

## Convention Essay

### CHRISTOLOGY AND JUSTIFICATION: A VITAL LINK

The Christian Church claims to have answers to the deepest questions that ever occupied the human mind. Do I exist by accident, or by design? If by design, by whose design? By whose order do I occupy a space on this planet, using up some of its natural resources, and contributing to its landfill? Is life worth while? What's it for -- just to pay your bills and stay out of jail? What are people for? Where am I headed, and how can I be sure I'll end up where I hope to? If the church is to have answers to important questions like these, we need not only a God who exists; we need a God who has spoken. And we have such a God.

When God spoke to a sinful world, he did not first conduct a public opinion poll to learn what people wanted to hear. Speaking through prophets and apostles at many times and in various ways, God gave us the message of heaven in the language of earth. He even gave it to us in written form. And then, after speaking through prophets and apostles, God gave us his final revelation through his Son.

The things Jesus Christ has to say to us are different from what any other religious teacher ever said. He says: "I am the truth. If you want to find out the truth about God, you'll have to come to me to find it out. If anything whatever hinders you from hearing what I have to tell you, throw it away. If it's your eye, gouge it out. If it's your hand or your foot, cut it off."

Realize what a drastic, what a shocking claim it is that Christ makes for himself in those words. The minute you hear them, you can understand how, when Jesus spoke people said: "No one ever spoke the way this man does!" The words Jesus speaks to us are radically different from what any other religious teacher ever told his followers. The people who first heard Jesus speak them came to very different conclusions about Jesus of Nazareth.

When Jesus preached and taught, some of his countrymen said: "He is out of his mind" (Mk 3:21). In plain English: "He's mad!" Others took an even more unflattering view. "You are demon-possessed," they told Jesus (Jn 7:20). In other words, "You're in league with the devil; you're bad." But God saw to it that there were others who recognized Jesus for what he claimed to be. The disciple Thomas was one of those. "My Lord and my God!" he confessed a week after Easter. These are the only three realistic options a person has when seeking to evaluate the words and the work of Jesus Christ. He is either mad, or he's bad, or he's God.

## I.

The topic assigned for this convention essay takes for granted that there is a vital link between what God has told us about Jesus' human/divine nature (that's "Christology") and God's "Not guilty!" verdict on the sinner (that's "justification"). The purpose of this convention essay is to explore the link between the two.

Before we can do that, however, there's a question we must ask. The question may strike your ears as harsh, but we must ask it: "What qualifies Jesus of Nazareth to save anybody?"

The Christology taught unanimously by both Old and New Testaments is that **in Jesus Christ a human and a divine nature are inseparably joined.** Seven centuries before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah called him "Immanuel," a Hebrew name meaning "God with us." Think of it: God joined with us humans! Jesus is the only Savior for sinful mankind because he is one-of-a-kind, both God and a human being -- the God-Man.

That Jesus is a real human being is obvious even to a Sunday School kid. He spent nine months as an unborn baby. He was born of a human mother. He ate and drank. He grew from infancy to childhood to teen to grown man. He got tired, he cried real tears, he bled when he got a cut, he died. For you. The Bible calls Jesus "Human." Nobody has difficulty recognizing him as such.

It's a different matter, however, when it comes to recognizing Jesus' divine nature. Many nominal Christians are willing to call Jesus "the Son of God," but back off when it comes to calling him "God." They will acknowledge his human nature, but refuse to recognize his divine nature. We will not identify any link between what the Bible teaches about Christology and what it teaches about the sinner's justification if we refuse to listen here: *the Bible calls Jesus "God."*

Listen carefully. In Psalm 45 the psalmist David addresses the Messiah and says: "Your throne, O God, will last forever." 700 years after the prophet Isaiah foretold that the virgin would give birth to a child who would be Immanuel ("God with us," remember?), the angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary. He gave her this information about the child she would bear: "The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). In describing the high privileges the ancient Israelites enjoyed, the apostle Paul comments: "Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever to be praised" (Ro 9:5). The

opening chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes how superior Christ is to the angels of God. They are merely God's "servants." "But about the Son he says (quoting Psalm 45): 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever'" (He 1:7-8).

The human nature and the divine nature of the God-Man don't exist side by side, like two boards glued together, two pieces of lumber which have absolutely no connection to each other. Christ's two natures are more like body and soul in a human being. Christ's divine nature so permeates and penetrates his human nature that the two together make one person. **In Jesus Christ a human and a divine nature are inseparably joined.** This is biblical Christology.

