



The **Word**
became

flesh

2021 Advent Devotional
Faith Memorial Church

The eternal Son of God became one of us in Jesus of Nazareth. As simply yet profoundly stated in John 1:14, God in Christ pitched His tent among us. In this marvelous and mysterious merger, God came all the way to us for our salvation.

The theological and practical application of this great truth has, understandably, been the focus of debate and attack over the centuries of church history. Dr. Case guides us through the grand history of understanding and appreciating the Incarnation. In doing so, he helps to expand our right thinking through orthodox teaching in order that we might not only think well but believe well to the good of our souls and the glory of God.

Jonathan W. Morgan
Pastor

December 1

This Advent Season we will be examining the theme of **The Incarnation**. In the days ahead, we will look at the biblical and theological support for this doctrine. We begin however, with the historical affirmation of this concept.

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day, he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

The Nicene Creed

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. 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.

The Chalcedonian Creed

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body...in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

December 2

The story of Jesus Christ, Son of God, is often referred to as “the humiliation and the exaltation” of God the Son. This can be portrayed as descent and ascent.

DESCENT

The preexistent Logos

Expected One

Incarnate One

Conceived by the Holy Spirit

Born of the Virgin

Baptized One who identified with Sinners

Suffering Servant

Crucified

Dead

Buried

Descended into the nether world

ASCENT

As final Judge of the Last Day

Who shall come again

Interceding

Sitting at the Right Hand of the Father

Ascended

Resurrected

In this was the twofold movement of descent and ascent, the humbling and exaltation of God the Son, provides a way of organizing exceptionally diverse materials of Scripture into a single confession of faith.

HE CAME HE LIVED HE DIED HE ROSE

December 3

The word “incarnation” means enfleshing or becoming flesh, the union of human nature with the divine in one person. The term “flesh” points to our entire created (not fallen) human nature. It signals in the words of Augustine that in the assumption of humanity *“nothing was lacking that belongs to human nature.”* In the fullness of time, the eternal Son assumed human nature without ceasing to be God. *No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.* ([John 1:18](#))

Incarnation is the necessary premise of any further episode of the unfolding Christ event. Since the incarnation is the antecedent basis of all other speech about specific acts pertaining to God’s coming, it must be studied, guarded and transmitted carefully. As Pannenburg observed, *“it finally renders hazardous, though not impossible, any exclusive Christology from below in the sense of a Christology that would begin with the human Jesus.”*

To summarize, the Russian Catechism defines incarnation: *“The Son of God took to himself human flesh without sin, and was made man, without ceasing to be God.”*

December 4

The Scriptural teaching of incarnation is found in two New Testament writers: St. Paul and John the Apostle. Both writers represent early First Century Christian thinking of the early church.

Paul wrote of One: “*Who, being in very nature God became made in human likeness*” ([Philippians 2:6-7](#)). The incarnation is metaphorically expressed in Paul’s phrase: “*Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich*” ([1 Corinthians 8:9](#)). Paul did not invent this tradition but received it from the early Christian preaching prior to his conversion.

John’s testimony on incarnation generally concurs with that of Paul, yet it is expressed differently. John’s Gospel was primarily interested in the way in which the divine glory shines through the veil of flesh and dwells in it. “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*” ([John 1:14](#)). John’s primary purpose was to reveal this pivotal truth of Jesus’ distinctive personal identity: He is “*from above*” ([John 6:33](#)), “*preexistent Logos*” ([John 8:42](#)), “*sent by the Father to the self-alienated world of flesh*” ([John 8:42](#)), and “*descended from heaven into the human-historical sphere*” ([John 3:13](#)).

December 5

At this point in our study of the incarnation of Jesus, Son of God, we must admit this topic remains a mystery even when best explained. The writer Maximos once remarked, *“Reverence forbids the pretension that human knowledge is competent to make a minute or exhaustive scrutiny of the empirical or physical dimensions of this mystery.”*

Even the New Testament writers recognized that the mystery would not be resolved by ever-extending logical or historical analysis. *“Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: he appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit” (1 Timothy 3:16)*. As Augustine observed, *“Let us grant that God can do something which we confess we cannot fathom. In such matters the whole explanation of the deed is in the power of the Doer.”*

It was inevitable that such a premise would generate a paradoxical tradition of rhetoric. *“Teacher of children became Himself a child among children, that He might instruct the universe. The Bread of heaven came down to earth to feed the hungry”* (Cyril of Jerusalem). *“The Word, though remaining what it was, became what it was not”* (Theophilus of Bulgaria). *“Reason stumbles at the incarnation. The question of **how** the incarnation occurred, you are to **believe**, not to know and to understand, until the solution appears on the blessed Day of our redemption.”* (Martin Luther).

