

# The Good News of the Incarnation

## Philippians 3:20-21

Sermon

*Hobart, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015*

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**Colossians 1:15-23 NIV (1984)**

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

<sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

<sup>21</sup> Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of<sup>a</sup> your evil behavior. <sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— <sup>23</sup> if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Or *minds, as shown by*

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (1984). (Col 1:15–23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

**Philippians 3:20-21**

<sup>20</sup> But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

<sup>21</sup> He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

## INTRODUCTION:

### I. ADVENT

#### A. WE ARE NOW IN THE ANNUAL CHRISTIAN SEASON OF ADVENT

1. The time in which we think of the ultimate purpose and end of God's plan
2. In which we see how the end ties in with the beginning and all that falls in between

#### B. AT THE HEART OF ALL THAT GOD IS DOING, AND WILL COMPLETE IN THE FUTURE, IS JESUS CHRIST

1. He is God with us, Immanuel
  - a) Christmas is the time in which we celebrate God becoming one of us, one with us

#### C. THE MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS ISN'T ABOUT SHINING STARS, WISE MEN AND CHOIRS OF ANGELS

1. These and other events and aspects of Christmas are there to accompany and point us to the vital event that lies at the centre of it all,
2. The Incarnation, God entering into human existence

## S.P.S:

#### A. TODAY WE ARE GOING TO LOOK ONCE MORE AT THE INCARNATION, THE BIRTH OF JESUS

1. And how Jesus being Immanuel, God with us, lies at the heart of the message of Advent, Christmas and the whole gospel message

#### B. PRAYER

## BODY:

### II. JESUS' BIRTH - THE EVENT

#### A. THE VIRGIN BIRTH

1. Jesus' birth is viewed by most as a quaint, cute and interesting story. One that has developed a warm and comforting place in our culture, at least up until recent times
2. The familiarity most have with the nativity story and scene tends to lead people to not look any further than the warm and fuzzy feelings, beyond the rudiments of the story
3. But it is a wonderful place to start with to explain our faith, our understanding of who God really is, his plan and desire for all to be embraced by the one born in the manger 2000 years ago
  - a) For example, the name *Immanuel*

#### B. IMMANUEL

1. The name *Immanuel*, "*God with us*", reveals the true nature of that baby
  - a) That he wasn't some mythical, mystical or strange personage who merely taught some helpful spiritual principles
  - b) He was in reality, God in the flesh
2. It is hard for the human mind to comprehend the deep mysteries and spiritual realities that lie behind the birth of Jesus.
  - a) But in order to begin to recognise the immense and incredible truth of the gospel message, Jesus needs to be seen for who he *really* was and who he *still* is

### III. JESUS' INCARNATION - ITS NATURE AND MEANING

#### A. AT HIS BIRTH JESUS WAS PROCLAIMED "LORD"

1. At his baptism and throughout his life there are statements about his being "the Lord", God in the flesh

#### B. INCARNATION

**incarnation** (Lat. *incarnatio*), a term meaning 'to enter into or become flesh.'

It refers to the Christian doctrine that the pre-existent Son of God became man in Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

1. Paul talks about it in Colossians

#### Colossians 1:15-23

<sup>15</sup> Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,\*

<sup>16</sup> for through him God created everything

in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see

and the things we can't see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

<sup>17</sup> He existed before anything else,

and he holds all creation together.

<sup>18</sup> Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body.

He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead.\*

So he is first in everything.

<sup>19</sup> For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ,

<sup>20</sup> and through him God reconciled everything to himself.

<sup>2</sup> Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed., p. 420). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

\* **1:15** Or *He is the firstborn of all creation.*

\* **1:18** Or *the firstborn from the dead.*

He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

<sup>21</sup> This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. <sup>22</sup> Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

### **C. THE SON OF GOD BECAME FULLY HUMAN, TRULY ONE OF US**

1. He was fully tempted and suffered all the physical pains and mental suffering and challenges of life that we do

a) But unlike the rest of us, he lived in full and complete faith and trust in his Father through the Holy Spirit

2. Gerrit Dawson

So he took to himself that which we really are, it was a real humanity. He took it in union with the Holy Spirit, so it was a humanity he wore sinlessly. <sup>3</sup>

3. As verse 15 tells us

<sup>15</sup> Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

4. He is God in the flesh,

a) God in human, visible, touchable, knowable, relatable form.

b) One of us, one with us.

