**The two natures of Christ**

Text: Isaiah 7:14; Confession: WCF 8:2

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Isaiah 7:10-14; Philippians 2:5-11

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 262, 271, 2, 266, 243

**Series:** Advent (#3)

**Theme:** The divine and human natures of Christ are inseparably joined in one unique person conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary as prophesied by Isaiah to king Ahaz.

**Proposition:** Christ is both fully God and fully man, the only meditator between God and man. He is the Saviour every human being needs.

**Introduction**

I think that mankind naturally desires the involvement of somebody or something that is vastly more powerful than we ourselves are. We can look up at the sky from this spinning planet and see the vastness of space and realise how very, very small we all are. We are literally specks of dust in a vast universe. Ancient mythologies have sought to provide more powerful forces either to protect us or to wickedly mess with our lives. For example immortal Greek gods, often behaving like spoilt children, were said to have come to earth wreaking havoc as they played games with mere mortals.

Powerful rulers were sometimes elevated in their own minds and that of their populations to divine status. Egyptian Pharaohs were considered gods on earth. In the Roman Empire, the imperial cult worshipped the Emperors and their families, declaring them to be divine. The powerful conqueror Alexander the Great is said by some historians to have thought of himself as a ‘divine hero’ who possessed god-like characteristics because he was descended from the gods. Today, the huge popularity of ‘superhero’ movies based on DC and Marvel comics testifies more to the appeal of god-like figures than the attraction of ever more elaborate CGI.

Throughout all human mythological ideas, ancient and modern, there is no response to the endemic insecurity felt and faced by mankind like the truth about Jesus Christ. He is truly a ‘divine hero’. He really does possess super-powers. He is neither a god who came to earth to play with lesser mortals, nor a man whose special abilities somehow elevate him to almost god-like status. He is utterly uniquely God and man, divine and human. He is both, in the words of WCF8.2, ‘*truly and eternally God*’ and he has also taken ‘*upon himself man’s nature, with all its essential properties and common frailties, yet without sin*’. There is no other person like Jesus Christ. All of humanity’s need of Him is reflected throughout human history in vain attempts to imagine someone who will fulfil our deepest desires and conquer our ultimate enemy. God’s Word reveals the two natures of Christ: God and man, giving us much information but by no means explaining all the mysteries of His person. From our text in Isaiah 7:14, together with the rest of Scripture, we’ll reverently explore His human nature, His divine nature and His unique personhood.

1. **The human nature of Christ**

The year was 735BC. Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of northern kingdom of Israel were in a military alliance against the southern kingdom – ruled by King Ahaz at that time. These armies “*came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but they could not yet mount an attack against it*” (Isaiah 7:1). Ahaz and his people were under threat. What would the king do? Where would he turn? From where would his help come?

The Lord spoke to Ahaz through His prophet Isaiah, firstly with a warning: “*If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all”* (Isa 7:9b)*.* God invites the king to ask for a sign, but in rebellion he piously refuses saying ‘*I will not put the Lord to the test*’ (7:12). So the covenant God gives a sign to His people, referred to in verse 13 as the ‘house of David’ through His prophet: “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*”.

Ahaz wants an army to protect himself and his kingdom, but God confounds his faithless desire and provide a small child as a sign. This promised child will be born to a “virgin”. The Hebrew word translated ‘virgin’ does not define a woman who has not been with a man, but it does presume a state of virginity which would be outgrown at marriage. The identity of the mother of this child, born in the 8th cent. BC is unclear. Some suggest Ahaz’s wife, but his son Hezekiah had already been born. Some suggest Isaiah’s wife, but his son Shear-jashub had already been born (Isaiah 7:3).

The truth is we do not know the answer to the question about who this child born in the 8th cent. BC was or which woman gave birth to him. Most likely this boy was born to an unmarried woman and fathered by an unidentified man. The identity of this 8th century BC child is actually unimportant because his birth was to be a sign. A sign points to something else or, in this case, somebody else.

There is both reassurance and warning in the prophesy that this promised boy-child would eat curds and honey (verse 15). Curds and honey are symbols both of plenty but also of depopulation, of a wild uncultivated wilderness. The birth of this child pointed in the first instance to the withdrawal of Rezin, king of Aram (Syria) and Pekah king of Northern Kingdom of Israel from the Southern kingdom governed by Ahaz. It also pointed to the destruction by God’s hand through the king of Assyria and later by the Babylonians.