December 6

A question the early church considered was: Is it fitting that God became human? The thinking was if God had the power to save humanity by fiat, by a simple sovereign act, then as Gregory of Nyssa phrased the question, *“why did God take a tedious, circuitous route, submit to a bodily nature, enter life through birth, pass through the varied stages of development, and finally taste death?”* He answered his own question by saying *“God’s saving action had to be consistent with God’s character, as not only powerful, but also just and good and wise and wise in their most congruent relationship.”*

But how could it be consistent with God’s wisdom and power that God should become human? From one viewpoint, it might seem unfitting, recalling that God from all eternity had been without flesh. Since God and flesh are infinitely different, it might seem the height of absurdity that *“He should be hid under the frail body of a babe”* (Augustine).

St. Paul spoke to this question when he wrote, *“it was fitting that by visible things, the invisible things of God should be made known”* ([Romans 1:20](#)). It was fitting for God to become human because it belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others, and particularly to those creatures most capable of responding. The mystery of incarnation occurred through God’s having united Himself to the creature in a new way, a way fitting to God for the salvation of humanity.

December 7

Job had long ago complained that God *“is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both”* ([Job 9:32-33](#)). Now just such a One has appeared in Jesus, through whom the goodness of God is communicated to humanity, and the flesh of humanity is assumed by God the Son.

No more complete revelation of God’s emphatic love is possible than this: that, as Tertullian stated, *“that God shares our human frame, participates in our human limitations, enters into our human sphere.”*

The end of salvation is already anticipated in the enfleshing of the Word. The consummation of history is anticipated in the coming of the eternal Son.

The advent of Christ had long been pledged by the prophets and angelic hosts as promised salvation. The hope of God’s own incarnate coming had been deeply but inconspicuously embedded in various prophetic witnesses. Isaiah especially had foretold that a human child would be born who would be called *“Mighty God”* ([Isaiah 9:6](#)). The name *“Immanuel”* ([Isaiah 7:14](#)) prefigured that was nothing less than God promised to come to deliver humanity. It was a human child that was called *“God with us.”*

Without this mediation, salvation is impossible. Cyril of Jerusalem, an early church Father, wrote *“For if Christ is God, as He truly is, but did not assume manhood, then we are strangers to salvation. Without incarnation, redemption is impossible.”*

December 8

A mediator is one who interposes between two parties at variance to reconcile them. To mediate is to act as the intermediary in effecting peace or reconciliation. In the political sphere, a mediator intervenes between quarreling, alienated powers so that by means of the reconciling offices of mediation, the quarrel may end.

The quarrel in this case is between God and humanity occasioned by the history of sin. Christ is sole mediator between God and humanity. Augustine said it well: *“He is the mediator between God and man, because He is God with the Father, and a man with men. A mere man could not be mediator between God and man; nor could a mere God. Behold the mediator: Divinity without humanity cannot act as mediator; nor can humanity without Divinity; but the human Divinity and the Divine humanity of Christ is the sole mediator between Divinity and humanity.”*

The mediation occurred as an event in time. There was *“one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time”* ([1 Timothy 2:5-6](#)). No one could overcome the divine-human estrangement unless able to so take *“what was ours as to impart what was his to us, and to make what was his by nature ours by grace”* (John Calvin). The sole purpose of Christ’s incarnation was our redemption. He came first to live and then to die for others.

December 9

We have attempted to make the point of the necessity of incarnation as the premise of redemption. Scripture states the point starkly: He came to die! The relation between his birth and death can be stated schematically:

| INCARNATION | PASSION |
|------------------------|---|
| He came | To give his life as ransom (Mark 10:45) |
| To this end I was born | Crucify! Crucify! (John 18:36) |
| God sent His Son | To redeem (Galatians 4:5) |
| God so loved | That He gave His only Son (John 3:16) |
| He humbled Himself | Becoming obedient unto death (Philippians 3:8) |
| The reason He appeared | To destroy the devil's work (1 John 3:8) |

The sacrificial mediatorial reason for the incarnation is stated directly in the Letter to the Hebrews: *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death”* ([Hebrews 2:14](#)). *“For that reason, he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted”* ([Hebrews 2:17-18](#)).

