

## Incarnation Day

- Blockbuster - Independence Day!...
  - aliens invade the earth.
  - lots of destruction, loud bangs, special effects!
  - *everybody noticed!!!*
- Almighty God breaks into history - same general effect?
- Not actually - we've just been celebrating "Incarnation Day!!!"
- Incarnation - God coming to earth in Jesus.
- I want to ask "three whats" about the incarnation:
  - What Happened?
  - What Achieved?
  - What Difference?

## The Incarnation: What Happened?

- Before we can understand what happened at the incarnation, we need to be clear on who Jesus is:

### Jesus was fully human

- Few today actually dispute the humanity of Jesus. Even so, it is worth reminding ourselves of the reality of that humanity:
  - Jesus was born: "...Mary gave birth to a son. And Joseph gave him the name Jesus." (Mt 1:25)
  - Jesus grew intellectually and physically: "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:52)
  - Jesus was tempted: "...and he was in the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan." (Mk 1:13)
  - Jesus desired food: "After fasting for forty days and forty nights, Jesus was hungry." (Mt 4:2)
  - Jesus became tired: "...Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well." (John 4:6)
  - Jesus needed sleep: "Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping." (Matthew 8:24)
  - Jesus cried: "Jesus wept." (John 11:35)
  - Jesus died: "But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs." (John 19:33)

### Jesus was fully divine

- The claim that Jesus was fully divine is the one today that might get more of a reaction from people. Many will dispute the divinity of Christ:
  - Muslims (he's a sinless prophet, though less great than Muhammed)
  - Jehovah's Witnesses (a created being, second greatest personage of the Universe, a god, but not the Almighty God)
  - Christian Science (separate Jesus and the Christ, Jesus not God)
  - not just sects & other religions - many sceptics, atheists, even some "Christian" scholars
  - etc, etc
- Scripture is, however, clear - Jesus was God. Here's just a sample of the evidence:
  - Jesus made **divine claims** (as did disciples of him)
    - "Jesus said... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)
    - "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am He." (John 13:19)
    - "...while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our God and

Saviour Jesus Christ,..." (Titus 2:13)

- Jesus performed **divine works** (ie, things only God can do)
  - Jesus is recognised as Creator (John 1:3, Colossians 1:6, Hebrews 1:10)  
(*Word - logos - active unifying principle of the world, source of existence, also God's word, that which accomplished his purpose*)
  - Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sin (Mark 2:5)
  - Jesus claimed to be able to give eternal life (John 10:28)
  - etc
- Jesus possessed **divine attributes**
  - Jesus possessed power over nature (Mark 4:35-41, stilling of storm)
  - Jesus knew of distant events (calling of Nathaniel, John 1:47-50)
  - Jesus had authority over life and death (widow of Nain, Luke 7:11-17)
- Not just particular events, things he did - also **divine characteristics**:
  - present everywhere (with you always, to end of age, Matthew 28:20)
  - all powerful (does whatever Father does, John 5:19)
  - holiness, truth, love, righteousness
  - etc, etc
- Finally, Jesus **received worship** as God
  - worship of the wise men (Matthew 2:2, 11)
  - disciples before his ascension (Matthew 28:9, 17)
  - man born blind (John 9:38)
- Just skimmed the surface - the weight of the NT evidence is considerable - Jesus is God

### Jesus was both human and divine: incarnation!

- We've established that Jesus is both human and divine - brings us to the heart of what the incarnation is all about.
  - "in-carnate" - in flesh (carnal)... God in flesh (John 1:14)
- So, Jesus left glory of heaven, and took on the frailties of human flesh and blood.
 

*Phil 2:6-11 - "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. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name..."*
- That's "what happened" - the first of our three "whats".
- But, what did the incarnation achieve?
- Why did Jesus leave the glory of heaven? Why did he do things this way?
- Our second what - what did the incarnation achieve?

### The Incarnation: What Achieved?

- Four main areas that are worth highlighting:

#### 1. Jesus Incarnate reveals God

- Start with John 1: Jesus Incarnate reveals God.
- No one has ever seen God. Even Moses only saw God's back, lest he die (Ex 33:18-23)
- If we take ourselves back before Jesus day, we know about God, but its hard to know him. Best description of a person is never same as meeting them. Even letters or phone calls are not the same as meeting the person.
  - Jesus said: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)
  - seen his character - his love, his holiness, his purity, his truth, his grace, his power, his purposes, his plans.

- Or, I suppose its a bit like trying to give directions: over the phone its really hard!
  - you can do a much better job face to face.
  - but best of all, get in the car and show the person! "Left here... right... keep going..."
- Jesus reveals God not by describing him - but by getting in the car with us and showing us the way, and introducing us to him!
- That's the first thing that the incarnation achieved - God with skin on, Jesus, shows us God, what he is like, in concrete terms.
- Jesus Incarnate reveals God.

