

**The Incarnation of Christ our God:  
Its Meaning and its Consequences for our Lives  
PATRISTIC CITATIONS**

**I. Selected Pre-Nicene Patristic Testimonies about Christology and Salvation:**

A) *Ignatius of Antioch (d. ~115): Selected texts about Christ's Nativity, Divinity, Humanity:*

- 1) Letter to the Ephesians Introduction (Christ as God): *Heartiest greetings of pure joy in Jesus Christ from Ignatius, the "God-inspired," to the church at Ephesus in Asia. Out of the fullness of God the Father you have been blessed with large numbers and are predestined from eternity to enjoy forever continual and unfading glory. The source of your unity and election is genuine suffering which you undergo by the will of the Father and of **Jesus Christ, our God**. Hence you deserve to be considered happy.*
- 2) Letter to the Ephesians 19 (Christ as man): *Now, Mary's virginity and her giving birth escaped the notice of the prince of this world, as did the Lord's death—those three secrets crying to be told, but wrought in God's silence. How, then, were they revealed to the ages? A star shone in heaven brighter than all the stars. Its light was indescribable and its novelty caused amazement. The rest of the stars, along with the sun and the moon, formed a ring around it; yet it outshone them all, and there was bewilderment whence this unique novelty had arisen. As a result all magic lost its power and all witchcraft ceased. **Ignorance was done away with, and the ancient kingdom was utterly destroyed, for God was revealing himself as a man, to bring newness of eternal life. What God had prepared was now beginning. Hence everything was in confusion as the destruction of death was being taken in hand.***
- 3) Letter to the Ephesians 20 (son of David after flesh, Son of God, Son of man): *If Jesus Christ allows me, in answer to your prayers, and it is his will, I will explain to you more about plan in a second letter I intend to write. I have only touched on this plan in reference to the New Man Jesus Christ, and how it involves believing in him and loving him, and entails his Passion and resurrection. I will do this especially if the Lord shows me that you are all, every one of you, meeting together under the influence of the grace that we owe to the Name, in one faith **and in union with Christ, who was "descended from David according to the flesh" and is Son of man and Son of God**. At these meetings you should heed the bishop and presbytery attentively, and break one loaf, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which wards off death but yields continuous life in union with Jesus Christ.*

B) *Other Pre-Nicene Fathers:*

- 1) Justin. First Apology 22 (called Son of God and man): *Moreover, the Son of God called Jesus, even if only a man by ordinary generation, yet, on account of His wisdom, **is worthy to be called the Son of God**; for all writers call God the Father of men and gods.*
- 2) Justin. Second Apology 6: (Jesus as Christ, Son of God, also man): *But to the Father of all, who is unbegotten there is no name given. For by whatever name He be called, He has as His elder the person who gives Him the name. But these words Father, and God, and Creator, and Lord, and Master, are not names, but appellations derived from His good deeds and functions. **And His Son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word who also was with Him and was begotten before the works, when at first He created and arranged all things by Him, is called Christ, in reference to His being anointed and God's ordering all things through Him**; this name itself also containing an unknown significance; as also the appellation "God" is not a name, but an opinion implanted in the nature of men of a thing that can hardly be explained. But "Jesus," His name as man and Saviour, has also significance. **For He was made man also, as we before said, having been conceived according to the will of God the Father, for the sake of believing men, and for the destruction of the demons**. And now you can learn this from what is under your own observation. For numberless demoniacs throughout the whole world, and in your city, many of our Christian men exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out of the men, though they could not be cured by all the other exorcists, and those who used incantations and drugs.*