To the casual observer of religion in America, this may seem to be one of the finer points of Christian doctrine. Is this pretty remote from the beating heart of everyday Christian life? If it is, why should we this morning devote a large block of convention time to this topic?

Satan knows something that casual observers of religion in America don't know. This basic teaching about the person of our Lord is the bedrock on which Christian faith and hope rest. Church history makes it clear that the teaching of the personal union of the two natures in Christ (the human and the divine) was one of the first teachings to be attacked by the opponents of Christ and his church. The attacks started while Jesus was still on earth. When he told the religious leaders of ancient Jerusalem: "I and the Father are one," they picked up stones to stone him down. In bible times, that was the penalty for blasphemy, for mocking God.

About four centuries later **Arius**, a church leader in Alexandria, Egypt, carried half of the church with him when he denied that Jesus of Nazareth had a divine nature. This Arius taught that Jesus Christ was only a man -- so perfect that his followers called him "divine," but only a man. A hundred years later **Nestorius**, bishop of Constantinople, denied that a divine and a human nature were united in the person of Jesus Christ. Nestorius argued -- very logically, I might add -- that the divine nature cannot share its attributes with a human being. He explained: "I cannot worship a God who was born, who died, and was buried." How many Americans would echo his thought, even though they couldn't say or spell his name? Nestorius' solution to the problem was to teach that the Son of God was one person, the Son of Man another person.

A century later a new attack was made on the teaching of the personal union of the two natures in Christ. This time it came from **Eutyches**, like Arius a

prominent leader in the Christian church in Alexandria, Egypt. He began to teach that at Bethlehem the two natures were mingled into one single essence. According to this heresy, Christ no longer has a human nature and a divine nature.

Perhaps more familiar to us is the time of the Reformation. The teaching of the union of two natures in Christ again came under heavy barrage, this time from **Huldreich Zwingli** and **John Calvin**. These men are the founders of the "Reformed" church on your street. They denied that Christ's two natures are inseparably joined since, as they saw it, Christ's human nature is not capable of divine power and wisdom. Their mantra was: "Finitum non est capax infiniti." Even if you don't read Latin, you can figure that one out: "The finite is not capable of the infinite." Finite human nature is not capable of having real communion with the infinite divine nature.

As Zwingli and Calvin saw it, Christ's human nature could not receive divine attributes without being annihilated, like a house not wired for all the electricity flowing into it. They argued, for example, that the minute you ascribe omniscience to a human being, he's no longer a human being. Calvin was a lawyer, and Calvin was above all logical. Of course, that's fine -- until the Bible disagrees with your logic. Then you must, as Dr. Siegbert Becker used to say: "Take off your hat in the presence of the Holy Spirit and give him credit for being more learned than you are."

It was to counteract religious lies such as the ones just described that our Lutheran fathers drew up Article VIII of the *Formula of Concord*. They had this to say about the personal union of the two natures in Jesus Christ:

We believe, teach, and confess that the Son of God, although from eternity he has been a particular, distinct, entire divine person, and thus, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, true, essential, perfect God, nevertheless, in the fullness of time assumed also human nature into the unity of his person, not in such a way that there now are two persons or two Christs, but that Christ Jesus is now in one person at the same time true, eternal God, born of the Father from eternity, and a true man, born of the Virgin Mary ...

We believe, teach, and confess that now, in this one undivided person of Christ, there are two distinct natures, the divine, which is from eternity,

and the human, which in time was assumed into the unity of the person of the Son of God.

These two natures in the person of Christ are never either separated from, or mingled with one another, or changed the one into the other ...

Christ is and remains to all eternity God and man in one undivided person, which next to the Holy Trinity is the highest mystery, upon which our life and consolation depends.

(*Formula of Concord VIII: 6.7.18*).

(That last phrase means that to be saved eternally we need to know this, agree with this, and trust this).

Since errors in Christology are usually of three different kinds, the response of the Lutheran Church (in Article VIII of the *Formula of Concord*) has been a threefold one.

