

## The Lord Jesus – The Son Incarnate

Today the Creed moves from heaven to earth, from eternity into history as it call believers to confess the fact, the manner and the motive of the only Son of God, the eternal Word who is with God and is God, becoming man – the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what the word incarnation means, the eternal Son taking on our humanity.

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.*

In these words you have The Fact of the incarnation – HE came down from heaven and was made man

The manner of the incarnation – by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary

The motive for the incarnation – for us men, that is all humans, women and men, and for our salvation

And in these words you have also both the glory and offence of the Christian message.

The offence, the challenge to humanity's desire to close our world to God, to believe that we are ok on our own

The glory, a God who while transcendent, the almighty Creator, is close – God with us

A God who can embrace humility and weakness, and yet save

Who experiences rejection and hatred, and yet loves.

Let's start with the fact

### The Fact – HE came down from heaven and was made man

It is plain in the gospel record that everyone thought Jesus was a real man, that no-one doubted that the Jesus they were dealing with was a human just like them, even if doing and saying extraordinary things.

The most persuasive testimony to his humanity is that of his enemies, who had no doubt they could kill him, and in killing him snuff out the movement he had started. They thought He was truly a man, mortal like themselves

But the Creed wants us to pause and think about what was obvious to Jesus' contemporaries, pause in the light of the Lord Jesus as confessed in the Creed being the Son of God, not an exalted man but the eternal Son sent by the Father into our world.

In confessing He was made man we are confessing two things – firstly that the Son became human, He took on and shared what is common to us all.

And secondly that he became human in the way we all do, by becoming a particular human, a man, the man Jesus.

Let's think about both.

He became human. We are confessing that the Lord Jesus had a full and complete human nature. He was not just a human body inhabited by the divine word, the eternal Word substituting for His human soul or mind. He had a complete humanity – body and soul, mind and spirit

And as Jesus born of Mary, God and Man, he shared in common human experience from the beginning, from conception.

HE shared our birth – he experienced being cradled in his mother’s arms, being nourished by her milk.

He grew up in a human family with brothers and sisters Mark 6:3, John 7:3, Acts 1:14

*Mark 6: 3 Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't his sisters here with us?" So they were offended by him.*

And in his family he knew grief, the death, the loss of Joseph, Mary’s husband – just as He knew what it was to weep at the tomb of a friend John 11:35

And as we work, He knew what it was to work, to work with his hands as a carpenter – hard, tiring, labour

He knew hunger and thirst and weariness [John 4:6-8], just as he knew joy and thankfulness [Matt. 11:25, Lk. 10:21]

He knew what it was to be tempted, to be enticed to take matters into His own hands and give up on trusting and obeying God. [Matt. 4:1-11]

And he contemplated his own death, as we all do, And he died, as we all must

And he experienced all this as a particular man, the individual Jesus, and we can see in the gospel story, his story, that he knew the hardness and bitterness of life as well

His was a family dislocated by the decisions of power hungry rulers, refugees in Egypt before moving to the small town of Nazareth,

Living in a small community where everyone knew everyone’s business, and where there was a whiff of scandal about his birth

Living like most Galilean families in that time on the edge of want

And when he started his ministry he experienced rejection by His community at Nazareth, [Luke 4:28-29]

Doubt and suspicion from his own family – Mark 3:21. He’s out of his mind, they said

*Mark 3: 20 Jesus entered a house, and the crowd gathered again so that they were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard this, they set out to restrain him, because they said, “He’s out of his mind.”*

And in his ministry He knew anger – at human unkindness Mark 3:5,

Frustration at persistent unbelief [Mark 9:19-23]

Exhaustion from facing overwhelming need, at times so busy he was not even able to eat [Mark 3:20; 1:32-45; 3:9]– so tired he could sleep in a boat through a storm [Mark 4:35-40]

He knew what it is to be betrayed, abandoned by friends, mocked

To be publicly shamed, exposed

TO be falsely accused, wilfully misrepresented

TO experience injustice and human cruelty

He experienced pain, knew suffering,

and He knew what it was to have prayer not answered in the way he desired – let this cup pass from me he prayed, but it was still his to drink; and to feel abandoned by God – my God, my God, He cried from the cross – why have you forsaken me

If you know the gospels all this may be familiar to you – but don't let familiarity blind you to its wonder.

