

THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST

by Joel Stephen Williams

One of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is the affirmation that Christ, although a man in his earthly existence, was more than a man. Christ, although born as a human at Bethlehem, did not begin his existence at that point in time, or even at the conception in Nazareth. The incarnation is the affirmation that God, in the presence of his Son, has entered humanity. As John put it: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (In. 1: 14). Paul explained that "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men...in human form" (Phil. 2:5-8).

A beautiful poem honoring Christ in his incarnation was written by Gregory of Nazianzus about AD 385 (Sermon 38. 1-2):

Christ is born, give glory to him;
Christ comes from the heavens, gather to meet him;
Christ comes upon the earth, be filled with rejoicing.
"Sing to the Lord, all the earth" ...
Who would not adore him who is from the beginning?
Who would not give praise to him who is the end of all? ...
All you nations clap your hands,
because a child is born to us, a son is given to us.
Sovereignty is upon his shoulder ...
and his name is called Mighty Counsellor ...
The One without flesh has assumed flesh;
The Word has taken on materiality;
The Invisible had become visible;
The Untouchable is able to be touched;
The Timeless takes on a beginning;
The Son of God becomes Son of Man,
Jesus Christ,
He who is yesterday, today and forever.¹

Paul wrote: "Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). So "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2: 10-11).

¹*Early Christian Spirituality*, translated by Pamela Bright, edited by Charles Kannengiesser (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 78-79.