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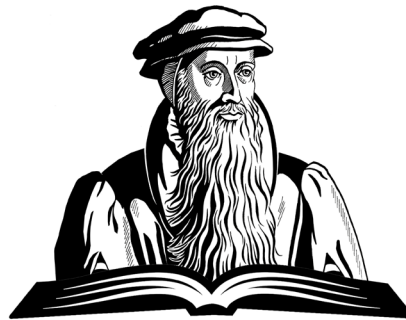
*Shorter*  
**CATECHISM**

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

Lecture #16

**The Incarnation**  
*Catechism Question 22*



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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# *The Shorter CATECHISM*

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### Lecture #16

## The Incarnation

**Question 22:** *How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?*

**Answer:** *Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.*

What good news to know there is a Savior, a Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Were there no Savior, no sinner could ever be forgiven or reconciled to God. All sinners would only have the certain punishment of damnation awaiting them. This is cause to praise God that there is a Savior. Our *Catechism* spends the next several questions focusing upon this Savior, Jesus Christ. There's much to think about—the whole Bible is related to him. This is the focus of God's Word, from Genesis 3, testifying that there would be a descendent of the woman who would come and crush the serpent's head and deliver his people, and the progressive build of promises and prophecies pointing to the coming of Christ, until he finally does come and accomplishes his work, and ascends back to heaven, having given promises to his people to return again. Well there's much, of course, throughout the Bible.

Today we get to think about what is known as the incarnation. You probably have heard the word before. It refers to the Son of God becoming man. The word "incarnation" itself comes from a word referring to "flesh" or "body." And it's a word that refers to how the Son of God took upon himself a true human nature, flesh and blood. Remember this word "incarnation," because it will be used throughout this lesson, and it's a work that's good to know as you grow in your own study of God's Word. It's a word that reminds us that the eternal Son of God truly became man.

Our question today is #22 from the *Shorter Catechism*. It asks, "How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?" The answer is, "Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin."

Well let's clarify a few key words that show up in this answer. The first is "reasonable soul." Our soul is that immaterial part of us, that part that's not physical. It's our consciousness, our spirit. While you can point to and touch your body, you cannot point to or physically touch your soul. Your soul is what thinks, and plans, and desires, and chooses, and loves, and hates. It is true that there is a great wonder of how our body and soul relate to one another. However, it is clear that they are two different things. Our body is not our soul, and our soul is not our body, though they

are brought together in our being.

Well, you'll notice it's referring to a "reasonable soul." The word "reasonable" refers to what type of soul is meant. It's a way of speaking of a human soul. The human soul has the ability to think or reason in ways that birds or other animals or fish cannot. Certainly, they think, and can even learn some tricks and ways about life in this world, but they cannot reason as humans do. They cannot formulate verbal speech, though they can make sounds and, in some sense, communicate, they can't compose rational thought. They cannot learn and know God as humans can learn about and know God. This is because humans have been given a reasonable soul.

Notice another word, the word "conceived." This refers to the forming of a human being in the womb of his mother. The normal way demands that there is a relationship between a father and a mother. And as we'll see, Christ was conceived, that is, formed as a human being, in his mother's—Mary—her womb, but this was miraculously, it was by the power of God.

Well, with these ideas, we'll now move into the main part of our lesson, and for our lesson today, we have three points. First, Our Redeemer's Preexistence; second, Our Redeemer's Conception; and third, Our Redeemer's Perfection.

So first then, Our Redeemer's Preexistence. We've seen the identity of our Redeemer in the previous lesson, it is the Lord Jesus Christ. The last question also reminded us that he is the eternal Son of God. In our question today, we see him referred to as the Son of God. This is important for us and for our lesson today. The conception of Christ, or the birth of Christ, did not make him the Son of God. He always, eternally, is the Son of God. He always has been, will be, and is the eternal Son of God. Remember the question we dealt with earlier, "How many persons are there in the Godhead?" The answer, "There are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory."

He is eternally the Son. The incarnation, his miraculous conception in Mary's womb, his birth from Mary, does not make him the Son of God. He always is the Son of God. In other words, our Redeemer is eternally the Son of God. He existed before the incarnation. We sing of this in Psalm 40, verses 6 through 8, and it's mentioned many other places as well, but in Psalm 40, verse 7, we have the word of Christ, wherein he says, "Then said I, Lo"—that is, behold, look—"I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me." Now this passage is quoted again in the book of Hebrews, and is explicitly clarified to refer to Jesus Christ. And when we think of the words, there's something important. It's not that he began to be in Mary's womb. He rather came. He, who already was, came into the world. In other words, he previously existed, and then came into this world. We could think of it by way of an illustration. You exist before you enter a room. You may be outside of the room, and then you enter into it. Well, the Son of God existed, as the Son of God, before he came into this world by means of his incarnation. This is what Christ is referring to when he said to the Jews, in the Gospel of John chapter 8, verse 58, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." He takes up the divine statement, and he says, "I am, I am God. Before Abraham was, I am. Right now I am." You see, the Jews realized that, which is one reason they took up stones to put him to death, for they accused him of blasphemy. Well, the point is, of course, that he is, and eternally is, a divine person. He is the eternal Son of God.

