

THE CHRISTIAN  
UNDERSTANDING  
OF GOD

THEO 331 – week 4

## **THE CORE DIFFERENCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

- **THE OLD TESTAMENT SPEAKS OF GOD AS A BEING IN RELATIONSHIP**
- **THE NEW TESTAMENT AFFIRMS THAT THIS RELATIONSHIP NOW HAS A NEW CONTEXT: THAT OF INCARNATION**
- **“IN-CARNE”:** LITERALLY, “IN THE FLESH”
  - **GOD COMES TO US, NOT IN SYMBOLS OR THROUGH PROPHETS, BUT IN PERSON**

## THE WORD MADE FLESH

- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 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: 1-3, 14)
- Strictly speaking, it is not God (*ho theos*) but the Word of God (*logos tou theou*) that becomes incarnate.

## **THE SPIRIT OF GOD, MEANS FOR THE INCARNATION**

The angel said to Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. (Luke 1: 30-32, 34-35)

## **THE HEAVENLY FATHER**

- The Incarnate Word is revealed as the Son – a relational title related to the title of Father (used for God himself).
- Jesus regularly calls God his Father, and even calls him his “abba” (a child-like expression similar to “daddy”).
- This title reveals that God is fundamentally relational in his very nature: “God is love” (1 John 4: 8b)

## HOW IS INCARNATION POSSIBLE?

- Recall that for us to have knowledge of God, God must **CONDESCEND** to us.
- “Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, 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.” (Philippians 2: 5b-8)
- This “self-emptying” is called **kenosis**, and is related to the Jewish concept of **tzim tzum**.

## **INCARNATION IMPLICATIONS: THE WAY, TRUTH AND LIFE**

- “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.” (Hebrews 1: 1-3)
- “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14: 6)
- Jesus is not merely a prophet, he is the Word of God himself made flesh, he is the visible revelation of God himself to humanity. It is therefore impossible to sidestep Jesus to get to God.

## INCARNATION IMPLICATIONS: THE NEW COVENANT

- “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after supper, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in my blood.” (Luke 22: 19-20)
- “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Cor 10: 16-17)
- The Eucharist is the sacrament (efficacious sign) of this new relationship with God and with each other.



## INCARNATION IMPLICATIONS: HUMAN NATURE IS CAPAX DEI

- The Incarnation reveals that human nature is **CAPAX DEI** (“capable of God”), i.e. that God can effectively express himself using our nature.
- This implies that individual human beings (i.e. you and me) are also *capax Dei*, and can be filled with God’s Holy Spirit.
  - “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?” (1 Cor 6: 19)
- We therefore become extensions of the Incarnation in the world, and are joined in the “Body of Christ” known as the Church. God becomes our “abba” as well.
- It is not just what Jesus says, but what he does and is, that is revelatory; therefore the Incarnation also “reveals man to man”.

## **PLURALISM IN GOD CONFIRMED: THE TRINITY**

- The word “trinity” itself does not appear in the New Testament but the reality itself is affirmed:
  - Jesus commanded his followers to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28: 19)
  - The Trinity was used as a greeting and blessing: “All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (2 Corinthians 13: 13-14)
- The early Christians accepted belief in the Trinity without being overly metaphysical about it. Remember, the Bible is a book of relationship, not a philosophical treatise!