

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 37

Halifax, 13 April 2008

Q. 37 How did Christ, the Son of God, become man?

A. Christ, the Son of God, became man by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance, and born of her, yet without sin.

As we continue in our sermon series based on the themes set forth in the Westminster Larger Catechism,

- we continue this week with the second question that has do with the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace.
- Last week we saw, as the answer to question 36 puts it, that:
 - A-36: “The only Mediator of the covenant of grace is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father, in the fullness of time became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person for ever.”
- We looked at how Jesus is uniquely qualified to be our mediator because He alone is one person with two natures, one of those natures being the nature of God and the other that of man.
 - Over the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at His natures and their relationship with each other in more detail,
 - but first, this week, we are going to look at how He, who was the Son of God from all eternity and who will always be the Son of God,
 - at a certain time in history became man.
 - He always was and always will be divine, that is the way it is when you have a divine nature—it never changes...
 - But of course the human nature is not like that...
 - It has a beginning—and so did the human nature of Jesus...
 - So tonight we are going to look at how the person who is the Son of God became man.

READ> Luke 1:26-38

I. Here are several remarkable things presented to you in God’s word.

A. First of all, that the angel Gabriel came to speak to a young virgin who lived in Nazareth.

1. Angels don't come every day—this was something big!
 - Ill> Solomon—God was especially provoked with him for his sins because He had appeared to him twice (and he was king)
2. That the angel came to a woman in Nazareth was also unusual.
 - Nazareth was a town lightly esteemed.
 - Yet, it had been prophesised that Jesus would be lightly esteemed (and His growing up in Nazareth was on of the reasons He was)

B. Secondly, the son Mary is to bear is to be an extraordinary son!

- Look at how He is described!
1. He is to be named Jesus...
 - a. This name means—“Jehovah saves”
 - It is explained in Matthew that Jesus is to be named this because He will save His people from their sins.
 - b. This corresponds to what we saw last week—that He is the only Redeemer.
 - **Acts 4:12: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**
 - He is the one that God chose and uniquely qualified to be our Saviour.
 - There is no other way to be saved.
 2. The second way His is extraordinary is that He will be the Son of God!
 - a. He will be called such:
 - vs. 32 says that He will be great and will be called the Son of the highest.
 - vs. 35 says that He will be called the Son of God.
 - to be called such means that He is such.
 - b. This also corresponds to what we saw last week.
 - That Jesus has a divine nature.
 - All through the Bible He shows that He is Jehovah (the self-existing one)
 - By His declaration that He is Jehovah (eternally existing with the Father)
 - That He had been working alongside the Father (John 5)
 - By His claim that He is equal with the Father.

- To be worshipped as the Father is worshipped
 - By revealing His authority over nature (even over death),
 - He raised the dead in His own name.
 - By revealing His power to forgive sin.
 - “Son, your sins be forgiven you”
 - By His authority to teach in His own name.
 - “You have heard it said, but I say to you...”
 - By His authority to judge the nations.
 - “When the Son of Man comes in glory with all the holy angels to judge the nations...”
3. The third way he is extraordinary is that He would be the promised Messiah.
- a. vs. 32- to be given the throne of His father David
 - Remember what was promised to David in 2 Sam 7 (a son forever)
 - b. vs. 33- that He would reign over the house of Jacob forever.
 - Remember what Isaiah had promised in Isa 9.
 - The government will be upon His shoulder—and of the increase of His government there will be no end.

TRANS> So then the first extraordinary thing in this passage is that an angel came to Nazareth to a young woman who was a virgin of lowly situation...

- the second is that extraordinary that the son she was to bear would be extraordinary... being the one who saves His people from the sins, being the one who is called the Son of God, and being the promised Messiah

C. And the third extraordinary thing is that Mary is to bear Him though she is a virgin.

1. The fact that she is a virgin is emphasised in this passage.
 - a. Her exact marital status is declared in verse 27.
 - She is twice called a virgin
 - She is said to be betrothed
 - Usually there was no sexual contact at all during the betrothal.
 - They were much wiser in the way they did marriages.

- b. But to make it absolutely clear that she is a virgin, we are also shown Mary's question in verse 34.
 - **Luke 1:34: Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"**
 - This shows clearly that Mary was not just thought to be a virgin, but truly had never had sexual relations with a man.
 - She says so...
 - Mary was completely at a loss to know how she could have a child when she had never had involvement with a man—
 - Think about it...
 - You don't lie to angels about things like this!
- c. What's more, look at what Gabriel says to her!
 - 1) He explains to her how this will be done
 - **Luke 1:35: And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."**
 - The Holy Spirit will form the body of Jesus in Mary.
 - Surely if God could create man from the dust of the ground and then form the woman from the rib of the man...
 - He could now create a body from a woman without a man.
 - 2) He goes on to tell her of another miraculous birth
 - **Luke 1:36: "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren."**
 - 3) He adds the point that God can do anything.
 - **Luke 1:37: "For with God nothing will be impossible."**
- 2. This corresponds beautifully with the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.
 - **Isa 7:14: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."**
- 3. God's Word is very clear about the virgin birth.
 - a. Sadly, there are many that deny this doctrine.

