

## JESUS CHRIST: TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory,  
glory as of the only Son from the Father.*

—JOHN 1:14

### SCRIPTURE READING

*Either before you arrive or as you wait for class to begin, find this short passage from Sacred Scripture in your Bible or through an online search. Reading it will prepare you for this week's material.*

—Luke 1:26–38

### OPENING PRAYER

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts,  
that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son  
was made known by the message of an Angel,  
may by his Passion and Cross  
be brought to the glory of his Resurrection.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## SESSION 7 VIDEO LESSON: JESUS CHRIST, TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

*As you watch the video lesson, refer to these key highlights. Feel free to use the space provided to take notes.*

- ♦ “The Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14). We call this the Incarnation, which literally means “enfleshment.”

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- ♦ Scripture teaches us that Jesus is true God and true man. This is one of the most important tenets of the Christian faith.

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- ♦ The Incarnation is a remedy for sin, and it repairs the fall of our first parents.

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- ♦ As man, Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit at the first moment of his conception, and this is manifested at his baptism in the Jordan.

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- ♦ In his humanity, Jesus possessed every spiritual gift and grace possible for a man.

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## *Wisdom of the Saints*

The Son of God became man so that we might become God.



—St. Athanasius

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Take a moment to answer these questions with a partner or with the group.*

1. What does it mean to say that the Word “became flesh”?

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2. How does Scripture typically explain *why* the Son became man?

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3. In what sense was Jesus “anointed” with the Holy Spirit?

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## WITNESS TO CONVERSION

*After concluding your group discussion, return to watch the second video where converts to the Catholic faith discuss their conversion and how they live today as Catholics.*



### *Rome to Home*

After the unhappy fall of Adam, the whole human race, infected by the hereditary stain, lost their participation in the divine nature, and we were all “children of wrath.” But the all-merciful God “so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son,” and the Word of the Eternal Father with the same divine love assumed human nature from the race of Adam—but as an innocent and spotless nature—so that He, as the new Adam, might be the source whence the grace of the Holy Spirit should flow unto all the children of the first parent. Through the sin of the first man they had been excluded from adoption as children of God; through the Word incarnate, made brothers according to the flesh of the only-begotten Son of God, they receive also the power to become the sons of God.

—Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, no. 12



### KEY TERMS

**Incarnation:** Literally, “enfleshment.” It refers to the Word becoming flesh (see Jn 1:14), his becoming man. More generally, the term refers to the fact that the Son of God assumed human nature and became man in order to accomplish our salvation in that same human nature. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, is both true God and true man, not part God and part man.

**Co-eternal:** A term used to express how the Son exists eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is no moment when one existed without the others.

**Anointing:** An act of consecrating someone for a special mission through the imposition of oil, as when David was anointed king (see 1 Sm 16:12–13). Anointing is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. In fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit as priest, prophet, and king. Christ (in Hebrew, *Messiah*) means the one “anointed” by the Holy Spirit.





