



---

## INCARNATION: GOD COMES

---

### Part 1 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | May 11, 2008

## INCARNATION: GOD COMES

All right, in this lecture we'll deal with incarnation—you're getting some Latin phraseology—it means that God comes into human history. So this is our seventh lecture. I need to explain to you incarnation, what does this word mean? Now part of Christian theology and doctrine is learning new vocabulary, okay? So I'm gonna give you a lot of new words and they help open up your understanding.

*Incarnation* means incarnate, in meat, in flesh, in a body, okay? I always use this analogy: go to the store, there's two kinds of chili. There's chili and chili con carne. The chili con carne is chili with meat. That's the Christian chili, that's what that is, because we believe in incarnate, that God comes in meat, that's the incarnation. So next time you see chili, think Jesus. Think Jesus, okay? He's God come in human flesh.

Now importantly, this is not—let me hammer this—this is not that a man can become God, that's what religions like Mormonism teach. That was the first lie that Satan told to our first parents, "You can become like God. You can become your own god." This is different. Some religions teach how people can become gods and goddesses. The Bible doesn't teach that at all. The Bible teaches how God became a person, a human being, a man, the man Jesus Christ.

Now this was anticipated throughout the Old Testament. The prophets were sent by God, inspired by the Holy Spirit to announce and pronounce the coming of Jesus. I'll give you a few.

Four thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ in Genesis 3:15—what is called the *protoevangelium*—the first gospel was preached by God. God says this to our sinful parents, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he [Jesus] shall bruise your [Satan's] head, and you shall bruise his heel." God said Jesus is coming, you're gonna hurt him. He's gonna crush you. And he says it would be through the seed of the woman. So a woman would give birth to one who would crush Satan. "He" denotes that it would be a male child.

Isaiah 7:14, written seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The prophet Isaiah says, "God's gonna give you a sign, a virgin will be pregnant, that's the sign. She'll give birth to a male child, a son, and his name will be Immanuel, which means God is with us." We sing it every Christmas, "O come, O come, Immanuel," God is with us.

Micah 5:2, a contemporary of Isaiah, writes about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." In the Hebrew it's "from eternity."

Genesis, the woman will give birth to a son. Isaiah, he'll be born of a virgin. His name will be Immanuel, which means God is with us. Micah, he'll be born in the town of Bethlehem, that's the city of David, back to the Davidic covenant, 2 Samuel 7. And his origins, his history is from eternity, the eternal one will be born in Bethlehem. It was a small town.

Malachi 3:1, written four hundred years before the birth of Christ, "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me." That was John the Baptizer. "Then suddenly the Lord," that's ultimately going to be the Lord Jesus Christ, "whom you seek will come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts." The God who rules over the angels and the demons, he will come to the temple. The temple was destroyed in AD 70. This puts a historical demarcation on the time by which the Messiah, that's what the Jews called him, would come.

They're waiting for their Messiah, their savior, their deliverer. Born of a woman, Genesis. As a man to a virgin, Isaiah. In Bethlehem, Micah. Before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Malachi. That really narrows down who we're looking for. Since AD 70, the temple has not been rebuilt, so that prophecy from Malachi could not come true because there is no temple for a Messiah to go to. I love my Jewish friends. I disagree with them. I asked one recently, what do you think about Messiah. They said, "We are waiting for Messiah." I said, "The Bible says—your prophets and mine (like Malachi)—that he will come to the temple. The temple was destroyed in AD 70. Whomever he is, he had to come before AD 70. There is no temple. You missed him, his name is Jesus. It's not too late."

How did God come? Matthew 1 tells the story. There was a young woman named Mary, probably a teenager. God came to her and revealed to her that she would become pregnant. Now, she was engaged to be married, actually betrothed. It was such a binding legal condition that you needed to get divorced to get out of it. She was not yet married, but she was right near her wedding day. She loved God and God chose her, a simple, humble, young woman to give birth to Jesus. She conceived by the power of God the Holy Spirit. It was a miracle. In fulfillment of Isaiah, she was a virgin.

Ultimately, Joseph was concerned, rightfully so, thinking that she had been unfaithful to him, so he's going to divorce her quietly, not to expose her to shame. Again, God revealed to him miraculously, supernaturally, that this was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, that the incarnation was happening, that God was coming.

