

Was God a Baby?

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So, you're telling me that God became a man. That he was born a male baby to Jewish woman 2000 years ago...and literally became a crying, hungry, helpless baby? Totally dependent on his mother to feed and protect him, and he was God? The notion that God would come into the world sounds fantastic, like something out of a fairytale. Considering it *scientifically*, it has no basis. It is one thing for God to come into the world as a man, but as a baby, born of a virgin? This seems even more preposterous. Yet this is what the age-old Gospels claim. And what about the *historical* reliability of these accounts? Aren't these just made up stories anyway? Finally, why would God come into the world *as a man* and not just drop a book from the sky or enlighten a few philosophers? This is the *theological* question—Cur Deus Homo?—that theologians and philosophers have asked for centuries. So, let's explore this fantastic claim through three lenses: historical, scientific, and theological.

Historically Reliable

The infancy stories are primarily recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew opens his Gospel with a long, questionable genealogy that begins: "[The book of the genealogy \(or descendants\) of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham](#)" (Matthew 1:1). So here we have the family tree from Jesus all the way back to Abraham. The claim of Jesus becoming a man in history is made right here in the genealogy, tracing him back through the prominent king David, to the very beginning of Israel, the father of the nation, Abraham. There are some very prominent, historically documented figures here—Abraham and David (Tel Dan), Mary and Joseph. This is public record. So if it's off, it's easily disputed. *Matthew is really going out on a limb to situate Jesus this deeply in history.* Now, it's also interesting to note that Jesus entered Israel through a rather spotted line, not the best stock. You'd think the King of the world would enter through a notable royal line, or at the very least, scrub out the bad ones. Instead, his line includes several women, which in a patriarchal society was a no-no. Men had the power and prestige. On a more scandalous note, it includes Tamar who was exploited sexually (1:3; Gen 38), and Rahab a prostitute (5; Josh 6). Both would be typically sidelined in society but are bravely included here. *So this ignoble genealogy is not attractive to first century people.* On top of all that, Jesus enters the world through a powerless nation. If you're the King of kings, you'd think he would have come through the Romans or the Greeks, people of real power and global influence. But instead, he came into an obscure nation with a long history of oppression—Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans. Jesus is in the line of an oppressed, deported people and has come to undo their exile (Matt 1:17). *Very unlikely for a king, much less God in the flesh.* What are we to make of this? A very public, ignoble, lowly genealogy. If it is a fictitious tale, and history is really written by the powerful, then the Gospel writers messed up because they publically associated Jesus with social and political undesirables. If you're really going to make a case for Jesus as God in the flesh, you should have done better than this...unless, it's true. To claim this is all fictional seems absurd. It would be awfully ridiculous to go to such great lengths, risk not ingratiating the powers that be, and scandalous identifying with marginalized people, when you could make up a much better history for yourself. But its too specific, too public, and too accurate, to be a wild tale. So

while the claim of God coming as a baby may be in suspense, we clearly have a historically reliable claim regarding the coming of God in Jesus. What does this tell us? God is invested in history, he's unfolding a story he has obligated himself to, from the beginning, such that if he is going to enter the world he will have to do it in the nation of Israel. He can't drop a book from the sky or appear as any old man because he has obligated himself through lineage and promises. Why would he do this? *Because he is serious about the world, about history, and about us.* Why should we even desire God to become one of us? If God became a baby, he gets us. If he did stoop so low, to be born, to grow, to suffer, to rejoice, to eat and drink and play, and die, then God knows what it's like to be you, to be human. He can sympathize. He sympathizes with humanity, with the ordinary, the oppressed, the brokenhearted, and marginalized. We all want a God that gets us, who is in touch with our struggles and hopes, and you can't get any more in touch than becoming one of us. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (we'll consider that next week). Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb 4:15-16).

