

## Chapter 7

### The Son in the World

Inasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood,  
he likewise partook of the same.

Hebrews 2:14a

#### SECTION 1: THE NEW MAN

Put on the new man, who in God's likeness is created  
in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:24

#### “A Man in Appearance”

From the moment God's Son came from heaven and took on the body of Mary's son, there was never again a Son of God/son of Mary difference. God's Son was completely blended with Mary's son “so that he might create of those two one new man in himself.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus of Nazareth became forever the Son of God from heaven, and the Son of God from heaven became forever Jesus of Nazareth. Paul was right to say that God's Son was “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4), and the author of Hebrews was right to say that when the Son came from heaven, a man's body was already prepared for him (Heb. 10:5). Jesus was right to tell Pilate that he had been born (in this world) and that he had come from heaven into the world (Jn. 18:37). All those statements are true because that “one new man”, created on the bank of the Jordan River, had two histories, an earthly and a heavenly one. All four of the gospels tell of the epochal moment when the Son of God descended from heaven, in the form of a dove, to enter into the body which His Father had prepared for him:

Matthew 3 (cf. Mk. 1:10–11; Lk. 3:21–22; Jn. 1:32)

16. After he was baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God in the form of a dove descending and coming upon him.

17. And behold, a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

This was the moment the hidden Son of God “divested himself” of his heavenly glory and came into this world, he “taking on the form of a slave”, and “he was found as a man in appearance” (Phip. 2:7–8), which is to say, he became a man. However, the man that he became looked the same as he looked before the Son became him. Nothing about Jesus' appearance was altered by his experience at the Jordan River to show that the Son had come and entered his temple, even though when the Son did it, a new kind of creature was introduced into the universe, one with a corruptible human body filled with God's incorruptible life. So, even though the Son had come to earth, he was still unknown, for men could only see the body that he had taken on, and that body was still human.

Many believers are taught that “the incarnation”, that is, the heavenly Son's entering into flesh, happened when Mary became pregnant. That is not the case. When the Son of God began his life on earth, it was not as an infant in a manger, and certainly not as an embryo in Mary's womb. Instead of

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase is from Ephesians 2:15, where the “two” are two groups of people, the Jews and the Gentiles. I borrowed Paul's phrase here to describe the “new man” who was created by the blending of God's Son with Mary's.

entering Mary's body when he came, the Son of God entered the body of her grown-up son. Mary was not the mother of the heavenly Son of God through whom God created the universe; she was the mother of the earthly son that God created in her womb. The Son of God was never Mary's baby; he was her creator. God had a Son long before Mary herself was born.

“As He Is, So Are We”

When the dove from heaven entered into Jesus as he came up from the Jordan, Jesus experienced what he would later call being “born again”. After his resurrection, when he ascended into heaven and offered himself to God for us, and secured for us God's kind of life, Jesus became “the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29), for others began receiving the same new birth which Jesus had experienced.

In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, the Son of God came again to earth, as he had promised his disciples he would do (Jn. 16:22; 14:23), but this time not like a dove, but “like a violent, rushing wind” (Acts 2:2). And when he did that, the humbles souls who were huddled together in an upper room in Jerusalem were born again just as Jesus had been on the bank of the Jordan River. It was a baptism of life, not water. When Jesus told Nicodemus that people must be born again (Jn. 3:7), he was only saying that we must experience what he had experienced: a baptism with God's Spirit. When Jesus asked James and John, “Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Mt. 20:22), he was not speaking of water baptism. James and John already had that kind of baptism, as Jesus knew full well.

Jesus' new birth at the Jordan had signaled the dawning of a new and eternal age, when humans could, with him, become sons of God, but no one at the time could understand the signal. Later, after John received the baptism Jesus was talking about and had become “a new creature in Christ”, he exclaimed with great joy, “As he is, so are we in this world!” (1Jn. 4:17). On the day the Spirit was poured out on John and the others, the new nation about which Isaiah prophesied (Isa. 66:8) was instantly “created in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Those followers of Jesus were re-created by God in the image of His Son when he was on earth, with fully-grown, mortal bodies filled with God's eternal life. They were not born again as little babies any more than the Son of God was; they were born “as men [and women] in appearance”, though they were newborns in the kingdom of God.

