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## CHAPTER

### 1

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## Great is the Mystery

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. . . . (John 1:14)*

**N**one of us can approach a serious study and consideration of the eternal nature and person of Jesus Christ without sensing and confessing our complete inadequacy in the face of the divine revelation.

Long ago the writer Milton had the courage and the imagination to select "Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained" for the theme of his great literary work, detailing the full sweep from the dim dawn of empty nothingness through to the triumph of Christ following his resurrection.

Milton said when he began his work that he was going to soar "above the Aeonian mount and justify the ways of God to men." When we read

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Milton's literature we are astonished that he accomplished so much of what he set out to do.

A literary critic, in comparing Milton and Shakespeare, once commented that Shakespeare's imagination and brilliance of mind were so much greater than Milton's that he limited himself to small subjects and short sections of history. It was the view of the critic that if Shakespeare had attempted anything as vast as Milton's work, he would have died of plethora of thought—that the vastness of it would have called so much out of the man that his mind would have exploded.

That was one man's opinion and I introduce it only because of the feeling of inadequacy we sense even in our mild attempts to discover and expound the eternal truths we find within God's revelation to man.

Think of where the Apostle John leads us, taking us up and into the Godhead where no Milton could go and certainly no secular Shakespeare could ever go. John introduces us to spheres and circles of deity so high and lofty and noble that if we follow him, we will certainly die in the attempt.

What should we do, then?

All we can hope to do is to toddle along on our short legs and gaze heavenward, like a goose whose wings have been clipped but whose heart is in the sky. Those wings just will not take her there.

Now, I have said all of this because my best faith and my loftiest expectation do not allow me to believe that I can do justice to a text that begins: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among

us" (John 1:14) and concludes: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (18).

This is what we will attempt to do: we will walk along the broad seashore of God and pick up a shell here and a shell there, holding each up to the light to admire its beauty. While we may ultimately have a small store of shells to take with us, they can but remind us of the truth and the fact that there stretches the vastness of the seashore around the great lips of the oceans—and that still buried there is far more than we can ever hope to find or see!

Yes, we are told that *the Word was made flesh*. May I point out that within the statement of these few simple words is one of the deepest mysteries of human thought.

Thoughtful men are quick to ask: "How could the deity cross the wide, yawning gulf that separates what is God from that which is not God?" Perhaps you confess with me that in the universe there are really only two things, God and not God—that which is God and that which is not God.

No one could have made God, but God, the Creator, has made all of those things in the universe which are not God.

So, the gulf that separates the Creator and the creature, the gulf between the being we call God and all other beings, is a great and vast and yawning gulf.

### *Bridging the gulf*

How God could bridge this great gulf is indeed one of the most profound and darkest mysteries to which human thought can be directed.

How is it possible that God could join the Creator to the creature?

If you do not engage in deep thinking, it may not seem so amazing, but if you have given yourself to frequent thoughtful consideration, you are astonished at the bridging of the great gulf between God and not God.

Let us be reminded that the very archangels and the seraphim and the cherubim who shield the stones of fire are not God.

We read our Bibles and discover that man is not the only order of beings. Man in his sinful pride, however, chooses to believe that he is the only such order.

Some Christian people and mankind in general foolishly refuse to believe in the reality of angelic beings. I have talked with enough people to have the feeling that they think of angels as Santa Clauses with wings!

Many say they do not believe in created orders of cherubim and seraphim or watchers or holy ones, or in any of the strange principalities and powers that walk so mysteriously and brightly through the passages of the Bible. Generally speaking, we do not believe in them as much as we should, at any rate.

We may not believe in them, brethren, but they are there!

Mankind is only one order of God's beings or creatures. So, we wonder: "How could the Infinite ever become finite? And how could the Limitless One deliberately impose limitations upon Himself? Why should God favor one order of beings above another in His revelation?"

In the book of Hebrews we learn to our amazement that God took not upon Him the nature of angels, but He took upon Him the seed of Abraham.

Now, Abraham certainly was not equal to an angel.

We would suppose that God in stepping down would step down just as little as possible. We would think that He would stop with the angels or the seraphim—but instead He came down to the lowest order and took upon Himself the nature of Abraham, the seed of Abraham.

The Apostle Paul throws up his hands in wonder at this point. Paul, declared to be one of the six great intellects of all time, throws up his hands and declares that "great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16), the mystery of God manifest in the flesh.

Perhaps this is the most becoming approach to the subject for all of us: to just throw up our hands and say, "O Lord, you alone know!" There are so many more things in heaven and earth than are known in our theology—so it is in the deepest sense all mystery.

I would like to quote the gist of what John Wesley said concerning the eternal, mysterious act of God in stooping down to tabernacle with men.

Wesley declared that we should distinguish the act from the method by which the act is performed and advised that we do not reject a fact because we do not know how it was done. I think that is very wise!

I think also that it is very becoming for us to enter into the presence of God reverently, bowing our heads and singing His praises, and acknowledging His loving acts on our behalf even with our words, "It is true, O God, even if we do not know or understand how You have brought it all to pass!"

We will not reject the fact because we do not know the operation that brought it into being.

How much, then, can we know of this great mystery?

We can surely know this, at least: that the Incarnation required no compromise of deity. Let us always remember that when God became incarnate there was no compromise on God's part.

In times past, the mythical gods of the nations were no strangers to compromise. The Roman gods, the gods of the Grecian and Scandinavian legends, were gods that could easily compromise themselves and often did in the tales of mythical lore.

### *Never compromise*

But the holy God who is God, and all else not God, our Father who art in heaven, could never compromise Himself. The Incarnation, the Word made flesh, was accomplished without any compromise of the holy Deity.