## God's Word

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

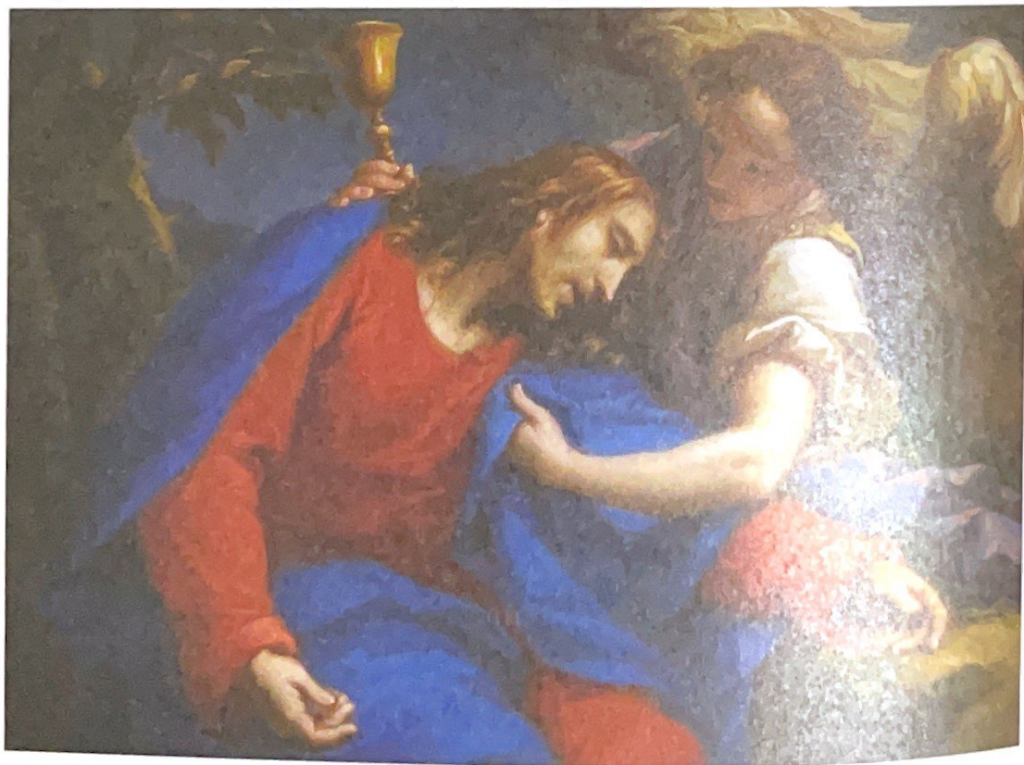
—Galatians 2:20

### CLOSING PRAYER

LEADER: Our Help is in the name of the Lord.

RESPONSE: Who made heaven and earth.

*All make the sign of the cross.*



**AT HOME REVIEW**

*Read this review of the material. Write down any questions you still have after doing so.*

**The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us**

St. Thomas Aquinas, when he wrote a short summary of the Christian faith for his good friend and secretary Brother Reginald of Piperno, told him that there were two things he should always keep before his eyes: the divinity of the Trinity and the humanity of Christ.

We already covered the first point in an earlier session on the Holy Trinity: the Son of God is co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father. He proceeds from the Father as the Father's eternal Word. The Son is true God. In this chapter, we're looking at the second central point: this very same eternal Son of the Father, who is true God, truly became man for our salvation in order to reconcile the world to himself and lead us back to the Father.

We read about this in the opening lines of St. John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:1, 14).

"The Word became flesh." We abbreviate this in a single word: *incarnation*. That word literally means the "enfleshment" of the Word, his becoming man. A famous Scripture passage on this theme is from Philippians 2. There, St. Paul is writing to a community he had visited some time earlier, and he quotes what scholars believe is an early Christian hymn about Christ that both St. Paul and the Christians in Philippi knew; in fact, this hymn, they think, may be the oldest writing about Jesus that has come down to us, older even than the Gospels. "Though he was in the form of God, [Jesus] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6–8).

The eternal Son is God from all eternity, equal to the Father. But, sent



by the Father, he emptied himself and took on a human form or nature—a true humanity, even to the point that he accepted to suffer and die on the cross for us.

This text, and many others like it, teach us two things about the inner identity of Jesus.

First, the person of the Son is God, and he pre-existed his conception and birth as man. Jesus is true God, and as God, he has always existed. Second, when the fullness of time came, he was sent by the Father to assume a complete human nature—with a human body and a human soul, with a human mind and a human will, a true human nature with a human mother, with human emotions, and even with a human vulnerability to suffering and death.



To say that the Word “became flesh” does not mean, therefore, that the Word stopped being God or was changed in any way. Rather, it means that the divine Son (“Son” and “Word” are names for the same divine Person) “assumed” a human nature to himself while still remaining fully and truly God. He did not cease to be God, but he joined to himself a true humanity so that, after that moment, the Son was both truly God and truly man.

In other words, Jesus Christ is one Person, who is true God and true man. To use the more technical terms of Catholic theology, in Christ, there is one person—the eternal Son—who, after taking on a human nature in

the womb of the Virgin Mary, then “subsists in” (or exists according to) two natures, the divine nature and an individual human nature.