We emphasize, first of all, that since *both* natures belong to the same Person, **attributes belonging essentially to only one nature of the God-Man** (for example, omnipotence and omniscience / being born, dying) **are always ascribed to his whole person.**

If Dame Reason says: "Divinity cannot suffer or die;" then you reply: "That is true; yet because in Christ divinity and humanity are one person, Scripture ascribes also to divinity everything that happens to the humanity, and vice versa. (F.C. VIII:41)

That means that Bible will often name the Savior according to *one* of his natures (either the divine or the human) and ascribe to him attributes of his *other* nature. This works two ways.

In 1 Corinthians 2:8, for example, Paul makes the striking statement that *the Lord of glory was crucified*. Now it surely cannot be said that one of the characteristics of the divine nature is the ability to die. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever; he cannot change. And yet Paul states that the Lord of glory was crucified. He designates Christ according to his *divine* nature and then says something about him which properly applies to his *human* nature. (The Holy Spirit may do that; its his book).

The reverse is also true. The Scripture often designates Christ according to his *human* nature and says things about him which actually and essentially apply only to his *divine* nature. For instance, Jesus once asked his opponents: "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?" (Jn 6:62). Here Jesus is named according to his human nature, but something is said about him which properly is not true of his human nature -- that he existed as a person of the Holy Trinity prior to his becoming a human being. Again, **an attribute which belongs essentially only to one nature is always ascribed to the whole person of the God-Man.**

Are you wondering if this kind of speaking is going to get a believer into hot water? The moment we teach this we have opened the door to all kinds of questions, and to apparent contradictions. The Bible tells us that Christ is *without a beginning*, yet he *was born* of a human mother. He was *born* of a woman, and yet remains *Maker* of the woman. He gives food to all, yet must be fed by his mother. He is the Shaper and the Shaker of the universe, yet must be carried about on Joseph's arm. He is omniscient, yet he grew in wisdom. In the beginning was the Word, yet as a boy he had to learn his Bible passages.

Lutheran Christology simply *states* the truth God has revealed to us about the God-Man without *trying to explain* the truth. It's enough for us to know that it makes sense to God. We're reminded once again that God is a hidden God, who has told us no more about himself than he feels we need to know. Is he under obligation to us to provide a rational explanation for everything he tells us? He doesn't owe us an explanation. He doesn't owe us a nickel. "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk 11:28).

At the time of the Reformation, Luther's Reformed opponents, Zwingli and Calvin, maintained that Christ's human nature is not capable of divine power and wisdom. "The finite is not capable of the infinite." Admittedly that viewpoint makes sense to our human reason. The fathers who drew up the Lutheran confessions, however, saw this as false Christology, because the Scripture speaks otherwise. **Christ's human nature shares in the divine power, knowledge, and glory of the Son of God.** When the Son of God assumed human nature, he communicated divine majesty to it. Referring to the Word who had become flesh, St. John tells us: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the Father" (Jn 1:14). When the disciples looked at the lowly Son of Man they saw all the excellence and majesty which his divine nature shared with his human nature. St. Paul assured the Colossians (2:9): "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

On the pages of the Scripture we learn that God's chosen leaders often performed miracles. They opened up a path through the Red Sea, made an ax-head float, and restored the dead to life. But they performed these miracles through power not their own. By contrast, the Carpenter-Teacher from Nazareth spoke of his divine power as his very own. "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (Jn 2:19), he told the religious leaders in ancient Jerusalem. He could say that because **his human nature shares in the divine power and glory of the Son of God.** *The Formula of Concord* puts it this way:

The entire fullness of deity dwelt in Christ bodily, as in its own body, so that it shines forth with all its majesty, power, and glory and efficacy in the assumed human nature as the soul does in the body, and as fire does in glowing iron (VIII:64).

Because of this communion of the two natures, Jesus Christ had this divine majesty at his birth. St. Paul explains, however, that for most of his life he laid it aside. He kept it concealed, so that if you and I had walked the streets of Nazareth and Capernaum 2000 years ago it's very possible we could have seen but never recognized God himself walking on our planet.

Christology as taught by the Reformed Church has consistently denied that Jesus of Nazareth possessed divine power. "Finitum non est capax infiniti," remember? The heirs of Zwingli and Calvin are willing to admit that Jesus had great power and wisdom, but insist that human nature is not capable of divine power and wisdom without being destroyed. The motives of Reformed theologians may be noble, for all of that; they believe themselves to be safeguarding Christ's glory and sovereignty. In effect, at the end of the day they deny that in Jesus of Nazareth all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.

