

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 47

Halifax, 3 August 2008

Q. 47 How did Christ humble Himself in his conception and birth?

A. Christ humbled Himself in His conception and birth, in that, being from all eternity the Son of God in the bosom of the Father, he was pleased in the fullness of time to become the Son of Man, made of a woman of low estate, and to be born of her, with divers circumstances of more than ordinary abasement.

Introduction:

Last week I introduced to you the subject of the humiliation of Christ...

- We looked at Philippians 2 where we saw that the Son of God emptied Himself of His glory—
 - not His essential glory (or the glory of His essence), for He cannot do that...
 - but His revealed glory.
- He did this by taking on human flesh—coming in our form rather than in the form of God...
 - The form of God is to us, inapproachable light.
 - Every vision of God that men have had, no matter how glorious the vision, has been a vision in which the brightness of His glory has been turned way down...
 - Whether we speak of the vision of Isaiah that made him feel as if he was undone or the vision of John that made him fall before Christ as a dead man...
 - or the vision of Him on Mount Sinai with clouds and thunder such that the people felt they would die if they say him like this again...
 - every one of these visions was a vision of the Son of God Himself with the brightness of His glory turned way down...
- But how much more was that brightness turned down when He came in actual human flesh—when He was conceived and born of the virgin Mary.
 - Not only did He who was from all eternity the Son of God become the Son of Man, but He also came as a man of lowly estate—
 - We want to look at the humiliation of His conception and birth in particular this evening.

I want to focus on three particular points concerning His humiliation in conception and birth...

- First, the humiliation of the Creator becoming a creature of flesh.
- Secondly, the humiliation of the Holy Son of God having a sinful pedigree.
- Third, the humiliation of a dishonourable welcome for Him who is the King of glory.

We will have a scripture reading for each of these points...

I. The reproach of the Creator becoming a creature of flesh...

- READ> Luke 2:1-20
 - I will not attempt to expound this passage, but simply to show you from it the humiliation involved in our Saviour becoming flesh...

A. Verse 11 is a very remarkable verse in this regard...

1. Here the angel announces to the shepherds that the Saviour who has been born is Christ the Lord!

a. And my brothers and sisters, we know what the word “Lord” refers to here!

- It refers to the Lord of glory,
 - the self-existing One...
- It refers to the One who revealed Himself to Moses as “I am that I am.”
 - The great “I am”
 - The author of all creation.
 - God the Son by whom all things were made that have been made and without whom nothing was made that has been made.

b. The amazing, remarkable thing is that **He** was *born!*

- **He** became what He had made!

2. This is absolutely astounding!

a. These angels who announced it—in their glorious appearance—made the shepherds greatly afraid because the glory of the Lord was seen upon them...

- And these were mere angels—themselves creatures...
- Creatures who shield their faces when they stand in the presence of the Lord’s revelation to them...

- For centuries, they had stood before the Lord and they had never gotten used to Him.
- b. And now, here He was, a baby in a manger!
- A baby who had grown in His mother's womb and had been brought forth in a bloody birth like all births,
 - all because of the curse that had made child bearing a bloody affair...
 - Here was that glorious Lord they had known and worshipped with awe now a terror to no one...
 - now lying in a manger in a cattle stall...
 - Here was the one who made the world now making dirty diapers.
 - Here is the one whom heaven and earth cannot contain now wrapped in swaddling clothes.
 - Here is the one who opens His hand to feed the world now feeding at His mother's breasts.
 - Here was the one whose voice thundered forth at Sinai and made Israel wish they could die,
 - now with nothing but the soft cry of a newborn.
- c. The angels understood better than we do what a great humiliation this was for the LORD of glory to appear in human flesh.
- How amazing this must have been for them to see who knew more of His glory than we do.

B. My dear friends, what great hope is put forth to us here...

1. All this was done in order that the Lord of glory might be a Saviour...
 - Indeed it was "good tidings of great joy"... (v. 10)
 - The Lord Himself had come from heaven to redeem His people—and there He was, lying in the manger.
 - He had come to bring peace on earth... (v. 14)
 - On the earth—the earth that had fallen under God's judgement...
 - The earth that was corrupt and full of sin...
 - The earth on which God's curse had fallen in Adam upon all men.
 - The *peace* in view was *shalom* of the Old Testament...
 - God's peace...
 - Not just an end to all the turmoil, but full reconciliation—