This incarnation is unique

It was unique then.

The Greeks knew stories of Zeus disguising himself to mate with women, [at least five – Semele, Io, Europa, Leda, Alcmena] and the offspring becoming kings [Perseus] or demi-gods with supernatural powers like Heracles or Dionysus

Not God becoming a man to dwell amongst us and share our life

It is unique now

Hinduism speaks of the appearances, the avatars, of the god Vishnu. Vishnu has ten major ones, including in the form of a fish, a tortoise and a boar, although we are told they are innumerable. But they are just appearances, temporary

Again, so different from the Son of God becoming man in the Lord Jesus, Who is Truly man, truly God – not a temporary appearance, adopting a human form for a time, not a mixing of divine and human in a demi-god with superhuman powers, but two natures forever united in the one person

The incarnation of the Son is unique, and it is full of comfort and encouragement for those who confess Jesus as the living Saviour, for any who would turn to Him for help

It means He knows us because HE is truly one of us

He knows what we are going through –

The weariness you feel caring for others

The frustration of being misunderstood

The weakness of a dying body

The grief of loss

you don't have to make Him understand the hard experiences – He has been through them

Or explain to Him the struggle with temptation

He has felt its power, even more strongly than you

But He is not just a listening ear

He is the living Son of God, powerful to help and knowing the help we need by what He has gone through.

As the author of Hebrews says

*Hebrews 2:<sup>17</sup> Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.*

And again

*Hebrews 4:*<sup>15</sup> *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.* <sup>16</sup> *Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.*

The reality of the incarnation encourages us to turn confidently to Jesus for help

But the fact of the incarnation also challenges the myth that the world is closed to God.

That He cannot enter His creation, cannot intervene

The incarnation says Our humanity is no limitation on Him.

that our life is not closed to God. You cannot shut Him out of your world, even if you want to close your eyes to His presence

The Creed, like the gospel, asserts the fact that the only Son of God came down from heaven and was made man – fully and truly

And it tells us how God did this

The manner – by the power of the Holy Spirit he [the Son] became incarnate from the Virgin Mary

This is saying the eternal Son of God takes on our flesh, our human life, in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Here the creed faithfully reflects the text of the gospel accounts of Jesus' conception and birth.

When Mary asks of the promised birth of a son

*Luke 1:*<sup>34</sup> *Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?”*

<sup>35</sup> *The angel replied to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*

When Joseph learns that Mary is pregnant he is assured

*Matthew 1:*<sup>20</sup> *But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.* <sup>21</sup> *She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

The Virgin birth does not prove the incarnation, but this is the only birth consistent with it.

Mary is called the Virgin Mary because 'she had not known a man', had not had sexual relations with a man, before Jesus' conception and this was still the case when Jesus is born. Joseph, we are told

*Matt. 1:*<sup>24</sup> *When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her <sup>25</sup> but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.*

This is to make clear that Jesus did not have a human father

The life of this baby, this man, does not originate in humanity, but is from God

Jesus' life comes from the Spirit

*Luke 1:*<sup>35</sup> *The angel replied to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*

*Matthew 1: <sup>20</sup> But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*

There are no sexual overtones of any kind in the phrases used to describe the origination of Jesus' human life in the womb

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' – uses the same verb used in the Greek version of Isaiah 32:15

*Isaiah 32: <sup>15</sup> until the Spirit from on high is poured out on us. [LXX comes upon us from on high]  
Then the desert will become an orchard,  
and the orchard will seem like a forest.*

And in Acts 1

*Acts 1: <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

And 'overshadow' is used of God's presence over the tabernacle in Ex. 40:35 ['rested upon' CSB]

*Exodus 40: <sup>35</sup> Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*

Together these words speak of the presence of God the Spirit, the life giving Spirit, in a unique creative act without any physical intervention – so that the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God – called, because He is.

The manner of the Son becoming flesh assures us of three important things.