<sup>19</sup> For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ

5. Jesus is God with us, *Immanuel*.

6. These matters Paul says, we must continue to believe and stand firmly in, as they are central to the Gospel

<sup>23</sup> But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News

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<sup>3</sup> Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Is Still a Human: Interviews With Gerrit Dawson*, Grace Communion International. 2013, <http://www.gci.org/files/Dawson.pdf>

has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it.

7. Paul knew how we can get confused by such profound and difficult matters
8. But he warned the Colossians not to get side-tracked or deceived by our human thinking or other influences
9. Robert Walker explains the important truth that Jesus was God and man in one person,

Equally important as the fact that Jesus is true God and true man, is the fact that he is one person. He who is God is now he who is man. The very person who is the eternal Son is now also the man Jesus, so that in his one person he is at once God and man.

The fact that Jesus is one person, not two, means that *in his one person he is the living union of God and man.* <sup>4</sup>

### **Colossians 2:8-15 NLT**

<sup>8</sup> Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ.

<sup>9</sup> For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.\* <sup>10</sup> So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

### **D. AGAIN WE HAVE A TRUTH, A CLEAR AND LONG HELD TENET OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

1. But one that some today take exception to, just as some did in the early centuries of the Church
2. The teaching that Jesus was fully human and fully God, and also that after his resurrection and ascension that he remained fully God and fully man

### **E. IT ISN'T EASY FOR US TO GRASP ALL OF THIS**

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4 Robert Walker, Incarnation and Atonement, An Overview, article in Theology in Scotland, Vol. XVI, Special Issue, In Memoriam, The Very Rev. Professor Thomas F. Torrance, St Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, 2011, p. 95

\* **2:9** Or *in him dwells all the completeness of the Godhead bodily.*



1. Particularly Jesus continuing to be God and man today
  2. But before we consider Jesus' ascension, let us next look at the Resurrection
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#### **IV. JESUS' RESURRECTION - THE EVENT, ITS NATURE AND MEANING**

##### **A. DID JESUS RISE UNCHANGED FROM THE TOMB?**

1. Was he still human in the same way he was at his birth, and when he died?
2. In what ways was he the same, and what ways was he different?

##### **B. WHAT LEADS US TO UNDERSTAND THAT HE WAS THE SAME?**

1. Those who knew him recognised him
2. He sat with them and walked and talked with them on a number of occasions,
  - a) He reminded them of how all they had seen him do fulfilled the Scriptures
3. He proved he was still the same God man Jesus, by having them touch him, including the wounds in side and spending time with them on repeated occasions
  - a) Including by the sea of Galilee, where he cooked and ate fish with them

##### **C. WHAT LEADS US TO UNDERSTAND THAT HE WAS DIFFERENT?**

1. They had a hard time recognising him at first (garden, Road to Emmaus etc.)
2. He appeared inside locked rooms, and walked through walls
3. Birmingham Seminary, Apostles Creed;

The resurrection proves that Jesus was a real human being because it reaffirms that his full, glorified human existence included the reunion of his real human body with his real human soul. The resurrection of his body occurred when his human soul was introduced into his perfected human body. Yes, his resurrected body was different in some ways because it had been glorified and was no longer mortal. But this did not make it any less physical or any less human. On the contrary, as we see throughout 1 Corinthians chapter 15, Jesus' resurrected body is the firstfruits of the bodily resurrections of all believers. As such, it shows us what our own human bodies will be like in the future. <sup>5</sup>

4. Let's read how this is made clear in;

### **I Corinthians 15:20-23**

<sup>20</sup> But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

<sup>21</sup> So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. <sup>22</sup> Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. <sup>23</sup> But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

5. The article continues;

Just as Adam was the first human being to be created, Jesus was the first human being to be resurrected with a glorified body. Others before him had been brought back to life, some of them raised by Jesus himself. ... But none of these had received glorified, immortal bodies.

