

uncommon

THE HOLY ONE OF GOD IS COMING

LESSONS:

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Lesson 1 | Was Jesus just Common? (12/7)

Taking the lead from a book called *“Compassionate Creator: Becoming Human For Me”* by Bruce Morton, we will take a look at the entrance of Jesus the King into the world in which He was born. Paul reminds us that “at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 6:6) and to the Galatians he wrote, “when the fulness of time came, God sent His Son..” (4:4). So, there is value in understanding, along with the written text, the events and the environment that led to God sending His Son into the world. This study will consider the amazing story of the incarnation (God made flesh) in a world, within the social, political and religious struggles of His own day.

Secondarily, the study will also reveal how vastly different was the birth of the Son of Man compared to the gaudy scenes of popular religion. The scene of Joseph, Mary, the infant Jesus, wrapped in beautiful clothes, with animals, shepherds, angels and wise men all surrounding the manger to worship the Christ Child. The scenes, repeated over and over as if they are historically true, have contributed to the hindrance of people understanding the true message of that King.

So just how common was Jesus?

Was Jesus a man? In the four Gospels, there is ample evidence that Jesus was fully human since He was born to a human mother (Matthew 1:25), He experienced hunger (Matthew 21:18) and thirst (John 19:28). Jesus also experienced temptation (Matthew 4:1) pain and suffering (Matthew 16:21), and He died (Matthew 27:50).

In fact, three words the writer of Hebrews uses indicate his understand of Jesus when he wrote: “Therefore he had to be made **like his brothers** in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17).

So, we should not dismiss what we have in common with him – that He was “like his brothers”. In fact, the writer says, “in every respect.” This comparison is to all the things of the context – namely that we face death, and fear death, and that he has set us from those things that he shared with us.

Had Jesus only been fully God, then He never would have had these human experiences. However, Jesus was more than a mere human.

Did He claim to be more than a man? The New Testament records several instances in which Jesus affirms, or at least does not deny, that He is God. In a few cases, He identifies Himself as divine outright.

- In John 10:30-33, Jesus says He is one with the Father God, which causes the devout Jews to want to execute Him for blasphemy. They say what His words imply: “You, a mere man, claim to be God?” (NIV); “make yourself God” (CSB; ESV).

- The context demands we consider Jewish history – the very thing that prompted their response. When God first appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Moses asked God for His name. And God gave Moses an interesting reply: God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).
- For generations following this interaction between God and Moses, the Israelites revered the name of God (“I AM”) as a precious title that was not to be slandered or given to anyone or anything other than God himself. Now read again John 8:49-58.
- Jesus made two remarkable statements.
 - First, he claimed to be eternal and to have existed before Abraham! But more importantly, Jesus called himself by the ancient title ascribed only to God Himself, “I AM”.
 - The Pharisees knew exactly what Jesus meant by this. From their perspective, Jesus said specifically, “I am God”. How do we know this was their interpretations of His words? We know it from their reaction. They responded by attempting to stone Jesus for claiming to be God (an act of blasphemy they considered worthy of death):
- In Mark 14:61-63 (NIV), Jesus is on trial for His life and is asked, “Are you the Christ, Son of the Blessed One [that is, God]?” He answers, “I am,” and then calls Himself the “Son of Man,” which is a title used for an exalted heavenly figure in the Old Testament on Daniel’s visions (Daniel 7).

Was Jesus God? Because these are not our experiences and outside our own frame of reference, they are often degraded to the impossible and a difficult concept for us to understand. The problem is that we just do not have a frame of reference to help us understand. It would be easy to understand if Jesus were *merely fully human* but not divine. We could also more likely accept it if Jesus *was fully divine* but not human. Alternatively, if all humans were fully human and fully God we would easily understand how Jesus could be fully human and fully God. However, no one is fully human and fully God except Jesus so we lack a frame of reference that helps us to understand this concept.

- Because of these uncommon experience, some theorize the incarnation with a theory called *kenosis Christology* where it is explained that the incarnation involved Jesus leaving his divinity behind for a while and living solely as a man. Though, If there was ever a moment when God the Son stepped aside from his divinity then he was never God in the first place. How then could it be said that the Word became flesh? (c.f. John 1:1,14).
- Again because of the uncommon experience of incarnation, some other theories have been presented for its explanation—sometimes labelled Monophysitism or Eutychianism—both of which try to preserve Jesus’ divine nature by having it operating *inside his humanity*. To say that God the Son never stopped being God, however, does not mean that his divine nature was lurking inside his human nature—as if baby Jesus was secretly sustaining the universe from somewhere inside his skull. This is to confuse the natures of Jesus.

- Jesus the man was just that—a man: flesh, blood, body and soul. When he worked miracles, he did them the way other humans would do them—through the power of God’s Spirit. As Peter says to Cornelius: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). But He was acting as a man though He was God. He emptied himself of the right to act as God and instead as a servant and a man, be used by God through the Spirit to work miracles. When we appreciate the radical difference between God and creatures, we realize that we need this different way, the uncommon way of thinking about Jesus coming into the world. It’s less like Him moving from one place to another and more like Him adding an entirely different mode of existence.
- So, to use an example from C.S Lewis, it’s like an author writing himself into his own book. The author and his character are not in one place or other; he’s not in two places at the same time. There’s no competition like that because the two realities are completely and utterly different. Of course, the analogy is imperfect because we are describing an uncommon event and, fictional characters aren’t real agents. Still, John clearly said, He “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands” we have declared (1John 1:1-3). Our knowledge is imperfect. We simply cannot explain the details of this uncommon truth of how Jesus was fully the son of man and the son of God in the same person: *we simply know that they are.*
- If Jesus is our Author appearing as a character in his own story then it means we can say two things that initially sound contradictory. We can say that he is “just a man”: his human life is a genuinely human life that obeys our human norms and limitations. But we can also say that “this man is God”—not because his humanity is illuminated with divinity, but because this same person who stands among us is also, in his (completely other) native mode of existence, the one who sustains the universe and rules with the Father and Spirit in indescribable majesty and glory.
- Jesus was a man. But Jesus wasn’t just any man. He was God the Son

Based on these sources about the life of Jesus, Jesus claimed to be God more than once. Some of these statements were overt and clear and the claim made Him uncommon among common men. And as we will see in the upcoming lessons, He came in the first century A.D. to announce the good news of the kingdom of God, His kingship and kinship, to save people and make them new again. When He indirectly stated His purpose in statements like “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6, New International Version) or “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12, NIV), He was preparing the way for us to see Him as the most uncommon among all of us.

**Next Lesson: 2. “He would be Compassionate and Holy” (12/14).
Read ahead: Luke 1:26-56, 67-69; 2:22-38; 3:1-22; Matthew 3.**