*Luke 1: <sup>31</sup> Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."*

Firstly, Jesus sharing our life from conception assures us the Lord Jesus is totally, fully, human from the beginning

His humanity shares in and is shaped by all that we share in as he experiences the continuous, unbroken, development of his human life from conception in the womb.

Secondly, it assures us that the Son coming to save is All of God, and all of grace. The incarnation of the Son is God's deliberate intervention to save. Salvation comes to us from outside of us, the free work of God from start to finish.

And thirdly it helps us feel the measure of the eternal Son's humbling of Himself. Not many of us will be publicly executed, but we have all been born, and seen the helplessness and dependence of babies. And here is the one through whom all things were made – embracing that helplessness and dependence. And His humbling is even greater when we consider that His birth is not the beginning we desire for our children

Born to a Teenage mother, with no settled home, laid in a manger, a feed box

*Luke 2: <sup>7</sup> Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

The graciousness of the Word becoming flesh is seen even more clearly when we consider the reason, the motive for the Virgin birth.

The motive – for us men, that is all humans, women and men, and for our salvation

The eternal Son comes to earth, becomes incarnate in the womb of Mary, humbles himself to take on our humanity and all that means for our sake, to bring us salvation

Here the creed repeats what the angel said to Joseph

*Matthew 1:<sup>21</sup> You will call Him Jesus for He will save His people from their sins*

That the Son has come to save is the consistent message of the gospel, of Jesus

When welcoming that tax collector Zachaeus Jesus said

*Luke 19:<sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."*

When Jesus said to Nicodemus he had to be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness to bring life to all who believe the gospel continues

*John 3:<sup>16</sup> For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Paul instructing the Ephesian church says of prayer for ruling authorities and for all

*1 Timothy 2:<sup>3</sup> This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

God sends the Son into the world to save, to save as our Hebrew reading reminded us, by His death and we will think more about that next week

But for now I want to think about this salvation the Creed says the Son came to earth to bring

That phrase 'For us, and for our salvation, HE came down from heaven' should fill us with awe and wonder and joy

But I fear sometimes it doesn't – we react instead with apathy and indifference

Because we can think too thinly about salvation

We think too cheaply of salvation

We think we don't need to be saved

Or we think we can't be saved

Let's look at these thieves of joy

We can think too thinly of this salvation, in two ways

WE can just think in terms of our own individual salvation, when this salvation embraces the renewal of all creation

We heard this in Luke

Luke talks about the establishment of an eternal kingdom, a forever reign of God's King over God's people.

*Luke 1:<sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."*

That reign in the Old Testament involves the whole world – the earth full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea; it involves the transformation of creation so that it is without threat or harm, the wolf dwelling with the lamb; it is the end of death; it is peace and wholeness, where every tear is wiped away by God Himself [Is. 25:6-8, 11:1-9; Hab. 2:14]

And we can focus only on the negative of salvation – what we are saved from, and not on the positive – what we are saved for, think only in terms of not getting what we deserve, and not think of getting what we don't deserve.

Forgiveness of sin is wonderful – but we are not just forgiven; we are saved to be adopted as God’s children, to be given the new life of the Spirit.

We are spared God’s wrath – alleluia – but that is not all. WE know peace with God, we inhabit grace [Romans 5:1-2]

To be saved is to be reconciled to God, to be assured of His grace, to know each day His steadfast love; it is to be freed from slavery to sin so that we can live the blessed lives of those who love God’s will, and so start to know already in this life wholeness and peace, which we will know forever and to the full in the resurrection

Salvation is rich, wide and deep, not thin and meagre; and it is a joyous thing to be saved, something to give thanks for every day.

And we should not think of it cheaply. Sometimes we can think salvation is easy, and to be saved not as valuable as some other things – like the opinion of our peers, or passing pleasures with the object of our desire – on line or in person, or the accumulation of money, or just getting our own way. But the value of something is the price somebody is willing to pay for it – everyone who has tried to buy a house knows that.

The Creed reminds us that the value of this salvation is beyond measuring, for it tells us the cost God was willing to pay to achieve it

It was the cost of the eternal Son leaving heaven and the glory He had with the Father – to be born in a stable. Can you measure the cost of that to Jesus?

