

## “Could Jesus Catch Covid?”

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An Advent Reflection including the carol, *Before the Marvel of This Night*.

Hebrews 2:11-18; 4:14-16

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Please read the Bible passage. You can find it [here](#).

Could Jesus Catch Covid?

No. It wasn't around 2,000 years ago! But other viruses were. Could Jesus have caught those?

Jesus is God-with-us. He is God's Word. He is in the form of God. He is the visible image of the invisible God. He is the radiance of God's glory, the exact imprint of God's nature.<sup>1</sup> He is God the Son birthed eternally of God the Father.

Could someone like that need a Benadryl?

A Roman Catholic Archbishop in Australia posted this picture.<sup>2</sup> How do you react to it?

If Jesus were a toddler today, could he catch Covid? Could others catch it from him? It all seems so . . . human.

Remember when Jesus' parents lost him, then found him in the Temple? After that it says, “*Jesus matured in wisdom and years. . .*”<sup>3</sup> But if Jesus has been from before the beginning, if he's eternal, if he is God, why would he have needed to grow up?<sup>4</sup> It's such a human thing to do.



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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 1:23; John 1:1-14; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3.

<sup>2</sup> <https://twitter.com/ArchbishopMark/status/1297811615820075008>. The responses archbishop Mark Coleridge received were often virulent. He was accused of heresy, blasphemy, and sacrilege. People concluded he has no faith, or is a Satanist, and is going to Hell. Someone asked how Jesus and Mary could get sick if Jesus (and Mary in Catholic theology) were free of Original Sin? Someone fumed that, since Jesus used his saliva to heal a blind man, it could not spread an illness. All these responses were on the archbishop's Twitter feed.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 2:52 (CEB).

<sup>4</sup> A question Stanley Hauerwas asks in his 2011 sermon, “Begotten, Not Made: The Grammar of Christmas.” [www.abc.net.au/religion/begotten-not-made-the-grammar-of-christmas/10100920](http://www.abc.net.au/religion/begotten-not-made-the-grammar-of-christmas/10100920)

## In Every Way

The Bible's "Letter to the Hebrews" emphasizes again and again how much more superior Jesus is. Jesus is greater than any prophet. He is greater than any priest. He is greater than any angel. He "*perfectly mirrors God, and is stamped with God's nature.*"<sup>5</sup> After that, can we say any more about Jesus?

That same Letter to the Hebrews thinks so. We heard some today.

*... since people share in flesh and blood, Jesus also shared the same things — flesh and blood — in the same way.*<sup>6</sup>

*... Jesus had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way.*<sup>7</sup>

*... Jesus is able to help those who are tempted, since he himself experienced suffering when he was tempted.*<sup>8</sup>

*Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, except he did not sin.*<sup>9</sup>

All this is about how much Jesus is like us, how human he is.

It's always been a temptation to think Jesus only seemed to be one of us, that his humanity was somehow an illusion.<sup>10</sup> No. When Jesus thirsted, he was actually thirsty. He really hungered. He battled temptations. He got tired. He experienced fear. He wept real tears. He suffered real agony. He died, really. Nothing was fake about him.

## Chalcedon

Jesus' human-ness. Jesus' God-ness, How does this get sorted out?

Have a meeting!

From Christianity's earliest days onwards, important leaders and thinkers have gathered together to wrestle out what we believe. Ours is thinking tradition, and understanding our faith matters.

Two weeks ago, I talked about one important meeting, the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. A little over a century later, another council met up the road in *Kalkadon*, a suburb of the imperial capital Constantinople. They met to sort out how Jesus is both "God with us" and "human like us." They brought together nearly five centuries of reflection, and

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<sup>5</sup> Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translation of Hebrews 1:3.

<sup>6</sup> I've tried to express the flow of thought in Hebrew's 2:11-14, based on the CEB translation.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 2:17.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 2:18.

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 4:15.

<sup>10</sup> That belief is called Docetism. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Docetism>. The Church has firmly rejected it.

wrestling with Scripture, and vigorous (sometimes mind-numbing) debate.<sup>11</sup>

What they came up with sounds very philosophical.<sup>12</sup> That's good; it needed to be well thought-out. It also sounds like lawyers wrote it. That's good too; it needed to be worded carefully. But it doesn't set to music so well. Nor does it lift ones' heart like some other creeds do. That's okay too.