- the fullness of God's blessing and favour—
 - the restoration of all things.
2. The angels who knew what radical measures had been taken—
- that the one before whose glory they had always covered their faces had now appeared in the manger—
 - to save the world.
 - The earth was sleeping, but the whole heaven was filled with rejoicing angels...
 - who said, "Glory to God in the Highest!"
 - Over the centuries, they had seen the Son's love for the Father, and they had seen His love for His people through His promises and care of them upon the earth...how He had carried them through the wilderness and such...
 - They had marvelled at how deep and how great that love was...
 - But at this—at His becoming flesh—
 - they break forth with marvellous praise because now the extent of His love is seen like never before!
 - They are delighted and amazed to see how far He is willing to go to save His people from their sins!
 - That the Lord of glory should appear in human flesh.
 - A baby in a manger.
3. My brothers and sisters in the Lord,
- This is what He did for you!
 - If you should become a worm, it would not be so great a humiliation as that the Creator should become a creature...
 - These radical steps were taken for you!
 - Who but God would have ever dreamed or imagined that such measures should be taken by the Lord of Glory for His creatures?
 - Stand amazed and worship!
 - Stand amazed and be comforted!
 - He has done all this for you!

TRANS> How the Son of God humbled Himself in becoming a creature of flesh...

- Now let's move to the second way I want to you show that He humbled Himself in His birth...

II. The humiliation of the Holy Son of God being born of sinful lineage...

- For this, our reading is Matthew 1:1-17.
 - READ> Matthew 1:1-17.
 - Once again, rather than attempting to expound this whole passage,
 - I will simply focus on what this passage shows us about our Lord's humiliation in His conception and birth...

A. We are told right from the start that this is "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ..."

- The Greek word translated "genealogy" in verse 1 is a very familiar word to you...
 - It is the genesis of Jesus Christ, or the beginning of Him.
- This should not be confused with the beginning of the Son of God,
 - For the Son of God existed from all eternity...
 - From all eternity as the Lord of Glory...
 - But this is the beginning of Jesus Christ...

1. We might at first be struck with the fact that His is a most noble pedigree...

- Verse 1 says that He is the son of David, who is the son of Abraham...
 - What a noble lineage this is from a human standpoint...
- For Abraham was the man God chose out of all the scattered nations at Babel,
 - and to whom He said, "I will be your God"
 - and through whose seed he promised to bless all other nations.
- And then there is David...
 - David was the greatest king of Israel,
 - a man after God's own heart,
 - to whom it was promised that his seed would sit upon the throne of God's people forever and ever...
 - This was perhaps the most holy lineage a man could have...

- These were the people that the Lord had redeemed and had called to be His own...

TRANS> From a human standpoint, they are honourable,

- but now consider how unworthy they are to be the lineage of the Son of God.

2. Just look at them...

- Matthew, knowing the pride of the Jews,
 - exposes how unworthy these holiest men the world had to offer truly were...
 - How unfit they were to be the lineage of Christ...

a. See how Matthew highlights their sin...

1) In verse 3, Judah is mentioned as begetting Perez by Tamar....

- Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law.
 - He slept with her, when she pretended to be prostitute...
 - She did it because of Judah's neglect of her.
- This is the ancestor of Jesus Christ...
 - and makes the holy Son of God a child of incest...

2) In verse 5, Ruth is mentioned—a Moabite...

- The Jews were not to marry Moabites for ten generations...
 - Yet, this was violated...
 - Christ's ancestress is a Moabite.

3) And then in verse 6, David is said to have begotten Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah...

- Matthew is here drawing attention to David's adultery—
 - The wife he had from an adulterous affair after which he killed the woman's husband to cover his tracks...
 - That makes the Son of God the child of an adulterer and a murderer...

b. When you get to verse 11, Matthew reminds us of the captivity...

1) The line from which Christ came,

- the kings from which he descended,
 - had to be removed from their thrones because of wickedness...

- The whole nation had become so idolatrous that the LORD had to vomit them out of the Promised Land...
 - This was the nation and the line of kings to which Jesus was born.
- 2) And after the captivity, though they were restored,
- they remained a people under judgement,
 - never really regaining the glory of the kingdom they had once had in the time of David.
3. It is a marvel that Christ should come from the likes of these...truly a sinful adulterous lineage...
- a. Yet, they were the best that the world had to offer—
 - They are God’s chosen people...
 - How unworthy the human race was to bring forth the Son of God...
 - b. Consider the holiness of the One who came from this sinful pedigree...
 - 1) He is the one Isaiah saw before whom the seraphim cried out, saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of hosts!”
 - 2) He is the one Habakkuk described as of purer eyes than to behold evil...
 - 3) He is the one before whom Moses had to hide in the cleft of the rock when he saw a pale reflection of His glory.
 - 4) He is the one who is pure and spotless, the one who rages against sin as a consuming fire, the one who hates all workers of iniquity...
 - c. What a marvellous thing that He should be born of such a sinful line to such a sinful people—
 - sinners who have come so short of His glory...