It was the cost of the Son, the Lord Jesus, God and Man, dying on the cross. Can you measure the infinite worth of His life?

It was the cost of the Father giving up His only begotten Son, loved in eternity, to shame and humiliation. Can you measure what that cost His love?

To say or hear the creed is to be reminded of the worth, of how expensive this rich salvation is.

But perhaps talk of salvation leaves you unimpressed because you don’t think you need salvation, or at least any salvation beyond what you yourself can achieve.

Just like people who were unaware of how quickly the flood waters were rising at Lismore felt they didn’t need help to get to safety.

Why would you not think you need this rich salvation?

Test these reasons

You are unaware of God. Perhaps you have dismissed the idea of God, or you just don’t want to engage with Him.

There is a bigger conversation to have – but if you are unaware, it is not for want of trying to get your attention on God’s part

He has sent His Son into the world, and sent the message of His Son out into the whole world

Perhaps you are used to dismissing that message – too ancient, or even too fanciful

If that’s you – think about this

In Luke 1 a song of Mary is recorded in which she says

*Luke 1:<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:*

*My soul magnifies the Lord,*

*<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

*<sup>48</sup> because he has looked with favor*

*on the humble condition of his servant.*

Surely, from now on all generations  
will call me blessed,  
<sup>49</sup> because the Mighty One  
 has done great things for me,  
 and his name is holy.

How can a first century teenage peasant Mum say that – and it be proved right?

Or, if you think Luke put these words in Mary's mouth [Despite Luke 1:1-4], – how can a first century gospel writer write that about a first century peasant girl and it be proved right.

For it is true – from then on there have been those in every generation of people who have called Mary blessed

And the most likely explanation is not that it is a cute story. At its centre is the horror of crucifixion

The most likely explanation is that people in generation after generation have recognised the greatness of her Son because the resurrection the gospels record is true

And if the Resurrection is true – God is in the world, and He has spoken, and HE ought to be listened to.

And he is knocking on your door and saying you need saving – urgently, because of your sin

And the rising waters of death will soon overtake you

Think about Mary and reconsider your dismissal of the gospels.

Or maybe you are not aware of your sin, or don't reckon your sin serious.

The angel said Jesus came to save us from our sins but the whole idea of sin – has no traction with you,

Our Lord gives us a picture of sin in the story of the prodigal son

That son – had no love of his father, couldn't wait until he was dead, and wanted to use what the father had given him in ways the father would not approve. In the story he tried to get as far away from the father as possible so he was free to do whatever he wanted.

We are all sinners because all of us in our dealings with God are like that prodigal

We want God out of our lives

We want to use what God has given us, our lives, as we please without reference to God

We see relating to God, being thankful to God, as a burden.

That real life is being free to do whatever we want without acknowledging God

That's sin

And you might be thinking – that's fine. I'm glad God's out of my life

But two problems

It messes up life and cause harm to others,

Where each of us decides for ourselves what is right and wrong, what we will tolerate and what we won't – there are inevitably clashes

And the strong – physically, emotionally, economically – get their own way – in relationships, in the home, in society

And leave others wronged – whether that is suffering from violence, or economic injustice, or emotional coercion

Where each of us is concerned to protect ourselves and our right to rule our own lives at whatever cost



There will be harm – there will be lying, disobedience to parents, ingratitude, destruction of trust – and more

We are all sinners, and our sin justly brings death, eternal death, hell - described as weeping and gnashing of teeth, as the fire that never goes out, an unshielded experience of God's just and holy wrath

and while God is patient now, waiting for you to return – that will run out

Third reason you may think you don't need salvation

You have minimized the seriousness of death, which is an event of great moral moment, ushering us into the presence of God

You might have chosen to believe that it will all end at death

But God says that judgement follows death – and He has raised Jesus from the dead to let us know that is certain.

More – the Father has entrusted that judgement to the incarnate Son, to the Lord Jesus

[John 5:22-23, Matthew 25:31-32, Acts 10:42-43, Acts 17:30-31.]

*Acts 10:*<sup>42</sup> *He commanded us says Peter to Cornelius to preach to the people and to testify that he Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.* <sup>43</sup> *All the prophets testify about him that through his name everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins."*

The one born into the world to save, the one who has experienced injustice on earth, will be the judge then.