To make that precious blessing, that “pearl of great price”, available to fallen man was God's entire purpose for everything the Son suffered on earth. What can we then say but “thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!” (2Cor. 9:15). Understanding what God and His Son did for us “leaves us with nothing but a mouthful of thank you!”<sup>2</sup>

“Son of God” among the Gentiles

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Sister Willie Mae Walker for this phrase.

The Gentiles believed that gods and goddesses sometimes mated with mortals,<sup>3</sup> producing demigods, that is, human offspring with divine attributes.<sup>4</sup> Believing this, they were prone to suspect that someone was an offspring of one of the gods if he was involved in an extraordinary event, as the centurion did when he witnessed the unnatural darkness at Jesus' crucifixion (cf. Mt. 27:54). And if someone performed a miracle, Gentiles might even consider him to be a god come down to earth, as they did the apostle Paul on at least two occasions (Acts 14:11; 28:3–6).

When King Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth man walking about in the blazing furnace with the three young Hebrews he had cast in there, he had no reason to say that the fourth man in the fiery furnace looked like *the* Son of God, as Christian translators usually have it. It is much more in keeping with the times for the king to have said that the fourth man looked “like a son of God” (Dan. 3:25),<sup>5</sup> and that is exactly what we find in the original language.<sup>6</sup>

Occasionally, it is necessary to add *the* to a phrase when translating the Scriptures, but by adding *the* to “son of God” at the wrong time, translators miss an opportunity to communicate the ancient, universal ignorance of the Son. An example of this is the aforementioned centurion who oversaw the crucifixion of Jesus. Awestruck at the unnatural darkness and the earthquake which attended Jesus' death, he responded exactly as Nebuchadnezzar did, and exactly as one would expect of a Gentile: “The captain and those who were guarding Jesus with him, seeing the earthquake and the other things that happened, were very frightened and said, ‘This really was a god’s son!’” (Mt. 27:54).

Christian translators, knowing about the Son of God, usually add *the* to what the centurion said, but that leaves the impression that ancient Romans knew about the Son of God. They most certainly did not. No one did. Paul pointed out the obvious fact that if men had recognized the Son of God, they would not have crucified him (1Cor. 2:7–8). In his gospel, Luke describes the scene at Jesus' crucifixion in a way which communicates much better what the centurion was actually thinking: “When the captain saw what happened, he honored God, saying, ‘Surely, this was a righteous man!’” (Lk. 23:47).

#### “Son of God” in Israel

By the time of Jesus, the phrase, “sons of God”, had long been in use in Israel as a reference to heavenly beings, as we saw in the book of Job, but it was only a figure of speech used to express God's fatherly authority over His heavenly court. Nobody in Israel believed that God had actually fathered those sons, and it would no doubt have been considered disrespectful of God to suggest such a thing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The early stories found in Genesis pre-dated all Gentile cultures, and knowing those stories, Gentiles often polluted them with their own imaginations. For example, the Babylonians produced several perverted versions of the Flood story, most notably, the one found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

<sup>4</sup> Such myths were based on the true story found in Genesis 6:1–2 concerning heavenly beings who lusted after beautiful women on earth (cf. Jude 1:67). Hercules and Achilles are two of many examples. Hercules was believed to have been fathered by the supreme god, Zeus, with an earthly female, Alcmena. Achilles, on the other hand, had an earthly father but a goddess mother, Thetis. Gentiles also believed that a few humans, by virtue of extraordinary deeds or gifts, were taken away to be numbered among the gods. For instance, Zeus was said to have elevated Ganymede to become a god because the youth was so handsome that Zeus wanted him as a lover.

<sup>5</sup> Or, “a son of the gods”.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrew: לְבָר־אֱלֹהִים

<sup>7</sup> The Koran insists that it is supremely disrespectful of God to say that He begot a son: “Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah . . . Allah is one Allah: (far Exalted is He) above having a son” (4:171). “Praise be to Allah who begets no son, and has no partner in His dominion” (17:111). “No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him” (23:91). Translation by Hafiz Abdullah Jusef Ali.

The title, “Son of God”, was also used in Israel, but only in reference to the expected Messiah. And, again, no one believed that God would be his actual Father. It is never explained in the Bible why the Israelites who looked for the Messiah felt that “Son of God” was an appropriate title for him, but Peter is one who used the term that way:

Matthew 16

16. Simon Peter answered [Jesus] and said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!”

Israel’s high priest also referred to the Messiah as “the Son of God”:

Matthew 26 (cf. Lk. 22:66–70)

63b. The high priest answered and said to him, “I adjure you by the living God that you tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God!”

