



APRIL 2018

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“THE INCARNATION OF JESUS”

Unlike all other world religions, the Christian Faith centers itself on a truth claim that can be investigated by the human senses. The great deeds of the Hindu god Vishnu, recounted in the *Ramayana*, take place in a long past Yuga (cycle) far beyond our ability to prove or disprove their historical veracity. According to Hindu mythology, the world has ended and begun many times since those events. The Islamic Qur'an records the teachings of Allah but the historical details are only ancillary to the Qur'an's message. The Qur'an says of its own historical narratives, “Such are some of the stories of the unseen, which We have revealed unto you, before this neither you nor your people knew them” (11:49). Islam places its historical claims outside the realm of any historian's prying eyes. Even many conservative Orthodox Jews are willing to say that many of the events recorded in the Old Testament are myths. What matters to them is the Law in the Old Testament, not the historicity.

By contrast, the very center of the Christian creed is the claim that God became a tangible, historical person. Not that He entered “humanity” in some abstract sense or became man in some metaphorical way, but that He became a particular man, Jesus of Nazareth, who was “born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven.” We firmly confess that Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection are historical events in the same way that we say George Washington was the first President under the Constitution of the United States. The historical resurrection is so important that St. Paul says, “**If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, [...] you are still in your sins. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied** (1 Cor 15:14-19).” If Christ was not truly raised from the dead, then we Christians are to be pitied above all people.

Unlike the imagined gods of the world's religions, the Lord God Creator of the universe, fully reveals himself to us in Jesus Christ. The Word of God is not distant from us but “he deals with [us] as a good teacher with his pupils, coming down to their level and using simple means [...] the Word of God, in His great love took to Himself a body and moved as Man among men, meeting their senses, so that [...] we might apprehend the Father through the works which He, the Word of God, did in the body” (St. Athanasius). Jesus taught publicly, performed miracles publically, was crucified publically, and was raised publically so that we could have confidence in what he did on our behalf. Our sins are forgiven because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and you will be raised from the dead just like he was raised in the body.

No one ever saw the Angel Gabriel speak to Mohammed or the Angel Moroni give the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith but multitudes witnessed Jesus' miracles. It is notable that, Jesus' opponents do not accuse him of playing tricks but of performing miracles by the power of “**Beelzebul, the prince of demons**” (Mt 12:24). All of Jerusalem bore witness to his trial and crucifixion, so that Cleopas can ask, “**Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?**” (Lk 24:18). Mary Magdalene, the twelve Apostles, James the brother of Jesus, Paul, and 500 others bore witness to his resurrection (1 Cor 15:6). And they did not lie. There are few people willing to die for something they know to be a lie. When Mohammed said that Allah had spoken to him through an Angel, he gained wealth, wives, and an earthly kingdom. When the Apostles said they had seen the risen Christ, they were persecuted and killed. They did not gain earthly treasure but only death. So take confidence you are not fools but “**in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**” (1 Cor 15:20).



Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum,

Vicar Folks