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- 3) Clement of Alexandria. Exhortation to the Heathen 1 (called both God and man): *Well, inasmuch as the Word was from the first, He was and is the divine source of all things; but inasmuch as He has now assumed the name Christ, consecrated of old, and worthy of power, he has been called by me the New Song. This Word, then, the Christ, the cause of both our being at first (for He was in God) and of our well-being, **this very Word has now appeared as man, He alone being both, both God and man**—the Author of all blessings to us; by whom we, being taught to live well, are sent on our way to life eternal.*
  - 4) Athenagoras. A Plea for the Christians 10 (called God, Trinitarianism!): *Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of **God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**, [33] and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists?*
  - 5) Athenagoras. A Plea for the Christians 12 (unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit): *Are, then, those who consider life to be comprised in this, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,” and who regard death as a deep sleep and forgetfulness (“sleep and death, twin brothers” [38]), to be accounted pious; while men who reckon the present life of very small worth indeed, and who are conducted to the future life by this one thing alone, **that they know God and His Logos, what is the oneness of the Son with the Father, what the communion of the Father with the Son, what is the Spirit, what is the unity of these three, the Spirit, the Son, the Father, and their distinction in unity**; and who know that the life for which we look is far better than can be described in words, provided we arrive at it pure from all wrong-doing;*
- C) Irenaeus of Lyon (130-202) Recapitulation:
- 1) Against Heresies 2.22.4, 3.18.1-7, 5.16.2-3, etc., assumes divinity of Christ but affirms humanity of Christ since Christ must assimilate each stage of human life to sanctify it.
  - 2) Against Heresies 2.22.4 (True humanity affirmed against Gnostics, also recapitulation): *Being thirty years old when He came to be baptized, and then possessing the full age of a Master, He came to Jerusalem, so that He might be properly acknowledged by all as a Master. **For He did not seem one thing while He was another, as those affirm who describe Him as being man only in appearance; but what He was, that He also appeared to be.** Being a Master, therefore, He also possessed the age of a Master, not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside in Himself that law which He had appointed for the human race, but sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to Himself. For He came to save all through means of Himself--all, I say, who through Him are born again to God --infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise He was an old man for old men, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise. Then, at last, He came on to death itself, that He might be "the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence," the Prince of life, existing before all, and going before all.*
- D) Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373): Human Condition and God's Fitting Response:
- 1) God creates man after his own image but in an indeterminate state wherein his fate is confirmed only by the assent of his own will by obeying God's command: Incarnation 27-28: *For God is good - or rather, of all goodness He is Fountainhead, and it is impossible for one who is good to be mean or grudging about anything. Grudging existence to none therefore, He made all things out of nothing through His own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ and of all these His earthly creatures He reserved especial mercy for the race of men. **Upon them, therefore, upon men who, as animals, were essentially impermanent, He bestowed a grace which other creatures lacked - namely the***

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*impress of His own Image, a share in the reasonable being of the very Word Himself, so that, reflecting Him and themselves becoming reasonable and expressing the Mind of God even as He does, though in limited degree they might continue for ever in the blessed and only true life of the saints in paradise.*

- 2) Man disobeys God, defacing God's image in himself, loses the knowledge of God, becomes subject to death through his natural mortality arising from being created from nothing, is enslaved to sin since is is rooted in non-being Incarnation 28-30: *But since the will of man could turn either way, God secured this grace that He had given by making it conditional from the first upon two things - namely, a law and a place. He set them in His own paradise, and laid upon them a single prohibition. **If they guarded the grace and retained the loveliness of their original innocence, then the life of paradise should be theirs, without sorrow, pain or care, and after it the assurance of immortality in heaven. But if they went astray and became vile, throwing away their birthright of beauty, then they would come under the natural law of death and live no longer in paradise, but, dying outside of it, continue in death and in corruption.** This is what Holy Scripture tells us, proclaiming the command of God, "Of every tree that is in the garden thou shalt surely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ye shall not eat, but in the day that ye do eat, ye shall surely die." "Ye shall surely die" - not just die only, but remain in the state of death and of corruption.*
- 3) God's fitting response On the Incarnation 35: *The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father's Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection. It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the Word of God was above all, when He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all, He fulfilled in death all that was required. **Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word's indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all.***
- 4) About our divinization, On the Incarnation 92-93: *As, then, he who desires to see God Who by nature is invisible and not to be beheld, may yet perceive and know Him through His works, so too let him who does not see Christ with his understanding at least consider Him in His bodily works and test whether they be of man or God. If they be of man, then let him scorn; but if they be of God, let him not mock at things which are no fit subject for scorn, but rather let him recognize the fact and marvel that things divine have been revealed to us by such humble means, that through death deathlessness has been made known to us, and through the Incarnation of the Word the Mind whence all things proceed has been declared, and its Agent and Ordainer, the Word of God Himself. **He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become God.***
- E) Pre-Nicene Father, Aphrahat (306-373): *Christ as Both True Man and True God:*
  - 1) Aphrahat. Demonstration 17:2: *Concerning these things, my beloved, so far as I, in my insignificance, can comprehend, I will instruct thee about them, **that while we grant to them that He is man**, and (while) we at the same time honour Him and call Him God and Lord, yet it is not in any novel fashion, that we have so called Him, nor that we have applied to Him a novel name, which they themselves did not employ. **Yet it is a sure thing with us, that Jesus our Lord is God**, the Son of God, and the King, the King's Son, Light of light, Creator and Counsellor, and Guide,*