Neither Peter, the high priest, nor anyone else in Israel ever used “the Son of God” as a reference to the Son who was hidden in heaven from the beginning of creation and “through whom God made the worlds.” Nobody knew about *that* Son.

No Old Testament prophet referred to the Messiah as the Son of God. So, just as we do not know how the Jews came to believe that no one would know where the Messiah came from (Jn. 7:27), neither do we know how the Jews came to believe that the Messiah would be so powerful and wise that the term “Son of God” should be applied to him, and to him alone.<sup>8</sup> For the Jews to attribute such a title to a man indicates that they expected their Messiah to be extraordinarily great, “bordering on the Divine”, as Alfred Edersheim pointed out: “The cumulative evidence . . . must leave on the mind at least this conviction, that the Messiah expected was far above the conditions of the most exalted of God’s servants, including angels; in short, so closely bordering on the Divine, that it was almost impossible to distinguish Him therefrom.”<sup>9</sup>

Such a view of the Messiah was closer to the truth than the Jews knew. So much like the Father is the Son, so perfectly does the Son reflect the mind and character of God, that it is indeed almost impossible for anyone to distinguish him from his Father. That is why Jesus reproved Philip when he asked Jesus to show them the Father: “He who has seen me has seen the Father,” he said. “So, how is it you say, ‘Show us the Father’? (Jn. 14:9).

#### When the Son Was Revealed

When Jesus came up on the bank of the Jordan after he was baptized, John the Baptist must have been deeply impressed when he heard the voice from heaven say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Yet, John could only have thought that God was speaking of the son of Mary, naming him as the Messiah. John did not even imagine that the dove he saw coming down and lighting on Jesus was the hidden Son of God, for God was still hiding him. Even during the years the Son walked on earth, he remained unknown, for people without God’s kind of life cannot know the Son, no matter where he is. The Son came into the world, but “his own did not receive him” (Jn. 1:11) because they did not know him; they knew Jesus, but not him. He was revealed only after he returned to heaven and sent back the kind of life that enables people to know him and his Father.

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<sup>8</sup> The plural “sons of God” is applied to humans in Hosea 1:10, but that was a prophecy of God’s New Testament people, who were not yet in existence. The phrase “sons of God” typically referred to heavenly beings.

<sup>9</sup> *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 126.

Mary's son is all that heavenly beings saw, too. When Satan heard God express His pleasure on the day the Son entered into his earthly temple, Satan must have been impressed, as John no doubt was. But seeing only Mary's son, he would not have been intimidated in the least. Satan himself was a son of God, and he was certain that God was more pleased with him than He was with any of His other sons, including this Messiah from Nazareth. Besides, he knew that he existed long before the man Jesus did, and like John the Baptist, he understood that whoever existed first was greater.

As miraculous as Jesus' birth in Bethlehem was, relatively few in Israel knew about it, and nobody who knew about it saw anything miraculous about Jesus after he was born. The pre-baptism Jesus was entirely human, living as a human in a world of other humans. Nothing about him stood out (cf. Isa. 53:2). No halo encircled his head; his hometown was insignificant; his parents were ordinary folk; and contrary to Christian mythology, the pre-baptism Jesus performed no miracles and had no special knowledge of God, although even as a child, he loved Him. Jesus' comment at the age of twelve, "I must be about my Father's business" (Lk. 2:49), was a sweet statement, but it was not earth-shattering. Young children who are taught about God often feel a deep, innocent love for Him, and when they feel those feelings, they can make some arresting statements. It was only after God's Son came from heaven and blended with Mary's son on the bank of the Jordan that Jesus began preaching astonishing doctrines and performing miracles. Before that, such things were as impossible for him as they were for any other man.

So, that God had a Son in heaven from the beginning of creation was revealed neither by the birth of Mary's son in Bethlehem nor by the arrival of the hidden Son at Jesus' baptism. Nothing before Pentecost, not even Jesus' resurrection, gave men the knowledge of God's Son. As I said earlier, even after the Son lived and labored on earth for years, his disciples did not know him (Jn. 14:9), for the revelation of the Son could not come before God's kind of life came. And because of that, ironic as it sounds, it is a fact the disciples came to know the Son only after he was gone.