December 10

Why then did God become human? Varied perceptions of the purposes of the incarnation have been summarized by complementary scriptural texts:

TO REVEAL God to humanity ([John 1:18; 14:7-11](#))

TO PROVIDE a high priest interceding for us able to sympathize with human weaknesses ([Hebrews 4:14-16](#))

TO OFFER humanity a pattern or example of the fullness of human life ([1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6](#))

TO PROVIDE a substitutionary sacrifice adequate for the sins of all humanity ([Hebrews 10:1-10](#))

TO BIND UP the demonic powers ([1 John 3:8](#))

TO PROVIDE for humanity a final judge at the end of time ([John 5:22-27](#))

John of Damascus, an early church Father, summarized this scriptural teaching in the following way: *“The Son of God became man in order that He might again grace man as He had when He made him. For He had made him to His own image, understanding and free, and to His own likeness, that is to say, as perfect in virtues as it was possible for human nature to be, for these virtues are, as it were characteristic of the divine nature – freedom from care and annoyance, integrity, goodness, wisdom, justice, freedom from all vice.”*

December 11

With such an important theological concept as incarnation, it is to be expected that questions would arise. One such question is: Did God become human only once? Or can we expect repeated incarnations? Nothing is more characteristic in the history of religions than the thought of the union of God and humanity. In some traditions, this occurs by the deification of the human who ascends to become a god and in others by the alleged descent of one or more gods to live with humans (but not as humans!).

The Bible recognizes that such expectations had been generally present in human history. When Paul preached at Lystra, the crowd shouted in the Lycaonian language, "*The gods have come down to us in human form!*" ([Acts 14:11](#)), and they called Paul, Hermes, and Barnabas, Zeus, an impression that the apostles sought immediately to correct. Hence, it is evident that, even in the earliest Christian preaching, such general expectations of deification or polytheistic descent were available and latent in human society. Often, they became blended with complex thoughts of transmigration of souls and with nativistic animisms.

Reports of alleged deification and polytheistic descent are many, but these all differ markedly from the incarnation. The incarnation speaks of the one true God who becomes flesh and suffers and dies in history without ceasing to be God. Thus Polytheistic myths of divine-human intermixing are all distinguished from and finally rejected by the teaching of incarnation. The once-for-all condescension of the one and only Son to assume human nature was thus understood to be a unique, singular, unduplicatable historical occurrence.

December 12

THE INCARNATE SON OF GOD WAS PARADOXICALLY:

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Father of the Mother | Son of the Mother |
| Without a Mother | Without a Father |
| Begotten from the Father | Generated from a Mother |
| As to divinity | As to humanity |
| One in being with the Father | One in being with humanity |
| Incorporeal birth | Corporeal birth |
| Born not made | Born and made |
| Before all ages | In the last age |
| Illimited in his Spirit | Limited in his flesh |
| Uncreated | Created |
| Impassible | Subject to Suffering |
| Beyond space | Bound by space |

The Eleventh Council of Toledo – 675

December 13

The question for this day is: Did the whole Godhead assume human flesh? An ancient error in the early church is “Patripassianism,” the idea that it was the Father himself, not the Son incarnate, who suffered upon the cross. The Council of Rome (382), condemned this heresy with this statement: *“If anyone says that in the passion of the cross it is God himself who felt the pain and not the flesh and the soul which Christ, the Son of God, had taken to himself – the form of servant which he has accepted as Scripture says – he is mistaken.”*

It is not Deity as such but the Logos that became flesh, so as to be God manifested in the flesh ([1 Timothy 3:16](#)). It is the Logos who was from the beginning, was with God and was God ([John 1:1](#)), was before Abraham (John 8:58), who existed in the form of God ([Philippians 2:6](#)), being of one substance with the Father, who became flesh in time ([John 1:14](#)). John’s Gospel does not say that the divine nature as such became flesh or that the whole Godhead became flesh, but the Word became flesh ([John 1:14](#)).

John of Damascus, an early church Father, insisted: *“The Word, while being God was made man without suffering change,”* but this does not imply that *“the Godhead was made man;”* rather it means that *“the Godhead was united to humanity in one of its Persons.”*

While incarnate, the Son was truly God. Scripture does not teach that his divinity ceased, was cast aside, absorbed, or left behind. As incarnate Lord he acted in a way that only God can act, forgiving sin, giving life to the dead, revealing the secret thoughts of persons, dividing loaves and fishes, and laying down his life and taking it up again.

December 14

The Creed of Epiphanius (374) stated that the Logos “*assumed a perfect man, soul, and body and mind (spirit), and all that belong to man, without sin.*” This creedal statement is just one answer to the question: Was He fully man?