Their denial actually goes one step further. Reformed Christology denies that Jesus' redemptive acts (all the verbs in the 2nd Article of the Creed: "...conceived, born, suffered, crucified, died, buried, descended, rose, ascended...") were shared by both of his natures. *The Formula of Concord* addresses this error by emphasizing that **Christ performs all his official acts according to both natures**, each nature contributing its proper share to the acts in intimate communion with the other. What our Jesus accomplished in his work as our Priest, our Prophet, and our King may not be ascribed to either of his natures to the exclusion of the other, but must be ascribed to both natures together.

Who was it who came under the law, so he could obey God's

Commandments perfectly, thereby providing the perfect obedience God *demands* of us ... but never *received* from us? Was it the man-child born of the Virgin Mary? St. Paul says no. "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons? (Ga 4:4f).

Who was it who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried? Again, was it the man Jesus? For centuries Christian have confessed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, *God's only son, our Lord*, who was conceived, born, crucified, and buried." For more than four-and-a-half centuries Lutheran children have learned to say, with Martin Luther: "I believe that Jesus Christ, *true God ... and also true Man ... is my Lord, who has redeemed me.*"

Let's say it again. Our faith needs to hear it again. Christ performed all of his official acts according to both natures. To destroy Satan and his murderous plan was not performed by Christ's divine nature independently of his human nature; it was performed through his human nature. The write to the Hebrews made this crystal clear when he wrote (2:14): "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death ..." (There's the human nature) "...He..." (namely the Son of God) "...might destroy him who holds the power of death -- that is, the devil." In every step of Christ's redemptive work his two natures did not act independently of each other. There was a communion, a sharing of the divine and the human natures in each of Christ's official acts.

Reformed theology aggressively disagrees. According to that lawyer-like belief system, to say that the Son of God could suffer and die changes God into a human being. Foolish! Blasphemous! Zwingli and Calvin consistently denied that the *Son of God* shed his blood. They also taught that Christ's human nature must be excluded from all cooperation in works of almighty power, because that would exceed its capability.

The simple Christian asks: "What do the Reformed books do with those clear Bible passages which ascribe Christ's redemptive work to both of his natures?" From the time they could talk we taught our kids to pray at bedtime: "The blood of Jesus, (God's) Son, purifies us from every sin" (1 Jn 1:7). "When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the *death of his Son*" (Ro 5:10). Zwingli readily admitted that many Scripture passages speak of the sacrifice of God's Son, but he insisted these must be understood as referring exclusively to Christ's human nature. he called this an "*alloeosis*," a figure of speech by which one nature is named, but the other one is meant.

Can you guess that Martin Luther had no kind words for the *alloeosis*? He labeled it a device of human reason which gives no credit at all to the Saviorhood of Christ or to the clarity of Scripture. Luther added: "If your reason objects: 'God cannot suffer or die,'

then you answer: 'That's true; yet because in Christ deity and humanity are one person, the Scripture ascribes also to deity everything that happens to humanity, and vice versa. Although deity does not suffer, yet the person who is God suffers in humanity. In truth, God's Son has been crucified for us, i.e. the person who is God.'"

## II.

Take a breath. From what we've studied so far today you can sense how the Lutheran Church has struggled to remain faithful to how the Bible speaks about Jesus Christ, and at the same time to respond to attacks made on it. The language used in Article VIII of the *Formula of Concord* is technical and theological. Maybe that was really necessary back in the 16th century. But perhaps more to the point: as the Christian Church approaches its 2000th anniversary, how important is the doctrine of Christ's two natures? Have the lengthy explanations and the careful definitions and the technical terminology we have reviewed been mere battles about words? The title assigned for this convention essay asks us to address the question: What connection is there between biblical Christology and the sinner's justification? Does it really matter?

In the opinion of many, Jesus Christ was a Jewish carpenter-teacher who taught beggar and king both that there's a whole lot to be said for loving your neighbor. They see in him a heroic martyr who was willing to put other people first. I pray that our review of *biblical Christology* has reminded us that Jesus is God in human form.