### The Virgin Birth

We began this chapter at the Jordan River instead of the city of Bethlehem because the hidden Son of God made his advent into the world there in the form of a dove, not in Bethlehem in the form of an infant. Jesus' physical birth was glorious, but his spiritual birth was more glorious. The virgin birth had to take place, of course, but it took place only as part of God's preparation of an earthly temple for His Son, who came to earth about thirty years after the birth of Mary's son (Lk. 3:23). Essential as Jesus' physical birth was, it is unwise to esteem that physical event more highly than the spiritual event of God's Son entering into the world.

It will help put the birth of Jesus into perspective if we remember that Gabriel's appearance to Mary was not the first time God had sent an angel to earth to tell a woman that she would bear a son. Over a thousand years before Mary's visitation, God sent an angel to Manoah's barren wife to tell her that she would bear an anointed son, Samson, who would deliver Israel (Judg. 13:2–5). Even before then, God was known as a God who miraculously gives children to women, as in the cases of the elderly Sarah and barren Rebekah (Gen. 21:1–2; 25:21). And He later did the same for both Hannah and the Shunammite woman who helped Elisha (1Sam. 1:1–2, 19–20; 2Kgs. 4:14–17). Lastly, about six months before God sent Gabriel to Mary, God sent him to the old priest Zacharias to tell him that he and his elderly wife would have a son (Lk. 1:5–13). So, God was known in Israel for His power to give children to those who could not have them, and David rejoiced in that:

5. Who is like the LORD our God, who makes His home on high?

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9. He makes the barren woman to keep house and to be a joyful mother of children. Hallelujah!

Much of what humans think is impossible is the norm in the spiritual realm. The words *impossible* and *miracle* probably do not even exist in the vocabulary of angels. Nothing that God has ever done, as far as we are told, has caused His angels to marvel, with the one exception that they wonder at the life of God which believers receive; they would love to understand that (1Pet. 1:12). When the heavenly host rejoiced in the night sky at the birth of Jesus (Lk. 2:13–14), they were not rejoicing because God had somehow managed to make a virgin have a baby; they were instead rejoicing because the child was Israel's long-awaited Messiah:

Luke 2

8. In the same area were shepherds, staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

9. And behold, an angel of the LORD appeared to them, and the glory of the LORD shone round about them, and they were very afraid.

10. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid! Behold, I am bringing you good news of great joy, which shall be for all the people!

11. For today, in the city of David, a Savior is born unto you who is Messiah and Lord!"

Mary's virginity presented God with no more an obstacle than did Sarah's age or Hannah's infertility. John the Baptist even declared that God was able to raise up children even from stones (Mt. 3:9). The angels, of course, knew that was true before John said it; they had witnessed what God did in the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37:1–10). So, to them, Mary being both a virgin and a mother would not have been astonishing; to them, her virginity was only a sign that God had told Israel to look for.

Exactly what the angels expected the Messiah to do is unknown, but they certainly were not rejoicing in the night sky because they knew what God had in mind; that was a secret He was keeping from everyone. They probably were thinking what both Satan and Jesus' disciples thought, which was that Jesus would soon drive out the Romans, take over the world, and "re-establish the kingdom of Israel" (cf. Acts 1:6). None of them had any idea that God had a Son before Mary did and that the honor He would bestow upon His Son was infinitely greater than the relatively small honor of ruling over this little planet.

#### God's Lamb, Not Joseph's

God had to be the actual Father of the one He would sacrifice for the sins of the world because it would have been unjust for Him to sacrifice someone else's son. According to the law that God gave to Israel, whatever was offered in sacrifice had to belong to the person who was offering it. If you took your neighbor's lamb to make a sacrifice for your sin, you would not be forgiven; indeed, you were more guilty than before because you had stolen a lamb. In creating a son for Himself in Mary's womb, God was being merciful to every father on earth by leaving their sons alone. The virgin birth assured that Jesus was *God's* sacrifice for sin, not Joseph's. That is why the Spirit moved John the Baptist to exclaim, "Behold! The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29), instead of saying, "Behold! The Lamb of Joseph!"

Understanding this principle, King David refused Araunah's generous offer when the king needed animals for sacrifice in order to stop a plague:

## 2Samuel 24

21. Araunah said, “Why has my master the king come to his servant?” And David said, “To buy this threshing floor from you, to build an altar unto the LORD so that the plague may be stayed from the people.”
22. And Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up whatever he wants. Look, here are the oxen for a burnt offering. And for the wood, here are threshing sledges and the instruments for the oxen.
23. All these, O king, does Araunah give to the king.” And then Araunah said to the king, “May the LORD your God accept you!”
24. But the king said to Araunah, “No. I must buy it from you for a price. I will not offer to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

David knew that if he did not own the oxen when he offered them, God would refuse the sacrifice and the plague would continue.