He precedes Abraham, not only in importance, but in existence, because he is the Son of God. To be clear, this doesn't mean that his human body and soul existed previously. His human nature began at the incarnation, in Mary's womb, as we'll see. Rather, it is as he is God, the eternal Son of God, that our Redeemer existed prior to his incarnation. After his conception in Mary's womb, he remains the Son of God, but he now has an additional nature of human nature. Remember we

spoke of this in the last lesson. The point is this, as we make this connection: our Redeemer is a divine person, who always is, and yet, as we'll see, wondrously took to himself an additional nature, even a human nature.

So now second, Our Redeemer Conception. Remember the word "conception" refers to how a human is formed in his mother's womb. Each of you was conceived in your mother's womb. Some of you may have had a younger brother or sister, and you remember when your mom's belly was getting bigger, as her pregnancy advanced? That was because your brother or sister was growing in her womb, and eventually, your mother delivered your brother or sister. It is an amazing thing. It's filled with mystery and wonder. And each of us amazingly began as a little human, tiny, and unable to be seen even by the naked eye, but grew in our mother's womb, until finally, we were brought into the world as well.

Well, what's amazing to think about is that Jesus Christ began his human existence in the same way, as a little human in Mary's womb. Now, remember, this was not the beginning of the Son of God. As the Son of God, he eternally is. Rather, he began his incarnation in his mother's womb.

In the Gospels, we see that his mother's name was Mary. You can read a part of her life in Luke, chapter 1. It's there that she finds out from the angel of God that she's been chosen of God to carry the Lord Jesus Christ in her womb. It's his human nature that was conceived in Mary's womb. His human body went through all of the normal developments in her womb, and he was eventually born and grew as a child grows, which is an amazing truth to consider.

But let's notice an important point that the *Catechism* makes. Mary is referred to as "the virgin Mary." The word "virgin" means that she was not yet involved with Joseph in a way that would cause her to become pregnant. Every other human in the world since Adam and Eve have had a human father and a human mother. This is the way that children are brought into this world. It's what our previous question referred to "ordinary generation." It's the way that a life ordinarily begins.

However, Christ, the Son of God, was brought into this world by a miracle. Well, a "miracle" refers to that which cannot happen in ordinary ways. It demands divine work that's extraordinary. In other words, he was not conceived in the ordinary way. He was conceived in an extraordinary—a way above the ordinary way. A woman who had not known a man conceived a child. Joseph was not yet her husband. Joseph had not yet been with Mary in that way, and yet she conceived a child. Now, how could this happen? In fact, Joseph himself struggled with the fact that Mary was pregnant. He thought that Mary had gone to be with another man when he found out that she was pregnant. You can read about this in Matthew, chapter 1, where he is wrestling with this truth. He thought that Mary had been unfaithful to him. Instead, the Lord showed Joseph that Mary was pregnant by a miracle. There was a miraculous work of God. Mary had miraculously, not in an normal way, but a supernatural way, conceived this child by the power of the Holy Ghost. This is what Joseph was told in Matthew 1, and verse 20: "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

It's the same thing Mary was told when she struggled to understand, in Luke, chapter 1, verse 35: "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." What this means is that God caused a miracle to happen. He did so by the power the Holy Spirit. There's much that we cannot understand about this, because it is above and beyond the normal way that things happen. It's a miracle, just like when the Red sea



was parted, not by a natural cause, but by God’s miraculous work. So Mary was pregnant by God’s miraculous work. So we can acknowledge that God miraculously caused his Son to be conceived in Mary’s womb. It’s a divine work. At that moment, his eternal Son took upon himself a true human nature.

