

Who is Jesus Christ?

He is the Son of God. He is the Messiah.

He is from the beginning, from before the world began.

He is the Word of life.

He is the revealer of the Father and the mediator of salvation.

He is our fellowship with the Father.

He is human and divine. He is our access to the Father.

He is an advocate for sinners. He is our redeemer.

His work is God's work. He is our participation in God.

He is the promised anointed one of God.

To us, the answer to the question "who is Jesus Christ?" may seem obvious and indisputable.

But in the early Church there was uncertainty, confusion, and conflict regarding who Jesus is.

Within St. John's community tensions arose

when a faction began promoting its own understanding.

John exhorts the members of his community to remain faithful

to what they were originally taught by him: **Jesus is the Son of God who took on human flesh.**

Those who hold and proclaim something different than this John labels as false teachers.

He encourages his people not to be swayed.

These false teachers were promoting what was later called Docetism,

a term rooted in Greek words for "apparition" and "phantom".

According to Docetism, Jesus' historical and bodily existence, his human form was not real.

It was counterfeit. It was an illusion. He looked human but his body remained heavenly.

Jesus appeared to be human but he really wasn't human.

He never took on human flesh, he only appeared to do so.

So, the suffering during his passion wasn't really human suffering.

His death on the cross wasn't human death. It only appeared to be so.

According to Docetism...to think that God experiences suffering and death is unacceptable,

it is contrary to a sound human understanding of divinity.

This controversy was officially settled by the Council of Nicaea

which took place 300 years after the resurrection event.

Docetism was condemned as heresy.

In Jesus Christ, divinity merges with humanity at the moment of his conception.

He has a pre-existent soul, one that existed before time itself

and he has a created human soul, one that didn't exist until he was conceived in Mary's womb.

With the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, something totally new is created.

This is simplistic but when the colors blue and yellow are mixed, when they merge together,

the result is something different from the original components: the color green.

Why is any of this important? Lest we conclude otherwise, Christmas is not a matter of a simple birth.

This is not your ordinary baby. There is something here that is human but also beyond human limitation.

Also, if we never ponder the theological matters that had to be settled within Church history,

we will never fully appreciate the faith that has been handed on to us.

And we will never appreciate the lengths to which God has gone in His love to save us from our sin.

Who in their right mind gives up infinity to become finite,

so that what is finite might gain a share in what is infinite?

On a practical level, we embrace love as a central premise of the Christian life.

How do we measure this love? How do we know we are living in love?

The love shown by Jesus Christ is our standard of measure.

Out of love, he gave up what is perfect, his divinity, and took on what is imperfect, our humanity,

so that in turn we might share in the perfection of everlasting life.

How might this be lived out? Are we willing to give up heat in this cold weather,  
so that a stranger or even an enemy who is cold might share in the warmth we so zealously cherish?  
Are we willing to give our coat to someone who is cold, even an enemy,  
and suffer the cold ourselves in exchange?  
Can we believe that such an experience will create something new as far as the quality of our existence?

(If you've been looking for a New Year's resolution, here it is. Ponder and practice this mystery of our faith.)

Today's prayer: "O Lord, increase my understanding of Your Son Jesus Christ. Increase the depth of my love for the Life he brings to this world. Amen!"