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and the Way, and Redeemer, and Shepherd, Gatherer, and the Door, and the Pearl, and the Lamp; and by many (such) names is He surnamed. **But we shall leave aside all (the rest) of them, and prove concerning Him, that He Who came from God is the Son of God, and (is) God.**

- F) Ephrem of Nisibis (306-373): *Albeit a Nicene Father, Ephrem represents early Syriac Orthodoxy well.*
- 1) Paradise Hymn 12:15-18: Adam's (representing all mankind) first state indeterminate, to be immortal or corrupted via his choice in the Garden. The reward must be accompanied by some effort of the will. He lost immortality, true knowledge, and the Robe of Glory.
  - 2) In the Incarnation, Christ restores the Robe of Glory to mankind. Nativity Hymn 23:13:
    - **All these changes did the merciful One make,**
    - **stripping off glory and putting on a body;**
    - **for He had devised a way to reclothe Adam**
    - **in that glory which Adam had stripped off.**
    - *Christ was wrapped in swaddling clothes,*
    - *corresponding to Adam's leaves*
    - *Christ put on clothes, instead of Adam's skins;*
    - *He was baptized for Adam's sin,*
    - *His body was embalmed for Adam's death,*
    - *He rose and raised up Adam in his glory,*
    - *Blessed is He who descended, put on Adam and ascended!*
  - 3) In the Incarnation, God grants the divinity which Adam sought to usurp in the Garden. Nisibene Hymn 69:12:
    - **The Most High knew that Adam had wanted to become a god,**
    - **so He sent His Son who put him on in order to grant him his desire.**
  - 4) Also Hymns on Virginitly 48:15-18:
    - *free will succeeded in making Adam's beauty ugly,*
    - *for he, a man, sought to become a god.*
    - *Grace, however, made beautiful his deformities*
    - *and God came to become a man.*
    - **Divinity flew down**
    - **to draw humanity up.**
    - **For the Son had made beautiful the deformities of the servant**  
*and so he has become a god, just as he desired.*
- G) *More on Characteristics and Goals of Divinization per Gregory of Nyssa (330-379):*
- 1) On the Soul and the Resurrection 79-80 (soul grows toward Image of God): *So when the soul which has become simple and uniform and an accurate image of God finds that truly simple and immaterial good, the one thing which is really lovable and desirable, it attaches itself to it and combines with it through the impulse and operation of love. **It conforms itself to that which is always being grasped and found, and becomes through its likeness to the good that which the nature is in which it participates.***
  - 2) Life of Moses 116 (Divinization without end): *This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. **Thus, no limit would interrupt the growth in the ascent to God,** since no limit to the Good can be found nor is the increasing of the desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied.*

