

## Is Jesus Eternal?

This question leads to a deeper and fuller contemplation and understanding of the person of Jesus as well as the Incarnation. It is, then, a good and helpful question to consider as we approach the celebration of Christmas, the birth of Jesus.

Some related questions that might help to gain a deeper understanding of Jesus are:

- Did Mary give birth to God? How could that be since God has no beginning and no end?
- At the Incarnation, did the Son of God just dwell within a human body? In other words, did God just make a human body and dwell in it?
- God cannot die (true). Jesus is God (true). Therefore, Jesus did not die. Is that conclusion true? If not, why not? How could it be otherwise? Can God die?
- Jesus was fully human, which is why He went to the Baptism of John – to have original sin removed. True or False? Why else, after all, would He go to the baptism of John?
- Did Jesus have 2 intellects?
- Did Jesus have the virtue of faith? An easier question is: did Jesus *need* the virtue of faith?

In order to answer these questions or even, we might say, to just really know the person of Jesus and have a greater appreciation for the Incarnation, there are 3 things that we have to really fix in our minds about Jesus:

- Jesus is *fully* human
- Jesus is *fully* Divine.
- Jesus is *one* person. These 2 natures are fully integrated into *one* person. He is *not* 2 persons.

Do these things seem obvious? Well maybe, but if so, then there should be no problem easily answering the questions posed above. I suspect that you probably can, but it might still be interesting and helpful to continue our contemplation of these 3 things, thus coming to know Jesus better, thus serving as a good preparation for the celebration of His birth.

**Jesus is fully human.** What are the implications of that? One implication is that He has a real human body. That means He had all 5 senses: taste, smell, touch, hearing, and sight. This means that in and through His human nature He could (and did) experience real pain and real hunger, for example. He fasted for 40 days and what does Scripture say about Him at the end of those 40 days? He was hungry.

Fully human also means that He had a real human soul. And what are the faculties of the human soul, the faculties that make it distinctly human in the material realm? They are: intellect and free will. So yes, Jesus had a real human intellect and a real human free will. Do you remember our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane? "Father if it be possible let this cup pass Me by; yet, not My will but Your will be done." He's praying to God here. But how can that be? How does that make any sense? He *is* God. How can He speak to the Father of His will, when the Divine Will is *His* will?? He is speaking here of His *human* will. Jesus accepted the horribly brutal work of our salvation through (or including) His fully human nature.

Fully human means that our Lord also had the passions – feelings, emotions, desires. Were His passions disordered by original sin? Our Lord's core identity is...what? He was primarily what? Teacher? Healer? He was, and is, those things but His core identity is that of Savior. Teaching and healing are simply part of His work as Savior. But if Jesus had original sin, He Himself would need saving. There would have to be another that would save Him, which would mean that He can't be *the* Savior. So no, Jesus was free of original sin. The baptism of John is too much to go into here but suffice it to say here that our Lord went there to "identify," in a certain sense, with sinners. This alone is worth our contemplation. The tremendous care He shows by this seemingly simple act. Perhaps we will say more about this when the Feast of our Lord's Baptism comes up. Coming back to Jesus' passions (feelings, desires, etc), our Lord had them and manifested them. He wept (over Jerusalem, and at the death of Lazarus), He experienced joy as well as anger (the cleansing of the Temple), as did His Mother Mary; the joyful mysteries are called joyful and the sorrowful mysteries are called sorrowful, in part, because they really were joyful and sorrowful for our Lord and our Holy Mother, just as they are for us. But in our Lord's case, the passions operated as they are intended to by God; briefly, this means (for one thing)

that He controlled them, they did not control Him. It also means that His passions compelled His human nature towards God, not away from God – which is the disorder of the passions caused by original sin.

Jesus had a human intellect so did He learn? This is a more difficult question and here we can really appreciate the teaching authority of the Church coming to our aid. Dr Ludwig Ott, a German theologian, compiled many (perhaps nearly all) of the dogmas and doctrines (definitive teachings) of the Church in a book called “Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma.” It is considered a very reliable source. I will use Ott for this question. First, we have to ask: what do we mean by learning and/or how do we learn? Human beings learn through their senses. For simplicity, let’s just say that something comes into us through one of our senses – hearing or sight or touch for example. Then our mind abstracts the information and stores it as a “concept.” For us, this is how we learn everything. Do you know what rat poison tastes like? Hopefully not! But that’s because you’ve never taken that information in. But you probably do know what hamburger tastes like. For us, this applies not just to simple things like taste but to things like knowing how to read as well. So we come back now to the question of: did Jesus learn. The answer, as Ott points out, is yes, but only in a limited sense. He learned “experiential” knowledge only; all other knowledge He had was either infused into His human intellect, or He was drawing on Divine knowledge. What experiential knowledge means is just things that we experience directly from our senses. So He experienced, for example, hunger and “hunger” was “stored” (say for simplicity) in His human intellect. He experienced pain and, being fully human, He “stored” it in His human intellect. His human senses and intellect learned what fish and bread taste like through the experience of tasting them. So did He have real human knowledge *through learning*? Yes, but only in this limited sense. As far as knowledge of “higher” things goes – for example, knowing He is – this was either infused into His human intellect or He drew upon His Divine intellect. Errors about this can easily and greatly mislead us. I once saw a movie about Jesus and it portrayed Him as trying to figure out who He is and what He was going to do, figuring out and choosing a line of work, and so on. It may very well be that the people making this movie had good intentions, but it was, nonetheless, a gross misrepresentation of the reality of the person of Jesus. He knew who He was and what His mission was; He didn’t have to figure it out in the same way we do.

Faith is necessary for man to enter into relation with God. Jesus was fully human so did He have faith – the easier question (once again) is: does/did He need faith? The answer to this question is not immediately obvious. To answer it, we first have to ask: what is the virtue of faith, what is it for? God, in His essence, is pure spirit, which means that we cannot see Him directly. In “nature” (or by nature) the only things that we can have certitude about are those things that we can directly and immediately see. For example, if the weatherman predicts snow for the next day, we cannot be certain that it will snow the next day until the next day comes – that is to say, until we can immediately and directly see the next day. Likewise, we cannot immediately and directly see God, and yet, we can have absolute certitude about Him – and not only His existence but all that He has revealed as well. Why? How? There is nothing else like this. In order to have the capacity to have absolute certainty about something that we cannot immediately and directly see, something has to be added to our soul to enable us to do that. That something is called the virtue of faith. The virtue of faith is not exactly belief, it is rather that which *enables* belief (certitude), about something we cannot immediately and directly see, specifically belief (certitude) about God. Those in Heaven do not need faith because they *do* see God “face to face” as St Paul puts it; they *do* (now) see God directly and immediately; this is what’s called the beatific vision. Now it is generally held (I say it that way because I don’t know that it has formally been declared as a dogma) that Jesus had the beatific vision from the moment of His conception. So did Jesus have the virtue of faith? Well what we can say for sure is that He didn’t need it or use it if He did have it (which means He probably didn’t have the virtue of faith) simply because He “saw” directly and immediately, like those in Heaven, and therefore didn’t need it.

This concludes the meditation that I wanted to present on Jesus’ humanity. Unfortunately we are out of space so we will have to return to this topic in next week’s article, starting with Jesus’ Divinity and then moving on to the integration of these 2 natures in one person. At that point, we will be in position to answer the remaining questions posed at the beginning of this article, including the central question of: Is Jesus eternal.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.