From the time the LORD God called: "Adam, where are you?" we have been called to hear our Lord's voice. But to whom are we listening when we hear Jesus Christ speak to us from the pages of his Word? We were reminded earlier that because of the union of the two natures in Christ, his human nature shared in all the majesty and power of God. Contrast this with the statement of the eminent Reformed theologian Charles Hodge: "Omniscience is not an attribute of which a creature can be made the organ." (Can you hear echoes of "Finitum non est capax infiniti?") Do you see how Hodge's statement debases all of Christ's teaching? If what Hodge said is

true -- if our great Prophet is not omniscient, then his ministry is reduced to the level of the prophets of ancient Israel. No offense to Jeremiah there, but our certainty of where we stand with God depends on knowing that **because Jesus is both God and man, when Jesus speaks to us, God is speaking to us.**

It's important to maintain the union of the two natures in all of Christ's work as our *Prophet* and our *King*. But it's absolutely critical to see clearly on this teaching when we study and proclaim Christ's redemptive work, his work as our *Priest*. That's the focus of the concluding portion of this essay.

You will recall that early in Christ's Galilean ministry he was in a house preaching. Some people brought a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to place him before Jesus. When this was impossible because of the crowd, they removed some roof tiles and lowered their friend right into the crowded room, in front of Jesus.

Jesus knew the man lying before him was suffering from a disability that made his life difficult and unpleasant. But Jesus knew also that the man suffered from another problem infinitely and eternally more serious than his paralysis. And so the first thing Jesus said to him was: "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees (those stalwart defenders of the law of Moses) and the teachers of the law who were in the house began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Lk 5:21).

Today people don't accuse Christ of *blasphemy* when he announces forgiveness of sins, but of *irrelevance*. The age we live in has an easy conscience about sin. I'm reminded of the answer the American poet Walt Whitman gave when someone asked him: "Have you made your peace with God?" He responded: "Why, I didn't know God and I were on the outs!"

Back to Jesus' treatment of the paralyzed man. What would've been the use of giving him two sound legs to walk on if the man didn't know where he was going and had nothing to live for? Augustine had it right when he said: "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you." I dare not forget that I am a creature of God. I'm dirt plus the breath of God. The Bible teaches that I have been designed to live under God in a master-and-servant relationship. Your life, my life have absolutely no value in and of themselves. We and everything we call our own are valuable and worthwhile only when we have found our way back into friendship and fellowship with the God who created us. And that will happen only when you and I have heard the message of how the Son of

Mary and Son of God traded places with us in life and in death, so that God could pronounce us "Not guilty!"

With pathetic pride, church leaders today pronounce this message irrelevant for people who have greater concerns as they prepare to enter the 21st century. But was this message irrelevant for the 1st century Jews and Greeks to whom Jesus and the apostles preached? There were social problems in Christ's day -- plenty of them, but he still thought it necessary to bring people the message of sin and grace, of law and gospel. There were plenty of people in Bible times who didn't have enough to eat. Jesus dealt with a man born blind, with a woman arrested in the act of adultery, and with a five-time divorcee. In Palestine there was racial hatred between Samaritans and Jews. Onesimus was a runaway slave. In Ephesus a labor union caused Paul a lot of trouble. In Rome there was anti-Semitism. Why do we think our problems today are so different, or that we need a new message for the people whom God has called us to serve?

You will remember that when God gave his law to his human creatures, he said basically two sorts of things. He said something about *obedience*, and he said something about *disobedience*. The one he demands; the other he forbids. He still says these things to every human being. God says first of all: "I want obedience, and I insist on it." "Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God" (Jer 11:4). But the moment God announces his requirements to his creatures, he has to spell out what will happen if they fail to meet his requirements. God does not say: "If you break my law, well, I disagree, but you have to do what's right for you." What God does say is: "I don't want disobedience, and I forbid it." "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out" (Dt 27:26).

Our Savior, therefore, had a double job to do in order to ransom and rescue us, and to restore us to a place in God's family. As our Substitute he first of all had to provide that perfect obedience to the word and the will of God which God demanded -- but never got -- from us. The one who had no place to lay his head was not permitted to mope or to covet a comfortable cottage by the lake. We call this Christ's *active obedience* -- doing what we had not done.

The other half of Christ's assignment was to undo what we had done. On that awful Friday we call "Good" he suffered the curse God has announced on our sinfulness. "It was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" (Is 53:10). This work we call Christ's *passive obedience*. He

provided this by suffering a substitutionary death, letting God's anger crush the very life out of him, suffering the ultimate torment of the damned in hell. Stop and think. Our God is a righteous God, a God who is true to his principles:

I am the God who punishes every sin.