But even though Jesus' body is now glorified, it is still fully human - just as we will still be fully human after God has renewed our bodies at the great resurrection of the dead. <sup>6</sup>

6. Let us now move on to the ascension.

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<sup>5</sup> Apostles Creed, Birmingham Theological Seminary,  
<http://btsfreeccm.org/local/Imp/lessons.php?lesson=APC3text>

<sup>6</sup> Apostles Creed, Birmingham Theological Seminary

## V. JESUS' ASCENSION - THE EVENT, ITS NATURE AND MEANING

### Acts 1:6-11

<sup>6</sup> So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?"

<sup>7</sup> He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

<sup>9</sup> After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. <sup>10</sup> As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. <sup>11</sup> "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"

#### A. THE QUESTION MANY HAVE IS:

1. How could Jesus still be in the flesh and have gone to heaven to the right hand of God?
2. Did he just drop off his human body in space or did it dissolve in the atmosphere or at the doors of heaven?

#### B. CONSIDERATIONS

1. First of all, this is a long held teaching of the Christian church,
  - a) It is not something new or casually arrived at
2. Secondly, it is a teaching some are not familiar with
  - a) And that can lead to an initial inclination to object to it
  - b) But should we reject a teaching just because we find it difficult to get our heads around

3. Jesus continuing to be God and man, is really a less astounding and miraculous mystery than the Son of God being born into his creation as a human baby in the first place.<sup>7</sup>

a) It is actually a very big assumption to believe that the Son of God ceased to be God and man in one person at some stage,

b) Where is the scriptural evidence to back up such a conclusion?

**C. THINK OF WHAT THAT WOULD MEAN**

1. Just as there was no Jesus Christ before the incarnation, Jesus Christ the human would no longer exist.

a) The Son of God would have perhaps subsumed his memories and experiences, but dropped the humanity completely

2. The Son would no longer be connected and at one with humanity at his core and in his essential being

a) The God human connection and full oneness in Jesus, Immanuel, the God man, would have been broken, and no longer in existence

3. Our salvation would be a transaction, an agreement, a deal

a) It would not be permanently based in the personal, intimate, familial union of God and man in Jesus himself

4. Our High Priest would not continue to share our life and nature

5. Our salvation would be all based on Jesus' past acts

a) Not in Jesus continuing as the second Adam, the perfect, faithful human in full union and communion with God, inside the Trinity, bringing us all in him, into relationship with God

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<sup>7</sup> This is similar to the issue some have with the nature of the Holy Spirit. And most of us are still relatively new to even grasping the reality of the Trinity and its ramifications for the Gospel message and our lives and future

6. There is much more to this basis of communion and atonement, in Christ, than we have time to cover in our time today.
  7. So let us move on briefly to Christ's return
    - a) To what Advent, in part, is focused upon
    - b) The goal and fulfilment of God's eternal purposes
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## VI. CHRIST'S RETURN

### A. IF THE INCARNATION CEASED AT THE ASCENSION

1. Jesus' returning from heaven to earth could not be in like manner to his departure (Acts 2:22b) as he would no longer be the same human Jesus who left
  - a) It would be the Son of God, fully God, but with no human side, no related and shared humanity
  - b) Not the same Jesus who walked the earth and died for us and was resurrected for our salvation

### B. JESUS CAME TO BE ONE WITH US

1. To live with and for us, and to die with and for us, and to be resurrected as one of us, to bring our humanity, healed, whole and purified to the Father, and us with him.
  - a) He is the first born of the new creation, the second Adam
  - b) He is still one of us with God, representing humanity because he is still human
2. He became eternally changed at his birth as Jesus,
  - a) His divinity and the humanity that he took on became bound together for eternity
  - b) He became and remains, unchangeably, the divine Son of God and the human Jesus Christ, fully united forever