- To deny it betrays a heart that does not want to accept a God for which nothing is impossible.
 - If a person cannot believe the virgin birth,
 - he certainly cannot believe that Jesus is the Son of God....
 - Think about it!
 - Which is the greater miracle?
 - a virgin birth or the Son of God coming in human flesh?
- b. What Isaiah says in Isaiah 8:20 certainly applies to those who deny the virgin birth.
- **Isa 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them.*”**
 - It is a person who has no light.
 - It is absurd to accept such a person as a qualified minister!
 - Yet, this is done all the time.
 - I spoke to you about neo-orthodoxy last week and how they reject things like this, saying that it doesn’t matter if you believe Jesus was born of a virgin...
 - It does indeed matter!

TRANS> And that is the second thing I want to look at tonight.

- Having seen three remarkable things that are given to you to believe...
 - That an angel came to speak to a young virgin
 - That the angel announced that the Son of God was to be born of her
 - That the angel told her that she would conceive this child as a virgin.

II. Let me now show you why it is important that Jesus be born of a virgin.

A. First of all, because He was a pre-existing person

1. As God, Jesus already existed from eternity (that’s just the way it is when you are God—you have no beginning and no end).
 - a. In v. 35 Gabriel speaks of “That holy One who is to be born”
 - This way of speaking suggests that He is one who is already alive, but who is to be born of her.
 - The one called “the holy One of God,” is now to be born.

- He was already existing as a person, but now He is going to be conceived and born.
- b. That this is in fact the case is clear from other scriptures.
- 1) Jesus says that He existed before He was born:
 - In John 8, He said, “Before Abraham was, I am.”
 - And in John 17, He spoke of: “the glory I had with the Father before the foundation of the world.”
 - So here is a person that existed before the world was even made.
 - 2) Repeatedly, the Bible speaks of Him as being sent
 - In John 6:38, Jesus says:
 - “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”
2. Ordinarily, when a man and woman conceive a child, a new person is brought into existence.
- a. But in this case, there is no need for a new person because the person already existed.
 - Therefore, a special birth was required to meet the special situation.
 - In Hebrews 10, it says that a body was prepared for Jesus.
 - **Heb 10:5: Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.”**
 - Here again is the idea that He was already around when a body was prepared for Him.
 - b. However, it is important to understand that Jesus did have, as the catechism teaches, a “reasonable soul” (a soul that could reason).
 - God, of course, is not said to have a soul or to be soul...
 - A soul is always associated with a body, so when Jesus became a man, He became a living soul—
 - He, for the first time ever, had a body that was mingled together with a spirit.
 - He was 100% human, yet He continued to be 100% divine.
 - There is much here that transcends our understanding.
 - but what is clear is that a new person was not created...
 - an old person was given a human nature.

B. Secondly, it was necessary for Him to be born of a woman...

1. He had to be fully human in order to live for us and die for us (as our rep)
 - **Hebrews 2:14-17: Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**
 - It would not do for Him to be a new species of human.
 - He had to be connected to our race.
 - He could not be a direct creation, but had to be of the human race that already was.
 - Remember how we looked at how we are one race when we studied about the creation of man...
 - And how even Eve was made from Adam...
 - She was not a direct creation, but was derived from Adam who was already made so that she was related to him—
 - She was, as it were, made of his substance.
 - She was a true relative, taken from the man—of his substance as it were...
 - And of course the children who were born to Adam and Eve were of Adam and Eve—
 - they were made of the same substance,
 - were truly related to their parents—not separate creations, but each coming from those who are already in existence.
 - Christ therefore, in his relationship to us, is something like the woman in her relationship to the man...
 - His body was not a new creation strictly speaking,
 - but is formed of the woman's substance.
 - His body was somehow formed of hers.

TRANS> Not only did Jesus have to be fully human,

2. He also had to be Abraham's seed and David's seed according to the flesh...

- He had to be related to them because the covenant promise was tied to their seed:
 - **Gen 26:4** “And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed;”
 - **Psalm 89:35-37:** Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: his seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even *like* the faithful witness in the sky.
 - So you see then that Christ had to come from the line of these men.