That the affirmation of Jesus as truly human was a part of the core of Christian confession from the earliest memory of him is seen in John’s First Epistle, which commends this test of faith that had been passed down from earlier oral tradition: “*This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God – every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh is from God*” ([1 John 4:2](#))

Palpable, fleshly, humanity is what is meant by the word “flesh” – the human condition – when it is said that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us ([John 1:14](#)). The implication is not that a Divine person co-inhabited a human body with another human person so as to be two distinct persons with one name, but rather the one man, Jesus Christ, made reference to a single person, God made flesh.

Jesus was called and called himself a human being – man ([John 8:40](#)). Pilate, who sought to discern his true identity and colluded in allowing his death, said of him, “*Behold the man!*” ([John 19:5](#)) – a fully human being.

There is a broader, more general sense in which God dwells in all humanity or lives in the hearts of all believers – that of course is true, but this general meaning is not what is referred to in the incarnation of the Son in Jesus Christ, the unique, once-for-all coming of God to human history.

December 15

Today, the question must be asked: Was humanity an absolute mediatorial requirement? The mediation between God and humanity would have to be nothing less than God and nothing less than fully human, otherwise this mediatorship would have been impossible, for how can one mediate in a conflict in which one has no capacity to empathize with one or the other side?

The key text is from the Pauline tradition: *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)). No mediation between God and humanity is possible if the mediator lacks full participation in one side.

The mediatorial requirement was brilliantly formulated in Hebrews: *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death”* ([Hebrews 2:14](#)) How could one destroy the power of death without being truly God? And how could the mediator have gained the trust of perplexed humanity unless our humanity has been genuinely shared?

Hence, Christ’s full humanity became axiomatic for classic Christology: *“For if Christ is God, as he truly is, but did not assume manhood, then we are strangers to salvation”* (Cyril of Jerusalem).

Paul had early recognized that it is possible to summarize salvation history in this way: *“By one representative human person (Adam) sin appeared in history. This is matched by the deepening irony that by one representative human being (Christ) grace appeared in history”* ([Romans 5:15](#)). It could not have happened either through the agency of some supra-personal angel or impersonal “force,” for sin had been personally conceived and willed, salvation must be personally embodied and enacted. *“For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man”* ([1 Corinthians 15:21](#)).

December 16

When theologians consider the humanity of Christ, they raise the question: Was this humanity ordinary or extraordinary?

ORDINARY HUMANITY:

First, it must be noted that Jesus' humanity was entirely ordinary. Jesus is pictured as a normal person in unmistakably human terms in going to weddings, visiting friends, eating and drinking, getting tired and napping. All the familiar elements of human nature are found in Jesus: body, soul, will and spirit. Scriptures speak of a real person having all things requisite for human existence, not an ephemeral but a real body, not an angelic but a rational human soul. Everything that we as human beings experienced in the normal course of being human, Jesus also experienced, sin excepted.

EXTRAORDINARINESS:

Yet at the same time, this human life was utterly extraordinary, since unfallen. The narratives were aware that Jesus, recollected as being wholly without sin, exhibited and lived out precisely that kind of humanity that had been primordially given to human history before our fall, to our first parents prior to their disobedience, unsullied by sin.

UNFALLEN INTEGRITY:

Paradoxically, the un-corruptible divine Logos assumed not only our fragile, vulnerable, created human nature, but also that which stands against our created human nature – sin and the consequences of sin – while, yet contributing further sin to the history of sin. God participated in our ambiguous, sin-drenched, human condition, yet without sin.

December 17

It is a fact that no individual experiences everything all individuals experience. To say that Jesus shared our humanity does not imply that he experienced every possible human experience – for we know that he was not an architect or thief, he was not married, he possessed no wealth. These are all human experiences that Jesus apparently did not have. But neither does any other human being experience all that is possible for all human beings, so in that sense he was more like us – by sharing in human limitation – than if he had specifically shared in every possible human experience of every time and place. His earthly life did not occur in both the first and fifteenth centuries in both Iceland and China – but neither did anyone else's.

If one hypothesizes that to be representative, he must have done everything possible that any human being could have done, then one would have already thrust him into some sort of non-historical status. Try the hypothesis that to be a representative human he must have undergone my particular personal history and your personal history and that of your brothers and sisters and your father and your mother, that he must be Hispanic and Korean and Polish – such a thought is absurd, and would be nothing like our own temporarily placed humanity. One cannot be human without being a particular human being. He shared sufficiently in human experience to teach us that he is one of us, even unto death.