### C. AS WE HAVE DISCUSSED BEFORE

1. The ascended Jesus was glorified

2. He is, in his human side, what we will be when we are resurrected and ascend to be with him in the new age when he returns
3. Jesus led the way as the captain of our salvation, the first born from the dead, as one of us.
  - a) As one of us, all the way to the right hand of the Father in heaven
4. Just as, in his resurrected glorified human state, he was able to walk through walls, and also be touched and eat and walk and talk, in his glorified human state he is able to dwell forever with the Father

#### **D. WHEN HE RETURNS.**

1. He will return as he is, the glorified Jesus Christ, who since his birth has been God and human as one.
  - a) He has never stopped being the Son of God and the human Jesus Christ since his birth.
  - b) And he never will
2. Because, in him, humanity is brought into the life and family of God, purified, and glorified, united once and for all, age without end.
3. That is an essential part of the powerful truth of the Gospel, and the message of grace, of salvation in Christ, not apart from him.

#### **E. OUR RESURRECTION AND GLORIFICATION**

1. If Jesus ceased to be human, then what about our resurrection and glorification

#### **Philippians 3:20**

<p><sup>20</sup> But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.</p>
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2. We belong to the kingdom, we are members of God's family, brothers and sisters of Christ, we are citizens of heaven, where Jesus lives

### 3. Our future is to live with the Triune God

- a) To live and be with him when God and heaven are on earth, and we are all one with him

## **F. OUR RESURRECTION BODIES**

1. But the same question, about Jesus' still being human and living in heaven, arises with regard to how we will be with God, how will we see him face to face, as human beings at the Resurrection

### **Philippians 3:20-21**

<sup>20</sup> But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. <sup>21</sup> He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

### 2. We will be glorified like him

- a) Just as Jesus was resurrected and changed to have a glorious, immortal, incorruptible, human body, we will share in and follow in his resurrection transformation

3. Just as Jesus is still the one who was born of Mary, we too will retain our unique individuality and humanness when we share in his resurrection

### 4. Gerrit Dawson;

The Christian hope of resurrection in the body, of eternal life to come, that you still get to be you, and I still get to be me, is all grounded in the fact that Jesus retains his body – resurrected, transformed, glorified – but still, as John Knox said, the self-same body in which he was crucified, dead, buried and risen, is the same body he ascended in. In terms of what happens to us in the future, that's really important. <sup>8</sup>

## **G. THIS TEACHING LIES AT THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL, THE PURPOSE OF GOD**

1. God wants us to share in Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and participate and share the same new life and glorified existence that Jesus does.

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<sup>8</sup> Dawson

2. We won't share in his being the Son of God, and all his divine powers, but we will share in the resurrection of his fully human nature

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## CONCLUSION:

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### VII. TWO IMPORTANT POINTS

#### A. FIRST: THE NEW RESURRECTED, GLORIFIED BODY OF JESUS, IS STILL A HUMAN BODY, BUT IT IS A GLORIFIED BODY, CAPABLE OF DWELLING WITH GOD, IN HEAVEN

1. I think this may be the misunderstanding that a rejection of Jesus' ongoing humanity is based upon
2. And similarly, some seem to have trouble in understanding that we will still be human with human bodies at our resurrection
3. Being human is actually not our problem
  - a) It is what we have done as humans with our freedom to choose how we live and how we relate or don't relate to God that is the problem. In other words, sin.
  - b) In the beginning we were made good, and in the image of God
4. Jesus, the second Adam, has lived the perfect human life in full trust and intimate union and communion with the Father through the Spirit
  - a) Humanity has been redeemed in him and remains reconciled and redeemed in him

#### B. THE SECOND POINT IS:

1. We are resurrected in Christ, not apart from him, not just because of what he did for us, but because of who he is
2. Because of what he does as God, on God's behalf



3. Because of what he does as a human, as us, and for us towards God

4. It is in him that God and humanity are reconciled, atone, brought into a new and inseparable, eternal relationship

5. Gerrit Dawson;

Another implication is that it has to do with our salvation. Often we think of our salvation as simply a transaction that occurred on the cross, and that's true – Christ took our sins upon himself, particularly on the cross when the sin of the world was upon him.

