**Incarnation**

This is not a word we commonly use so it’s best to explain what it means. It comes from the root word for flesh – carnal. If you’ve eaten chilli-con carne you’ve had chilli (peppers) with meat; also known as flesh.

Some terms that are sometimes still used today are ‘to put the meat on the bones’ and ‘we need to flesh it out’. These are used to express putting more substance into a point, plan or description. The meaning is to make something more substantial; fill it out to be better defined and understood.

The term incarnation is used to describe that filling out or ‘enfleshment’ of God; God becoming flesh, or human, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Let’s read from the account of a witness at the time of Jesus called John:

***John 1 1-16***

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.****2****He was in the beginning with God.****3****All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.****4****In him was life, and the life was the light of men.****5****The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

***6****There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.****7****He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him.****8****He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

***9****The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.****10****He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.****11****He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.****12****But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,****13****who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

***14****And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.****15****(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”)****16****For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace*

That is quite a statement and can take a couple of reads to understand. What is being described is no ordinary run of the mill event but one that stretches our minds.

John is setting out to bring the reader to understand who God is, what was foretold about the coming of God, or the person of God known as the Word and Son of the Father and a little on what it means to receive or greet the Son of the Father.

A question for you to consider for a moment, does God have faith?

Faith is to have confidence or strong trust in someone or something. It is a question we generally put to ourselves or others. Some years ago I made a Go-Kart from an old sack trolley and golf bag trolley where my friend Paul came and welded the two parts together. He hadn’t done any welding for a while at that time so was a bit rusty, as was the old sack trolley! Still, we put it together and there is really only one way to test it and find out if it worked – you need a hill, the confidence to sit in it and to put those 2 things together. That’s exactly what we did, together with my two sons and we had a great time. Of course we could perhaps have thought more about how we were going to stop... but then that seems to come more easily to mind when you’re hurtling down hill!

That’s working out your faith; confidence and trust in something or someone that you’re willing to commit time and effort.

I asked the question, ‘does God have faith?’ for a specific reason. Some people choose to think that there is no God, others that there is God who is aloof – completely separate – so letting us just get on with things and allowing all sorts of things to happen and others still who think there are many God’s sometimes tussling for power. John’s account challenges these and many other theories about us, God and life in general.

My suggestion to you is that God has faith. I think He has demonstrated that in that He has faith in us, mankind. He has so much belief and confidence in mankind that He became one of us.

 Eugene Peterson’s translation of John 1 1-16 in the Message: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.”

This is a game changer! John not only asserts that there is one God with the attributes of Father and Son but that the Son had a human birth. That must mean mankind, all and each of us is, incredibly, of value to God. He has belief in us, His creation and is committed to His world. Let’s face it we have a chequered history. People and nations can go careering off without much thought on the consequences. Yes, despite this He chose to demonstrate His commitment to us.

Why? Was there an ulterior motive and does this mean that He:

* Condoned the way people lived and how we all behave – good and bad?
* Preferred to be human and gave up being God?
* Decided on direct intervention to take control and make us bend to His will?
* That it was time the tribes of Israel were regrouped and made the lead nation of the world?

What evidence do we find when we look at Jesus birth and life?

* **Condoned the way people lived and how we all behave – good and bad?**

Did Jesus accept everything as it was, go along with the crowd and teach that tolerance to others means giving up, at least publicly, God’s commands? No, He didn’t. He did not worry about upsetting the teaching of Jewish leaders who were misunderstanding God and putting burdens on those they were supposed to be leading. Jesus was direct with the woman at the well in telling her to put right her life. He taught that we were to take responsibility for our lives, always seeking God first. Read through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapters 5 to 7) and you will find a Jesus who did not accept lawlessness, liberal views on life ‘do as you please’ or the strict oppressive ‘you must do what we say’.

Instead we see Jesus extolling God’s way and that He captured the imagination of thousands who sought Him out.

* **Preferred to be human and gave up being God?**

His birth was foretold over thousands of years before including where ‘In the City of David’ and that He would come from Nazareth. No one can choose where they are born or in what area they will live as they are growing up. For that to be foretold by different people over a great many years and then for it to come into being is a unique event.

