

Reading: John 1:1-18

Theme: The Wonder of the Incarnation.

Many people, whether young or old, can have their imaginations captured by superheroes. I don't know who would be your favourite superhero now or as a child, Superman or Superwoman seem to be the favourites of many, but then there's Batman or Batwoman, the Incredible Hulk, the Flash and a whole host of others promoted by Marvel. Both children, and I guess a few adults, have wondered what it would be to have superhuman abilities and yet the Bible has someone even more amazing because, unlike the superheroes, our "Superhero" truly lived and His powers exceed those of comic book tales.

This morning we are going to be looking at the supreme mystery associated with the gospel - the incarnation. It has been said that the incarnation is more of a miracle than the resurrection because in it somehow a holy God and sinful humanity are joined, yet without the presence of sin. Jim Packer said "*Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is the truth of the incarnation.*" We are to realise that in Jesus, God entered the human realm, lived among us, taught, did miracles and inter-reacted with real people in real situations. I want us to consider the start of v14 "*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.*" Although we will look at this great Christmas theme, I want us to turn back to OT and Moses for a few moments. In Exodus 33:18ff Moses desired to see God's glory and he was privileged to have God's name (*character and being*) declared to him and to see the tail end of the glory of God. Moses was told that no one could see God and live as God is so glorious, so awesome, so burningly, destructively

wonderful that a mortal man would find it a terror and torture to be in His presence. If we are a Christian we can only anticipate being there with delight and joy because of the great work of God's grace in us and that alone will enable us to bear that holy presence and sight. No human body could stand being in God's presence.

Now move on from Moses' time to the birth of the Lord Jesus in Bethlehem and consider the miracle of the power displayed in the Word becoming flesh, that God the Son should join frail humanity and almighty deity together is staggering. Here is manhood that did not merely see God and live, but was inhabited, forever joined with that awesome fullness of deity. It is an amazing thing that a human body could abide the presence of Jehovah, Yahweh, the Lord in union with it.

We are briefly looking at the wonder of the Incarnation. The Word "*Incarnation*" is a shorthand way of saying that the eternal Son of God took a real humanity to Himself and was at the same time fully God and fully man. John 1:14 simply says "*The Word became flesh*" and Paul in 1 Timothy 3:16 (AV) says "*God was manifest in the flesh*". Here is the wonder, the supreme mystery, the miracle of Christmas – the incarnation and on this we rest in our faith and we will go on to see it was necessary. I want to use 3 points to help us look at the wonder of the incarnation:

1. Who?

John and the Bible are very clear that it was not the triune God that took humanity, but the second person of the Godhead. Yes, the Trinity is a mystery - one God and yet three distinct

persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. All fully God, all of the same substance, all infinite, all pure spirit and invisible, all immortal, all never changing, all holy, free, wise and all sufficient. We cannot, unless by divine revelation distinguish, any difference of being, but Scripture reveals to us three distinct persons, but the Godhead is one. Yet in John's Gospel in His introduction which we read, the second person of the Godhead is there termed "*the Word*". He is shown as God, was with God at the beginning, was active and instrumental in Creation (v3) and we learn more of Him in Hebrews 1:2 & 3 "*but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word*"

Straightaway we are confronted with the glorious God in the second person of the Godhead. He was forever God and not a created being and if we could go back in time and into eternity 'past' there would never be a point when He did not exist. He is the pre-existent Son of God and we are not to limit His Sonship to when He was born on earth, for He is described as the eternal only begotten Son of God. The Christmas story doesn't merely centre on a crying baby, born to displaced parents in a situation of abject poverty, but it centres on the glorious, awesome Son of God who took a real body to Himself and yes He did become a crying baby but I'm getting ahead of myself as we see:

2. What?

Charles Spurgeon, a famous Victorian preacher, called the incarnation "*a miracle of power and love*". This eternal, self-existent God, took, was manifest in the flesh. It was not the appearance of a body, it was not a superhuman or Superman type body, but He took to Himself a real, "*bog standard*" body. If He had taken the nature of an angel that would have been amazing and incredible; if He had taken a superhuman body that too would have been even more amazing, but that He became bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh is truly staggering - He became a real man and everything that makes us human He had - blood, bones, nerves, tissue, hormones, mind, imagination, humour, feelings and a soul. Everything that naturally belongs to an ordinary human being He took - the incarnation is awesomely amazing.

To look at Him you would see a baby, you would see a child, a teenager, a young man, a man. As a baby He needed to be fed, cared for, have His nappy changed, learn how to crawl, walk, talk, read, write, to use the tools in Joseph's workshop. He was a real man. Yet the miracle of power and love is that this one person, at the same time, had all that belongs to God and all that belongs to man. The eternal self existent God the Son began to be what He eternally was not. There are vast contrasts here - the infinite became finite; the eternal one outside of time entered into time and became subject to its conditions; the immutable unchanging one became mutable and subject to change as a human; the invisible became visible; the Creator became the created; the sustainer of all became dependent on creatures; the Almighty became weak and helpless - all these and more are included in the phrase "*the Word became flesh*".