We know that the sign of the child had a far greater significance because gospel writer Matthew, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit links this enigmatic Old Testament prophesy to the birth of Jesus about 730 years later. An angel of the Lord appeared to a man, who was a genetic descendant of both King David (1:6) and King Ahaz (1:9). This messenger said: "*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins."* (Matt 1:20a-22).

Joseph had been wrestling with what to do about the woman he was betrothed to, but who had become pregnant. The only natural explanation was that his wife-to-be had been with another man, but God, through the angel, revealed that something supernatural had occurred – the baby in the virgin Mary’s womb had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. This child, who was to be called Jesus, uniquely had no human father. Matthew explains that what had happened was connected to the prophesy made by Isaiah with these words: *“Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,”* which translated means *“God with us*" (Matt 1:23). The birth of Jesus to virgin mother was the final fulfilment of the prophesy of Isaiah to Ahaz. Unlike the untrusting King of Judah, Joseph believed the Lord who appeared to him in a dream and he “*did as the angel of the Lord commanded Him*” (Matt 1:24) without asking questions.

We know that Jesus grew up as the child of very ordinary parents, Joseph and Mary, in the small township of Nazareth. Luke records that “J*esus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men*” (Luke 2:52). He was “*in every respect… tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*”(Heb 4:15). Jesus was, and still is, flesh and blood - like you and me. He was (and is) truly human and truly righteous. He is living proof that to be sinful, in rebellion to God, impure, unrighteous and imperfect are **not** essential human characteristics.

Drawing exclusively on Scripture, the Westminster Confession of Faith helpfully states that: “*When the fulness of time had come, (The Son of God) took upon himself man’s nature, with all its essential properties and common frailties, yet without sin. He was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary and of her substance*” (WCF 8:2). The human nature of Jesus Christ is revealed through: His conception and birth; His growth and development (Luke 2:52); His frailties (e.g. hunger (Matt 4:2), thirst (John 4:7), tiredness (John 4:6)) and non-sinful emotions (Matt 26:37; John 2:15; 11:35).

The physical conception and birth of Jesus to virgin woman Mary is of vital importance. Jesus is the promised seed of the woman who would bruise the head of serpent – Satan (Gen 3:15). Being born of a woman meant that Christ took His human nature from Mary (WCF ‘from her substance’) through his conception in her womb. Because this unique supernatural conception did not take place with the involvement of a man, Jesus was unpolluted by the sin of Adam. Jesus is therefore the ‘*one mediator between God and men*’ (1 Tim 2:5). He is the man Christ Jesus, but also the Son of God, which brings us to our second point.

1. **The divine nature of Christ**

Old Testament names can sometimes be difficult for us, as non-native Hebrew speakers, to pronounce, but they have significant meaning. For example, Isaiah’s son was called “Shear-jashub” (Isa 7:3) which means “a remnant shall return”. What an encouragement this would have been to his father who prophesied about the coming Assyrian invasion. Another example is King Ahaz’s son who was called Hezekiah which means ‘God strengthens’. It was King Hezekiah who, unlike his father, trusted in God (2 Ki 18:5) ‘*did what was right in the eyes of the Lord*’ (v3) and removed idols from the land.

The child to be born to the virgin, as prophesied was to be named by her “Imm-anu-el” which literally means “With-us-God”. Does it seem a bit strange that Mary was notinstructed by the angel Gabriel to call her son ‘Immanuel’ but another name: Jesus? (Luke 1:31). Jesus was not known by the name “Immanuel’ to his human family, his hometown community of Nazareth, or the wider society during his public ministry. So, whilst Immanuel was not the name He was addressed by, it was His very nature. He displayed the divine characteristics of being, true to the name “Immanuel” ‘God with us’.

John writes in his gospel *And the Word became flesh, and* ***dwelt among us****, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14)*.* Jesus referred to Himself as being divine, using the self-existent name of God ‘I AM’ (from which the name YHWH is derived) by saying “*Before Abraham was, I am*” (John 8:58). The Apostle Paul refers to Jesus Christ as ‘*our great God and Saviour*’ (Tit 2:3). In our earlier reading from Philippians 2, we were reminded that before His incarnation Jesus was ‘in the form of God’ having equality with God the Father. God the Father says of His Son ‘*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever*’ (Heb 1:8).

Jesus did works which only God could do - including miracles of healing, and forgiving sins (e.g. Mark 2:3-12). He knew things only God could know. He knew all about other people inside and out: thoughts, motives, actions, both past, present and future. Jesus willingly received worship from human beings ((Matthew 2:11; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; 20:28) as only God can rightfully do.

