

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 1st December 2024 am
TITLE: "Uniqueness of Christ's humanity" TEXT: Matthew 1 verses 18-25
SERIES: "Guarding the deposit" Pt 12 Scripture references from the ESV

1 Timothy 3:16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

Matthew 1:18-25 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed^[1] to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

If someone were to ask you where your confidence lies in this uncertain world, or why you have hope in life and even in death, how would you answer them succinctly? Where would you look for assurance yourself when you face uncertainty of any kind? What short, succinct, but not trivial, answer can you give that would strengthen your faith?

At one time, most Christians would have been able to draw on the Christian creeds or catechisms

that they regularly recited, which gave a summary of what they believed.

Knowledge of the Heidelberg Catechism meant that they could offer this answer for their hope:

**I am not my own, but belong body and soul, in life and in death,
to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ**

The truth of the creeds is designed to strengthen our faith in uncertain times and enable us to help others understand why we can have such confidence. Their roots can be traced back to the earliest days of the Christian faith. It is widely believed that what Paul writes in **1 Timothy 3:16** (above) is based on an early creed, giving us a memorable, short, succinct statement of our Christian faith. It is obviously not trivial and it is

A statement that points us to Jesus

As we enter the season of Advent, it is good to focus on the first line and ponder the fulness of its meaning:

He was manifested in the flesh

Here, we are pointed to the earthly life of Jesus, not just his birth but his whole life on earth right up until his death. A statement like this is meant to cause us to stop reading and instead ponder on everything we know about Jesus and the life he lived in his human flesh. In doing so, we shall see that Jesus is concerned about our bodies as well as our souls. We will be confident that:

**We belong to Jesus, body and soul, in life and in death,
and it is this that gives us hope in uncertain times.**

What makes Jesus different to the many other people who have been influential during their lifetime? Why are there creeds written to make us think about Jesus' life 2000 years on but not about any of those people?

There are four truths that make Jesus unique in human history on which we need to ponder.

1. **The pre-existence of Jesus.** The term **He was manifested** carries the implication that Jesus existed before his

birth. We only began our existence when we were conceived in our mother's womb but the birth of Jesus did not bring the Son of God into existence.

Jesus existed as the Son of God before he was conceived in the womb of Mary.

The birth of Jesus was the revealing of God's pre-existing eternal Son.

- The apostle John wrote: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)**, making a direct reference to Jesus' eternal pre-existence as the Son of God.

- The letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus spoke to the Father before he came to this earth, saying: **Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; ⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'** (Hebrews 10:5-7)
- If you went back to the beginning of time, and then further back into eternity past, you would have seen Christ, the Son of God, being delighted in by God the Father.

**The eternal Son, one with God the Father,
the architect and judge of the universe, without beginning,
was revealed in human form 2000 years ago.**

2. **The conception and birth of Jesus.** We have all had a physical father and a physical mother, but Jesus' conception was unique. The accounts of his birth from those who were there clearly point out that his conception was a supernatural. What was conceived in Mary was from the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 1:18** above). Mary was a virgin and Matthew's account leaves us in no doubt the Joseph was **not** the Father. He took Mary as his wife, but did not have sex with her until she had given birth to her first-born child.

**The child conceived in her womb was through a miracle performed by God
so that he would be both Son of God and Son of Man.**

Many, in our day and age, make the arrogant assumption that we should not believe this story because it does not fit with biological facts that we know today, but Matthew shows us that Joseph was not gullible and did not believe it at first (v19). Mary herself questioned how this could happen: **And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"** (Luke 1: 34). It needed God to send an angel to convince both Mary and Joseph that Mary was telling the truth.

Jesus is unique in his conception and birth in being the only human born on earth who was

- conceived in the womb of a virgin
- born through the birth canal of a woman who was still a virgin

Let earth and heaven combine, angels and men agree,
to praise in songs divine the incarnate Deity,
our God contracted to a span,
incomprehensibly made man.

3. The sinless life of Jesus. He is the only human being who has fully obeyed God from his heart, even at his hour

of greatest temptation. The Bible begins with creation. Adam, our first father, was placed in a perfect environment and given only one command. He was not to eat from the tree that would bring the knowledge of evil into the world. In that perfect garden, Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan. The tempter overcame them, seducing them into disobeying God. As a result, every human being since then has been born with a sinful nature.

- The propensity of our heart is always away from God towards sin.

2000 years ago, Jesus came into the world, and, in his humanity, he was tempted by the same Satan to disobey God's clear commands. Adam fell to sin but Jesus did not.