I am the God who forgives every sin. (Ex 34)

Because of Christ's active and passive obedience this God could -- without compromising his principles -- pronounce a world full of guilty sinners "Not guilty!"

Now what does the doctrine of Christ's two natures have to do with this cardinal doctrine of Christianity -- justification? Everything, that's what. Imagine for a moment that you were perfect, without stain of sin. What could the heavenly Judge say to you when you stand before his judgment throne? What else than "Come, my child, your place is ready. Enter the joy of your Lord." But what if in that moment you were to ask God: "May I take my family along with me?" The Judge would have to answer: "Your holiness is sufficient for you, but not enough for you and them. They'll have to stand before me on their own."

Do you sense the frightful implications of that Reformed Christology -- that God cannot die, that death is incompatible with deity, that Jesus Christ died only according to his human nature? What if Christ obeyed God's law only according to his human nature? What if he died only as a man? Then you and I don't have a Savior. *It's Christ's divine nature personally united with his human nature* which elevates his work to count for you and all of your fellow sinners. If I write you a check for \$100,000, don't get your hopes up; my checking account does not stand for that kind of money. But if you get a \$100,000 check signed by Bill Gates, take it to the bank.

The psalmist has said it well: "No man can redeem the life of another, or give to God a ransom for you -- the ransom for a life is costly; no payment is ever enough" (Ps 49:7f). The deliverance only God can give is not for sale; if it was, you couldn't afford it. But Jesus Christ is no mere human being, either. He, **the God-Man, came to earth as the only one in all of history who could be holy and remain holy.** He did this so that God might credit the holiness of his Son as a free gift to all. What God demands he has given to us in his Son, who became our Substitute. The God whose holiness will not permit him to accept me for what I am is a God whose mercy has accepted me for what Christ is.

Surely he took up our infirmities  
and carried our sorrows,

yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.  
He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before he shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

(Isaiah 53:4-7).

Because of the union of the two natures in Christ, **the God-Man's death on Calvary was actually not a single death, but one death for every sinner who ever lived.** He who had no sin became what he was not -- he became sin for us. He treaded places with you under the judgment of your righteous God. He intercepted and absorbed in his holy body the fiery bolts of God's white-hot anger over your sinful heart and hand. On the skull-shaped hill Jesus was damned by his Father; he experienced hell for you. And now a righteous God can justly consider the penalty for sin to have been paid for a whole world of sinners.

Here is the vital link between Christology and justification. Because the God-Man lives the life we owed, and died the death we had coming, he reconciled a world of sinners to God. Martin Luther wrote many beautiful prayers, but none more beautiful than the one incised in marble at the base of his statue on the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary:

Lord Jesus, are you my righteousness; I am your sin.

You became what you were not, and made me to be what I was not. Might you want to memorize that?

Dr. Martin Luther once made the perceptive comment: "If it's only the human nature of Christ that died for me, then Christ is a mighty poor Savior. We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom of the scale. But if 'God's death' and 'God died' lie in the balance of the scale, then he sinks down and we rise up." If Christ died only as a human being, then he was no more than one of the many great human benefactors who have died in a noble cause. **But if it's**

**the God-Man who lived a perfect life and who died an innocent death, a world of sinners is saved.** That means I am saved. And then life is worth living, and death is worth dying. "I love you, O LORD, my strength!" (Ps 18:1).

Think of what the biblical doctrine of the two natures of Christ means to you as you live out your life in a world that's hostile to Christianity. The Scripture has assured us that Christ ascended to heaven not merely as some sweet saint, but as the all-powerful and ever-present God-Man. The LORD is my Rock, my Fortress, and my Deliverer. When Christ was on earth, in the words of St. Paul, "he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Php 2:7). During the thirty-something years Jesus spent on earth, he kept his divine nature under wraps; he didn't always use it. In what we call his "*state of humiliation*," he chose to be in only one place at a time. If he was in Perea, east of the Jordan River, than he wasn't in Bethany, where Martha later complained: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn 11:21). But Christ is no longer in his state of humiliation. The Ascension festival we celebrated three weeks ago promises that he has ascended far above all heavens. He rules as God-Man from sea to sea, to the ends of the earth -- at your kitchen table, in the hospital corridors, on the runway, over the Oval Office and the Kremlin.

