

Questions

for understanding the
Basics of the Faith...

WHAT IS THE INCARNATION?

by William B. Evans

TO THE GROUP LEADER: This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. What difference does it make if Jesus’ father was Joseph or God Himself? (5-9)

Let this be your warmup question to get the study in motion. Don’t spend a lot of time on this as the study will itself bring out more as you go along. However, do emphasize that this question leads to how you understand the Person of Christ, which makes a great deal of difference to what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

2. What connections are there between our understanding of Christ’s personal identity and the work He came to accomplish? (6-8)

There is indeed a close connection between our view of Christ’s person on the one hand, and our conception of the human condition and our understanding of salvation on the other. Those with a high view of human potential and a low view of sin inevitably look for a modest savior. A merely human teacher will do. Thus, groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses have a moralistic, works-based understanding of salvation.

3. If a Jehovah’s Witness came to your door, how would you explain that Jesus is God, which they deny? What verses in the OT and NT would you use? (10-12)

The answer to this question will reveal how much each person in your group truly understands this critical issue, which is at the heart of Christianity. Listen very carefully to their responses as they will tell you what they really understand. List every verse presented, examine it, and keep it for later use.

4. How did the church go about carefully considering a variety of options regarding its understanding of the person of Christ? What key truths were at stake in these debates? (12-18)

In a remarkable process of reflection during the fourth and fifth centuries the church considered various proposals that compromised the full deity of Christ (Ebionism, Arianism), the full humanity of Christ (Docetism, Apollinarianism), and the proper relationship of the two natures in a single person (Nestorianism, Eutychianism). In each of these debates our salvation was at stake.

5. When the infant Jesus was born, what did He know? In other words, the infant was God, but did He at this time have *infinite* knowledge? (See Luke 2:52 and Philippians 2:5-8.) (18-20)

As to His incarnate humanity, Jesus lived a genuinely human life. In this, Jesus would teach us what it means to depend on the Holy Spirit to lead our lives, just as He did. At His birth, as to His humanity, the infant Jesus knew no more than any other infant. He would grow and learn, just like us. At the same time, as many church fathers, Calvin, and the Reformed tradition generally have affirmed, His divine nature retained its attributes such as omniscience and omnipresence and was not restricted to the incarnate humanity. This truth is a good illustration what we call the “mystery” of the incarnation.

6. Read Hebrews 2:17 and Romans 5:12-21. Jesus is called the “Second Adam.” What does this mean? (24-26)

When Adam was created, there was a test period. If he had remained faithful, the race would have remained perfect. But, as we know, Adam failed the test, and his posterity (those united with him by natural

generation) share in the resulting guilt and sinful condition. Jesus came to fulfill what Adam failed to do – He remained perfect, triumphing over sin and thereby was able to pay the penalty for Adam's sin (and ours). Thus Jesus serves as the head of a new redeemed humanity, and we are incorporated into that new humanity through our union with Christ.

7. Read Exodus 20:4. Should we allow any kind of pictures of Jesus? (25-27)

Carefully take the group through all the arguments presented by Dr. Evans to make sure we don't just give flippant answers to this question. The issue here is the worshiping of idols. Is there any way our pictures of Jesus might become idolatrous? Dr. Evans points out how they can. Don't miss this important point.

8. Portions of this study may perhaps strike us as unnecessarily technical exercises in systematic theology, but should it not be much more? How does the mystery of the Incarnation call us to praise and worship God? (28)

Here is the chance to take the group back over WHY God did all this. It was out of His infinite love He reached down to do everything necessary to reach us. He wanted us to know Him, and He did this through the life and teaching of Jesus. Jesus told His disciples the night He headed to the cross: "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." Everything Jesus said and did, He did so we could grow deeper in love with the God Who created and communicated with us. You might, at this point, suggest the group sing the Doxology together.

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

GROUP: Take all the verses you have found proving Jesus is God and begin to put them together in a way each person would be able to present a logical defense to a Jehovah's Witness. Keep in mind, the JW's have "canned answers" for many verses, especially in John's Gospel, so look for as many as possible outside John.

Personal: Refine what your group has done in a way you are comfortable using with a JW. Write these down in the front of your Bible so you have them readily at hand. Begin to memorize as many of these verses as possible for your own edification.

NOTE: Any time a JW, or any cult, comes to your door, **don't** invite them in. Instead, set up a time for them to come back when you have had time to prepare your heart to share the truth with them. Many cults deny the deity of Jesus and also have a distorted teaching of what He accomplished on the cross. It is also suggested you have someone else with you when you meet with them. There is a good reason Jesus always sent the disciples out two-by-two.

Extra: Many churches repeat the Apostles Creed in their services. Why not, as a group, memorize the more complete creed - the Nicene Creed?

For Further Study

A Theology of Matthew: Jesus Revealed as Deliverer, King, and Incarnate Creator, Charles L. Quarles. P&R, 2013.

God With Us: Exploring God's Personal Interactions with His People Throughout the Bible, Glenn R. Kreider. P&R, 2014.

The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship, Robert Letham. P&R, 2004.

Find this and more at www.pcabookstore.com.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
 Maker of heaven and earth.
 And of all things, visible and invisible.

And we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds,
 God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.
Begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father
 by Whom all things were made.
Who for us men and our salvation,
 came down from heaven
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary
 And was made man.
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate,
 He suffered and was buried;
 And the third day He rose again
according to the Scriptures and ascended in heaven
 And is seated at the right hand of the Father
 And He shall come again with glory
 to judge both the living and the dead
 whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of life,
 Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
 who with the Father and the Son together
 is worshipped and glorified,
 who spoke by the prophets.

I believe in one holy Christian and Apostolic church.
I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins
And I look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
 and the life of the world to come.

Amen