

## The War on Christmas

Luke 1:26-35



An all-out war has been declared on Christmas. Christmas as we know it, is being beaten down into an unrecognizable shell of its former self. Let me be clear—the war on Christmas to which I refer is not the fact that Walmart and other retailers may not wish you a “Merry Christmas” as you leave the store with your butter, eggs and oil filter in hand. I have said before that I could care less whether or not the retail clerks wish me a “Merry Christmas” and the people who worry about this have taken the issue way too far. What if the Walmart cashier is Jewish or Muslim? Should I demand that they wish me a “merry Christmas”? If all of the cashiers were forced to wish customers a “merry Christmas,” would that somehow bring glory to God? If I boycott retailers who use the word *holiday* instead of *Christmas*, will more people be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ? I could make a compelling case that these things will have the opposite effect of what we intend. No, this is not the war on Christmas I am talking about.

In a 1400 year old religious book that has spread throughout the world, the Christmas story has a very unique twist. The crowds gather around baby Jesus and Mary and ask, “How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle? He [Jesus] said: ‘I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet.’”<sup>1</sup> This is taken from the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Quran and turns baby Jesus into a speaking prophet who declares allegiance to Allah. This particular war on Christmas has been raging for 1400 years, but it is not the war on Christmas to which I am referring.

Let me read something to you and tell me if it sounds correct or not. “He that confesseth not that Jesus has come in the flesh...is not of God, but is Antichrist.” Would you say that this is a Biblically correct sentence? It sounds very similar to 1 John 4:2-3. “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist.” If I were to read that sentence, there would be nothing that would cause me concern. But did you notice the dot, dot, dot in the middle? I left something out of the sentence. Here is the full quote. “He that confesseth not that Jesus has come in the flesh and sent Joseph Smith with the fullness of the Gospel to this generation, is not of God, but is Antichrist.”<sup>2</sup> This quote is from Brigham Young, the second major prophet of Mormonism. This war on Christmas has been intensifying for the past 170 years, but it is not the war that concerns me the most.

In order to explain the war that most troubles me, watch this video clip of R.C. Sproul where he is answering the question, What is the biggest theological issue of our day? (play video clip) He concludes by saying, “We’re playing with real dangerous stuff.” But did you notice where his chief concern lay? Sproul said, “But even within the evangelical movement today, you see the assault on the work of Christ.” We know that Islam and Mormonism and every other religion or cult is incompatible with Christianity. We expect assaults from those kinds of directions, but Sproul is concerned about an assault from within the evangelical community.

More specifically, he is concerned about assaults on the *person* and *work* of Christ among fellow evangelicals. These two aspects of Christ always hang together and always affect one another. The person of Christ defines who he is and the work of Christ defines what he does. If you mess with one of these you ruin the other. This morning we will examine the personhood of Jesus Christ in the famous passage when the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary.

<sup>26</sup> *In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”*

<sup>29</sup> *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.*

<sup>30</sup> *But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.*

<sup>32</sup> *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”*

<sup>34</sup> *“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”*

<sup>35</sup> *The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*



This passage is known as the Annunciation of Mary. As you have probably guessed, I like Biblical art and use it frequently in my powerpoint slides. But I have a hard time finding a painting that accurately depicts this historical event. The vast majority of them look like one of

these paintings that depict Mary as a wealthy baroness or hyper-spiritualized saint. Of course all of these paintings are heavily influenced by yet another error—the false teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary—but we won't even go there this morning. I prefer paintings that are more historically accurate, like this one, which depicts Mary as a common person who may actually be working, instead of the first century equivalent of sitting on couches eating bon bons.



What is important here is not so much the announcement to Mary but the content of the announcement—the incarnation of Christ. Let's make sure we understand this word—incarnation. It doesn't have anything to do with Carnation instant milk nor is it a religious type of kingly coronation. The word “carnal” is another word for “flesh,” so to be in-*carnate* means that God took on human flesh. The incarnation is that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. This is not a small, doctrinal point. Our very salvation is dependent upon this fact.

