

The Word became Flesh: the Human Jesus

Luke 2-5

Turn to Luke 2 please. During Advent we read John and his view of Christ, and John emphasizes the deity of Christ in his existence before he became human. Before he became human, he was the Word, back in the beginning he was with God, he was God, all things were made through him, and so on.

So today we will talk about the humanity of Jesus, how much he was like us. The way I was taught about Christ, he was more or less God in a human body, God pretending to be human. No one ever said that, but that's the idea I walked away with. I think there is quite a bit of that around. I want to make sure I don't pass that on, so we'll talk about Christ being like us.

Two Steps Down, One Step up – Php 2:6-9a

Philippians 2 gets as close as we'll find in the NT about how the Eternal Word became flesh, and what that change looked like. We don't get much even there, but we get a little.

Christ Jesus, in the past, existed as God. That's what John said: he was with God, and he was God. So Paul begins that way. Christ Jesus existed as God, but instead of grabbing on to it, he let it go, and instead of existing as God, he chose to exist as a servant of God, a human.

This is Christ's first great step down. People were made to serve God. Christ existed as God, then he said goodbye to that, and took on the existence of a human being, a servant of God.

Then he took a second step down. He humbled himself further, in his obedience to God, and he took a position below other humans. He let people shame him, and bring him suffering, right up to death, in fact death on a cross, the ultimate shame and suffering.

His first step down was to trade in existing as God for existing as a servant of God, a human. His second step was to humble himself, in obedience to God, and let other humans get the best of him, completely, up to and including the worst death possible at the time.

Because of these two steps, God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the name above every name. Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess.

Paul's not thinking theology when he writes this to the church at Philippi, he's thinking ethics. He's giving them and us an example. Jesus is our example. He explains Christ's two steps down, and then he says, "you be like that. Think like that. You have that attitude among yourselves.

Imitate Jesus. Then you will look like children of God in a warped and crooked generation. You will shine among them like stars in the sky.

We are going to talk about the real humanity of Jesus. Luke 2.

Twelve year old Jesus in the Temple with the Teachers – Luke 2:46-47

When Jesus was 12, his parents took him on their annual trips to worship God at the Temple in Jerusalem. He stayed behind when they went back home, without their knowing he was staying. They found him on the third day, it says, “*sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.*”

People, Jesus was not born “knowing” the things God knows. He needed to learn, and ask questions. He was curious, eager to know about God. He found better teachers at the temple than he had at Nazareth, so he sat there and listened to these good teachers, and asked them questions. Jesus was and is human, and that means he learns things.

Before this, in 2:40, it says the **grace** of God was on Jesus in his childhood. That means God was helping him. Paul said, “by the **grace** of God I am what I am, and by the **grace** of God I worked harder than the other apostles, yet not I, but the **grace** of God on me.”

Paul asked the Lord to take away his thorn in the flesh. The Lord said, “no, I don’t think so. My **grace** is enough for you, my power is made perfect in your weakness.” My **grace** is enough for you. Grace is God’s generous help for humans. Several NT Letters end with “The **grace** of the Lord Jesus be with you.” This grace of God was on the child Jesus.

It says in 2:47 that the teachers were amazed at the understanding of 12 year old Jesus. Is that because he was God in the flesh? No. They were amazed because, as we were already told in 2:40, the **grace** of God was on the child Jesus.

In Luke 2:52, Jesus after 12 years, it says that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and people. Luke is quoting what we read about the boy Samuel, growing up in the temple. 1 Sam 2:26 says that Samuel grew in stature, and in favour with God and people. In the OT, Samuel was a special child, and Luke tells us that Jesus was special just like Samuel was.

We might be a little offended with this. The nerve of Luke, comparing Jesus to Samuel. Jesus is so much greater. Well, Luke knows Jesus is greater than Samuel. What Luke understands, that we often don’t, is that Jesus lived as a human, and he did NOT get help from his deity, in living as a human. He got the grace of God, available to all of us.

When the Word became flesh, he really became flesh. When he exchanged existing as God to existing as a human, made to serve God, he really did leave behind existing as God. And I’ll tell you something else – he will never pick that up again. It is the human Jesus at the Father’s right hand today, and forever. Jesus, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

**Three things** in the life of Jesus, in the Gospel of Luke, show his humanity. Jesus depends on **Scripture**, Jesus depends on **prayer**, Jesus depends on the **Holy Spirit**. How does Jesus live and carry on? How does he do the Father's will? He depends on Scripture, on prayer, and on the Holy Spirit. Just like we do.

Jesus depended on the Scriptures

Let's look at the baptism of Jesus, Lk 3:21-22. All three of these are present in this story, so we will start here. *When all the people were being baptized Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

So, Jesus was praying, and the Spirit descended on him. And God responded to Jesus so warmly from heaven. Jesus must have just done something very pleasing to God. In simplest terms, Jesus has just said "yes" to God's call on his life. Through John's preaching, Jesus can feel God's call on his life, and he gets baptized to say "yes" to God's call, whatever it might be.