Scientifically Questionable

Just because it is a historically reliable claim does not mean that the claims of Jesus were true. We could assert, as Richard Dawkins has, that everyone else is delusional about God. Richard Dawkins has compared belief in God to belief in the Flying Spaghetti Monster, belief in one, he says, is as probable as belief in another. He is honest enough to agree that God's existence is beyond proof, but then asserts so is the FSM. The question, he claims, is one of probability, and the coming of God in Christ is all too improbable. A major flaw with this line of reasoning is that he doubts the existence of God by using a scientific category—probability. But this is not a matter of science; it is a matter of faith. It is not chemistry; it is theology. This is not to say that science and faith are mutually exclusive (I believe they can be very well related), but that they are different disciplines that make appeals to different categories or faculties. Here, Dawkins and atheists like him, foist a scientific rationalism on Christianity. They are trapped in science, unable to see the world in any other way. They, like many of us, are prisoners of the Enlightenment, chained to reason alone. Westerners are an ugly kind of creature, all head and very little heart. **Bound to the dark cell of science, we cannot imagine the light of faith that rises with each new day.** Curtis White, author of the cheekily titled, *The Science Delusion* is frustrated with Dawkins etc. since it is *"the narrowest and most reductive understanding of religious experience, and its insistence on the scientific method as the only legitimate approach to truth."* He is convinced that the demotion of the humanities—of poetic, philosophical, and spiritual approaches to truth—is a demotion of humanity itself. To restrict our humanity to the realm of reason is tantamount to hopping into a prison, locking it, and throwing away the key. Science is biased. It's closed minded. I'm open to science and to faith. Are you open-minded? Open to faith? Is the claim that God came in Jesus scientifically questionable? Absolutely. It doesn't fit with strict science. It requires faith.

Theologically Necessary

Taking the position of faith, even for a moment or as a convinced Christian, why should God come at all, and as a man, even a baby? God could have communicated with us in a variety

of other ways. He could have dropped a **book** from the sky, but the reason he didn't is because God is not concerned primarily to win us to his *doctrine* but do something much deeper. He could have appeared as an **adult**, skipped the awkward baby stage, and just shown us his exemplary life, but the reason he didn't is because he wasn't trying primarily to convince us to follow his *code of ethics*, but something much deeper. He could have draw a few men and women into **enlightenment** about his nature and ways, but he wasn't primarily concerned with lofty *spirituality*. Instead he came in the flesh, began as a child, a baby. God did not throw down a book, appear as an adult, or enlighten a few because God in Christ is concerned primarily, not about doctrine, ethics, or spirituality, but with **redemption of humanity & renewal of the world**. As the climax of the history of Israel, Jesus is also the hinge of the humanity. **Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because wall sinned... But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.** Romans 5:4-5. Sin and death through one man, grace and life through one man Jesus Christ. The human predicament is internal. From the inside out we sin and die. In order to get into our system, to recreate humanity from the inside out, God had to get on the inside. He could not just wave a wand. He had to enter the bloodstream of his creation to cure the virus, and appearing as a man would not be good enough. God would have to do the yucky work of being born, the awkward work of growing up, and the difficult work of suffering and dying. He could not simply "appear" as a magic trick. He had to "incarnate" be inscribed in flesh, become one of us, for any of us to be redeemed (Romans 5). At the cross, he swallows the virus of sin whole, and puts it to death in his death. Then, at the empty tomb, he resurrects to offer a new life free from the power of sin and the penalty of death. It has been paid. No baby, no redemption. God also renews the world by becoming a baby. Instead of remaining outside his system, by incarnating, not just assuming human form, Jesus restores a bond between God and creation. In effect, he says "The whole world is worth redeeming." He gives creation value, affirms it, and commits himself to its renewal. **For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.** Rom 8:21-22 Creation will be set free, resurrected, just as we are set free and resurrected in the light of God's everlasting glory. Moltmann: **"The surplus of grace over and over the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of sinners, represents the power of the new creation which consummates the creation-in-the-beginning. It follows from this that the Son of God did not become man simply because of the sin of men and women, but rather for the sake of perfecting creation."** Did God really become a baby? You will have to decide. You will have to make a choice where to put your faith—in science or in Christ. Dawkins vs. God. Which promises a brighter future? You decide. I believe in Christ, we have a historically reliable, scientifically superior, and theologically necessary hope. God born, as a baby, crucified and risen, to redeem history and renew the world. A God filled with so much humility and love that he would do the yucky work of becoming one of us, and the beautiful restoration, of redeeming us. This, of course, would require a perfect, sinless man, which we will look at that next week.