The evidence for both the humanity and deity of Christ is all throughout Scripture, and it is also clearly evident in Gabriel's announcement to Mary. First, we'll look at evidence for Jesus' humanity.

*You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.*

This one sentence gives us a lot of information. First, we see it was a direct fulfillment of the prophecy from Isaiah 7:14. “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” There can be no doubt that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. Second, we see that Mary would become pregnant—*you will be with child*. Furthermore, the pregnancy will result in a birth of a son who will be given the name Jesus. Joseph and Mary didn't have to flip through any baby name books, did they? The name of their child was determined from before the foundation of the world. Mysteries such as the incarnation usually tempt us to ask questions like, “Could God have become incarnate without the normal course of pregnancy and birth? We almost always start to tread on shaky ground when we ask questions like, “Could God have done this...?” or “Why didn't God do it this way?”

Some religions and cults believe that Jesus was infused with the Spirit and became God for a brief time, usually during his years of ministry, but then he returned to being just a man afterwards. But the Bible is clear on the fact that Jesus was fully God from the very first moment of conception. If you recall, during Joseph's dream, the angel of the Lord said to him, “what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” We call this the “virgin birth,” but technically it should be called the “virgin conception.” From the first instant of conception, Jesus was both fully God and fully man. The rest of the birth narratives in the gospels also make this clear.

As I said before, there are numerous Scriptures that speak of the full humanity of Christ, but one in particular describes errors in this belief.

*This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. 1 John 4:2-3*

John doesn't mince words, does he? If you fail to believe in the full humanity of Christ, then you have the spirit of the antichrist. This is not exactly the way you would function in a debate. In other words, I don't recommend that you go around calling every other person you see the antichrist. If you do, you will lose all of your friends in a hurry. Notice that John is not saying that such people are The Antichrist, but that they have the spirit of antichrist. Any veering from this core belief is the proof that the person has a spirit of antichrist.

Evidence for the deity of Christ is also present in the announcement to Mary. *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*

The child will be great and called Son of the Most High. After his death, Julius Caesar was conferred the title of "the son of god," but Jesus was given this title at his conception. Before he was born, before he could walk and talk, long before he would perform miracles and wonders, Jesus possessed the title of Son of the Most High. It wasn't a title based upon what he did, but who he was. He was God. It was his essence, it was his very nature to be God.

We should also be reminded that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy from 2 Samuel 7:16. "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."

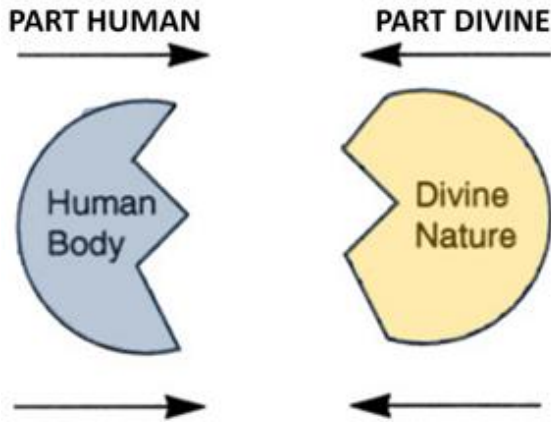
Furthermore, just as the apostle John had strong words for anyone who would deny the humanity of Christ, he gave an identical warning to any who would deny his deity.

<sup>22</sup> *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.* <sup>23</sup> *No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. 1 John 2:22-23*

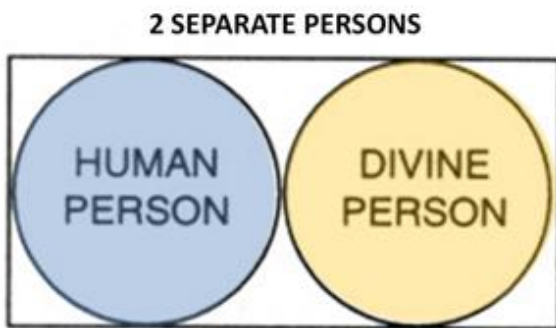
Finally, the last part of our Luke passage is a combination of the deity and humanity of Christ, given as a response to Mary's question.