He does not need to confess sins, or be forgiven, but he does need to say "yes" to God, because he is God's servant. He's praying right after this. What's he praying for? We don't know, of course. But he has just said some kind of "yes" to God, and he's probably asking for help and guidance. Is that not about what you and I would be asking at a time like that?

So the Spirit comes down on him. That's part of the answer, and we'll come back to that later, but now let's look at what God said. *You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.*

In this line, God has aimed Jesus at 3 different OT Scriptures. *You are my Son*. That's Ps 2, a psalm about the Christ. In that psalm, God himself says to the Christ, *You are my Son*. Jesus is praying for guidance, and he has just heard a voice from heaven say, *You are my Son*. The Father is telling him, "Psalm 2 is about you. Jesus, you are that Christ, that's you in there. Read Ps 2."

The Father's words end, *with you I am well pleased*. The prophet Isaiah has 5 servant songs in the second half of Isaiah. This line, *with you I am well pleased*, is from the first verse of the first servant song (Isa 42). It reads, "*Here is my servant, my chosen one, **with whom I am well pleased**; I will put my Spirit on him.*"

Jesus has just received the Spirit, and God quotes to him a line from the first servant song about God being well pleased with him, and putting his Spirit on him. So God is telling Jesus, "you want guidance? Read Isaiah's servant songs, that's who you are."

And the fourth servant song is Isaiah 53, *he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities ... the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*. So Jesus learns on that day that this also is his calling. He's that servant, who will die for his people's sins.

And there's one more Scripture here, in the phrase "*whom I love.*" There is a famous OT story that begins like this: *Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and offer him as a sacrifice at the place I will show you.* "Take your son, your only son, whom you love." God to Jesus at his baptism: "You are my son, whom I love." God is telling Jesus, "Genesis 22 is also about you, Jesus; you will be my Isaac son."

We don't know how much of this Jesus knew before. But we can be sure that by the time Jesus had thought about Psalm 2, and Isaiah's servant songs, and Genesis 22, he knew a lot more about his calling than he knew at the beginning of that day. Scripture, people. Jesus took Scripture as God's words to him. God's audible voice aimed Jesus of Nazareth at Scripture.

That's in Luke 3. In Luke 4, we have the temptation of Jesus. Jesus fought temptation with Scripture. He quoted from Deuteronomy to resist all three temptations. Jesus was determined to be a righteous Israelite, and a righteous Israelite would obey Moses when tempted, and that is exactly what Jesus did.

We are not talking about Jesus using Scripture to convince *others* about anything. These are stories about Jesus using Scripture to guide *his own* life and obedience. The Eternal Word did not need to read the Bible to find out what to do. But the Eternal Word became flesh, he made himself nothing, and humbled himself, and he needed Scripture to guide him.

By the way, we have just talked about 40 days of temptation in the wilderness. This is real temptation. We should assume a grueling difficult battle to do the right thing. Somewhere in your life, you have been strongly tempted to do the wrong thing, and you did not, you did right. It is not a pleasant fight. Jesus saw lots of that.

So, he guided himself with Scripture, he depended on Scripture. There's a lot more about that in Luke just before his death, and after his resurrection, but not today.

Jesus depended on Prayer

Jesus prayed a lot. We hear more about this in Luke than the other Gospels. Right after his baptism, he was praying. As he was praying, the Spirit came down on him, and he heard the Father speak to him.

In Luke 5:15-16 we read that the news about Jesus went out more and more, and many crowds came to listen to his teaching, and be healed. And then it says, *but Jesus often withdrew into the wilderness to pray.*

Jesus needed to pray, and he did so, often. In Luke 6 we read of Jesus choosing the twelve, and calling them his apostles, his sent ones. But before that day, he spent all night praying. He had to make important choices, and it seems he did not have an easy time figuring out how to handle this. He prayed all night.

In Luke 9:18 he was praying, and after that he invited the disciples to tell him who they thought he was, and when they answered, “the Christ of God,” he began to teach them that he had to suffer many things, and be rejected, killed, and then rise the third day.

So we know that Jesus prayed regularly, and he prayed at important turning points in his life. In Luke 22, after the Last Supper, and Jesus was facing his obedience up to death, even death on a cross, he prayed like never before, desperate prayers.

He needed Scripture to guide his life, he needed prayer. And, God gave him the Spirit.

Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit.

God sends his Spirit to help his people. In Luke 1:15, we read that John the Baptist would be filled with the Spirit right from his mother’s womb. Later in that chapter, we read that Elizabeth, John’s mother, was filled with the Holy Spirit to speak. And still later in Luke 1, we read that Zechariah, John’s father, was also filled with the Holy Spirit, to speak God’s words.

In Luke 2 we read about old Simeon in the temple when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to be circumcised. It says that the Holy Spirit was on Simeon, and in the next verse it says the Holy Spirit had told Simeon that he would not die before he saw the Christ. And the next verse says that Simeon came to the temple that day “in the Spirit.”

In Luke 3, the Spirit came down like a dove on Jesus after his baptism, when he was praying. In Luke 4, Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tested. Wow. That one always gets my attention. The Spirit led him into long difficult testing.