Listen to how Pope St. Leo the Great put it in his famous letter written in AD 449, which became the basis for the profession of faith of the Council of Chalcedon. In the incarnation of the eternal Word in Mary’s womb,

the Son of God, descending from his heavenly throne, enters into the infirmities of this world; and not leaving the Father’s glory, he is generated in a new order and a new birth. . . . For he who is true God is likewise true man, and there is no falsehood in this unity, in which the lowliness of man and the heights of divinity coincide. God is not changed by his compassion, nor is man swallowed up by such dignity. For each nature does what is proper to each in communion with the other.

This truth about the inner identity and constitution of Christ—that Jesus is true God and true man—then unfolds into a very beautiful truth about his work of salvation: the eternal Son was sent into the world by the Father and became man for the salvation of the world. Listen to what the first Letter of St. John says: “God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him” (1 Jn 4:9). St. Paul testifies to the same thing: “when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4–5).

The reason for the incarnation—the reason why a person who is true God became also truly man—was for us and our salvation. After our first parents fell into sin, humanity was corrupted by sin and destined to die. Jesus then came as a savior and assumed our human nature in order to redeem it and raise us up to share in his divinity and, more specifically, *to share in his own sonship*, as we become adopted sons and daughters through him.

This is why it is so important to say that he is true God and true man. As true man, he truly enters into our condition, and he saves human nature from inside, you might say. And as true God, he brings the eternal life of God *into* our humanity so that we could be raised up to share in his divinity.



Though it may be difficult for our minds to fully grasp it, this is a marvelous and very profound truth that is, in fact, the Christian message of salvation. And it is why the Church has been so careful to preserve and proclaim her belief in the full divinity and the true humanity of Christ.

Let's return to the Gospels to speak about another wonderful facet of the truth about Jesus. As man, he is anointed by the Holy Spirit. Anointing is an act of consecrating someone for a special mission by placing oil on one's head, as for instance when David was anointed king (see 1 Sm 16:12–13). In fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus the Christ (or *Messiah*) was anointed by the Holy Spirit as priest, prophet, and king. Jesus himself quoted the words of the prophet Isaiah, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, / because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Lk 4:18). You might also think of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river, when the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and a voice was heard from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). This does not mean that Jesus only became the Son at that moment, or that he only started to possess the Holy Spirit at that moment; rather, this event was an extraordinary manifestation at the beginning of Jesus's public ministry of his true identity, an identity he possessed from the first moment of his conception as man.

That identity is two-fold: he is both the Son of God as well as the anointed of God. In fact, this is what *Christ* means: *Christus* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*, which means "the anointed one." Thus, Jesus is true God and true man, and as man, he is *anointed by the Holy Spirit*.

This means that, in his sacred humanity, Jesus possessed every spiritual gift and every grace that it is possible for a human being to have. He had a true human mind, which received all of the graces of prophecy and even of knowledge so that he really could read the hearts and minds of those around him. As John 2:25 says, Jesus "knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man."

What is more, he had a perfect knowledge of God. With the highest part of his human mind, Jesus constantly beheld the face of the Father. And therefore, as the incarnation of the Father's Word, he was the most perfect



possible revelation of God to the world: he spoke, in human words and with human images and parables, in order to reveal to us who God truly is. Or, to put it another way, Christ is *the most perfect teacher*.

Similarly, Jesus worked many extraordinary miracles; one of the most striking things in the Gospels is the way they show him doing this from a power that he possessed in himself. This is another way for the Scriptures to show *his divine authority*. In fact, these miracles were also a confirmation of the truth of what Jesus said and taught. For example, when the Pharisees doubt that he has the authority to forgive sins, he proves it by healing a paralyzed man who miraculously stands up and begins to walk.

Jesus's greatest miracle, of course, was his resurrection from the dead, after being crucified, killed, and buried. This, more than anything else, shows how his incarnation destroys death and bestows life.

#### **I STILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

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#### **DIGGING DEEPER**

St. Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*. Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012.