## 2. Jesus Incarnate reveals how man can & should live

- In similar fashion, Jesus reveals how man was meant to be - without sin, fully in the image of God. He is what we all should have been like - like Adam before the fall.
- Indeed, the NT describes Jesus as the "last Adam".
- The old advice to Christians when faced with a difficult choice: "What would Jesus do?"
- Jesus, God incarnate - reveals God, and
- Jesus, God incarnate - reveals what mankind can and should be like.

## 3. Jesus Incarnate is able to atone and so bring life

- As Christians we believe that it is through Jesus Christ that we are reconciled with God:
  - we have all sinned, and that sin has separated us from God. We are destined for judgement, for eternal separation from Him. And yet God in his love reaches out to us: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Or again, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." (2 Cor 5:19)
- One facet of Jesus' work on the Cross was that he bore the punishment for our sins:
  - and he was able to do so in part because he himself was human
  - it was human sin that was the problem, and it required a human to take the penalty of that sin.
  - but at the same time, only someone who was without sin could do any more than take his **own** punishment... Jesus, being perfect, being God, being without sin, was uniquely able to take our punishment, to take our place.
  - *(2 Cor 5:21) "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*
- Because Jesus was both human and divine - because of the incarnation - he was able to reconcile us to God on the Cross.
- As John 1 puts it, "in him was life" and "to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."
- Jesus, God incarnate - reveals God,
- Jesus, God incarnate - reveals what mankind can and should be like, and
- Jesus, God incarnate - reconciles us with God.

## 4. Jesus Incarnate understands our frailties

- If we face an unknown or a difficult situation, we'll tend to ask advice from, or learn from the experience of those who've faced the same thing before.
- Now, already seen Jesus fully human - tempted, hungry, wept, laughed...
- This also means that Jesus understands what we are going through when we face these same things.
- Hebrews 4:15 has perhaps the clearest expression of this:
  - "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin."

- So, when Paul states that "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Cor 10:13), he knows that God really does know what you can bear - for he has been there himself in Jesus.
  - (incidentally, it also means we are without excuse when we give in to temptation!)
- When I go and visit folk during the week - people on their own, people unable to get out, people seriously ill, people who've just lost a wife or husband - I don't know what they are going through. Any comfort I could offer is empty. My only confidence is that Jesus understands, and that he goes with me.
- Jesus, God incarnate - reveals God,
- Jesus, God incarnate - reveals what mankind can and should be like,
- Jesus, God incarnate - reconciles us with God, and
- Jesus, God incarnate - understands our frailties.
- What Happened? God became fully human in Jesus.
- What Achieved? Jesus revealed God, reveals man as he should be, reconciles us with God, and understands our frailties.
- So, our final "what": What Difference does that make?

## The Incarnation: What Difference?

- Obviously cause for rejoicing - for praising God - for worshipping him, his surpassing love and mercy, the wonder of his self-revelation...
- More to it than that.
- Incarnation is like a principle for the way God works.
- As God in Jesus got his hands dirty, as God in Jesus gave up glory to become a man, as God in Jesus demonstrated his love for the people he came into contact with in concrete, practical ways, as God in Jesus revealed himself and the way to salvation....
  - so we will do the same.
- I've a friend who runs a youth club in his church.
  - I asked him one time what he was seeking to do - what was he trying to achieve. His answer was very striking:
    - *"I want to be Jesus with skin on for these youngsters"*
- Its all very well to talk about Jesus, to tell stories of his love, even to challenge friend and neighbour to commitment.
- But how did God choose to reveal himself? By living amongst us.
- If you like, there's an incarnational principle at work:
  - Church in the local community - not separate from it, but involved
  - *(What other ways can we as a church be "Jesus with skin on" to our community?)*
  - That's why we are "in but not of the world":
    - God did not remove us from the world; we still face all the pressures and temptations. Leaves us with the opportunity of being Jesus with skin on - at home, in the family, with our neighbours, at our work, in everything we do and are... Jesus with skin on.
- That's why our **evangelism** will not simply be hit and run, not merely preaching at, not merely dropping leaflets through doors and hoping that will be enough! Rather we'll get involved with the real people in our community, the hard to get alongside as well as the easy, and we'll be "Jesus with skin on" for them - showing them what our Saviour is like by our every word and action.
- That's why any **discipleship**, the training and encouraging of others in the faith, will not merely rely on the preaching (however inspired), on books, or whatever, but

will involve more mature believers getting alongside others, building relationships with them, encouraging and challenging by action as well as by word.

- And so on, and so on....
  - Jesus with skin on!
  
- Three "what's" about the incarnation, about Jesus coming as a babe at Bethlehem:
  - what Happened? God became fully human in Jesus.
  - what Achieved? Jesus revealed God, reveals man as he should be, reconciles us with God, and understands our frailties.
  - what Difference? A desire to live as "Jesus with skin on" for those around us... and a profound desire to praise God for the wonder of what he's done for us!