What matters is how they balanced the God-ness and the human-ness of Jesus, without reducing either.

Two Natures, One Person

In a nutshell, that's how they put it.

They realized that Jesus is completely and fully God, and he is completely and fully a human being. Being human does not "turn down the volume" (so to speak) of his God-ness, and being God does not "turn down the volume" of his human-ness. His God-nature is just like God the Father's and God the Holy Spirit's. His human nature is just like ours.

It's not that there are two Jesuses—the "divine Jesus" and the "human Jesus"—crammed together. He isn't two parts. He isn't divided. He isn't a hybrid. He isn't a human body with the human soul, will, and mind removed and divine ones transplanted in. Jesus is one person, whole and integrated, and he has two natures: he is all human, he is all divine.

Don't worry, this won't be on the test. There is no test! This is mind-boggling stuff.

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<sup>11</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1897), 104.

<sup>12</sup> This is commonly called "The Chalcedonian Definition."

*Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach people to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in human nature, truly God and truly human, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his humanity begotten, for us and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the Godbearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.*

I adapted from a translation by Henry Battenson (<http://anglicansonline.org/basics/chalcedon.html>) My changes reflect the inclusive meaning of the Greek word *anthropos* which was traditionally translated as "man" but which is a non-gendered term for a human person.

Should we expect any less when it comes to Jesus? These folks at Chalcedon weren't trying to explain Jesus. They were trying to express him, so that in our following of him, our talking about him, our love for him, we can be true to him.

Mirror, Mirror

Jesus is a window. Because he is God-with-us, we look at him and see who God is, what God is like.

Jesus is a mirror. Because he is human like us, we look at him and see ourselves.

Sort of.

It's not simply that Jesus is *as* human as we are. That assumes we, or any of us, or all of us together are the model of what it means to be human, and Jesus somehow fits our model. We are not the model.

Jesus is. He is more human than we are, because he did not sin. He always walked in step with God and God's ways. My sin is not part of my humanity. It is the diminishment, the distortion of my humanity.

It's like we're standing in front of one of those fun-house mirrors, the kind that is bent and curved so what we see in it is all out of shape and size. Imagine if that's the only way I ever see myself, and looking at you in the same mirror is the only way I ever see you, and everyone else. We'd think that's normal. That's who we are. It's not.

When we see Jesus, fully human undiminished and undistorted by sin, we finally see who we truly are made to be, meant to be, and will become. We are distorted; he undistorts us. We are diminished; he increases us. When we are pointed at Jesus, when we trust in Jesus, when he is our Master and our Model, the Holy Spirit is working in us, making us more and more like Jesus.

Jesus is the most human person ever! And, don't forget, he is God forever! So he can free me from my sin, and you from your sin, so we can be fully human too, like him.

A Teasing Taste

Lets hear a Christmas carol, *Before the Marvel of This Night*.<sup>13</sup> It's by two American Lutherans: Jaroslav Vajda wrote the words, Carl Schalk composed the music.

The song imagines the marching orders being given to the army of angels, as they're about to fill the earth on the night of Jesus' birth. It begins with them summoned to prepare with prayer, then burst into the world with sky-tearing proclamations of peace.

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<sup>13</sup> Voices United #40. For more information about this song, along with Vajda and Schalk, see [https://hymnary.org/text/before\\_the\\_marvel\\_of\\_this\\_night](https://hymnary.org/text/before_the_marvel_of_this_night), [https://hymnary.org/person/Vajda\\_JJ](https://hymnary.org/person/Vajda_JJ), and [https://hymnary.org/tune/marvel\\_schalk](https://hymnary.org/tune/marvel_schalk).

In the second verse, they won't worry about waking the neighbours as they sing bliss, which is perfect happiness and great joy. The last verse tells of the love they've known and experienced in the presence of God, now into our loveless and deathly world breaking.

One line I notice in particular:

*Give earth a glimpse of heavenly bliss,  
a teasing taste of what they miss.*

That's what Jesus gives us: a glimpse of God and a teasing taste of ourselves. We savour in him what we have been missing, including who we really are. We realize what he has to give us, including (finally) our true selves.

. . . O, yes. I think Jesus would be wearing a mask. He is love, and protecting our neighbour is what love does. It's truly human. Amen.

Please listen to *Before the Marvel of This Night*

You can find it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7DduTxHqt4>