

JESUS HUMBLLED HIMSELF

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(The following article is based on the pertinent sections of A Short Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, CPH, 1943, and Kurth's Catechetical Helps, CPH, 1961, 70.)

The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed says:

“And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;

“He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

As you can see, this article falls rather neatly into two sections. The first half speaks of Christ's *State of Humiliation*, and the second half speaks of Christ's *State of Exaltation*. Since we are beginning our Lenten season it is fitting that we spend time meditating on Christ's *State of Humiliation*.

Jesus humbled Himself in order to redeem me and all sinners; to give His life a ransom for all.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

1 Timothy 2:5 For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

One Scripture text in particular that speaks very clearly about the *State of Humiliation* is found in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Now some people believe wrongly about the meaning of the words, “...made himself of no reputation.” They take these words to mean that Christ divested himself for a time of attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, so that the divine nature was reduced, or diminished, by the incarnation. They claim that Christ performed His miracles solely as a man empowered by the Holy Ghost like any of the prophets or apostles. This is a grave error which ‘un-deifies’ Christ in a rationalistic and anti-Scriptural manner.

The proper way to think about Christ's *State of Humiliation* is to think in accord with the definition given in the Synodical Catechism, (p. 109, question 134):

“According to His human nature, Christ did not always and not fully use the divine attributes communicated to His human nature.”

It is not that He didn't have them; it is that He did not always and fully use them. Thus, while He usually used a boat, He was also able to walk on the water. While He usually used food and drink that was furnished in the normal manner, He was also able to turn water into wine and multiply loaves and fishes in order to feed the multitude. This correct way of thinking about the

State of Humiliation preserves a right understanding of both the humanity and divinity of Christ.

The Creed presents the humiliation of Christ in six steps:

Conceived by the Holy Ghost;
Born of the Virgin Mary;
Suffered under Pontius Pilate;
Was crucified,
Dead,
And buried.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost. The Bible teaches that the Son of God was conceived, given a human start, by the miraculous working of the Holy Ghost, by whom He received His human body and soul in the Virgin Mary. Jesus' real Father is God. Joseph was the foster or guardian father of Jesus.

Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her [Mary], The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Matthew 1:20 But while he [Joseph] thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

From this we learn that Jesus, though truly human, was true God.

Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. Christ was born a true man.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (See also Mat 1:18)

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Luke 2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

The Christian Church, therefore, in accordance with Holy Scripture, confesses that there is one person of Christ who has two natures: divine and human. He is true God and true Man. As a man He could take my place under the law and suffer and die in my place. As God His fulfilling of the law was sufficient for all people, His life and death were a sufficient ransom for our redemption, and He was able to overcome death and the devil for us.

Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate. During His life and public ministry Christ suffered poverty, contempt and persecution. He was born in a barn, and laid in a manger. Herod tried to kill Him. The people of Nazareth tried to throw Him over a cliff. The Pharisees, Saducees and Scribes plotted to kill Him. Note how Scripture portrays His sufferings.

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Matthew 8:20 And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head.

2 Corinthians 8:9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

But that is not all. Under Pontius Pilate, Christ suffered extreme agony of body and soul. He was mocked, whipped and beaten. He was led through the streets in shame carrying His cross. He was crucified on the hill Golgotha, a shameful and accursed death. He was jeered while He suffered. He suffered the tortures of the damned in hell, crying, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Christ was crucified. Crucifixion was a shameful and accursed death for it says in the fifth Book of Moses:

Deuteronomy 21:23 ...(for he that is hanged *is* accursed of God;)...

But He did this for us, as St. Paul says:

Galatians 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: 14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Crucifixion was also an extremely painful and slow form of execution. Jesus hung from the nails and the wood from 9am to 3pm in great agony before He finally gave up the ghost and died.

Christ was dead. Many rationalists and liberals like to think that Jesus merely ‘swooned’ on the cross, was thought dead, and taken down. But when He was placed in the coolness of the tomb He revived and recovered. This is a lie. Scripture proves that Jesus was physically dead in two ways: first, the soldiers didn’t bother to break His legs because they saw that He was already dead, and second, the centurion pierced Jesus’ side with a spear and blood and water came out. But Scripture also proves that Jesus was legally dead. Pilate, on hearing the report of the centurion, gave the body to Joseph of Aramathea and Nicodemus.

John 19:32 Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: 34 But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. 35 And he that saw *it* bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.

Only the disingenuous deny that Jesus died.

Jesus was buried. In fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus was buried in a rich man’s tomb.

Isaiah 53:9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither *was any* deceit in his mouth.

Joseph of Aramathea permitted Jesus to be buried in his own tomb. Had this not happened, Christ’s body would have been thrown on the garbage heaps in the valley of Hinnom and left to rot. But Christ’s body was laid in a tomb and did not suffer corruption, that is, it did not decay.

Acts 13:37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

In all of these steps in His *State of Humiliation*, Christ was at work for my redemption. He redeemed me from sin, death and the devil. From sin in that He took my guilt and blame upon Himself so that now I will not be punished; From death in that He took away the punishment of hell thus taking away the fear of death; From the devil in that He delivered me from Satan’s dominion enabling me to resist temptation.

Since then, He has made me His own it is a privilege to “live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity.”