**II. Ephesus I (431) and its Immediate Aftermath, Alexandria at Pinnacle, Antioch Banished:**

- A) *Primary Issue is Christology, not Politics!*

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- 1) Cyril of Alexandria. Scholia on the Incarnation 13 (p. 307 McGuckin) “So when sacred Scripture says that all the ‘fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily’ (Col. 2:9) **in Christ we do not, for this reason, conclude that the Word simply dwelt in the man as if in a different Christ; nor do we divide things that have been united to one another so as to conclude there are two sons.** We maintain that sacred scripture sometimes uses the title Christ to refer to the manhood of God the Word which he has made his very own, and which he has made in the order of a temple. For it is written somewhere about human souls: ‘Those who dwell in houses of clay, of which number we too are of clay’ (Job 4:19). Just because it calls the bodies of men, ‘houses of clay,’ should we divide the one man into two men? Is it not entirely correct, nonetheless, to say that the human spirit dwells within the man? Even though these examples convey to us the form of our condition, and it cannot be otherwise, this still does not mean that the natures of these two things (spirit and flesh) are mutually injurious, on the contrary we should regard rather as having advanced us along the straight road of truth.”
- 2) Finally Cyril’s 433 Formula of Union with John of Antioch: “We confess, therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, perfect God, and perfect Man of a reasonable soul and flesh consisting; begotten before the ages of the Father according to his Divinity, and in the last days, for us and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin according to his humanity, of the same substance with his Father according to his Divinity, and of the same substance with us according to his humanity; for there became **a union of two natures.** Wherefore we confess one Christ, one Son, one Lord. **According to this understanding of this unmixed union, we confess the holy Virgin to be Mother of God;** because God the Word was incarnate and became Man, and from this conception he united the temple taken from her with himself. For we know the theologians make some things of the Evangelical and Apostolic teaching about the Lord common as pertaining to the one person, and other things they divide as to the two natures, and attribute the worthy ones to God on account of the Divinity of Christ, and the lowly ones on account of his humanity [to his humanity].” Feared confusion of natures had to be denied to assuage John. (**Bolded text from Theodoret**, reflected in Cyril’s letter to John). Moderates relieved, fanatics on both sides displeased.

### **III. Constantinople III (680-681): Reconciliation Near Miss, Neo-Chalcedonianism Perfected**

- A) *Religious polices have mixed results: True Cross Restored, Monergism/Monothelism, Ekthesis (638)*
  - 1) Maximus, Opusculum 6 (65C-68A): “If, however, you understand the subject of the phrase, ‘let not what I will, but what you will prevail’ to be not the man just like us but the man we consider as Savior, **then you have confessed the ultimate concurrence of his human will with the divine will, which is both His and the Father’s;** and you have demonstrated that with the duality of his natures there were two wills and two operations respective to the two natures, and that he admits of no opposition between them, even though he maintains all the while the difference between the two natures from which, in which, and which he is by nature.”

### **IV. Consequences and Significance for Later Theology and Our Christian Lives**

- A) *Iconoclasm and Nicaea II (787): Consequences rather than Development of Christology now Focus*
  - 1) John of Damascus (675-749):
    - On the Divine Images I:5-6 (Icons portray Divinized, visible humanity of Incarnate Christ): *I do not adore creation more than the Creator, but I adore the creature created as I am, adopting creation freely and spontaneously that He might elevate our nature and make us partakers of His divine nature. Together with my Lord and King I worship Him clothed in the flesh, not as if it were a garment or He constituted a fourth person of the Trinity—God forbid. That flesh is divine, and endures after its assumption. Human nature was not lost in the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so flesh became the Word remaining flesh, becoming,*

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rather, one with the Word through union (καθ' ὑπόστασιν). **Therefore I venture to draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes through flesh and blood. I do not draw an image of the immortal Godhead. I paint the visible flesh of God, for it is impossible to represent a spirit (ψυχῆ), how much more God who gives breath to the spirit.**

