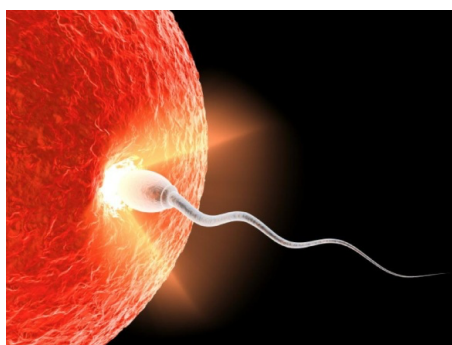


The Conception & Incarnation of Christ.



Part of the Nicene Creed states that: '[Jesus] came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.' But how could Jesus be conceived in such a way that he was both fully Divine and fully human?

One possibility is that God created a fully fertilised egg from nothing and implanted it in Mary's womb. But if He had done this, Mary wouldn't have been the real mother of Jesus, only a surrogate mother carrying God's baby. God would have been using her womb merely as an incubator. The baby wouldn't have had any of Mary's genes so couldn't have been fully human. He would have been the Son of God but not the Son of Man or the Son of David.

Another possibility is that God took one of Mary's eggs, genetically modified it – changing the X chromosome into a Y chromosome – and then caused the egg to spontaneously divide. It is the Y chromosome that is responsible for maleness, so God would have needed to make that switch in the sex chromosome of one of Mary's ova.

But if He had done this, Jesus would have been more human than Divine, more Son of Man than Son of God. Apart from the different sex of the baby, Jesus would have been an identical twin of Mary!

So it seems likely that what God did was this. By His Spirit, He created a male sperm in Mary's womb which had the 23 chromosomes characteristic of a male sperm cell. These chromosomes, including the Y sex chromosome, contained Jesus' 'Divine' DNA and it was this sperm that fertilised one of Mary's eggs which contained her 23 'Human' chromosomes.

Only then could we truly say that Jesus had a Divine Father and a human mother and was therefore conceived as the unique God-Man. From this view of the conception and incarnation of Jesus certain things follow.

First of all, it means that Jesus was real flesh. Many of the early church heresies, like Docetism, said that Jesus didn't have a real body, he wasn't real flesh; he only appeared to be human. They said he was fully Divine but not fully human. But the apostle John refutes this when he writes: "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God." (1 John 4:2&3)

Conversely, Arius of Alexandria and his sect believed that Jesus was human but not Divine, created but not the Creator. Jehovah's Witnesses believe this today. But Jesus said: "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father.... I and the Father are one."

Secondly, Jesus' incarnation means that he was Jewish flesh. Jesus had a Jewish mother and was always aware of his nationality. He was the 'King of the Jews' and said 'Salvation is from the Jews'. Jesus was not a pale-skinned European; he didn't have blonde hair and blue eyes; neither was he a Black man. He was a dark-skinned middle-eastern Jew.

The next characteristic of Jesus' flesh in his incarnation is that he was male flesh.

In 1974, Winston Churchill's grand-daughter, Edwina Sandys, sculpted a figure, in bronze, of Jesus on the Cross which she called 'Christa'. The figure is entirely nude and entirely female. But Jesus was male flesh; he was 'the man, Christ Jesus'. And it's because he was both Jewish flesh and male flesh that he was circumcised.

Finally, and this needs careful unpacking, Jesus was sinful flesh. God sent Jesus in the 'likeness of sinful flesh' (Rms. 8:3 RSV); 'he came with a nature like man's sinful nature' (Rms. 8:3 GNB).

This means that to be fully human, Jesus had to inherit some of Mary's fallen genes ~ those genes which programme us to go our own way and do our own thing.

In order to avoid facing this particular truth, the Catholic Church introduced the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (proclaimed as an article of Faith by Pope Pius IX in 1854 and now celebrated every year on 8th December) which says that Mary, when she herself was conceived, was free from any personal or hereditary sin. They say she needed to be a perfect mother in order to have a perfect son. This is not true.

Jesus knew from personal experience the real and internal temptation of the flesh.

But whereas the first Adam yielded to temptation and disobeyed God, the second Adam, Jesus, always successfully resisted temptation and obeyed God; hence he remained the sinless Son of Man and Son of God.

Jesus had to be made 'like his brothers in every way'. This means that he can feel with us and help us in our temptations because he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, experiencing the power of sinful flesh from within his own humanity. (Heb. 2:17&18)

But perhaps the true mystery of the incarnation (and something we can all agree on) is best captured by Charles Wesley in these words from one of his hymns: -

'Let earth and Heaven combine -
Angels and men agree -
To praise in songs divine
the incarnate Deity -
Our God contracted to a span -
Incomprehensibly made man.'

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