

# What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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## The Incarnation

Christmas is often referred to as a “magical” time, and it truly is, not because of the seasonal trappings that capture our attention and emotions, but because it reminds us that Jesus truly was and is Immanuel, “God with us”.

The Scriptures are abundantly clear: Jesus Christ is not part God and part man; He is wholly God and wholly man. This unique and mystical revelation of our Creator’s direct participation in human history is the central mystery of the Christian faith.

### Jesus’ Deity

Christ’s full deity is evident in the divine titles that are used of Him, in His direct and indirect claims, and in His divine attributes and works. Jesus Himself claimed:

- To know Him is to know God (John 8:19)
- To see Him is to see God (John 12:45; 14:9)
- To hear Him is to hear God (John 14:24)
- To confess Him is to confess God (Matthew 10:32)
- To hate Him is to hate God (John 15:23)
- To reject Him is to reject God (Luke 10:16)
- To receive Him is to receive God (Mark 9:37)
- To honor Him is to honor God (John 5:23)

Jesus claimed to be the I AM (John 8:24, 28, 58), the unique Son of God (Matthew 16:15–17; John 10:36), the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises concerning the Messiah (Luke 24:26–27, 44) and the one who will raise all people from the dead and before whom all will stand in judgment (John 5:25–29). He is eternal (John 17:5; Hebrews 1:11–12), omnipresent (Matthew 28:20), and omnipotent (Hebrews 1:3). He is the Creator of all things (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2) and holds all things in the universe together (Colossians 1:17).

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15–17)

## **His Humanity**

The Bible builds an equally clear case in support of Christ's full humanity subsequent to the incarnation. Several passages indicate that He had a human birth (Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:4–21; 1 John 4:1–3), and that He also experienced human development (Luke 2:52). He had the human elements of a body (John 2:21), a soul (John 12:27) and a spirit (Luke 23:46) as well as human names such as “man” (1 Timothy 2:5), “Son of Man” (Luke 19:10), and “Son of David” (Mark 10:47). Jesus possessed all the human limitations except sin. He got tired, hungry, thirsty, and sorrowful, and He died.

*Jesus possessed all the human limitations except sin.*

## **Self-Emptying**

Philippians 2:5–11 describes the *kenosis* (self-emptying) of Jesus. This is related directly to Christ's nature as God and man, and verses 5–8 tell us precisely what was involved:

*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*  
(Philippians 2:5–8)

Jesus did not surrender His deity in becoming a man, but condescended to be united to unglorified humanity out of His compassion for us, so that we can ultimately be united with Him in glory. He veiled His resplendent glory and chose not to exercise His divine powers and prerogatives on most occasions while He was on earth.

## **Mystery and Controversy**

The mystery of the incarnate God-man has been the source of numerous controversies throughout the history of the church, and early church councils sought to avoid on the one hand the extreme position of rejecting His deity in favor of His humanity, and on the other the opposite extreme of rejecting His humanity in favor of His deity.

Only the God-man could fulfill the mission of bearing the sins of the world and giving His life as a ransom for many (John 1:29; Mark 10:45). If Jesus were just a “great teacher” or a “prophet from God” -- if He was only a man -- He would not be worthy of worship, and His death could never have atoned for the sins of others. And if Christ had not come in the flesh as one of us, He could not have died in our place:

*Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 2:17).*

Subsequent to His incarnation, the One who eternally possessed a divine nature now possesses a divine-human nature. In His resurrected body, the Lord Jesus will forever be the God-man. One might rightly say, there is a Man in heaven, and He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father as our Advocate (Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1).

*... who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Romans 8:34)*

### **Living Incarnationally**

As Christians, our spiritual life is founded on an incarnational dynamic; it is a divine *and* human process. This is why Paul told us to “have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Just as Christ loved and served others by putting their interests above His own, so He wants to continue this process through us.

## **Incarnationally, the Beginning Points to the End**

The Magic of Christmas is that it illustrates the way things should be and intimates the kingdom that is yet to come.

In his first advent, Jesus came in the weakness of infancy to become the Suffering Servant of those who were hopelessly lost; in his second advent, He will come as the sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

He first came veiled in the form of a child. The next time He comes, everyone will know Him for who He really is.

In His first advent, a star marked His arrival; but in His second advent, the heavens will roll up like a scroll, the stars will fall out of the sky, and He Himself will illuminate it.

The first time He came, the Magi brought Him gifts; but the next time He comes, He will bring gifts and rewards for His own.

The first time He came, there was no room for Him; the next time He comes, the whole world will not be able to contain His glory.

At His first appearance, few attended His arrival; but at His second appearance, every eye will behold Him.

He came first as a baby; but He will come again as the glorious Ruler of the universe.

In His first advent, Christ came in the weakness of an infant to become the Suffering Servant of those who were hopelessly lost. In His second advent, He will come as the sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

**Merry Christmas, Indeed!**