The living God did not degrade Himself by this condescension. He did not in any sense make Himself to be less than God.

He remained ever God and everything else remained not God. The gulf still existed even after Jesus Christ had become man and had dwelt among us. Instead of God degrading Himself when He became man, by the act of Incarnation He elevated mankind to Himself.

It is plain in the Athanasian Creed that the early church fathers were cautious at this point of doctrine. They would not allow us to believe that God, in the Incarnation, became flesh by a coming down of the Deity into flesh; but rather by the taking up of mankind into God.

Thus, we do not degrade God but we elevate man—and that is the wonder of redemption!

Then, too, there is another thing that we can know for sure about the acts of God—and that is that God can never back out of His bargain. This union of man with God is effected unto perpetuity!

In the sense which we have been considering, God can never cease to be man, for the second Person of the Trinity can never un-incarnate Himself, or de-incarnate Himself. The Incarnation remains forever a fact, for “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

We ought to turn our thoughts here to those earlier days in man’s history, for after God had created Adam we know that the Creator communed with men.



I have leafed through a book entitled *Earth's Earliest Ages*. I will not say that I have actually read it because I quickly concluded that the author seems to believe that he knows more about the antediluvian period than Moses did. When I discover a man who claims to know more than Moses on a subject in which Moses is a specialist, I shy away from his book.

I admit that I like to dream and dwell in my thoughts upon those ages long past. I have always been fascinated by the Genesis passage which tells us that God came and walked in the garden in the cool of the day, calling for Adam. But Adam was not there.

I do not think we are reading anything into the account by assuming that God's meeting with Adam in this way was a common custom at that time. We are not told that this was the first time that God had come to take a walk with Adam in the midst of bird song and in the fading light.

God and man walked together and because the Creator had made man in His own image there was no degradation in His communion with man.

But now Adam is in hiding. Pride and disobedience, doubt and failure in testing—sin has broken off the communion and fellowship of the Creator with the created. The holy God must reject the fallen man, sending him from the garden and setting up a flaming sword that he might not return.

### *Lost the presence*

Adam had lost the presence of the Creator God and in the Bible record of the ages that followed, God never dwelt with men again in quite the same way.

To the Israelites, God dwelt in the Shekinah, hidden in the fire and the cloud. Occasionally He would appear in what theologians call a theophany, an appearance of the Deity. God might speak briefly with a man as He did with Abraham in the tent door or with Gideon on the threshing floor. God did not linger; His appearance always cautious and veiled.

Even when God showed Himself to Moses it was in the fire of the burning bush or while Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock. The eyes of fallen, sinful men were no longer able to endure the radiant majesty and glory of deity.

Then, in the fullness of time, He came again to men, for "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

They called His name Immanuel, which means God with us. In that first coming of Jesus the Christ, God again came to dwell with men in person.

I will have you know that I am not a prepositional preacher but at this point we must note three prepositions having to do with the coming of Jesus, God appearing as man.

He appeared to dwell *with* men. He appeared to be united *to* men. He came to ultimately dwell *in* men forever. So, it is with men, and to men and in men that He came to dwell.

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I always note with a little chuckle the frustrations of the translators when they come to such passages as “No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).

God’s Word is just too big for the translators. They come to this phrase in the Greek: *The Son hath declared Him*. In the English of the King James Version it is just *declared*. In other versions they skirt it, they go around it, they plunge through it. They use two or three words and then they come back to one. They do everything to try to say what the Holy Ghost said, but they have to give up. Our English just will not say it all.

When we have used up our words and synonyms, we still have not said all that God revealed when He said: Nobody has ever seen God, but when Jesus Christ came He showed us what God is like (paraphrase of John 1:18).

I suppose that our simple and everyday language is as good as any.

“He has revealed Him—He has shown us what God is like!”

He has declared Him. He has set Him forth. He has revealed Him. In these ways the translators shift their language trying to get at this wondrous miracle of meaning.

But that man walking in Galilee was God acting like God. It was God, limited deliberately, having crossed the wide, mysterious gulf between God and not God; God and creature. No man had seen God at any time.

“The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father . . .” (John 1:18)—will you note that *was* is not the tense? Neither does it say that the Son *will be* in the Father’s bosom. He *is* in the Father’s bosom. It is stated in present, perpetual tense; the continuous tense, I think the grammarians call it. It is the language of continuation.

Therefore, when Jesus hung on the cross He did not leave the bosom of the Father.

You ask me, then: “Mr. Tozer, if that is true, why did our Lord Jesus cry out, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ ” (Mark 15:34).

Was He frightened? Was He mistaken?

Never, never!

The answer should be very plain to us who love Him and serve Him.

### *Godhead never divided*

Even when Christ Jesus died on that unholy, fly-infested cross for mankind, He never divided the Godhead. As the old theologians pointed out, you cannot divide the substance. Not all of Nero’s swords could ever cut down through the substance of the Godhead to cut off the Father from the Son.

It was Mary’s son who cried out, “Why hast thou forsaken me?”

It was the human body which God had given Him.

It was the sacrifice that cried, the lamb about to die.

It was the human Jesus. It was the Son of Man who cried.

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Believe it that the ancient and timeless Deity was never separated; He was still in the bosom of the Father when He cried, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

So the cross did not divide the Godhead—nothing can ever do that. One forever, indivisible, the substance undivided, three persons unconfounded.

Oh, the wonder of the ancient theology of the Christian Church! How little we know of it in our day of lightminded shallowness. How much we ought to know of it.

"No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18).