

# Reflections on the Incarnation I: Creation, Incarnation, and New Creation

*John 1:1-5, 1 Tim 4:16, Col 1:12-20*

**Introduction** – As Advent begins and Christmas approaches, let's think more deeply on the doctrine of the Incarnation. It is my hope to do so with pastoral and personal implications. The first point will be: Because of the Incarnation we are the New Creation and this world is a different place, far different than Christians tend to think. We will consider several passages of Scripture and meditate a bit on Athanasius' *"On the Incarnation"* as we go along.

**Jesus the Word-Creator** (John 1:1-5) – Expressing His deity from *"the beginning,"* John describes the unique relationship of God (the Father) and the Word. This Word made all things, and all life and light proceeded from Him. Only later, does this Word become flesh (John 1:14). Athanasius says, *"You must understand why it is that the Word of the Father, so great and so high, has been made manifest in bodily form."* The Word was the Creator and with regard to His work, God called it *"very good."* There was nothing sub-standard with the created world and there was no reason God could not or would not meet with His creation there. Therefore, when it came time to renew creation (bring forth the salvation of the world), it is completely consistent that it would be wrought by the *"Self-same Word Who made it in the beginning."* Jesus takes on flesh and this does not make Him unclean. It is only when He takes on our sins that He becomes sinful. When it comes to God's creation, the problem is not with the creation (stuff) but with the sin (perversion) of it, with it, and by it.

**Jesus the Man-Redeemer** (1 Tim 3:16) – Paul's point in reciting this (most likely) hymn is that godliness is mysterious, not in that it is unattainable, but that it is not found in a set of propositions but in a Person. In order to describe this truth, he must turn to poetry and singing (like the angels in Luke 2). God comes in the flesh and is justified in His resurrection by the Spirit – and so are we if we are in Jesus by faith. That faith comes by preaching, even if to those who do not want to hear (Gentiles). Faith is granted and the world will come to the Father through the Son Who has ascended, as a Man, to the throne of God. Jesus, the God-Man, now takes the place of the head of the New Humanity – and the new creation with it. Athanasius says, *"It was unworthy of the goodness of God that creatures made by Him should be brought to nothing through the deceit wrought upon man by the devil...it would be unfitting and unworthy of Himself."* Because of Jesus, a new race of men has begun. And that race has dominion over creation in the way the first race had but lost.

**Jesus the Firstborn of the New Creation** (Col 1:12-20) – In Christ, *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,"* (Col 1:13). That kingdom is over all of creation, not just heaven, *"...for by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible..."* (v16). It pleased the Father *"...to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him,"* (v20). God's plan was not to simply deliver some to heaven when they die (although that is a wonderful gift to all believers in Jesus). What do we see here? When Jesus rose from the dead, the principle of new life was placed at the heart of the cosmic order and began to work its way out (and so 2 Cor 5:17, *"behold, all things have become new"*). Jesus was born into this world, a world He created; and Jesus brought new life through His resurrection into this world, a world He recreated.

**Understanding Definitive, Progressive, and Consummative Salvation** – But we do not yet see a saved world, so what's up? Again, let the scriptures teach us. We have been saved (2 Tim 1:9), we are being saved now (Phil 2:12-13), and we will be saved (1 Pet 1:9). This is the same regarding our sanctification: we have been remade in God's image (Eph 4:24), we are being remade into His image (2 Cor 3:18), and we will be perfectly remade in His image (Phil 3:20-21). What we see is that salvation was definitively completed in the finished work of Jesus Christ; and it is being applied progressively during this age, personally and corporately (individually and over all creation).

**Not Just for Spirits** – Because the Word became flesh, this salvation will reach its final fulfillment and glory at the end of history when Christ returns in the flesh to the world. The final working out is not in jeopardy even if certain generations or areas of the world rebel. *"For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"* (Isaiah 11:9), which is not simply speaking to spirits, but to mankind and the created order He now rules over.

To celebrate Christmas is to celebrate the dawn of salvation, the salvation of creation-gone-corrupt. The Incarnation drives us into creation not away from creation; it thrusts us into the world of stuff and not simply the world of ideas. The kingdom of God is front and center here, on earth, because Jesus came. The New Creation is all around us because Christ was born in a manger. When we look to Jesus, we look to God Who Became a Man, Who definitively did, Who progressively is, and Who ultimately will redeem/sanctify/glorify what He created. And that is why we should go make some fudge. But more on that another time.