



The Epiphany of Our Lord

January 6, 2012

In lieu of a 'regular' sermon, I thought it appropriate this Sunday observing the Epiphany of Our Lord to post the following reprint from Professor W.H. McLaughlin's We All Believe in One True God – A Summary of Biblical Doctrine as a means of Christian instruction as to:

IV: 'The Person of Christ'

“What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He?”

This most important question is asked by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 22:42). The Pharisees whom He interrogated failed to give an adequate answer to His question; for their reply: “The son of David,” though true, is only half of the truth.

Simon Peter, by illumination of the Holy Ghost, had given the right answer when Jesus examined His disciples on the doctrine of His Person at Caesarea Philippi, for he had confessed: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16).

The confession that He is “the Christ,” the Lord’s Anointed, includes, according to the uniform tenor of Old Testament prophecy, the recognition of Him as the Son of David; and the further confession that He is the Son of the living God gives expression to the divine mystery which David himself acknowledged when he called Him “Lord” (Psalm 110:1; Matt. 22:44).

The correctness of this answer to the question: “Whom do ye say that I the Son of man am?” (Matt. 16:13,15) was acknowledged by Jesus in the words: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:17).

Everyone who has been taught of God makes the same answer. Luther gives this same answer in his Small Catechism: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.” And every Christian of all ages, including the believers who lived in the days before God’s Son came in the flesh, agrees in this confession concerning the God-man.

David, for instance, not only calls Him Lord, in the One Hundred Tenth Psalm before quoted, but he also clearly expresses his faith in the two-fold nature of this Lord, in 2 Samuel 7:19b, as correctly translated from the Hebrew in Luther’s German Bible: “This is the manner of a Man who is the Lord Jehovah.”

The blessed season of Advent and Christmas has its place in the Church Year for the special purpose of stressing this all-important Bible teaching of the Incarnation, or the coming of the eternal Son of God into the flesh. Therefore only a Christian knows the meaning of Christmas. And every Christian who kneels in worship at the manger of Bethlehem does know and confess the doctrine of the Incarnation, even though he may be unacquainted with many of the technical terms in which orthodox theology has from the earliest ages of the New Testament Church confessed and taught this divine truth.

Contrary to my general practice in this little book on the principal doctrines of our Christian faith, I shall in the subsequent paragraphs of this chapter employ the very words of a great teacher of our Church, Dr. Franz Pieper, in the second volume of his *Christian Dogmatics* (English translation), pp. 57, 58, only eliminating a few technical terms which he introduces for the purpose of demonstrating that the truths they express are known and confessed even by Christians to whom these terms are unfamiliar, as long as they adhere to the Christian faith expressed in the simple words of Holy Scripture: “It is an altogether false assumption that the Christian Church arrived at the true knowledge of the Person of Christ only in the course of time, and that before the ecclesiastical terms were coined this knowledge was lacking. Luther is perfectly right when he sets forth that the true doctrine of the Person of Christ was known and believed in Christendom from the very beginning, before any council passed any resolution, on the basis of the clear statements of Scripture. All that our Confessions teach concerning the Person of Christ every Christian knows and believes because it is found clearly revealed in the Word of the Prophets and Apostles.

“The Christian believes that there are two natures in Christ, for he reads or hears that the eternal Son of God became man through the Virgin Mary (Gal. 4:4, 5; John 1:1, 2, 14). He does not doubt the unity of the Person, for he reads in Scripture that one and the same Jesus presents Himself as the Son of Man and the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:13–17). He entertains no doubt about the real communion of natures, for Scripture tells him that the fulness of the Godhead dwells not beside, but in the human nature of Christ as in its body (Col. 2:9). He believes, on the testimony of Scripture, that the Lord of Glory was crucified (1 Cor. 2:8) and that this gives to the suffering and death of Christ its value (Rom. 5:10; 1 John 1:7).

“The Christian further believes, on the testimony of Scripture, that to Christ was given, here in time, according to His human nature, omnipotence, omniscience, etc. (Matt. 28:18; Matt. 11:27; John 3:34,35). The thought is foreign to his mind that the omnipotence, omniscience, etc., of which Scripture speaks, may designate merely ‘finite, great gifts.’ And when Christ promises His Church that He will be with her always even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:20), he cannot but think of this Savior as being present, not without and outside of His human nature, but with and within it, i.e., he ascribes to Christ also according to His human nature omnipotence, omniscience, and, equally so, omnipresence.

“And when Scripture states that the Son of God appeared in the flesh to destroy, through His activity in the assumed flesh, and through the assumed flesh, the works of the devil, and to save mankind (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14, 15), the Christian understands this to mean exactly that Christ performs His official acts as Prophet, Priest, and King not beside, but in and through, the assumed human nature, i.e., according to both natures.

“He repudiates the notion that the finite is not capable of the infinite, for Scripture has convinced him that the Son of God did actually become partaker of flesh and blood, that therefore the Infinite has been united with the finite into one Person. This short summary, based on clear Scripture passages, contains the entire doctrine of Christ’s Person in its farthest reaches — and all of it is intelligible to every Christian.”

As a clinching demonstration of the main thesis of this entire book: that Lutheran doctrine is simply Christian doctrine, which every true Christian, as a Christian, believes, let me present a quotation from a Christian theologian, who does not belong to the Lutheran Church but to a denomination which officially disputes against the doctrine of the Person of Christ presented in our Lutheran Confessions, in which he shows the vital necessity of just this Biblical doctrine for our faith in Christ as our Redeemer.

Dr. Alan A. MacRae, President, Faith Theological Seminary (Bible Presbyterian), Philadelphia, Pa., in “The Reformation Review,” July, 1956, pp. 202, 203: “Man is a sinner and must suffer eternally if God is to be just. Man is powerless to save himself. It is he who must pay the penalty of sin, and no other can justly pay it. It would take an eternity of suffering for any man to pay the penalty of his own sin. He could not possibly redeem anyone else. God, however, is not only just, but also loving. His great heart yearns for man’s salvation. His power is limitless. But this power can accomplish nothing, unless it can be made available to man. God cannot forgive man’s sin and still remain a just God, unless man himself first pays the penalty that is due. Man must pay the penalty but lacks the power. God has the power, but it is man who must pay. How, then, can man be saved?

“The second person of the Trinity entered the womb of a virgin and she conceived a son. The eternal One took on Himself human flesh. He was God, the infinite One. He was God, the sinless One. He had no sin of His own which must be dealt with. As man, He could pay the penalty of sin. As God He had the power to make this payment. Through the miracle of the Virgin Birth the God-man came into existence, and only thus could we be saved. All that we need for salvation is simple faith in the atonement of Christ. He, the sinless One, died for our sins. But if we are truly saved, we will go on to become true servants of God, and to do this we must understand something of the infinite mystery of the Incarnation. Only through the Virgin Birth could the power of the infinite God be made available to man in his dire need. The Virgin Birth is vital to belief in a Christ who is capable of being our Redeemer.” The above quotation is Biblical, Lutheran, i.e., Christian, doctrine.

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*May the Peace of God that surpasses all human understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen*

A note from the Lutheran Watchman: A complete copy of W.H. McLaughlin’s We All Believe in One True God – A Summary of Biblical Doctrine and an accompanying study guide (listed separately) are available for download on the Lutheran Watchman’s ‘**Resources**’ page. All written material on the Lutheran Watchman website is prayerfully purposed for instruction in the Christian faith and as such is free of charge.