B. But that is exactly the line from which the Lord Jesus came.

- 1. He came in order that He might be one of us in order that He might represent us.
 - He could not have redeemed us if He had been a special creation—
 - a newly created man...
 - He had to be flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone...
 - He had to come forth from us.
 - Being born of a virgin,
 - and being already a pre-existing sinless person,

- He was not constituted a sinner as we are at our conception,
 - but He was still born of sinners and of a sinful line.
2. We saw how great a condescension it was for Him to humble Himself as the Creator to become flesh,
- but for Him, it was no doubt an even greater condescension that He came of a sinful line,
 - that He should be born of sinful flesh...
 - He sees sin in its true colours and the humiliation of this was even greater than the humiliation of becoming flesh.
 - He came into the cesspool of human sin—
 - to swim in the sewer into which we had brought ourselves...
 - And why did He do it?
 - He did it in order that He might bring us out!
3. My brothers and sisters, He was willing to do this for you...
- He was willing to bear this reproach in order that you who believe might be brought out of the cesspool of sin to live with God.

TRANS> So now we have seen how He humbled Himself in His birth...

- first, that He who was creator should become a creature...
- second, that He who was pure and holy should come of a sinful lineage...
- Now thirdly, I want you to see...

III. The humiliation of the dishonourable reception given to the King of glory...

- The scripture reading for this is Matthew 2:13-23
 - READ Matthew 2:13-23
- A. You would expect that when the King of Glory came to earth, He would surely be treated with the highest honours that earth could give...
1. Here is the One whose throne is in the heavens and who is worshipped by angels, night and day...
- Here is the One who enjoyed glory with the Father from all eternity...
 - who lived in blessed fellowship, under the perfect delight of the Father...

- He is the Son of His love who had always been loved and honoured and praised by His Father.
2. Surely He would be given a palace with attendants, a purple robe and a crown, with all the honours of royalty...
- You would expect Him to be surrounded by armed guards...
 - What else could be appropriate for the king of heaven who came to visit earth?
 - for the welcome of the Sovereign Lord who is the blessed and only potentate and who dwells in inapproachable light.

TRANS> But the world was not worthy...

B. Consider how the reception He was given instead...

1. We read in Luke that He was born in a cattle stall because there was no room for his family in the inn...
- We also see in Luke the poverty of his parents at the time of His birth...
 - This is made evident in Luke 2:24 where we are told that for Mary's purification, a pair of turtledoves was offered instead of a turtledove and a lamb...
 - Special allowance was made for the poor (Lev 12:8) so that they could offer a turtledove or pigeon if they could not afford a lamb.
2. But it is worse than poverty in Matthew 2:13...
- a. Here we read that instead of the honours and welcome He deserved He was pursued by Israel's puppet king of the Romans with murderous intent...
- And Jesus has to be carried by His parents into Egypt for safety...
 - They have to flee in the middle of the night!
- b. Do you realise who this is?
- This is the one who rides on the clouds as His chariots,
 - and who has His way in the whirlwind!
 - He is the one before whose glory heaven and earth will flee away when He comes to judge...
 - And here He is fleeing,
 - being carried by His parents, to Egypt for safety,
 - just as Jacob had to go down to Egypt lest he perish in the famine.

- Egypt was the place God sent His people to teach them that they were helpless and unable to keep themselves alive...
 - To show them that He was the Lord by delivering them from there...
 - to show them salvation is of the Lord, and that they were unable to free themselves from the bondage of Egypt...
 - Egypt is as a grave from which God had to raise Israel up.
- c. There is a glorious hope here...
- The verse in Hosea—"out of Egypt have I called my Son," is a verse of hope...
 - In that verse from Hosea 11,
 - the Lord is expressing His deep love for His Son and how He will not leave Him to perish; how he will bring Him forth...
 - Jesus coming forth from Egypt represents His coming forth from the grave...
 - This is a picture of the resurrection...
 - But what a dishonourable thing for the Son of God to be chased out of Israel into the land of Egypt—
 - to be buried there, as it were, until the time of deliverance.
3. But even after the Lord is brought out of Egypt, we see that still He has to be hidden away...
- a. That instead of a palace in Jerusalem with guards,
- He is a carpenter's son in a despised place called Nazareth—
 - a place from which no prophet was to come.
 - Though born in Bethlehem as the prophets had said,
 - Jesus did not have the honour of this being generally known...
 - Instead, he was despised as a Nazarene.
- b. Do you see the great contrast here?
- The one who should have been recognised as coming from heaven was instead regarded as coming from Nazareth!
- C. And once again I want you to know why Christ bore this reproach...

1. It was not because He delights in being degraded—not at all—He despises shame...
 - He is the Lord of all glory and it is a grave injustice for Him to be treated with less than divine honours...

2. But He was willing to bear this shame,
 - to be treated as a lowly one...
 - to be despised and rejected of men...
 - all in order that at last He might go to the cross for us.
 - That he might bear the shame of all our sin before the Father and before the world...
 - What can we say of such love?
 - What can we say of our human pride before this humble saviour who was made low not because of his own sin, but because of ours...