Later, after the testing in the wilderness, still in Luke 4, we read that Jesus headed into Galilee in the power of the Spirit. A few verses later, Jesus goes into the synagogue in Nazareth, and he read Isaiah’s last servant song to the people there. The opening line of Isaiah’s last servant song reads, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.*”

He read some more, then sat down and said, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The people in Nazareth did not like that. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, but early in his ministry he seems to have moved to Capernaum. Nazareth, his home town, did not want him.

In Luke 10, the seventy he had sent out came back with joy, and reported how well everything had gone. And Jesus was filled with joy in the Holy Spirit, and praised God for what God was doing. He was filled with joy in the Holy Spirit.

Why did Jesus of Nazareth have the power to do amazing miracles? Because the Holy Spirit of God was on him. Moses and Elijah also did amazing miracles, for the same reason. Why does Jesus know things that ordinary people don’t know? Why does he know that the Samaritan woman has been married 6 times, and now lives with a man she has not married?

Because the Spirit of God is on him. How did old Simeon know that he would not die until he had seen the Christ? The Holy Spirit told him. That's how Jesus knows these things. Remember that Jesus was surprised a number of times, things happened Jesus did not expect. He was surprised how resistant Nazareth was. He was surprised at the Roman centurion's great faith.

Jesus did not do anything that OT people did not do by prayer and the Holy Spirit. Elijah and Elisha both raised a person from the dead. Jesus is truly more than those people, he is the Eternal Son of God. But we don't find that out from his miracles, or what he knows.

We find that out he's God because he can forgive sins. We find that out because he commands the wind and the waves, and they instantly obey. And we find it out because he said so. He said that on judgement day, he would be the judge. He said he can give life to whomever he wants, eternal life. That's how we find out that Jesus is the Eternal Son of God.

How did Jesus find out that he was the Eternal Son of God? How does a man find out he is God? Someone tells him. Imagine the Spirit telling Jesus what we read in John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning, with God. That's you, Jesus."

The Holy Spirit tells Jesus, "All things were made through the Word, and nothing was made that was not made through him. That's you, Jesus. And the Word became flesh, and lived with us. That's you, Jesus. You were in very nature God, but you made yourself nothing, and were made in very nature a servant, a human. That's your story, Jesus of Nazareth. And if you continue to obey your Father, you will be exalted to the highest place."

I don't know how Jesus found out, of course. I'm guessing here. But based on what we do know about our Lord, it had to have been something along these lines.

Jesus took on humanity. The Eternal Word was made flesh, and lived with us. And during his life he depended on the same things we depend on: Scripture, prayer, and God sending his Spirit.

Existing as a human, Word made Flesh, lasts forever.

Jesus the Lord will not walk away from his humanity. He took on flesh permanently. He is, right now, at the Father's right hand, with scars on his hands and feet, a raised and glorified Servant of God. 1 John 3 says, "*Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be [when we are raised and glorified] has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" We will see him, we will be like him.

He's on the Throne, not us, He's still the Eternal Son. But the Son taking on humanity lasts forever.

I am stressing this today because the way I was taught Jesus, the emphasis was always on his deity. We thought this was more devout, we thought we were doing Christ a favour. That's what I thought. To speak too strongly about his humanity was to make Christ smaller somehow, that's what we thought, and that of course is not good.

I taught the NT long enough to realize that this is not true. In the Scripture, it is the glory of Christ that he lived as an obedient human. That exactly is his glory and his honour and majesty.

We have two things to gain from Christ Jesus being an obedient human servant of God. One, he's our example. If Jesus was God in a human body, then he had a huge advantage over us, and his obedience does not really count. But if he really was made in every way as we are, and tempted in every way as we are, then he did not have an advantage.

If he was really surrounded by weaknesses, as we are, and if he carried on by praying and obeying the Scriptures, and God helped him with the Spirit, then he truly is our example.

We gain Christ being a real example, and we gain a second thing – we gain his sympathy. If the Word truly became flesh, if he existed as an obedient human, if he was tempted in every way as we are, if he really was surrounded by weaknesses, if obeying God was often a great struggle, then he knows what it is like.

Hebrews 4 is very clear. He feels sorry for us. Because he was made like us, and tempted like us, and surrounded by weaknesses like us, his reaction to our battles with sin is sympathy. He knows what it is like. We are disgusted with ourselves that we have to fight some of these battles at all. He is not disgusted, he fought the same ones, he has sympathy for us in all our weaknesses.

We have Jesus as an example, and a sympathetic priest, because he became flesh, and lived this life just as we do, depending on prayer, Scripture, and the Holy Spirit. His life from the inside felt more like ours than ever occurs to us. Thank you, our great Lord. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, we're doing what Jesus did. We've been reading the Scriptures, and right now we are praying. We ask you for help and guidance, as he did. May your Holy Spirit be with us, and may your grace be upon us. We want to be your obedient servants. We do not like to humble ourselves, we do not like to consider others first. Lord Jesus, at some level you did not like that either. So we pray for help, and for your Holy Spirit to guide us. May your grace be with us. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify us through and through. May our whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls us is faithful, and he will do it. Amen. Go in God's peace, to love and serve the Lord.