He is more like us by living in a particular time and place. He would have been less like us if he had spent his earthly ministry in all times and places. This is in part what is meant by the phrase the “scandal of particularity” – that God comes to us in a special time (when the hour had come) and a special place (the Holy Land) to a specific woman birthing a particular child, yet in a way that bestows, as Luther said, “*significance upon all other times and places.*”

December 18

The main point of today's reading is this: Christ assumed an ordinary human body. In fact, there can be no doubt that the Jesus of the Gospels had a real, not an imagined or fantasized, human body. He experienced hunger, love, fear, and sorrow and as having made reference to his own ordinary body and its members: head, hands, feet, blood and bones ([Matthew 26:12](#); [Mark 14:8](#); [Luke 24:39](#)).

Embedded in the Gospel narratives is a determined struggle against a Docetism (appearance, semblance, illusion) that would suppose that since matter is intrinsically evil, Jesus Christ could not have had a human material body; a fleshly existence; rather his body was a mere phantom or fantasy.

Oppositely, the Gospels constantly portray him as living a thoroughly human, bodily existence: he was conceived in a womb and born when a census was being taken; he was circumcised when he was an infant. He grew in stature – he did not come full grown. He got hungry, thirsty and weary. His body was nourished by ordinary food and rested by ordinary sleep; his spiritual relation with the Father was refreshed by prayer, like us. In saying, "*I thirst*" ([John 19:28](#)), he revealed his affinity to everyone whose throat had become parched, who had desired a drink of water on a hot day. The human body of the Savior was neither imaginary nor celestial.

A more difficult point viewed in the light of the glory of his sonship was: he experienced bodily pain. He felt exhaustion, for example, when his bodily powers failed and he was unable to carry the cross. He was wounded and hurt when nailed to the cross. The most decisive proof of his humanity is simply that he died. This teaching of the suffering of the incarnate Lord is utterly distinctive of Christianity.

December 19

The focus of today's reading is: The mediator assumed a human soul, spirit, and will. What does the term "soul" imply? Soul is that without which the body is a corpse. Soul is the animating, enlivening dimension of human experience. Jesus Christ possessed not only a human body but a human soul – that liveliness without which the body is unresponsive, hence dead.

That implies that Jesus, like the rest of us, experienced the whole range of human emotions – whatever living persons experience. A good sampling of this emotive repertoire is reported in the Gospels. Mark reports that Jesus experienced pity ([1:41](#)), anger ([3:5](#)) deep sighing ([7:34](#)), compassion ([8:2](#)), surprise ([6:6](#)), and disappointment ([8:17](#)). Jesus is portrayed in Luke as experiencing joy ([10:21](#)), distress ([22:1-5](#)), and love (7:36-50). These emotions are certainly not falsely ascribed to him. Jesus assumed the whole man and everything that is his, except sin, including hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, the tears, the destruction, the shrinking from death, the fear, the agony, from which came the sweating. Even more poignantly he wept, "*deeply moved in spirit and troubled*" at the death of his dear friend Lazarus ([John 11:33-35](#)).

Hence, the view of Apollinaris had to be rejected that Christ had not human soul, the divine nature having completely taken the place of the human soul, the full range of affective experience, and fully human emotions.

December 20

The Gospels make clear one particular aspect of Jesus' life for our instruction and benefit – Jesus was a man of prayer! Without soul, what could the Gospel writers have meant when they reported that Jesus prayed? Surely, his prayers were not a pretense. His prayers reveal a soul heavy with human burdens, capable of joy in God, happy to withdraw from the world for a time to converse with the Father.

He prayed not only for others, but for himself when he said: “*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*” ([Mark 14:34](#)). “*He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him*” ([Mark 14:35](#)). How can one read the account without feeling with him the full burden of his human situation at that time? What other purpose might these details have been recorded than to show the Savior as one of us, fully human, sharing our human condition, our agony, this same one being none other than God?

In praying he, as John of Damascus wrote long ago, “*became a model for us, he taught us to ask of God...He actually had two wills that are natural and correspond to His nature and are not mutually opposed. Father, he says, if it be possible, not because he did not know but to instruct us to put the divine will before our own.*” It was his fully human soul that longed, prayed, pleaded, agonized, and was tempted to despair, yet that finally was willing to affirm, “*Yet not what I will, but what you will*” ([Mark 14:36](#)).