- 3. He also had to be of the seed of the woman, because this was promised in Gen. 3:15.
 - **Gen 3:15:** “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

- 4. And so we are told that Jesus was made of Mary’s substance.
 - **Gal 4:4-5:** But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.
 - He was born, or **made**, of woman, and so of her substance...
 - The word here is *made* and it refers to the fact that He was made of what she was made of it...
 - Again, in a similar way to the way in which Eve was made of Adam.
 - This meets all three of the criteria:
 - 1) It means that He is truly a member of the human race...
 - 2) It means that He is a natural descendant of Abraham (and David as we find in Romans)
 - Mary was a natural descendant of David and...
 - She was betrothed to a man who was a descendant of David making Jesus a legal heir of David.
 - 3) It means (obviously) that He is the seed of the woman.

- C. Thirdly, Jesus, while fully human, also had to be free from the corruption into which our human nature fell (else how could He lift us out of our corruption?).
 1. It is wrong to think that sin is “only human.”
 - Sinfulness is not “only human,” it is contrary to humanity—it is humanity corrupted and ruined.

- It is appropriate for you to say “I am only human” if someone asks you to jump over a house or to run a mile in two minutes...
 - Being “only human” is a legitimate excuse in that case.
 - But it is not appropriate to say “I am only human” when you have sinned.
 - Being “only human” is not an excuse for sin—
 - It is not that you are **only** human, but that you a **fallen corrupted** human.
 - The truth is, being without sin is more true to what humanity is supposed to be than being sinful...
 - We are contrary to truth as sinners; contrary to what we were made to be as the image of God.
 - **Eccl 7:29: God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes.**
2. Jesus had to be without sin because if He had sin,
- a. He could not have redeemed us.
 - To redeem us, He had to fulfill all righteousness for us.
 - Hebrews 7:26 says:
 - **Heb 7:26: For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.***
 - What could Jesus have offered if He had had to offer something for His own sins?
 - He would have had nothing to offer that could take away anyone else’s sin!
 - b. But because He is without sin, then He is entirely different than the priests in Aaron’s line.
 - **Hebrews 7:28: For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected forever. Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.**

TRANS> And so you see that Jesus had to acquire a human nature without acquiring sin if He was going to redeem anyone...

3. But besides this:
 - It was also impossible for Him to be conceived in sin.
 - He was a pre-existing person who had no sin,
 - He was in fact a divine person who was, as such, perfectly holy!
 - It was not fitting that He should be conceived a sinner...for that would change the person.
 - It **could** not be that He should be a sinner
 - Divinity could take on human flesh, but divinity could not be corrupted with sin.
 - He could not be “conceived in sin” as His father David was...
 - Yet, after Adam fell, the rule was from then on that
 - “Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image...”
 - In other words, Adam’s son, like Adam, was a sinner.
4. The virgin birth made it possible for Him to be conceived without sin because a new person was not formed—only a human body and soul.
 - Therefore the divine person could come into a fully human nature and take that nature as His own.
 - Jesus was not a new person that came into being but an old person who acquired a human nature in addition to His divine nature.
 - The corrupted likeness of Adam was not passed along to Him.

III. Now my friends, do you see what we have in Jesus Christ?

- A. We have a divine person who has come in human flesh to redeem sinners.
 1. The person who lived among us was none other than God the Son...
 - There was no flaw in Him.
 - He shared our humanity, but He did not share our sin.
 2. And so it is that we have in Him a perfect example of what a human being ought to be.
 - We can follow His example as a man.
 - Illustrate:
 - Compassion
 - Unrelenting service

- Wholesome words
 - Patience
 - Absolute commitment to the Father
 - Meekness
 - Faith and dependence on God
 - His submission to God
 - Even His reliance upon the Holy Spirit,
 - His prayers,
 - His worship
 - Everything about Him is for our imitation...
- We see what a perfect human is supposed to be like.
- B. And because He is a perfect human who is also the Son of God, you can put all your trust in Him as your Saviour.
1. As we saw last week,
 - There is no one else like Him.
 - No other name given among men by which we must be saved.
 2. In our flesh, He had met all the demands of God's law—not only for Himself, but for all the elect...
 - In our flesh, He is fulfilled all righteousness...
 - He could not be corrupted because he was the Son of God.
 - He always did, even in our flesh, what pleased the Father.
 - In our flesh, He has also paid the penalty of our sin...
 - Because He is the Son of God, His sacrifice was sufficient to atone for all our sin.

Conclusion:

- Let nothing keep you from this Saviour.
 - He has come from Heaven to dwell among us in our flesh.
 - What a remarkable humiliation this was!
 - All this, so that you who believe might be saved.