

O Gladsome Light*Samuel Longfellow (1819–1892)*

O gladsome Light, O Grace
 Of God the Father's face,
 Eternal splendor wearing:
 Celestial, holy, blest,
 Our Savior and our guest,
 Joyful in your appearing.

Day has not faded quite;
 We see the sunset light,
 Our evening hymn outpouring,
 Father, incarnate Son,
 Who our redemption won,
 Spirit of both adoring.

Glory to you belongs
 And praise of holy songs,
 O Three in One, Life-giver;
 Therefore, our God most high,
 We worship, glorify,
 And praise your name forever.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***The Word Became Flesh***Kevin T. Bauder*

The introduction to John's Gospel provides a rich description of the person of Jesus Christ, whom John calls the Word. He existed before every beginning. He was with God, which implies some level of distinction from God. Yet He possessed all the qualities or properties that belong to God—the entire divine nature. These assertions can only be held together by the doctrine of the Trinity. The Word is the eternal Second Person of the Godhead, but He is not the Father and He is not the Holy Spirit. He is the Son.

The Word is God. The Word is also the life and the light. He is the one who provides salvation for humans. When people believe on His name, He is the one who grants them authority to become God's children.

The Word extended life and light to humans by coming unto His own. What He did to provide salvation is a wonderful story, but it is a story that presupposes an important question. *How* did He come unto His own? How could the eternal one, the one who was always face-to-face with God, and the one who possessed all divine attributes—how could that one come unto His own?

That question is answered in John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." This verse draws attention to the Word coming unto His own. The Word was made flesh. The Word dwelt among us. These are marvels, and they need to be rightly understood.

John does not use the term for *making* in this verse. He uses the term for *becoming*: the Word *became* flesh. What does that mean?

It certainly does not mean that any of the Word's deity was converted into humanity. God does not change (Mal 3:6). He is always the same as to His being and His personhood. No change ever occurs in the divine nature. God did not somehow morph deity into humanity.

Nor did God trade off divinity for humanity. He did not cash in fifty dollars' worth of deity to swap for a nickel's worth of humanity. God can never stop being God. God has no degrees of divinity. God can never be less God than



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He is. Nothing ever was, and nothing ever could be, subtracted from the divine nature.

Even among the divine persons there are no degrees of God-ness. The Father is fully God. The Son is fully God. The Holy Spirit is fully God. All are of the same substance. Each is equal in glory, power, majesty, and dignity to the others. When He emptied Himself (Phil 2:7), Christ did not lay aside a single fragment of His deity.

The Word became flesh, not by conversion or by subtraction, but by assumption. He took a human nature into His divine person. His deity remained unchanged, but He became something that He had never before been: a genuine, complete human.

In His incarnation, the eternal Second Person of the Godhead took a complete human nature into His divine person. This act is sometimes called the *hypostatic union*, which means a union of natures. His divine and human natures remained distinct and unmixed, but they are united in one person.

People easily misunderstand the union of human and divine within Christ. Some imagine that this union makes Him a kind of mixture. For example, one ancient teacher (Apollinaris) thought that Jesus had a human body and soul, but that the divine Logos took the place of His human spirit. The problem with making Jesus a mixture is that this tactic always erodes His human nature.

By replacing Jesus' human spirit with the divine Logos, Apollinaris made Jesus less than fully human. The same thing happened with another ancient teacher, Eutyches. He imagined the union of human and divine in Christ was like mixing a drop of honey in an ocean of water. The honey would be absorbed in the water. While really present in the water, it would be so diluted as to be undetectable. The effect of Eutychianism was to make the humanity of Christ less complete and real.

Such efforts to safeguard the deity of the Word erode His humanity. They do a disservice to the notion that the Word became flesh. If the Word is truly the life and light of humanity, then His human nature must necessarily be complete. He had to become like those He came to save. He had to become like them in every respect except one: He was without sin (Heb 4:15).

Another flawed explanation of the Word's incarnation is that He joined His eternal, divine person to a completely distinct human person. Those who held this view thought that Jesus' divine personhood was conjoined to His deity much like Siamese twins are connected. Thus, Mary did not give birth to the divine person, but only the human person. The divine Word traveled through her like water through a pipe.

This theory was advocated by the followers of Nestorius. It creates a significant problem. It keeps Christians from worshipping *one* Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Christians cannot tell which person (divine or human) was speaking and acting during any moment on earth. They do not know which person died on the cross. They do not know which person to trust for salvation. The Nestorian view implies that God was cooperating with a man, but that Christ was not a single God-man.

Early Christian leaders wrestled with the question of how to express the truth that the Word became flesh. How could they explain this truth as fully as possible without saying more than Scripture authorized? After many false starts, they agreed upon the following language (drafted at Chalcedon in 451). They said that Jesus is fully God and fully human, and that He possesses two natures, "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." As the centuries have passed, no one has found a way to say it any better.

This summary statement hedges against important errors. At the same time, it raises yet other questions. Some of those questions are also implied by the rest of John 1:14. They will be worth looking at.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