- **On the Divine Images I:24** (Honour passes to prototype, veneration of saints, icons grounded in Incarnate Christ): *We depict Christ as our King and Lord, and do not deprive Him of His army. The saints constitute the Lord's army. Let the earthly king dismiss his army before he gives up his King and Lord. Let him put off the purple before he takes honour away from his most valiant men who have conquered their passions. For if the saints are heirs of God, and co-heirs of Christ, they will be also partakers of the divine glory of sovereignty. If the friends of God have had a part in the sufferings of Christ, how shall they not receive a share of His glory even on earth? 'I call you not servants,' our Lord says, 'you are my friends.' Should we then deprive them of the honour given to them by the Church? **What audacity! What boldness of mind, to fight God and His commands! You, who refuse to worship images, would not worship the Son of God, the Living Image of the invisible God, and His unchanging form. I worship the image of Christ as the Incarnate God; that of Our Lady (τῆς θεοτόκου), the Mother of us all, as the Mother of God's Son; that of the saints as the friends of God.** They have withstood sin unto blood, and followed Christ in shedding their blood for Him, who shed His blood for them. I put on record the excellencies and the sufferings of those who have walked in His footsteps, that I may sanctify myself, and be fired with the zeal of imitation. **St Basil says, 'Honouring the image leads to the prototype.'** If you raise churches to the saints of God, raise also their trophies. The temple of old was not built in the name of any man. The death of the just was a cause of tears, not of feasting. A man who touched a corpse was considered unclean, even if the corpse was Moses himself. But now the memories of the saints are kept with rejoicings.*
- 2) Theodore the Studite (759–826):
- **First Refutation of the Iconoclasts 5** (Mosaic prohibition qualified by Moses' brazen serpent, type of Incarnate Christ, Christological basis of icon veneration): *So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. Now you see the whole teaching of Scripture; although the angels are not solid like us; and although the serpent differs from us by its reptilian shape, nevertheless it was received figuratively as a symbol of Christ. **If God formerly condescended to be symbolized by a serpent in order to heal those who were bitten, how could it not be pleasing to Him and appropriate to set up an image of the bodily form which has been His since He became man? And if the symbol in animal form cured those who had been bitten by its sight alone, how could the holy representation of Christ's holy form do otherwise than hallow those who see it?***
  - **First Refutation of the Iconoclasts 13** (Honour passes to prototype, hence not idolatry): *So whether in an image, or in the Gospel, or in the cross, or in any other consecrated object, God is evidently worshiped "in spirit and in truth," as the materials are exalted by the raising of the mind toward God. **The mind does not remain with the materials, because it does not trust in them: that is the error of the idolators. Through the materials, rather, the mind ascends to the prototypes: this is the faith of the Orthodox.***
- 3) Gregory Palamas (1296-1357):
- **Triads 24:** ***But even if we affirm that this energy is inseparable from the unique divine essence, the Superessential is not for that reason composite;** without doubt, no simple essence would exist if it were so, for one would search in vain for a natural essence without energy. How is it possible for the deifying light not to bear the Master's characteristics?*

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- Triads 29: *But you should not consider that God allows Himself to be seen in His superessential essence, but according to His deifying gift and energy, the grace of adoption, the uncreated deification, the enhypostatic illumination.* You should think that that is the principle of the divinity, the deifying gift, in which one may supernaturally communicate, which one may see and with which one may be united. But the essence of God, which is beyond principle, transcends this principle, too. This grace is in fact a relationship, albeit not a natural one; yet it is at the same time beyond relationship, not only by virtue of being supernatural, but also qua relationship. For how would a relationship have a relationship? But as to the essence of God, that is unrelated, not qua relationship, but because it transcends the supernatural relationships themselves. **Grace is communicated to all worthy of it, in a way proper and peculiar to each one, while the divine essence transcends all that is participable.**
- Gregory Palamas. Triads 31: *Yet the divine Maximus has not only taught that it (deification) is enhypostatic, but also that it is unoriginate (not only uncreated), indescribable and supratemporal. Those who attain it become thereby uncreated, unoriginate and indescribable, although in their own nature, they derive from nothingness.*