<sup>34</sup> *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

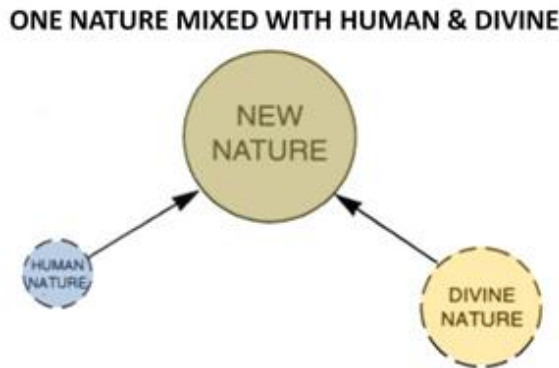
<sup>35</sup> *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*



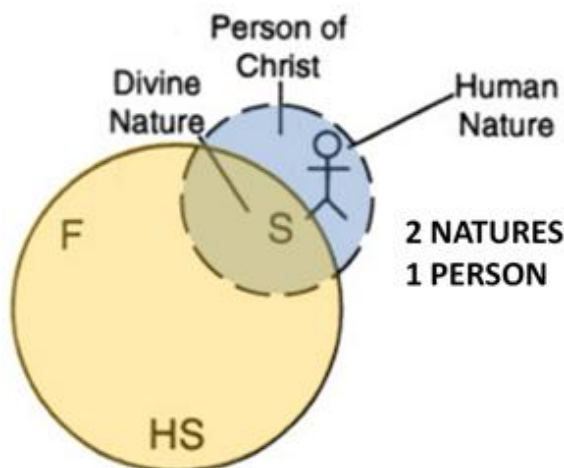
Notice that Mary’s question was not one of doubt, like Zechariah’s doubting question which left him unable to speak for nine months. Mary’s question was not a question of “if” God will do this wonderful thing, but rather “how” will God do it. Understand that Mary was about fifteen years old at this time. Speaking of Walmart as we did before, Mary was probably not old enough to be hired by Walmart or Walgreens, but here she was about to carry the Son of God in her womb. Gabriel’s answer is equally elegant and enigmatic. *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.* The word used here for being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit is the same word when Peter, James and John were enveloped by a cloud on the mount of transfiguration. They were enveloped by the Shekinah cloud of glory. Mary’s womb became an intimate tabernacle for the glory of God to dwell, and amazingly, develop into a human baby. The result would be that *the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God*—a Savior who would be 100% divine and 100% human.



So that we are clear about this, let me show you incorrect ways to understand this combination of humanity and deity. I have taken all of these illustrations from Grudem’s<sup>3</sup> Systematic theology that we study on Wednesday mornings.



Some have seen this unity as a combining of parts, like a half man, half God kind of person. This idea would like a centaur from Greek mythology. A centaur is half horse and half human and together they create a new creature. But Jesus is not half God and half human, he is fully God and fully human.



The second error is to understand Jesus as two separate persons in one body. If you are familiar with Gollum from Lord of the Rings, you know that he had a split personality and often spoke about himself in the plural—“We must have the precious! Jesus did not have a multiple personality disorder, swinging uncontrollably from one to the other.

The third error is believing that Jesus was a mixture of God and man. This type of Jesus could be compared to a chemical process like combining sodium and

Chloride. Was the two chemicals are combined, they form a new chemical and cease to be either fully sodium or fully chloride.

In contrast to these three errors, Scripture confirms that Jesus retained both his human nature and his divine nature. He possessed two natures in one person. In this way he is 100% human and 100% divine.

