament. The final charge that gets Jesus crucified is His claim to divinity, that He is in fact the Son of God. It is the only piece of testimony Jesus provides at His trial. If Jesus was not divine and yet accepted worship, called Himself the I Am, and claimed to be the Son of God, then He was a liar or a crazy man and we shouldn’t accept anything about Him. But if was divine, then we must listen to Him and follow Him.

Again, we ask, why does it matter? Jesus' divinity is what bridges the gap between God's Kingdom and our sin. The Messiah needed to be human to save humanity, to stand in for us and with us. But the Savior also needed to be divine because His sacrifice needed to cover all His people throughout all of time. In Scripture, we learn that you die for your own sin. If someone could have, in fact, lived a perfect life without sinning, they would not deserve to die. However, no human being has the power to take away someone else's sins unless He is also divine.

Think about it this way...two nations are at war. One side committed treason and is the aggressor, who has broken every agreement with the other. The other side is willing to have peace talks, but justice has to be done; the costly damage must be paid for, and the negotiator must be able to settle the terms. The aggressors won't send a diplomat, and even if they would, they couldn't find a person worthy of handling the terms. It would seem that the conflict will go on forever.

That's exactly the situation we were in. No human had the perfection to stand in God's presence and negotiate a true peace. No one could pay the cost even for their own sins, let alone the sins of someone else. So God, in His grace, sends Jesus. He is fully human and fully divine, able to negotiate both sides of the peace. And because He is fully human and fully divine, perfect in every way, His sacrificial death is just what is needed to cover the cost of our treason. Through Jesus, God is reconciled to man and man is reconciled to God.

That brings us to the truly unique nature of Christ. *He is the God-man*. There is only one. Jesus is utterly unique. Jesus is so perfectly unified with the Father and the Holy Spirit that they are one; there is only one true God in three persons. And yet because of the incarnation, unlike the Father, unlike the Holy Spirit, Jesus is truly human at the same time. He is always able to communicate with the Father and the Holy Spirit because He is one with them. And yet He is always relatable to us because His humanity doesn't ever go away. He is always and forever going to be one of us. When someday the new heaven and the new earth arrive, Jesus will be among us as one of us.

Jesus is able to be with us now precisely because He is the God-man. His body still exists and was raised to heaven. Jesus will never be disembodied. But because He is also divine, He can be with us spiritually, all of us, wherever we are. His body remains in heaven, but through His Spirit, He can be anywhere. We never need to fear that Jesus is somewhere far away. Jesus told His disciples right before He ascended into heaven, "I am with you always, even to the very end of the age."

When we come to the birth of Jesus, then, we look on the stable doors with fresh eyes. We see a child there, perfect, innocent, fully human but far more than human, fully divine even though He has shed of all the outer signs of divinity, really and truly God with us. In a single person, the human and divine meet. Jesus, still fully part of the Trinity, also becomes eternally human. How amazing is that!

Again, let's bring this home: what does it mean for us now? Simply this: *a greater understanding of the true nature of Jesus leads us to deeper worship, richer fellowship with Him, and a greater appreciation of what He did for us.*

No one else is who Jesus is. No one else could have done what Jesus has done. And no one else would do it so freely and selflessly. Even the mythological gods never did what Jesus did. Zeus and his gang of buddies only pretended to be human in order to satisfy their human desires and to test humanity – the idea of a god becoming human to suffer with humanity and die for our sake? Inconceivable! Absurd!

But Jesus emptied Himself of His divinity. It doesn't mean He rejected it or it went away. He willingly set aside all the rights and privileges that were rightfully His in order to save us. And His human life was one of suffering. Can you imagine being the One through whom the universe was made willingly being confined to an infant's skin, utterly dependent on Mary and Joseph? Can you imagine being rejected by the very beings you made, up close and personal?

Jesus didn't come to the king's palace. At no point in His life did Jesus live anywhere near our standard of living, even those of us who really have it rough, and I know that's a few of you. He deserved everything and demanded nothing. He had nothing to give but Himself, and He gave of Himself tirelessly, over and over again, healing, teaching, restoring. I have trouble just getting up enough gumption to make dinner for my family after a day of work, and He's out there constantly sharing the Kingdom of God with us.

We don't even have to go into the great trials of the crucifixion and His passion to appreciate that Jesus spared nothing of Himself so that we could be freed from sin, made whole, and brought into the Kingdom of His glorious Father.

If we can appreciate all this, if we can appreciate the unique nature of Jesus, if we meditate on it, think it over, realize just how wonderful He is, we won't worship the same way. We won't live the same way. Because we will come to worship, come to fellowship, come to Bible study and prayer time and devotions with a different heart. My friends, this perfect Jesus, this God-man, He is worthy of your time and energy and praise. Learning His ways is worth the effort. Living like He lived is the one truly noble pursuit of this world.

We have more to learn together about the unique Christ, our Lord, in the coming weeks. But for now, rejoice in this: we have a Savior who loves us, uniquely human and like us in caring for us, in knowing our temptations and trials and able to see us through them, uniquely God and helping us know the Father and the Spirit, divinely able to move within us past our human frailties and sins. When we come to the manger, we worship the only one who is both God and man in perfect harmony, the only one who can rescue us from this dark world and bring us into His Kingdom of light.