But a deeper understanding, a full biblical understanding, is that Jesus himself is our atonement, he is the one who reconciles God and humanity by being, in himself, the one who brings those two together. So our atonement continues because Christ's incarnation continues.<sup>9</sup>

"He's still holding our humanity, next to his God-head, he's still uniting himself to us."<sup>10</sup>

6. This is the clear teaching of the gospel as we read on in Colossians

### **Colossians 2:9-10, 12-13 NLT**

<sup>9</sup> For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.\* <sup>10</sup> So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

7. It says, present tense, for in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. It doesn't say just when he was on earth.

<sup>v12</sup> For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

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<sup>9</sup> Dawson

<sup>10</sup> Dawson

\* **2:9** Or *in him dwells all the completeness of the Godhead bodily.*

- a) Notice that we were buried **with** and raised **with** Christ, not separately (v12).

<sup>13</sup> You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.<sup>11</sup>

8. These verses tell us that because Christ lives as fully God in a human body, we are made complete as human beings through our “union with Christ”.

### **I John 5:20**

<sup>20</sup> And we know that the Son of God has come, and he has given us understanding so that we can know the true God.\* And now we live in fellowship with the true God because we live in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the only true God, and he is eternal life.

9. We need not only the historical saving acts of Jesus, in his life and death on earth

- a) We also need the Son to continue his dual nature as God and as Jesus Christ, the resurrected, glorified human, to continue in fellowship with the Father in heaven
- b) Because it is only through our ongoing fellowship with Jesus Christ, that we can share in his ongoing union and fellowship with the Father

10. As Gerrit Dawson explains;

There is a heaven in which spiritual bodies occupy space, a created realm in which creatures are, to the limits of their capacity, in the immediate presence of God. Of course, here we are beyond the limits of language and the three-dimensional thinking of our world.

What matters is that we hold together the reality that Jesus remains enfleshed, in a glorified, transformed body, with the reality that ‘where he is, in heaven, is a realm beyond our perceptions, beyond our understanding of space and time, yet in the presence of God who is as near as our next breath.

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<sup>11</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Col 2:8–15). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

\* **5:20** Greek *the one who is true*.

The ascension, therefore, represents the departure of the incarnate Son of God back to the place where God is, taking human nature where it has never gone before. ...by the Holy Spirit we on earth may now be intimately related, in the closest union, with our ascended, yet embodied Lord in heaven.<sup>12</sup>

As we open ourselves to union with Christ, by the Spirit, he lives his ascended life in us more and more. That's where the power for Christian living comes from: Christ in me, the one who is God and still man, living his resurrected, ascended life through us.<sup>13</sup>

#### 11. Robert Walker sums up T.F. Torrance's view on Jesus' continuing incarnation,

The fact that Jesus is one person, not two, means that *in his one person he is the living union of God and man*. Further, the fact that the incarnation was not a temporary event, that Jesus is man still, means that he is the *eternal* union of God and man, that the union which began at Bethlehem is for all eternity.

It means that in his person Jesus Christ constitutes the whole bringing of man into union with God: he is the union of God and man begun in the incarnation, worked out in his earthly life and victorious over sin and death in the cross, resurrection and ascension.<sup>14</sup>

### C. THAT WAS ALWAYS GOD'S PLAN

1. From the beginning, as we have quickly looked at today, God sent the Son of God to become one of us, one with us

a) So that we could be eternally one with him

b) Sharing in the ongoing life and the fellowship that the Son has with the Father through the Spirit

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<sup>12</sup> Dawson, p.49-50

<sup>13</sup> Dawson, interviewed by Justin Buzzard, <http://www.justinbuzzard.net/2007/04/04/gerrit-scott-dawson-interview-the-ascension-of-jesus/>

<sup>14</sup> Robert Walker, Incarnation and Atonement, An Overview, article in Theology in Scotland, Vol. XVI, Special Issue, In Memoriam, The Very Rev. Professor Thomas F. Torrance, St Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, 2011, p. 95

2. And the good news is that this all takes place in Jesus Christ, the God man, who in order to make this happen became and remains one of us, and at the same time also one with God.

3. Wayne Grudem;

The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Part IV. *The Doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit*, Harper & Collins, 1994