December 21

The question for today's reading is this: How was humanity honored in His coming? It is the firm belief of the church that humanity is incomparably honored in the incarnation, for God made flesh divine, without providing occasion for the worship of the creature.

This question had profound, experiential relevance for Augustine: *"Why should there be such great glory to a human nature – and this undoubtedly an act of grace, no merit preceding it – unless it be that those who consider such a question faithfully and soberly might have here a clear manifestation of God's great and sole grace, and this in order that they might understand how they themselves are justified from their sins by the selfsame grace which made it so that the man Christ had not power to sin?"*

The whole nature of humanity was taken up by God the Son, Augustine summarized: *"By the Holy Spirit there was granted to us so great humility on the part of so great a God, that He deemed it worthy of Him to assume the entire nature of man."*

Martin Luther, in a sermon, remarked: *"The devil came close to us, but he did not come so close as to assume our nature. For although he fell through pride and thereupon persuaded man also to fall away from God, he nevertheless did not become man and did not come so close to us as did God's Son, who became flesh and blood."*

Early church Fathers stated the point correctly. For example, Irenaeus said: *"He became what we are that he might bring us to be even what He is Himself."* Also, Athanasius taught: *"He was made man that we might be made God."* In this way the early church enhanced the glory of being human and thereby brought human nature into the divine nature.

December 22

James Montgomery celebrated Christ's humanity magnificently:

What is the thing of greatest price,
The whole creation round?
That which was lost in Paradise,
That which in Christ is found:
The soul of man – Jehovah's breath –
That keeps two worlds at strife:
Hell moves beneath to work death,
Heaven, stoops to give it life.
God, to reclaim it, did not spare
His well-beloved Son;
Jesus, to save it, deigned to bear
The sins of all in one.
The Holy Spirit sealed the plan,
And pledged the blood divine,
To ransom every soul of man –
That price was paid for mine

(PS, p. 41)

December 23

Whatever unites human beings through their participation in human nature is precisely the human nature experienced by Jesus. Whatever distinguished one person from another also distinguished Jesus from all other human persons, for there was only one Jesus of Nazareth.

The most essential distinctions were tightly compacted in these phrases of the Quicumque Creed (A.D. 440), which confesses:

Our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God
both God and man;
God of the substance of the Father, begotten before time,
and man of the substance of his mother born in time;
perfect God and perfect man,
consisting of a rational soul and human body;
equal to the Father in his divinity;
less than the Father in his humanity;
who although both God and man, is not two but one Christ;
one, however, not by the conversion of the Godhead into flesh
but by the assumption of manhood into God.
Wholly one, not by fusion of substance but by unity of person. For
as the rational soul and the body are one man,
so God and man are one Christ.

December 24

Ecumenical council definitions sought to define faith in such a way that it would not be easily distorted. Their definitions were largely elicited and required by persistent distortions that did not reflect the consensual mind of the believing church.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (A. D. 451) defended the scriptural teaching of the personal union of Christ by defining it as:

- **Unconfused**, with no mixing of the two natures, which remain distinct even while they are in communion (against the Eutychians)
- **Unchanged**, in the sense that the deity is not transmuted into humanity, nor humanity into deity (against the Eutychians)
- **Indivisible**, unable to be divided – the personal union is never at any point split apart (against the Nestorians)
- **Inseparable**, undissolved through eternity, perpetual (against the Nestorians)

Chalcedon was intensely economical in ruling out rejected options. The Eutychians tended to confuse the natures, the Nestorians tended to divide the persons. The rejected options may be summarized in this simple schema: Heresies that reject Christ's humanity (Docetists, Appollinarians and Eutychians). Heresies that reject Christ's divinity (Eutychians, Ebionites and Arians). Heresies that reject Christ's personal union (Nestorians).

December 25

CELEBRATE IMMANUEL'S NAME

Celebrate Immanuel's name,
The Prince of life and peace;
God with us, our lips proclaim,
Our faithful hearts confess.
God is in our flesh revealed;
Heav'n and earth in Jesus' join;
Mortal with immortal filled,
And human with Divine.

Fullness of the Deity
In Jesus' body dwells,
Dwells in all His saints and me,
When God His Son reveals.
Father, manifest Thy Son;
Breathe the true incarnate Word;
In our inmost souls make known
The presence of the Lord.

Let the Spirit of our Head
Through ev'ry member flow;
By our Lord inhabited,
We then Immanuel know.
Then He doth His name express;
God in us we truly prove,
Filled with all the life of grace
And all the power of love.

Charles Wesley
(from the Foundery Collection, 1742)