- All through his life, Jesus perfectly kept God's law.

At his trial, no charge against him could be made to stick. All the false witnesses were shown to be liars and even the Roman governor said he could find no fault. The only charge they could bring against him was one of blasphemy, since he claimed to be God. Ironically, in making that charge, they were actually declaring the truth about him:

Jesus truly is God in human flesh

Even when men were telling him to come down from the cross, and, in the worst trial of all, when his own Father turned his face away from him because of our sin, Jesus remained sinless. He turned toward (and not away from) the one who was inflicting his wrath on him and did not cry out against the Father as many do when they come under God's righteous justice.

Jesus cried out to the Father in faith.

- Ponder these truths as you consider the words: **He was manifested in the flesh.**

Then go on to the fourth truth.

4. The sacrificial death of Jesus. Men have sacrificed their lives in war, and for humanitarian reasons, but the death of Jesus on the cross is the only human

death that has secured eternal life for humanity. Our sin, which merits the eternal wrath of God in Hell has been put to Jesus' account and he has suffered that eternal wrath as our substitute. No other death has accomplished righteousness before God for humanity

When we put our trust in him, not only is our sin taken away, but we are credited with Christ's righteousness and as a result declared righteous before God.

Jesus did not stay dead. He was vindicated by the Spirit (1 Tim 3:16 above). God's answer to those who lied, rejected Jesus and had him crucified was to raise Jesus to life and declare him to be his own Son: **He was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, (Romans 1:4).**

Jesus now lives forever in that resurrected human body

- Ponder the statement: **He was manifested in the flesh**

In all of this, there are implications for how we think about the physical world around us, and our own physical bodies.

- a) Our physical world matters to God.** For the Greeks, the great goal of salvation was to be set free from the physical world and enter the spiritual realm, and our western world is deeply influenced by this worldview. However, it is an unbiblical concept.

God created a physical world as well as a spiritual one and when he looked at what he had made, he declared it all to be good. The physical world was not created evil, but with Adam's fall, the physical world came under God's curse. Though we can see much beauty in it, we also experience floods and earthquakes, and get stung by nettles or bitten by spiders.

God has not written this world off

Jesus came to earth to redeem the whole of creation, not only our souls. A day is coming when this earth will be renewed and it will be a place full of beauty, with nothing to harm us. Until then, we are to seek to steward our resources so that we can mitigate the effects of the curse, anticipating the day when Jesus will make all things new. It is Jesus who governs this physical world, ruling over every aspect from the sparrow which falls out of the nest to the shape

and size of every star.

We can have confidence in life because we have been redeemed by Jesus.

We belong to him body and soul and he rules over this world for our good.

- Do you believe that everything that happens is by God's design? Take time to consider this.

b) Our human bodies matter to God. He created us to be soul **and** body, joined in one being. The human body was part of the creation that God declared to be very good. Of course, sin has damaged our bodies as well as our souls. We get ill, break bones and get wounds, eventually experiencing the tearing away of the soul from the body in death. However:

God has not finished with our bodies.

Jesus did not come to earth as a spirit. He came with a real human body because he came to redeem our bodies as well as our souls. It was his human body that was resurrected from the grave and made suitable for eternal life.

Jesus wedded himself to his human body forever.

The Bible describes him as the first fruits of our resurrection. Our resurrected human bodies will be like his.

We can have confidence in death because we belong to Jesus who redeemed us, body and soul.

Therefore we will rise to life with him.

c) Our actions in our body matter to God. Paul includes this creed here because he has just spoken about our behaviour as God's children. We are to live godly lives, using our bodies, not as we see fit, but to bring glory to God by joyfully submitting to HIS will for us.

- The gospel we believe is to change how we behave.
- How we behave is to commend the gospel we believe.

The secret of godliness does NOT lie in legalistically keeping a set of rules written by the church.

The secret of godliness is found in Jesus who came and lived in the flesh. He came to secure our justification, so we are righteous in the sight of God through faith alone, and our sanctification, so that we are being transformed.

His godliness can only become ours as we are united to him by faith, and spend time with him each day listening to his word and speaking to him in prayer. As we do that, so he qualifies us to stand in God's holy presence and transforms us to become more like him.

- Thus, we can have hope in the uncertainty of life.

The Heidelberg Catechism asks: **What is your only comfort in life and death?**

Take time to dwell on the wonder of the truths expressed in the answer it gives:

**That I am not my own but belong body and soul, in life and in death to my faithful
Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

**He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the
tyranny of the devil.**

**He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without
the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.**

**Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.**