So Joseph, being a good, godly, noble man, he married her, he loved her. He adopted Jesus as his son. If you've been adopted, you're like Jesus. That's why Christians practice adoption. Jesus was adopted. It's a good thing. Furthermore, the Bible says that Joseph didn't have any intimate relations with her until after Jesus was born. They went on to have other sons and daughters, unlike the Catholic Church teaching. This is how God came into human history, Mary and Joseph.

Where was he born? Bethlehem. How did he get there? Well, the government decreed a census. Everyone had to go to their hometown to register. Joseph's line, in God's providence, was from the line of David, so he had to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, to register. Just so happens, in God's providence, that his wife, Mary, is pregnant and she just happens to give birth while they happen to be in Bethlehem before AD 70 so that later Jesus could be brought to the temple and he's a boy, born of a woman who's a virgin. That's the guy we're looking for. That's him. God's become a man. The incarnation is happening.

John 1 says it this way, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." John 1:14, "And the Word became," what? "Flesh," carne, "and made his dwelling among us," came to the earth. Immanuel, God with us, incarnation.

Two points then that need to be noted: Jesus was fully man and fully God. He was fully man; he was born. Luke 2 says he grew in wisdom and stature and favor with men and God. He was fully human, he ate food, he slept, he walked, he learned, he grew up. He was fully human and he was fully God. He was both. He was both: fully human, fully God.

Now Jesus continually says he's God. No other religious leader of any other major religion has ever declared himself to be God. This claim by Jesus is without precedence. It's altogether unique. Again, John 10:30-33, Jesus says, "I and the Father are one—" back to the Trinity. "Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?' 'We're not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'"

Jesus was a man who said he was God. Everyone knew it, ultimately, that's why he died. Just so you know, they crucified Jesus because he kept saying he was God. New York Judge Gaynor says it this way, "It is plain from each of the gospel narratives that the alleged crime for which Jesus was tried and convicted was blasphemy," a man said he was God.

If Jesus wasn't God, he wasn't a good man or a nice teacher or a decent example, he was a heretic. He was a false teacher. If I told you I was God, that's either true or false. It's false. But if I told you that, you couldn't say, "Well, Mark was a good guy and a good teacher and he had some good insights. He just missed it on this one minor point of who we should worship and trust for eternal salvation. Other than that, he nailed a lot of things." That's kind of the big idea. On the eye chart, that would be the big "E" in the middle, right? That's the big idea. You can't say Jesus was a nice guy, a moral teacher, had some pithy insights, he just missed on the whole God thing. He either is or is not God. Fully man, fully God. Fully man, fully God.

Now, the question is, how could God become a man? This was a debate in church history that culminated in 451 with something called the Council of Chalcedon, where a bunch of theologians got together for a long time and opened their Bibles and they tried to clarify all of this. Now the church had always believed that Jesus was one person with two natures, fully God, fully man. Heretics challenged that. The church got together to clarify what they'd always believed and they call this the *hypostatic union*, that Jesus is one person with two natures, fully man, fully God, that God became a man.

Errors, heresies, false teachings happen when you deny one or the other. When you reduce Jesus just to cosmic presence and force and you deny his humanity, you're denying what I John is really focusing on, that Jesus Christ was a man in a body. When you say Jesus was a man in a body but not truly, fully, totally, continually God, you reduce him to a nice teacher or a guru, that's wrong too. He is fully man, fully God, hypostatic union, one person, two natures.

This is what we believe. Just so you know, this is what Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox believe. This is what all Christians believe and always have because it's the teaching of the Bible. Augustine says it this way, "Christ added to himself that which he was not. He did not lose what he was." So Jesus is fully God, and he doesn't lose his divinity, he adds to it his humanity.

Now Philippians 2:5-11 tells us how this happened. It's called the *kenosis*, that means emptying. It says in Philippians 2 that Jesus Christ did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or held on to but he emptied himself and he humbled himself and he took on the posture of a servant. Jesus didn't set aside his deity, but he set aside his rights at deity to humble himself and become a man, to live in poverty, to be lied against and about, to be abused, to ultimately be murdered and betrayed. He did this in humility, and he did it to serve us.

That's the incarnation, that God identified with us and Jesus. Why? Because the only way to reconcile human beings to God is for God to become a human being, to identify with human beings, to atone for the sins of human beings and to reconcile men and women to God, that's the incarnation.

Therefore, Jesus is our only mediator between us and God. First Timothy 2:5 says "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." God became a man to reconcile men and women to God, his name is Jesus. He's the only way by which we experience salvation, forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation with God. That's the incarnation. Jesus is Immanuel, God come to be with us, to save us and put us in covenant relationship with him.

*Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.*