This is evidence of a divine plan, but does that mean that Jesus was no longer part of God? He was born of the Holy Spirit by the Virgin Mary. He took up our nature, we being created in the image of God as described in Genesis but He did not take off His divinity. We can see many witness accounts of Jesus having command over the elements, turning water into wine at a wedding and commanding a storm to cease, of healing diseases, feeding thousands of people from scraps of food, raising people from the dead, bringing dead people back to life and having full insight and understanding of people’s lives such as the woman He met at a Well.

He is wholly God AND wholly Man.

* **Decided on direct intervention to take control and make us bend to His will?**

In Jesus life we see that He gave direct teaching, upholding God’s law while remaining compassionate, without aggression and without seizing control. The disciples asked Him when His kingdom would come. They were expecting a coup; for the Roman Empire to be brought down and for Jesus to become the new leader. The Jewish teaching was that the Saviour would come and take back power. Peter, when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane chopped an ear of a soldier and what did Jesus do? He put the ear back on and healed that soldier!

The expectation was that God would seize control. I’m sure there will continue to be many interpretations of scripture and people making their own rule book. Yet that is not what Jesus did and is not what the scriptures show at all.

* **That it was time the tribes of Israel were regrouped and made the lead nation of the world?**

Continuing on from the expectation of the Jews that God would send a saviour to lift them out of being a scattered and oppressed people. In the Old Testament scriptures we read about Prophets being sent to restore Israel, of Joshua leading the people into the Promised Land and of David being made King. These were all events where the nation of Israel as a single kingdom was powerful in the land. Perhaps understandable then, that the thought was that God would send another and re-create the nation. The problem with this attitude is that it sets one nation against all the other non-Jew, or Gentile nations. It says that only the Jewish nation as the chosen people have access to God.

The Samaritans, for example, as non-pure Jews were vilified – looked down upon. So did Jesus back-up that view and did He re-group Israel into a new military power?

Well, no. Perhaps and I’m only guessing here, some Jews of the time didn’t accept Jesus as the Son of God because of that. As we noted earlier, Jesus did not simply accept the teaching and views of the time. In fact we see he actively went against any teaching that did not fulfil God’s law and purpose for us. Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, He released a Canaanite’s daughter from being demon-possessed (Mat 15 21-28) and He healed a Roman Centurion’s servant (Matt 8 5-13).

**What does this mean for us?**

The incarnation, the Word becoming flesh was God acting out His commitment to His creation. It was a unique event heralding in a new era, so giving us the Old & New Testament scriptures and a measurement of time before and after Christ.

God’s commitment is to all and not just one race or certain types of people. Rather than there being a sinister motive or the incarnation being some kind of bizarre made up story we find that God has a plan to reconcile His creation back to Himself for the benefit of all.

Jesus exampled what it means to be human. He showed what we were created to be like before the fall without malice and unmarred by our habitual distortion of humanity. That distortion of humanity de-humanises us; we live in acceptance that bad things happen, that we cause bad things to happen, that someone, somewhere is suffering at the hands of another. When we see the news showing us war zones or places in crises we become de-sensitized.

Yet Jesus constantly showed compassion and understanding living without blemish. We are called to become more like Jesus inviting God to work within us and expand from within. The more like Jesus we become, we are liberated to become who God intended us to be. The bad stuff is taken away and our characters, skills, joy, humour, fun, compassion and interest in life all grow. We don’t lose what it means to be us; we are better us. We begin going through a healing process; and don’t stop.

God’s intended plan for us was to be in relationship with Him in all parts of our life. There is no secular / sacred divide as taught by many today. It was God’s intention that we enjoy and explore the world about us. It was not His intention for us to be narrow minded, religious fanatics, national fanatics, or anti-religious fanatics. All of those labels and many others besides used to describe people into boxes are simply prejudiced assertions to suit the argument of a particular group.

Man was made in the image of God. We cannot, and should not put God into a box because we cannot even begin to fathom God (read the book of Job for further insight) and we should not seek to put ourselves into boxes for our own convenience and, often pride. God’s commitment to mankind did not stop when we fell from grace and we would do well to remember that and learn from the life of Jesus, God incarnate.