The incarnation ensures the justice of that judgement

He knows us.

He knows our hearts

He can see through our excuses

It won't be a case of he said this or she said that

There won't be doubt about His assessment of the facts or His weighing of motives

You won't be able to justify your failure to love God or love others by saying – 'But you don't know what its like', or "if you had been in my shoes you would have done the same', or 'I had no choice' – you will be speaking to the One who died rather than disobey God, and He has been in your shoes

We sin – and we are trapped in sin, our own and the sins of others – bringing regret, and pain, and shame,

we die – and our race is marked by grief, a growing grief and heartache as the years go by,

we face judgement, and we will be justly condemned in that judgement

And we cannot free ourselves from sin, cannot hold death back, cannot escape the just judgment

We need salvation, rescue – we need a Saviour, the Saviour God has sent, the Son, the Lord Jesus who has authority to judge and forgive

But not thinking you need salvation may not be your issue.

Maybe you hear it all but talk of salvation leaves you cold because you have convinced yourself you can't be saved

You are too messed up, too much a failure, living with a quiet desperation, counting the disappointments and regretting your role in them

Maybe trying to numb that ache in your heart with things that do not help – drink, or drugs or porn or gambling

Thinking wholeness, peace can never be yours

The salvation the Son brings with His coming is for all

The incarnate Son is the Saviour of the world – and the world are all those who are living alienated from God.

The Lord Jesus, if you will turn to Him, call upon Him, trust Him – will save you

That is what He came to do

Later in Luke 1 we hear Mary rejoicing in the Saviour she was carrying in her womb

*Luke 1:<sup>50</sup> His mercy is from generation to generation  
on those who fear him.*

*<sup>51</sup> He has done a mighty deed with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud*

*because of the thoughts of their hearts;*

*<sup>52</sup> he has toppled the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted the lowly.*

*<sup>53</sup> He has satisfied the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty.*

*<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering his mercy*

*<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he spoke to our ancestors.*

God sends the Son to bring mercy – to give the life and peace we need, and could never deserve

He has come for the hungry, the lowly – not for the full, the proudly self-confident and self sufficient

And if you doubt His power and authority to show you mercy, to fill you in your emptiness

remember what the angel said to Mary

*Luke 1:<sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.”*

God will save you if you call out to His Son Jesus

The salvation God the Father sent the eternal Son into the world to bring by becoming incarnate in the womb of Mary is wonderful

Rich

Costly

Necessary

For all

I hope you know that for yourself as you believe in Jesus

Know the joy both of what you are saved from and for

Know yourself Forgiven, a child of God

Know the hope of the end of death, the renewal of all Creation, your own resurrection

Know each day peace with God and His steadfast love

Yours because God sent the Son, and the Son humbled Himself to be born one of us – and to die for us

If that is you – let it show in joy and thankfulness

Whether we are healthy and prospering, or whether we are in the slow grind of the weariness and grief of this life, tasting like our Lord some of its bitterness

Be giving thanks for salvation

And shouldn't we want to share what we confess in believing the gospel, to share from the joy in our hearts

Not just a conviction of the truth of the gospel, but the goodness of being saved

It is salvation the Son of God was born as a man to bring

Not moralism, not a better philosophy, not religious rituals to earn God's favour

But rescue

We say He left heaven to save, He endured death to save, He himself sought out the lost to save them

How hard hearted are we if, thanking God for salvation ourselves, we do not want others to be saved, are not praying to God to save others, are not ourselves seeking to bring the good news of salvation to our neighbours, to a world, ensnared in sin and the hurt it brings and facing death and judgement

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,*

*the only Son of God,*

*Who*

*For us and for our salvation*

*he came down from heaven:*

*by the power of the Holy Spirit*

*he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,*

*and was made man.*

This is a confession that should take our breath away

The eternal Son, taking on our life and all that means – for us – not just unimportant, but sinful and helpless,

Taking on our life to bring us the rich salvation promised by God

A Saviour who knows us and can always help us

A Saviour who can save us to the full

A saviour to be loved, trusted and obeyed - always