

The Pre-Incarnate Christ

Introduction:

Although He did not possess His human body prior to the incarnation, the Scriptures are clear that the Son was eternally pre-existent, co-existent, co-essential, and co-equal with God the Father and God the Holy Ghost.

I. Scriptural Proofs of the Pre-Existence of Christ

- A. John 1:1 - "In the beginning was the Word..."
- B. John 8:58 - "Before Abraham was, I am." (cf. Exodus 3:14)
- C. John 17:5, 24 - "...which I had with thee before the world was."
- D. Philippians 2:6 - "Who, being in the form of God..."
- E. Colossians 1:16, 17 - "For by him were all things created..."
- F. Revelation 1:8 - "I am Alpha and Omega..."
- G. Isaiah 9:6 - the "everlasting Father."

II. The Pre-Incarnate Relationship Between God the Father and God the Son

A. Eternal Sonship or Incarnational Sonship?

There are those who teach what may be termed the "Incarnational Sonship" of Jesus Christ — that He became the Son of God only at the time of His birth into this world.

"Christ is and always has been the second member of the Trinity but only became a Son in His incarnation... The term Son, then, refers only to Christ's incarnation." -John McArthur Jr.

"He became a Son by His virgin birth and was affirmed a Son again at the resurrection." -John McArthur Jr.

"From eternity He has been the second Person of the Trinity. He assumed the role of a Son in His incarnation." -John McArthur Jr.

The text most used to support this theory is Luke 1:35.

Opposed to this view is the Biblical declaration of the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ — that He has always been the Son of God from eternity past by eternal generation.

B. The Eternal Sonship of Christ Demonstrated

A number of Scriptures teach or imply the fact that Jesus has always been the Son of God.

1. Psalm 2:7 and Hebrews 1:5-6

Psalm 2 is a "Messianic Psalm" in that it refers directly to Jesus Christ. Notice the tense of verse 7 — it is present rather than future. It cannot be argued that the tense is present only in the prophetic sense, because Hebrews 1:6 states that God brought His "firstbegotten [Son] into the world..." — i.e. Jesus was already the begotten Son before His incarnation.

2. The Father Sent the Son

See: John 3:16; Galatians 4:4; I John 4:10, 14

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These verses do not say the Father sent the second Person of the Godhead into the world (to become the Son) — they declare He sent His Son!

3. Colossians 1:13-20

“We note that all the fifteen pronouns in verses 15 to 20 inclusive are in apposition with the noun, Son, [of] verse 13. Each dependent sentence, therefore, declares some fresh glory of THE SON, to Whom they all relate, and in Whom they all combine with a transcendent harmony.” -W. J. Hocking

Thus it is clear that the SON was the Creator of the universe, not just the Word or the Second Person of the Trinity. See also: Hebrews 1:2

4. John 1:18

We know that Jesus Christ declared the Father during His earthly ministry (e.g. John 14:8-9; 17:6, 8, 14, 26). This means that the Lord Jesus Christ must have been the “only begotten Son...in the bosom of the Father” before His incarnation!

5. Matthew 21:37

The son in this parable was clearly a son before he was sent to his mission.

6. Romans 1:3-4

These verses are very clear: Verse 3 states that the [eternal] Son was “made of the seed of David according to the flesh” — a reference to the incarnation and Christ’s humanity; Verse 4 states Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power” — meaning that His eternal Sonship was demonstrated by His resurrection (Acts 13:33). They do not teach that Christ was made the Son of God. Just as the [eternal] Word was made flesh (John 1:14) so the eternal Son was made flesh.

7. Proverbs 30:4

A Son in eternity past.

8. A Son GIVEN, A Child BORN

Isaiah 9:6

9. Hebrews 5:8

This Scripture teaches that the Son became a servant (Philippians 2:7-8). It does not say he became a Son — he WAS a Son!

The term “Son” implies equality, not subordination (see: John 5:18; 10:30, 33)

C. The Incarnational Sonship of Christ Refuted

Even though those holding to the incarnational Sonship theory do not deny the deity of Christ or the Trinity, there are several implications involved in its acceptance.

1. This View Denies the Eternal Father.

Sonship implies (and requires) Fatherhood. Therefore, if Christ was not the Son of God before His incarnation then there was no Father before that time.

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2. This View Denies the Actual Relationship Between God and Jesus.
The term “Son of God” becomes a title assumed by Christ, and has Him ‘playing’ the role of a Son during His earthly ministry. In actual fact, the term “only begotten Son” declares the intimate, eternal relationship between the Father and the Son — John 1:18; 17:5.
3. The Bible Never Says Christ Became the Son of God
Luke 1:35 does not say Mary’s child would become the Son of God, but that Christ would be called [by men] the Son of God. The Bible does teach, however, that He became the Son of Man.
4. Christ is the Son of God by Eternal Generation.
Both Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 quote Psalm 2:7. If the “this day” refers to a point in time, then Hebrews 1:5 places that point at the incarnation, whereas Acts 13:33 would have Christ becoming the Son of God at His resurrection. He was clearly the Son of God before then, so it makes sense that he was also the Son of God before His incarnation.

III. The Pre-Incarnate Works of Christ

The Scriptures teach that the Son was active in the creation of the universe.

John 1:3, 10; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:2, 10.

IV. The Pre-Incarnate Appearances of Christ

In the Old Testament a Personage called “The Angel of the Lord” from time to time appears on the scene. It is evident from a close study of such accounts that this Angel is a “pre-incarnate manifestation of deity” — undoubtedly the Lord Jesus Christ in angelic form.

The theological term used for these appearances is “theophany” — from “theos” meaning God, and “phainein” meaning ‘to show’. See. Genesis 17:1; 18:1, 2

- A. The Angel of the Lord is Identified as God.
Genesis 16:13; 22:11-12; 31:11, 13
- B. The Angel of the Lord is Worshiped.
Genesis 18:2
- C. The Angel of the Lord Displays Omniscience.
Genesis 16:11; 18:13, 15
- D. The Angel of the Lord Displays Omnipotent Judgment.
Genesis 19:24
- E. The Angel of the Lord Makes Promises and Prophecies.
Genesis 16:10, 12
- F. The Angel of the Lord Redeems and Saves.
Genesis 48:15; Isaiah 63:9

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Note: Jesus Christ is not an angel.

The Jehovah's Witness cult teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ is to be identified with the archangel Michael. This effectively denies the deity of Christ by making Him a created being — which John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16 refute.

A careful study of I Thessalonians 4:16 and Jude 9 differentiates Michael and the Lord.

Note: The appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection and ascension (Revelation 1:10-20) is distinguished from a "Theophany" by being termed a "Christophany."