



Doctrine

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

Jesus Christ

Small Group Work Sheet
October 4, 2010

Part 1 - Ice Breaker

- Have everyone write down three surprising things about themselves, two of which are true, and one of which is made up. Each person, in turn, reads their list and then the rest of the group votes on which "fact" they feel is the "false" one. If the group does not correctly pick a person's made up "fact", then that person wins.

Part 2 - Review the sermon

- What does *incarnation* mean and how does it make our faith different from other world religions?
- What was Jesus doing before Bethlehem?
- When Philippians 2:7 says Christ *made himself nothing*. What is the wrong way to understand this phrase? What is the right way to understand it? Why does this difference matter?
- What was Christ's mission before coming to earth? What was his mission while on earth? What is his mission now that he has returned to heaven?
- Christ's humility is the example we are to follow. As you think the humility of Christ's incarnation, what areas of pride or false entitlement does it reveal in your life?
- Why does God often let us suffer rather than rescuing us with a miracle?

Part 3 - Digg deeper ...*get the rest of the story.*

Did people know God was coming?

Was Jesus' appearance on the scene of human history something unexpected? Were there hints he was coming? If there were hints, what were they? It all starts in Genesis 3. In Genesis 1 and 2, we learn God created everyone and everything. In Genesis 3, we learn the story of how sin came into the world. As a result, separation from God was introduced along with physical and spiritual death. In Genesis 3:15 is something called the *protoevangelium*. That is simply a big word for *the first gospel*. 4,000 years before the birth of Christ, God preaches about the birth of Jesus.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

So God says, someone is coming. It will be a male son, that will come from the line of the woman; Eve. He will do battle with Satan. Satan will physically hurt him, but he will ultimately destroy Satan.

What I find interesting is that we get our first inference of the virgin birth. The rest of the Old Testament genealogies are all given in *patriarchal* form (All the genealogical information is given through the line of the father.) This is the *only one* that is given in *matriarchal* form (through the line of the mother). It makes one wonder why there is no earthly father? Perhaps there isn't one!

Right from Genesis 3 we are waiting for a male son, that will come through the line of the first woman, who will do battle with Satan. Satan will hurt him but he will ultimately destroy Satan. In doing so, he will make right everything that went wrong with Adam.

The Old Testament moves the story forward in Isaiah 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. Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

This second clue about Christ's coming is a young virgin woman will give birth to the one who is Immanuel. Immanuel means *God with us*. This is very specific identification of what Christ's mother will be like.

The third clue gets even more specific.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2 (ESV)

Micah was written 700 years before the birth of Jesus. This prophecy shows the sovereignty of God over history. Remember what Bethlehem is like. It is a small, rural dumpy town that is outside the city of Jerusalem. When you think Bethlehem, think Graettinger, IA. Think of a town not big enough to have their own school system.

Out of this dumpy forgotten town will come the one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins is from ancient days. This is a Hebrew way of saying *someone who existed before he existed*. The only one who fits the bill is God himself. It gets even better with the fourth clue.

"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1 (ESV)

400 years before the birth of Christ, we have the announcement of John the Baptist. He is the one who will prepare the way for the Lord, the one they were to be looking for. Something interesting is the text says my messenger... will prepare the way before me.

This is God saying he will send his messenger to prepare the way for himself! It is another announcement of the incarnation.

Another thing I find interesting is we learn *the Lord will come suddenly to his temple*. If you go to Jerusalem today, you will discover the temple no longer exists. Today, a mosque covers the temple mount. The last temple existed until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.. Since that time, no temple has existed. Some of my Jewish friends believe the Messiah is yet to come, unfortunately, they have a problem. Until the mosque on the temple mount is destroyed, and a new temple erected, *their Messiah can not come!* The only other option is the Messiah came and he came before the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.! The only one who fits these prophecies before 70 A.D. is Christ!

So let's review what the Old Testament teaches us about the coming of Jesus.

1. He would be born of a young woman.
2. He would be virgin born.
3. He would be born in the forgotten town of Bethlehem.
4. He would come before the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D..

As you know, many Jewish people today do not accept this. I don't want you to believe no Jewish people accept Jesus as the Messiah. In the first century, many Jewish people believed Jesus was the Messiah they were looking for!

Is Jesus fully man and fully God?

Many errors hover around the identity of Christ. It is difficult to understand the Bible's claims that Jesus is fully man and fully God but to eliminate the tension is to dive into heresy. The ancient church wrestled with this for years and finally in 451 A.D. issued something called the Chalcedonian Creed. This creed talks about something called the *Hypostatic Union*. Hypostasis meaning person. It essentially says *Jesus is one person who is composed of two natures*. He is fully man and fully God in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is important because no other religious leader in any major world religion claimed to be God. In fact, every other major world religion was founded by someone who claimed *they weren't God*; they just had a plan on how we could please him. In the history of religion, it is a very short list of people who claimed to be God and they were all cult leaders and very dangerous whackos!

Jesus claims he is God and a few billion people on the planet follow him because of those claims. There is no half-way commitment to him. Jesus either is who he claimed to be or he is a lunatic. For example.

"I and the Father are one." The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." John 10:30-33 (ESV)

Jesus was crucified because he claimed to be God. He never recanted. It is a pretty amazing claim.

One important section of Scripture that tells us more about this is John 1. The gospel of John was written by the apostle John. He also wrote 1,2,3 John and many believe he also wrote Revelation. In John 1, he brings together two of the major cultures of his time as he tries to explain to them the identity of Jesus in his incarnation.

The Jewish culture had the concept that the Word of God was preeminent and powerful. They saw the power of God's Word from the creation story in Genesis. They believed God's Word always accomplished what it was sent out to do. God's Word was powerful and behind every created thing.

The Greek culture was the other dominant culture of the day. They were very philosophical in orientation with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander the Great. They traced the history of their philosophy back to a man named Heraclitus. He was so powerful a man that his face was on the coinage of their day, not unlike George Washington is on our dollar and quarter. He said the most important, essential, powerful thing in the world was *the word* or the *logos* (*Greek for word*). The logos created, and the logos held the world together. John sought to take the concept of *the Word* from Jewish thinking and the concept of *the logos* from Greek thinking and bring them together in Jesus Christ as he described Christ's identity and incarnation. Read John 1:1-18 and reflect on the underlined verses.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. John 1:1–18 (ESV)

