

## Is Jesus Eternal?...Part 2

In anticipation of the celebration of the birth of Jesus, last week's bulletin article posed the question of: Is Jesus eternal, along with a number of other related questions. In order to answer those questions, we have to contemplate the person of Jesus: His full humanity, His full Divinity, and the integration of those 2 natures into one, *one*, person. Last week's article talked about the full humanity of Jesus. This article, then, will start with the Divinity of Jesus.

On the one hand, there is no limit as to what could be said about His Divinity – His “full Godness,” if you will – since God is infinite and we can never fully grasp Him. On the other hand, His Divinity can be covered rather briefly and simply because whatever pertains to God pertains to Jesus. He is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Divine Trinity, and thus fully God. Through His Divinity, then, He is all-powerful, all-knowing; God cannot die so the Divinity of Jesus cannot die; God cannot suffer so Jesus cannot suffer in His Divinity; He is life; He is absolute truth, and so on.

One of the most important things that we have to really anchor in mind is that our Lord's two natures are fully integrated into one, single, individual person. In case you ever hear the term “the Hypostatic Union,” it refers to this union of the two natures of Jesus in one person; hypostatic comes from Greek: hypo meaning one and stasis meaning something like substance – so He is one “substance,” i.e., one person. He is fully human, fully Divine, and *one* person. He's not two persons (or people); He is not half-and-half; His Divine nature does not negate or overwhelm His human nature; the two natures are not just “glued” together in some way; the Divinity did not somehow just hover over or around His human nature; no, the human and Divine natures are fully integrated into one person, the person of Jesus. At the Annunciation, when Jesus was conceived, God did not just create a human body and dwell in it. God dwelt within Mary from the moment of her conception, but she was not a divine person like our Lord.

What is this like, this union of our Lord's two natures? How can we picture it or imagine it? We cannot actually form a true concept or picture of it in our mind because there is nothing else like it in nature; we don't have any experience of anything exactly the same as the hypostatic union. However, there are some analogies that can help gain at least some approximate understanding and I think the best analogy is that of body and soul. We don't say things like: oh that's not me, that's my soul; or: that's not me, that's my body. No, our body and soul together form a single, individual person. Likewise, the human and Divine natures of Jesus are united (or “form”) a single person.

The questions posed help to iron this out and thus help to truly know, and know in a fuller way and more fully appreciate, our Lord. Let us come now to the question of: Is Jesus eternal? Well, what do we know?

- Jesus *is* the second person of the Divine Trinity, the Son of God (He is God).
- God *is* eternal (which means He has no beginning and no end).
- But did the Son of God always “have flesh?” Is Jesus' humanity eternal? No.
- What do we mean by the person of *Jesus*? Do we mean the Son of God *without* His humanity? No.
  - Our Lord's humanity began in time. It had a beginning. It is not eternal.

So we have to answer:

No, the person of *Jesus* is not eternal because Jesus is *one* person, a person with a full human nature as well as a full Divine nature, and the *human* nature began in time.

Consider the other questions posed. At the Incarnation, did God just create a human body and dwell in it? This one was already answered and the answer is no, which is fairly easy to see. God actually dwells in every baptized person who is in a state of grace. So just dwelling within a human body is not enough to say: yes, that's Jesus. Our Lord, in the Tradition of the Church, is referred to as a Divine Person (with a human nature) rather than a human person, which emphasizes that He did not just dwell within a human body.

Did Mary give birth to God? I think most Catholics will quickly and easily answer yes to this question. But if we did not have the Church's teaching authority to tell us that that is in fact what God has revealed, it would not

be such an easy question to answer. In fact, there were many heresies (false teachings) about the Trinity and the person of Jesus (Christology) in the early Church – and this was one of them. A bishop by the name of Nestorius refused to say that Mary was/is the Mother of God, because God had no beginning; thus, Nestorius wrongly claimed that Mary only gave birth to the human nature of Jesus. This splits Jesus into two persons; it means His Divinity and humanity are not united in a single person. If that were true, it means that we are not yet redeemed, that a path to Heaven has not yet been opened. This is so because the “debt” to God incurred by sin is an infinite debt and can only be paid by an infinite being, one of infinite value. There is only one infinite being, God. If Jesus is (somehow) two people (or persons) and only His human nature hung on the Cross, then His sacrifice, as good as it may be, is not of infinite value and thus we are not redeemed. The Church declared the truth, then, that: yes, Mary is the Mother of God because it goes to the true identity of Jesus. It cannot be otherwise. Yes God is eternal, but Mary gave birth to Jesus and Jesus is one person, not two, and He is God. To say that Mary did not give birth to God, denies the true identity of Jesus. As you really think about this, it helps us realize just how committed our Lord is to us. He held nothing back; He gave His all for each of us.

Consider again the little syllogism: Jesus is God. God cannot die. Therefore, Jesus did not really die. Both of the premises are true – Jesus *is* God and God *cannot* die. But yet the conclusion is false, Jesus *did* die. What’s wrong? “Jesus’ death” refers to His human nature. Human death means that the human soul separates from the human body and so the body becomes lifeless. So yes, even though His Divine nature did not (and could not) die, Jesus did experience human death – His human soul separated from His human body at the Crucifixion and His human body became lifeless. Did His Divine nature stay with His human body after His death? Yes, once the Son of God “took flesh” – became man – it was permanent; Jesus will not cease to exist, He will have no end. The Son of God will now always retain His human nature. If He gave up His human nature, then the person of Jesus would cease to exist. This point alone is worthwhile really dwelling on because it reveals the depth of His love and care for man. Suppose you had a great love of dung beetles – a small, nothing bug that thrives on dung – and you loved them so much that you not only became one of them and suffered intensely for them to save them, but you kept the nature of a dung beetle even after you finished that work. Even if you had a great love of them, wouldn’t you want to shun the dung beetle nature after you saved them and return, once again, to your purely human state? This analogy is not an exaggeration; in fact, it *understates* the condescension that God made in becoming man. Human nature is infinitely less than God.

Our Lord’s love of man, of each individual person, that He shows us by retaining His human nature even after His redemptive work, is stunning. Does He do something with His human nature? Well, recall when Moses went up the mountain to get the 10 commandments. When he came down, he found the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. God said to Moses: I will destroy these people and make a great nation out of you. God ended up sparing them... why? Because Moses stood in the breach between God and man and pleaded on their behalf. This is what our Lord now does for us – in and through His humanity. He stands before God (as priest – one who offers sacrifice) pleading on our behalf, offering the merits of His sacrifice for us, a Passion He suffered in and through His humanity. This is what He now makes present to us in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Can we really think about what He has done for us, and continues to do, and not be moved to respond to it?

I hope that everyone, starting with myself, will take some time this Christmas season to really think about the person of Jesus, what that all entails, and thus come to a deeper appreciation of what He has done for us, the great care that He has manifested for each one of us individually. Salvation is not cheap. Can we not do what He asks in order to receive it? What can we do? He told us – the first step is to receive His mercy. This is why He became man. Please think long and hard before you shun the sacrament of Confession, before saying no to One who has done so much. Is it really that hard to trust someone or believe someone who does so much not just for “mankind” but for you individually and personally? The sacrament of Confession is not some horrible burden forced upon us; it is the means for a great unburdening, the reception of God’s mercy, the very thing that the person of Jesus came to bring to each and every one of us. The greatest gift we can give Him is to gratefully accept the one He brings to us. Let’s take care to not be ungrateful by rejecting His unimaginable gift of mercy.

A very Blessed and Merry Christmas to all! God bless you, Fr Kuhn.