

The Word made Flesh

Ephesians 4:9-10

This is a summary of the saving work of Christ which we commemorate around the Lord's table.

His incarnation

'He descended to the lower parts of the earth'

- Not hades
- Not Pentecost

Christ came to the earth as a human being. He took on human flesh. (Latin: *in-carn-ate* = be in flesh). Jesus became a true man. See John 1:14; Hebrews 2:14-17.

- Not Docetism (from Greek *dokeo* = 'I seem' ie that Jesus only *seemed* or appeared to be human). Signs of humanity: hunger, thirst, weariness, limited knowledge etc indicate his humanity. It is this great mystery we recall in the communion service
- Not just God dressed up as a man like Father Christmas: He really was a man.
- See the Athanasian Creed—

(29) It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. (30) Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man. (31) He is God from the Father's substance, begotten before time; and He is man from His mother's substance, born in time. (32) Perfect God, perfect man composed of a human soul and human flesh, (33) equal to the Father in respect of His divinity, less than the Father in respect of His humanity. (34) Who, although He is God and man, is nevertheless not two, but one Christ. (35) He is one, however, not by the transformation of His divinity into flesh, but by the taking up of His humanity into God; (36) one certainly not by confusion of substance, but by oneness of person. (37) For just as soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ.

(38) Who suffered for our salvation, descended to hell, rose from the dead, (39) ascended to heaven, sat down at the Father's right hand, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead;

The Table of the Lord

See 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

In communion we take bread and wine to remind ourselves that Jesus was made like us in every way. We do not use jewels or precious stones to remember Him. Simple elements of the earth remind us that Jesus was also of the earth (Eph 4:9,10). The bread and wine most profoundly remind us of the conclusion to His incarnation—His death on the cross for our sins.

His exaltation

- Jesus was also exalted on high
- Far above all (Eph 1:23)

So at the Lord's table we also look forward to His coming. The bread and the wine remind us that His coming will be bodily and visible. See Matthew 24:27-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.

Celebration

This is a place where we do two things: we look back and we look forward—

- We remember his incarnation with sorrow
- We celebrate his exaltation with joy

The Real Presence

Three views—

1. Sacramental

Transubstantiation = the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ
Cf Chinese ancestor rituals where paper models are thought to change to material objects. But this is going too far.

- 'I am the bread' is a metaphor (cf 'I am the door, I am the light, I am the road')
- Jesus was there in the flesh when he said 'this is my body'...
- He explained that eating his flesh meant believing (Jn 6:35)

2. Representative

The bread and wine are only symbols and no more. This is not going far enough

3. Dynamic

Jesus is present through—

- The Word
- The Spirit
- Faith

When we take the communion elements in faith, we experience—

- His presence
- His power

For example, if taking the elements unworthily brings about sickness and even death (1 Cor 11:30), there is a corresponding blessing of health.

When we share in this mystical feast—

- Let's remember Christ's incarnation
- Let's celebrate his exaltation

- Let's believe in His 'real presence' by His Holy Spirit to move among us and touch us by His saving power.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

1. Think about Jesus as a Man. Make a list of all the evidence you can think of to affirm that he was truly human (for example, he hungered...)
2. Why is it important for us that Jesus was truly human? Make it more personal: why is it important for *me*?
3. Read Hebrews 2:14-18 again. What are the major points made by the writer here about Jesus' humanity?
4. Which aspect of Hebrews 2:14-18 means most to you? Why?
5. Why is it important that Jesus ascended to heaven? (10). List as many reasons as you can. Chapters one and two of Ephesians might be helpful here (NB 1:18-23; 2:1-7).
6. What does the phrase 'higher than all the heavens' mean to you? What does it tell you about the ascended Jesus? How do you think we should understand this phrase—geographically, symbolically, spiritually...?
7. Read verse 10 in different translations. The Greek text of the last few words literally reads: 'that he might fill all things.' Which translation seems most helpful to you in bringing out the meaning of this phrase? Why?
8. In the Lord's Supper, we remember in particular Christ's humanity. Think about the words below from Isaac Watts about Jesus. If you are in a group, you could sing it together. Or you could listen to it on a CD... Ask God to make Jesus very real to you as you do so.
9. Now use the hymn as a closing a prayer.

When I survey the wondrous Cross,
 where the young Prince of Glory died,
 my richest gain I count but loss,
 and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
 save in the death of Christ my God.
 All the vain things that charm me most,
 I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,

sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Want to read more by Barry Chant? Easy. Just go to www.barrychant.com and browse around. There is something for everyone – Bible studies, children's stories, articles, devotional materials, poems, short stories, Christian resources, pioneer Pentecostal research and more. And lots of it is free. Dr Barry Chant is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is an ordained minister in the CRC Churches International and was the founding president of Tabor College, Australia. He is married (to Vanessa) and they have three adult children and twelve grand-children.