The fullness of God in Christ

Text: Colossians 2:9

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**Scriptures:** Colossians 2:1-13

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 233, 42, 231, ‘Behold the Lamb’, 266, 23, 271, 253, 531+532

Series: Incarnation of Christ (#2)

Occasion: Lord’s Supper

Theme: The liberating and complete truth is that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man.

Proposition: Live for Christ Jesus by being rooted and built up in Him and established in your faith knowing that He is fully God and fully man.

**Introduction**

Christmas is, according to my dictionary ‘*an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed primarily on December 25 as a religious and cultural celebration among billions of people around the world*’. Many people today do not think about the identity of the ‘Christ’ in the word ‘Christmas’ is. If you ask the question ‘who is Christ?’ you will likely get a range of answers, including: He was a good man; He was a madman; He was the founder of an outdated, misleading religion; He was a great teacher.

These ideas about the identity of Jesus are not new. They were expressed by people who met Christ when He was here on earth. People who met Jesus in the flesh did not merely tolerate him – they were either for him or violently against him. Gospel writer records that there was ‘much muttering’ about Jesus among the people in Jerusalem. Some said, ‘*He is a good man*’ (John 7:12). The crowd said to Him ‘*You have a demon*’ (John 7:20). Others said, ‘*He is leading the people astray*’ (John 7:13). He was addressed by others as ‘*Good Teacher*’ (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18).

Jesus spoke as a very wise, good man who did not overturn the revelation of God throughout previous history, but confirmed and completed the Word of God (e.g. Matt 5:17; Heb 1:2). He was a great teacher who expressed complex truths about God’s character, work and kingdom in terms which could be understood by ordinary people, but as John Stott noted, He also clearly explained that He is much more than a teacher of truth. He is the perfect human being who is God in the person of the Son of God.

Bible scholar John Stott wrote “*We cannot regard Jesus as simply a great Teacher, if he was so grievously mistaken in one of the chief subjects of his teaching, namely himself*”. He knew and knows His true identity and reveals this to us in His Word so that we may know Him and in so doing, know God. With this knowledge of the truth, we can then live for Christ Jesus by being rooted and built up in Him and established in our faith knowing that He is fully God and fully man. His two natures, divine and human are revealed in our text today: “*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*”.

We will look at this under two headings:

1. God’s whole fulness in Christ
2. God’s residence in a body
3. **God’s whole fullness in Christ**

At times we can read in the world press media some amazing claims: “*Life has been discovered on the planet Mars*”; “*The COVID virus is a hoax or else a product of 5G technology*”. The question is – are these claims true? In His letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul warns the church about the claims of false teaching based on human ideas and traditions.

Then, in our text, the Apostle Paul makes an astounding statement himself about Jesus Christ: “*In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*” (Col 2:6). Where does Paul get this extraordinary idea from? We do not know for certain whether he ever met Jesus in the flesh. Paul had been a resident of Jerusalem as a child ([Acts 22:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2022.3)) and was also there years later to approve of Stephen’s stoning ([Acts 8:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%208.1)). Jesus was known to have visited Jerusalem ([Mark 11:11](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2011.11); [John 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%202.13); [5:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%205.1)). It is quite possible that Paul could have seen Jesus or heard Him speak during one of Jesus’ several trips there, especially at the time of the Passover when both he and Jesus would have been in or near the temple. As a Pharisee, Paul would likely have had a keen interest in the public teaching of a popular, though unconventional, Jewish rabbi. However, although some suggest a pre-conversion acquaintance of Paul with Jesus based on the Apostle’s words in 2 Cor 5:16 “*we once regarded Christ according to the flesh*”, we cannot say whether or not Paul met Jesus before his dramatic encounter with the resurrected Christ on the Damascus Road.

The primary sources of reliable information for Paul were the eyewitness accounts of the life of Christ which he could readily receive by talking with others who had met and lived with Jesus in the flesh. In that sense we are in a very similar position to him, we too have eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus on this earth in the four gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as the revelation about the person and work of Christ in the New Testament epistles.

The truth that in Jesus, ‘*the whole fullness of deity dwells*’ is evident in many ways, for example:

* His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary. This is naturally impossible. Children are conceived with the direct involvement of both a mother and a father. This is the wonder of God’s design to combine genetic characteristics of a man and a woman together to produce a third unique individual.
* The angel who appeared to Mary described her child as ‘*holy – the Son of God*’ (Luke 1:35). Jesus is completely holy – set apart, ‘altogether other’. This is true for no other human being in and of themselves. It is only true of God Himself.
* The character of Jesus is clearly revealed to us through the true accounts of the gospels. John summarises the fullness of God’s perfect character in Jesus with these words: “*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 1:14). Only God, and God alone is complete in grace and truth.
* The supernatural miracles which Jesus performed evidenced the divine power and authority which only God possesses, for example: Changing water into wine (John 2:1-11); Healing many who were sick with diseases and casting out many demons (Mark 1:34); Feeding the 5000 (John 6:5-14); Walking on water (John 6:16-24). When Jesus forgave sins, he knew that what He was doing only God alone has authority to do (Mark 2:1-12).
* Jesus referred to God as ‘my Father”, whereas no Jew ever spoke directly and personally of God as their father. Jesus claimed unity with God saying, “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30). He said that to know Him was to know God (John 8:19; 14:7), to see Him is to see God (John 12:45; 14:9), to believe in Him was to believe in God (John 12:44; 14:1), to receive Him was to receive God (Mark 9:37); to hate him was to hate God (John 15:23) and to honour Him was to honour God (John 5:23). Jesus used the highly significant words ‘I AM’ to identify Himself as being self-existent and eternal– as only God is. When the Jews asked if He had ever seen Abraham He responded: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am*" (John 8:58).
* Jesus accepted the worship of others e.g. Thomas (John 20:28).

