

The Two Natures of Christ

Rev Dr Tim Patrick, Bible College SA
Trinity Church Adelaide, 13 June 2024



Matthew 16:13–17 (NRSV)

- 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'
- 14 And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'
- 15 He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'
- 16 Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'
- 17 And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.'

- A human title: 'The Messiah'

- A divine title: 'The Son of the Living God'

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is revealed as both *fully* human and *fully* God.

Where in the New Testament do we see Jesus' divinity most clearly displayed?

Where in the New Testament do we see Jesus' humanity most clearly displayed?

The classical formulation of the two natures of Christ—which still stands as the benchmark for orthodoxy today—is the Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith.

An extract from *The Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith*, AD451

...

For the synod opposes those who presume to rend the mystery of the incarnation into a duality of sons; and it expels from the company of the priests those who dare to say that the Godhead of the onlybegotten is passible, and it withstands those who imagine a mixture or confusion of the two natures of Christ, and it drives away those who fancy that the form of a servant, taken by Him of us, is of a heavenly or any other essence; and it anathematizes those who imagine two natures of the Lord before the union, but fashion anew one nature after the union.

Following, then, the holy fathers, we all unanimously teach that our Lord Jesus Christ is to us one and the same Son, the self-same perfect in Godhead, the self-same perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man; the self-same of a rational soul and body; co-essential with the Father according to the Godhead, the self-same co-essential with us according to the manhood [*sic. passim*]; like us in all things, sin apart; before the ages begotten of the Father as to the Godhead, but in the last days, the self-same, for us and for our salvation (born) of Mary the Virgin Theotokos [God-bearer] as to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten; acknowledged in two natures unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the difference of the natures being in no way removed because of the union, but rather the properties of each nature being preserved, and (both) concurring into one person and one hypostasis [person]; not as though He were parted or divided into two persons, but one and the self-same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as from the beginning the prophets have taught concerning Him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself hath taught us, and as the symbol of the fathers [the Apostolic Creed] hath handed down to us.

...

- Jesus is not here recognised as half God and half human nor as sometimes more God-like and sometimes more God-like, but as 100% human and 100% God for 100% of the time.
- This is easy enough to state if we're careful with our words, but very hard to get our heads around conceptually. (Do we need to? Are we meant to??)
- The early church argued about it for centuries... (and some people still do...)

What might be the best metaphor or illustration—or drawing—to help explain the two natures of Jesus?

Some of the mistaken understandings –

- Jesus is not really God – egs. First century Phariseeism, Arianism (cf. Athanasius and Santa)
- Jesus is not really human – eg. Docetism
- Jesus only temporarily blended aspects humanity and divinity – eg. Apollinarianism
- Jesus temporarily suspended aspects of his divinity – eg. Kenosis
- Others... ?

Does your metaphor above risk running into any of these mistakes? Do any of the metaphors hold up well?

When we read the Bible, do we ever think anything like the following?

When Jesus did things like eat and cry, he was acting out of his humanity.

When Jesus did things like miracles, he was acting out of this divinity.

If so, do we need to rethink it... ?

Was Jesus showing something fundamental to his divinity in his weeping?

Was Jesus showing us true what humanity looks like in his displays of power over the creation?

This could significantly change our understanding of what God is like, and what it means to be a truly spiritual human.



To make matters more complicated, Jesus is also a divine person, but this is a separate thing.

It is part of his trinitarian nature – he is one of the three persons of the Trinity.

But a divine ‘person’, is not the same thing as a human person.

The central statement of Trinitarian theology: God is one being in three divine persons.

The central statement of Christology: Jesus is one divine person with two natures.

Small Group Work (Google is ok for this!)

Ancient Christological Heresy	What does this view claim?	What might be some modern equivalents?
Docetism		
Ebionitism		
Adoptionism / Dynamic Monarchianism		
Monophysitism / Eutychianism		
Apollinarianism		
Nestorianism		