Here we have a great mystery that there are two natures in one person. Theologians have discussed this and given it a wonderful name - the hypostatic union. Basically it means that Jesus wasn't a blend of God bits and man bits, but He was totally God and totally man in the same person and was the God-man. Paul acknowledges it as a mystery - "*great is mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh*" 1 Timothy 3:16 (AV). This miracle of power and love occurred in the incarnation at Jesus' conception. While we speak of the virgin birth and rightly do so, realise the manner of His birth was not supernatural per se as it was the ordinary birth process and delivery, as was the foetal and embryonic development in Mary's womb before the birth. At her full-term Mary truly gave birth, but the miracle of power and love occurred in the begetting, the conception, the giving of life to and the fertilisation of the cell in Mary from which the humanity of Jesus developed.

This is a supernatural event. We stress the virgin birth to show no man was involved in the process, no coming together of human sperm and ova. The humanity of the Lord Jesus was begotten, procreated, created by the Holy Spirit. It was not some idea of a sex act between a divine being and human, but was an overshadowing and a creative act in her by the power of the Holy Spirit through which Mary conceived as the Holy Spirit procreated, begat, gave life. This makes the incarnation supernatural through and through. At the point of begetting and conception, the eternal Son of God was joined to human flesh - a single cell before ever the baby was born. "*Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man*" - a

microscopic cell is true also! The baby was the Holy One and the developing foetus and embryo was too as He went through the developmental process we all go through in the womb, as He subjected himself to the laws of nature He himself had designed and established, but at all stages this was uniquely watched over by the Holy Spirit.

The Word became flesh and did not take away anything He was, but added human nature to His divinity and that wasn't for a short time, but for all eternity. The God-man sits enthroned in heaven now. Only by this supernatural process could He be born of a virgin. We can speak of these things, but do we see anything of the wonder of this miracle of power and love? People have mocked and ridiculed the incarnation, the virgin birth, but in our time genetic engineering, cell research by great brains and doctors, make many things seems so possible. I don't feel that the God who designed and made all, found it too hard to create the body of the incarnate Son of God from the womb of the Virgin Mary. He has all the power, all the knowledge and all the authority to do such. In fact the NT and OT make much of this truth and therefore I think it's quite important! Have we ever thought about its importance? Let's consider briefly now:

3. Why?

God knew man would fall into sin, He planned the incarnation before the foundation of the world. The need for the incarnation was brought about by man's sin. This miracle of power and love was brought into being as a result of our need of a Saviour and in the plan of God this one would come to save us from our sin and rescue us from its consequences.

This is the only Saviour that God in His power, wisdom and love has provided and it was One who was fully God and fully man. The Son of God became a real man; of His own free will He did this, so that He might become capable of suffering death for His people. As God He couldn't suffer death, couldn't shed His blood, couldn't conquer sin and Satan ***for mankind*** and so make salvation secure. Man sinned and fell and so the victory had to be accomplished by a man. The first Adam was defeated and we are all in him. The last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) was born the seed of the woman and in His supernatural begetting and conception, Jesus' humanity was supernaturally preserved, kept from the pollution of original sin that is passed on in our human nature. We are all born with sin in us - total depravity, which does not refer to the extent of our sin, but that sin affects our bodies, minds, desires, emotions and every part of us has sin's depraving influence upon it. Sin affects us totally in every part. In His supernatural conception Jesus was preserved from this and so was able to live a sinless life. Yes He could be tempted all His life, even tempted on the cross, but He was without sin.

Isn't it staggering then that this magnificently incarnate Son of God offered Himself as a perfect sinless sacrifice to God. He had no sin of His own, but because and only because He was fully God, He took the infinite punishment our sin deserved from God. If He were less than fully God, as many teach, then He could not have taken infinite punishment as a finite being. The incarnation secured for us salvation because the One who would die in our place was the God-man and really achieved our victory and bore our punishment. Yet as a real man, He even bore temptation (*to be tempted is not*

wrong) and He became qualified to become our Great High Priest. In the book of Hebrews we read of the high priest needing to be taken from among the people so that he could understand and sympathise with them. Our Great High Priest was tempted in every way as we are and yet without sin and because of this He is able to understand and sympathise with us perfectly (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16)

We may question that if He did not sin how He could sympathise with us, but He was God the Son manifest in the flesh and He had to humble himself to do that. As He was tempted and tested the devil tried every trick in the book and more besides, but He took all the enormous pressure of temptation that came His way and He stood perfect and sinless. He took the full force of temptation and of the schemes and wiles of the devil and yet He did not sin. This perfect one, the Word made flesh, then endured more suffering as He humbled Himself to death, even death on the cross, where He became sin. The sinless, spotless, perfect Son of God was made sin and took its punishment in our place, so that He could be our Saviour - as His name Jesus means.

This was all gloriously possible and occurred because of the miracle and power of love in that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The incarnation is wonderful. We have only really bounced along the surface of this glorious truth, but I pray it will cause us to wonder at its glorious truths and that Jesus really is Immanuel "*God with us*", and He did so to become the Saviour of people like you and me.