Jesus is true God, self-existent, eternal, the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) and the One through whom all things were made (Col 1:16). Westminster Confession of Faith 8.2 states that Jesus Christ is ‘*The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity…truly and eternally God’*. When Jesus was incarnate in the womb of the virgin Mary, He did not stop being God so that He could become human, but He continued to be what He had always been, divine.

However, whilst He remained God, he set aside His divine status and privileges in order to become a lowly man. This is how his conception is described in Philippians 2:6-8: **“***though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*”.

When Jesus walked this earth, for a limited time only, He was ‘God with us’ Immanuel. Those like gospel writer John who were there at that time were able with their own physical eyes to *‘see His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth’*. Today we see Jesus in the flesh through the eyes of faith as we believe the accurate eyewitness testimony of God’s Word. The day is coming when we, brothers and sisters in the Lord, will see with glorified resurrection eyes Jesus the God-man in the flesh. Perhaps then we will understand even more about His unique person than we do now. In this life, we can learn everything God reveals about His Son in His Word, but no more, so let’s understand how His unique two natures co-exist in one person; in so far as we can.

1. **The unique person of Christ**

It is clear from Scripture that after His incarnation Jesus was never less than fully divine and never less than fully human. He was not two persons: one God and one man, but only one person. His divinity was never mixed up with his humanity so that he became some kind of a hybrid of both. He is not a different kind of divine because he is also human. Neither is he a different kind of human because he is also divine.

Whilst there is much mystery remaining about how His two natures coexist in Him, there are some clear statements that can be made from Scripture, and that is what the Westminster Confession of Faith 8:2 does: Jesus Christ’s “*two whole natures, the divine and the human, perfect and distinct, were inseparably joined together in one person without being changed, mixed, or confused. This person is truly God and truly man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man*”.

The purpose of Christ becoming fully human is revealed in the last clause ‘*the only mediator between God and man*’ and connects to His name ‘’Jesus’ which comes from the Hebrew Joshua, Jeshua, “Yahweh Delivered”. Joseph was commanded by the angel of the Lord to give the son who would be born to his betrothed Mary the name ‘Jesus’ because this name revealed Christ’s mission “*for He will save His people from their sins*” (Matt 1:21).

The dual nature of Christ (God and man) is critical to His work of purchasing our freedom from sin and death. He is fully human and therefore able to substitute Himself for us. An animal, or any other creature will not do. As the writer to the Hebrews puts it “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Heb 10:4). He is fully human and was therefore able to die as the second Adam to undo the curse of the first Adam (Rom 5:12-17). He is fully divine able to withstand the wrath of God for all the sins of all God’s people. He is fully divine able to rule over His people forever with supreme power. Jesus Christ alone is the unique Saviour who is able to make His people right with God forever.

Before giving the sign of the virgin birth, God offered to save Ahaz by challenging Him to true faith through His prophet Isaiah: “*If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all”* (Isa 7:9b)*.* So how did that go? What happened? Ahaz did not listen to God’s voice through His prophet. Instead, he appealed for help to the king of Assyria who at that time was called Tiglath-pileser III. Ahaz hoped to gain strength from human forces to solve his national security problem. They were perhaps the closest thing to a superhero he could think of, in his unbelief, at the time.

History teaches us that this approach never brings lasting peace to nation or individuals. In 2 Chronicles 28:6 we read of the consequences of Ahaz’s lack of faith in the covenant God of Israel: Pekah, king of Israel, killed 120,000 from Judah in 1 day, all men of valour, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. What about Ahaz’ appeal to help from the ferocious Assyrians? We read in 2nd Chronicles “*So Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him*” (2 Chron 28:20).

History teaches that supposed super-heroes can easily become super-enemies. Be careful who you look to for help! All human aid, even friendly assistance, ultimately fails because no mere human can “*ransom another or give to God the price for his life*” (Ps 49:7). King Ahaz met a humiliating end. He was not buried in the royal tombs (2 Chron 28:15). Brothers and sisters, I don’t believe we will see this man in the New Heavens and New Earth, unless he later turned in repentance to God and believed upon the Saviour born to a virgin. Scripture gives us no reason to hope for the salvation of Ahaz.

What about you? Where do you look for help? When forces combine against you, where will you turn? To which king? All human aid will eventually fail you. Only the God-man Jesus can save completely and forever. Friend, if you will not believe you surely will not be firm at all. Isaiah brought the promise of Christ to king Ahaz. You have heard the promise of Christ today "*He who believes in the Son has eternal life*” (John 3:36). Come to Christ for protection, peace and salvation. He will never let you down, leave or forsake those who come to Him in repentance and faith.

AMEN