

Article: The Foundation for the Joy of Christmas

Along with the great theologian and philosopher Anselm of Canterbury, we ask the question, “Why the God-man?”

When we look at the biblical answer to that question, we see that the purpose behind the incarnation of Christ is to fulfil His work as God’s appointed Mediator. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:5: “*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself*”

Now, the Bible speaks of many mediators with a small or lowercase “m.” A mediator is an agent who stands between two parties who are estranged and in need of reconciliation. But when Paul writes to Timothy of a solitary Mediator, a single Mediator, with a capital “M,” he’s referring to that Mediator who is the supreme Intercessor between God and fallen humanity. This Mediator, Jesus Christ, is indeed the God-man.

In the early centuries of the church, with the office of mediator and the ministry of reconciliation in view, the church had to deal with heretical movements that would disturb the balance of this mediating character of Christ. Our one Mediator, who stands as an agent to reconcile God and man, is the One who participates both in deity and in humanity.

In the Gospel of John, we read that the eternal Logos, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us. The Second Person of the Trinity took upon Himself a human nature to work out our redemption.

In the fifth century, at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the church had to fight against a sinister teaching called the Monophysite heresy. The term monophysite is derived from the prefix *mono*, which means “one,” and from the root *physis*, which means “nature” or “essence.”

The heretic Eutyches taught that Christ, in the incarnation, had a single nature, which he called a “theanthropic nature.” This theanthropic nature (which combines the words *theos*, meaning “God,” and *anthropos*, meaning “man”) gives us a Saviour who is a hybrid but, under close scrutiny, would be seen to be neither God nor man. The Monophysite heresy obscured the distinction between God and man, giving us either a deified human or a humanised deity.

Against the backdrop of this heresy, the Chalcedonian Creed insisted Christ possesses two distinct natures: divine and human. He is truly human and truly divine, or truly God.

These two natures are united in the mystery of the incarnation, but it is important, according to Christian orthodoxy, that we understand the divine nature of Christ is fully God and the human nature is fully human.

So this one person who had two natures, divine and human, was perfectly suited to be our Mediator between God and men.

An earlier church council, the Council of Nicea in 325, had declared that Christ came “for us men, and for our salvation.” That is, His mission was to reconcile the estrangement that existed between God and humanity.

It is important to note that for Christ to be our perfect Mediator, the incarnation was not a union between God and an angel, or between God and a brutish creature such as an elephant or a chimpanzee. No, the reconciliation that was needed was between God and human beings.

In His role as Mediator and the God-man, Jesus assumed the office of the second Adam, or what the Bible calls the last Adam. He entered into a corporate solidarity with our humanity, being a representative like unto Adam in his representation. Paul, for example, in his letter to the Romans gives the contrast between the original Adam and Jesus as the second Adam. In Romans 5:15, he says, “*For, if the many died as the result of the one man’s transgression, much more, God’s grace and the gracious gift of the One Man, Jesus Christ, have overflowed to the many.*” Here, we observe the contrast between the calamity that came upon the human race because of the disobedience of the original Adam and the glory that comes to believers because of Christ’s obedience.

Paul goes on to say in verse 19: “*For as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of the One Man, the many will become righteous.*” Adam functioned in the role of a mediator, and he failed miserably in his task. The perfect success of Christ, the God-man rectified that failure. We read these words later in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: “*As Scripture has said: “The first man, Adam, became a natural living being.” The last Adam has become a life-giving spirit.* ⁴⁶ *However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.* ⁴⁷ *The first man was of the earth, made of dust. The second Man is from heaven.* ⁴⁸ *Those who are made of dust are also like the man of dust, and those who are heavenly are also like the Man from heaven.* ⁴⁹ *Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the Man from heaven.*” (1 Cor. 15:45-49).

We see then the purpose of the first advent of Christ. The Logos took upon Himself a human nature; the Word became flesh to effect our redemption by fulfilling the role of the perfect Mediator between God and man. The new Adam is our champion, our representative, who satisfies the demands of God’s Law for us and wins for us the blessing that God promised to His creatures if we would obey His Law. Like Adam, we failed to obey the Law, but the new Adam, our Mediator, has fulfilled the Law perfectly for us and won for us the crown of redemption. That is the foundation for the joy of Christmas.