Much more could be said about the direct and indirect claims which Jesus made to His divine nature. In summary, the gospels clearly reveal that in Jesus ‘*the whole fullness of deity dwells*’. When Jesus was incarnate in the womb of the virgin Mary, becoming man, being born, growing up, living and dying, He was not merely a vision, a manifestation, an image, a representation, or a reflection of God, in the words of the writer to the Hebrews: “*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power*” (Heb 1:3).

We can have the greatest confidence that in Jesus Christ ‘*the whole fullness of deity dwells*’. God is not inaccessible and unknown to us. He has come to this earth in the person of the Son to reveal His glorious nature and to show us the way to true knowledge of Him and close relationship with Him. By faith, informed with the absolute truth of Scripture, we can say together with the Apostle John *“we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*”. We have beheld God dwell in a human body, which brings us to our second point:

1. **God’s residence in a body**

We all live today in what is very much a ‘marketplace of ideas’ – a wide range of philosophies, beliefs and religious practices which have become widely accessible to much of the world’s citizens via the internet. Whilst the population of the 1st century AD Roman Empire was clearly not connected with fibre broadband and supplied with fast search engine software, there was much sharing of information. There was also, in part as a result of many competing ideas, much confusion about what was true.

Very much like today, the blending of many false ideas influenced wider society and also affected believers in the church. In Colossae, a city in the Lycus river valley, located in modern day Turkey, the Christians to whom Paul writes the letter of Colossians, were at risk from a mix of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophical speculation and oriental mysticism. This amalgamation of false beliefs is sometimes called the ‘Colossian heresy’.

One of the Greek philosophical ideas which influenced the thinking of many back then was the view that the material world is inferior to the spiritual realm. The body was seen as a prison or tomb in which the soul is trapped. This later developed into what is known as ‘Gnosticism’ a worldview which regarded all matter as being evil in contrast to the spiritual which was seen as being good.

It was against captivating false ideas and empty philosophies that Paul wrote: “*In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*” (Col 2:6). He affirmed the true humanity of Jesus with the word ‘bodily’. The honour, glory and majesty of the human body is revealed in these words. Our flesh and blood are not inherently evil; our bodies are one of God’s glorious gifts to us all who are ‘fearfully and wonderfully’ made in His image.

What corrupts our flesh is not the material from which we are composed, but the evil thoughts which come from souls (Matt 15:19) and affect the way we live and how we use or abuse our body. Christ, in whom the whole fulness of deity dwells has no evil thoughts. What is true for God the Father is true for Him: He is perfectly good and only does good (cf. Ps 119:68). In His body there is no corruption. Christ’s human body is a fitting temple, a truly holy place for God the Son to ‘take up residence’.

Something of the glory of God in Christ the man was seen by the three disciples Peter, James and John at His transfiguration when his face shone like the sun and his clothes become white as light (Matt 17:2). We could say that the human body of Christ largely veiled the glory of His divine nature whilst He lived on this earth. He expressed the truth that in His human body God has taken up residence, when He said, as recorded by gospel writer John: "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body*” (John 2:19-21).

There was nothing that Jesus did to damage his human body; he cared for it by eating, drinking, sleeping and being active and mobile. Yet the body of Christ was severely wounded unto death as a result of the evil intent of others who did not believe that He is who repeatedly He said He is, God and man. We remembered the damage done to the physical body of Christ today in the celebration of Lord’s Supper. “*This is my body which is given for you*” (Luke 22:19). “*The cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood*” (Luke 22:20). We also remember that in three days the dead body of Jesus Christ in which the whole fulness of deity had dwelt, was raised up to life. It is true now and always will be that the whole fulness of God will continue to dwell in Christ, the God-man.

Brothers and sisters, we have already seen His glory with the eyes of faith, the day is coming when we will see Him face-to-face in the renewed flesh of the resurrection (1 Cor 13:12). In a few minutes we’ll sing together the Christmas hymn “Once in royal David’s city”. The fourth verse is as follows:

“*And our eyes at last shall see him,*

*Through his own redeeming love,*

*For that child, so dear and gentle,*

*Is our Lord in heaven above:*

*And he leads his children on*

*To the place where he has gone*”

In the future it will be true for us all who have believed in Christ with saving faith that the whole fulness of the image of God will dwell in us as citizens of the New Heavens and New Earth.

Many people today do not think about who the ‘Christ’ in the word ‘Christmas’ is. We live in a world of competing ideas, as did the Colossians church. There is much confusion, and many do not know who Jesus really is.

Do you know? Can you see that He is more than a good man, more than a great instructor? That He is perfectly wise and leads those who follow Him into all truth. That whilst He is a great teacher, He is so much more and that He taught much about His true nature as being fully God and fully man. “*In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*” (Col 2:6).

The great gift that we, who believe on Christ, have is the true knowledge about His identity. This truth has been entrusted to us so that we may live for Christ Jesus by being rooted and built up in Him and established in our faith knowing for certain that He is fully God and fully man.

AMEN.