This true human nature is made up of two primary things: a true body, and a reasonable soul, as the *Catechism* indicates. In other words, he did not merely appear to be like a human. He really became human. Again, he did not stop being fully God. He did not give up anything divine in becoming man. Instead, he took something additional to himself, and what he took to himself was a real human nature. His real body grew and developed. And when he was born, he hungered and thirsted. He felt pain, and he felt pleasure. This is not only so on the cross, of course, it is so throughout the whole of his life in this world. Additionally, just like you and me, the Son of God took upon himself a human soul. He had human thoughts and desires, feelings and longings. It is not as if the divine person of the Son of God merely took on a human body. Instead, the divine Son of God took on a full and complete human nature—body and soul. You can see this most clearly when he’s on the cross, and dies. Christ’s human body is nailed to the cross. He’s nearing death, suffering while he pays for the sins of his people. Well, as he approaches the moment of death, notice his words recorded in Luke, chapter 23, at verse 46. It’s there we read, “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” Well, what happened? His human body remained nailed to the cross. Eventually it was taken down and laid in the tomb. And of course, eventually, he would rise again. But notice at that point what happens. He dies, his body remains nailed to the cross. But as he prayed, he commended his soul, his human soul referred to in the text as “his spirit” or ghost, was commended, or placed, in the care of his Father. He had both a body and a soul. He was fully human. His death, as with the death of every human, was the separating of his human body and human soul. The eternal Son of God truly became and, there’s a wonder here, remains a real human.

Well third, Our Redeemer’s Perfection. We need to clarify a point that our *Catechism* makes as well. Notice the final few words at the end of the question, “Yet without sin.” These words are very important. All humans since Adam and Eve are conceived in sin. Remember, “All mankind descending from Adam by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression.” This is one of the things that David laments in Psalm 51. Notice verse 5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Well the Christ was not shapen or formed in iniquity. He was not conceived in sin. He was without sin. He was sinless from his conception, throughout his life, and death, and so on. Now this is beautifully stated, and simply, in 1 John, chapter 3, verse 5. John writes, “And ye know that he”—that is, Jesus—“was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” When Christ came, he did not appear as one sinful in Mary’s womb. Additionally, he never sinned. Hebrews 4, verse 15 indicates this. There we read, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Every temptation Christ faced, he faced it perfectly, never once compromising his integrity, never once sinning against God.

So Christ’s incarnation means that the Son of God truly became a real human. However, it does not mean that he became a personal sinner. Adam was a real human. Before the fall, he was not a sinner. Christ entered this world in that way. He is a real human, yet not a sinner. Additionally, he lived sinlessly the whole of his life. What this means then is, he’s not a sinner like you and I are sinners. He’s truly human, but he’s sinless from his conception throughout his life, which qualifies

him to be the Savior.

This Biblical truth is beautifully expressed in the Nicene Creed. This statement of faith was developed in the first few centuries of the early church, and it's an excellent expression of what the Bible teaches regarding the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Regarding the Son of God, it expresses the truth of the incarnation in the following words. It says, "For us, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven. He became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human." In other words, the incarnation, and his sinlessness, was so that he would save sinners. In other words, the incarnation is not just a wonder. It is that, of course. A miraculous thing demands wonder and amazement. But it is a gracious wonder. The reason for the incarnation is so that he would save sinners.

Well, what an amazing truth this is. It is worthy of our meditation and our praise. One thing we learn is how perfectly suited Christ is to be our Savior. He is fully God, and thus able to do all that is needed for our salvation. But he's also fully man, so that he can do it for us. We saw this in our last lesson. And this lesson helps clarify to us how this is the case—fully God, fully man.

The second thing this helps us see is the immeasurable love of Christ for his people. The Son of God, glorious and perfect, was willing to humble himself and take to himself this true human nature. We'll look more at this in the future, but it's worth noting that the Son of God was pleased to become man. Remember back to Psalm 40, you could read verses 6 through 8. And he speaks with an encouraging excitement, "Lo, I come...I delight to do thy will." He didn't come grudgingly, but he came willingly to become a man. He did not cease being God, however, he did truly become man. God and man in two distinct natures and one person for ever. And to do this, he truly took to himself a real human nature.

Well, the final point for us to consider as we close is that this is something for us to wonder at—the miraculous work of God for us. Mary wondered, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" Well, it's right for us to wonder at the miraculous power of God. It was utterly impossible for this to happen, that is, it was utterly impossible, were it not for God's power. Thus the angel responded to Mary's question, "For with God nothing shall be impossible." We should take time to praise God for his mighty work of grace. Men love to think about the accomplishment of heroic men of women from the past. But think for a moment, what are those accomplishments of mere men compared to the miraculous power of God? We ought to take time to meditate on the immeasurable power of God displayed in the incarnation. And as we do, then add this to our thought: God did this in order to save sinners. Oh, what a God we have, who would send his Son, and the Son himself willing to come and do this for us!