By now some of you might be wondering why this is so important. You are not planning to attend seminary and you don't have any theological exams you are studying for, so why do we have to spend so much time on all of these fine details? Let me answer that question with a quote from A.W. Tozer, which has been a theme for our Wednesday morning men's study. "The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems."<sup>4</sup> How could we finish Tozer's quote? The man who has a false belief about God will have ten thousand temporal problems. I try to point this out as often as possible—our beliefs will determine our behavior. What we believe about God can not only have eternal consequences if we get it wrong, but it can also have temporal consequences. Let's look at the reasons we need to have a right view of the person of Christ.

If Jesus is not fully human, then Hebrews 4:15 is turned on its head. *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.* Without the full humanity of Jesus, this precious verse becomes, *For we do not have a high priest who is **able** to sympathize with our weaknesses, because he was not tempted in every way, just as we are.* It was his humanity that allowed him to experience genuine temptation. Speaking of temptation, we are sometimes tempted to downplay the true nature of Jesus temptation. We somehow assume that it was easy for Jesus to overcome temptation because he was also fully God. He was fully God, but he faced and overcame all of his temptations as a man. Otherwise, this verse in Hebrews would be a lie. He was tempted in every way, just as we are. Really? Just like us? Yes, just like us. While Jesus did not have our modern versions of temptations, he experienced the core sinfulness of everything we have ever desired—power, fame, lust, significance, fear, depression, and more. Therefore, when he overcomes temptation it shows us that we can overcome temptation. Really, he was tempted just like us? Yes, just like us.

If he had not been fully human he could not have functioned as a substitute sacrifice for our sin. He was sin for us, on our behalf, yes, because he was God, but also because he bore those sins as a man.

The humanity of Jesus speaks loudly of his humility. A great song that illustrates this truth is Meekness and Majesty.

Meekness and majesty  
Manhood and Deity  
In perfect harmony  
The Man who is God  
Lord of eternity  
Dwells in humanity

Kneels in humility  
And washes our feet

This song has everything we have been talking about. Manhood and deity in perfect harmony. Lord of eternity dwells in humanity, knees in humility and washes our feet. How could the man who is God stoop down and wash the filthy feet of the disciples? Humility. The same humility that God asks us to imitate.

Understand that no one in their right mind outright denies the humanity of Jesus. Even the most liberal and atheistic person believes that Jesus was a real, historical person. But what they deny is his full humanity. If you deny that he became God at conception, then you are denying his full humanity,

Fully God and fully man. His is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He is still the God who is man, and as far as we can tell, will be so throughout eternity. This morning we sang the words, "I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon his cross." There is no doubt that for all eternity we will be meditating upon the wonder of the cross, but I also believe that we will be meditating upon the wonder of the incarnation—that the Creator of the universe could become a man.

Rich Maurer  
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One person, two natures

George Whitefield, the great British evangelist, was speaking to a man about his soul. He asked the man, "Sir, what do you believe?"

"I believe what my church believes," the man replied respectfully.

"And what does your church believe?"

"The same thing I believe."

"And what do *both* of you believe?" the preacher inquired again.

"We both believe the same thing!" was the only reply he could get.

A man is not saved by assenting to a church creed. He is saved by trusting Jesus Christ and bearing witness to his faith (Rom. 10:9–10).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>Isa 7:14</sup> **Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.**

<sup>32</sup> *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”*

<sup>2Sa 7:16</sup> **Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.**

<sup>Mic 4:7</sup> **I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever.**

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<sup>1</sup> The Quran, 19:29-30

<sup>2</sup> Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 9, p. 312.

<sup>3</sup> Grudem, Wayne A.: *Systematic Theology : An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich. : Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994, S. 300

<sup>4</sup> A.W. Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, chapter one, *Why We Must Think Rightly About God*.

<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Jn 2:20