Do you sense the implications of this statement for you? Little five-year old Sarah was afraid to be alone. Her mother told her: "But, Sarah, God is with you." To which the little girl responded: "But I want somebody with skin on." The Helper God sent us is a Helper "with skin on." The One who is seated at the video monitor of the universe is the eternal God ... yet who in the womb of the Virgin wrapped himself in your flesh and blood. He is like us in every respect except that he is without sin. And do you recall he never laid aside his human nature? He may not always have *used* it, but he *retained* it and still retains it. It's our Brother who is alive today in a resurrected and glorified body of flesh and blood who rules the world. He knows your pain, your loss, your broken heart, your homesickness, and he has promised us that nothing in all of creation will separate you from his love. you just have to love the Holy Scriptures!

Seems to me that *those of you who have been called into the public ministry* have additional reason to remind yourself exactly who this omnipresent Lord of the church is. The Lord of the lampstands, the One who guides and oversees the work of his church, who is he? Is it enough to answer: "The Lord of the church is God?" I confess I find that a disturbing thought. If the One who observes and evaluates my ministry is only God, majestic and perfect, then I must know that his holiness is to my ministry what fire is to

stubble. I'm toast, and my work is of no consequence. That's as grim as it gets. That's the bleakness which moves desperate people to go out in a blaze of meaningless gunfire. And then, really, what man is there among us who will dare to say with Isaiah: "Lord, here am I; send me"? Then we'll more likely want to say with Moses: "Here am I; send Aaron!"

The God-Man, my Savior and my Brother, has promised his Christians "that not only his mere *divinity* would be with them, but that he, the *man* who has spoken with them, who has tasted all tribulations in his assumed human nature, and who can therefore have sympathy with us as his brothers -- he will be with us in all our troubles also according to the nature according to which he is our brother and we are flesh of his flesh." (F.C. VIII:87).

Jesus ... my Brother ... sympathizes ... with me! It almost brings tears to your eyes. What a Savior!

Many people feel God is far away and aloof and disinterested. It's hard to understand a God who is remote. Just try to love a God like that. But our Brother has said: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). Because the God-Man permitted his Father to become his Judge, we can look upon him who is our Judge as our loving Father. We can talk to him as dear children talk to a loving father. We know the Father to whose house we are going.

In Jesus Christ God entered life on this planet. This God-Man experienced our hurts, wept our salty tears. He loved people and served the weakest of his creatures. We have no reason to suspect that this has changed now that Immanuel, the God-Man, has ascended. Let me tell you of a widow who has been in a sitting position for live long, weary, painful years. Think about it: five years, unable to stretch, unable to lie down. She wrote: "I have spent many a day alone, but never a lonely day, because of Jesus." Disciples of Christ, this matters! As we live out the lives God has cut out for us, we can rejoice, as the *formula of Concord* puts it, that

"our flesh and blood is placed so high at the right hand of God." (VIII:96).

Enough of "Finitum non est capax infiniti." Accept in simple faith what the Scripture teaches about the union of the human and the divine natures in Christ. Today we have identified the vital link between Christology and justification. And we have something solid to live for, to work for, to die for, something to share. And having that, we have all we need.



Now to him who loves us  
and has freed us from our sins by his blood,  
and has made us to be a kingdom  
and priests to serve his God and Father --  
to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Re 1:5)

### Questions for Discussion

1. What is distinctive about the Lutheran Church's teaching regarding the two natures of Jesus Christ?
2. Agree/disagree:  
The teaching about the two natures of Christ is one of the finer points of Bible doctrine of which the average Christian is unaware, and which does not really touch his/her everyday life.
3. Why did Jesus have to be a real human being in order to be our Savior?
4. Why did Jesus have to be true God in order to be our Savior?
5. When discussing Christ's divine nature, why is it not enough to teach: "Jesus is the Son of God?"
6. The Bible teaching about how God justifies the sinner has been called "the article by which the church stands or falls."  
Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why / why not?  
In your view, is it still considered that today in the Lutheran Church?
7. If God cannot die, how could the apostle Paul say (1 Co 2:8) that the Lord of glory was crucified?  
If Jesus is without beginning and without end, how could he have been born of a human mother?
8. What significance for your life do you see in the truth that Jesus never laid aside his human nature?
9. What difference does it make in your everyday life that Jesus Christ is God?

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