## The Owner Had To Kill It

Another requirement of the law was that the owner of the sacrificial animal had to be the one who killed it. God knew man. He knew that if a man fell on hard times, he might regret the sacrifice he had brought to God and the if the priest had been the one who killed the animal, the man might well become bitter against the priest. The law protected God’s priests by requiring each man to kill his own animal; only after that was the priest allowed to perform the sacrifice:

## Leviticus 1

4. He [the owner] shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering and it will be accepted for him to make atonement for him.
5. And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD. Then the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall bring the blood. . . .

Those who crucified Jesus were not struck dead by God for killing him because the Lamb was His, and He was the One killing him (Isa. 53:10). Satan and wicked men were only doing what the Lamb’s Owner had determined should be done (Acts 4:28). It was because Jesus knew who was killing him that he did not waste his time pleading with his enemies and Pontius Pilate to spare him the agony of crucifixion; instead, he pleaded with his Father:

## Mark 14

- 35b. He fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour would pass from him.
- 36a. And he said, “Abba (that is, ‘Father’)! All things are possible with you. Take this cup away from me!”

When Jesus ended his agonizing prayer that night in the garden, he told his disciples that what he was about to suffer was the cup his Father had given him to drink (Jn. 18:11). The following day, on the cross, Jesus remembered that the ones torturing him were ignorant of what God was doing to him, which meant that they were ignorant of what they themselves were doing, and being full of God’s love in spite of his agony, he prayed, “Father, forgive them; they don’t know what they’re doing” (Lk. 23:34a).

### The Owner, Willingly

Another of the law's requirements for sacrifices is that they had to be willingly offered.

Leviticus 1 (cf. Lev. 19:5; 22:29)

3. If his offering be a burnt offering from the herd, he shall bring it . . . of his own will before the LORD.

No sacrifice which someone was forced by another to make was acceptable, and since the law was the pattern for the sacrifice of Christ, we know that it was of His own free will that “God gave His only Son, so that every one who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). What love the Father has for us!

If Jesus had belonged to Joseph, even if Joseph had the ungodly notion to offer him up as a sacrifice for the sins of others, he would hardly have done so *willingly*. Besides, anyone in Israel familiar with the law, as Joseph no doubt was, knew that God abhorred human sacrifice. Not only did God strictly forbid that cruel practice, but He even threatened with damnation anyone who concealed a person who sacrificed a human (Lev. 20:2–5). God hid much in Old Testament time, but He did not hide His indignation when Israelites sacrificed their children to bloodthirsty Gentile gods:

Jeremiah 19 (cf. Jer. 32:33–35)

4. They have forsaken me, and have estranged this place from me. They have burned incense in it to other gods, whom neither they, nor their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and they have filled this place with the blood of innocents.
5. They have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command, and did not speak, nor did it come into my mind!

Who, then, would have believed that any human could be an acceptable sacrifice for sin, since the prophets had made it so clear that human sacrifice was an abomination to God? Certainly not a righteous man like Joseph. It is true that Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac, but that was only at God's command. Abraham was surely greatly relieved that God put a stop to that sacrifice and that it proved to be just a test of Abraham's faith.

No sane father on earth would have believed that he could sacrifice his son to atone for the sins of everyone on earth, including all the sins the world has ever committed (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15). Paul said that it was all but impossible to find someone willing to die for a good person (Rom. 5:7), much less for an entire world of sinners. But even if a father had been found who believed he could offer his son as a sacrifice for the world's sins, he would not willingly offer up his *only* son, especially a dutiful and wise son like Jesus (Lk. 2:40). Hidden along with the Son was the truth that God's Son alone was worthy to be sacrificed for sin,<sup>10</sup> and God willingly did it for our sakes, unclean sinners all.

Romans 5

7. Rarely will someone die for a righteous man, though for a good man, one might possibly bring himself to die.
8. But God commends to us His kind of love, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

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<sup>10</sup> Even if a man had offered up his son as a sacrifice for the world's sins, it would have been unacceptable to God because all humans, including Mary's son Jesus before God's Son came, had a sinful, human nature, which would have made the sacrifice unacceptable. Only God's Son was sinless, both before he came to earth and afterwards.