

Who Is Jesus?

by Wanda Shirk

Answers to the question "Who is Jesus?" fall into four main categories among those who profess to be believers:

1. Eternal God the Son - the traditional Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Protestant view.
2. A created being, an angel, possibly Michael the Archangel - Jehovah's Witnesses view.
3. Son of God, Begotten before time - "Preexistent Begottenness" view.
4. Christ/Messiah, Begotten in time - "Conception Christology" view.

Arguments for "Conception Christology"

1. The Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) give no clue that the Messiah pre-existed with God in eternity past.
2. Think Jewish! As a corollary of the above, the Jews did not believe that their Messiah dwelt in eternity past with God. They expected one like Moses (Deut. 18:15-18), a prophet, to rise up from the line of David. It is from history that they accepted other human beings as potential Messiahs. If, therefore, the Messiah was a pre-existent spiritual being, the Gospel writers and apostles should clearly have corrected Jewish thinking on this. They did not.
3. The synoptic Gospels and Acts give not the faintest hint that anyone thought Jesus to have pre-existed his birth. There is no hint of incarnation. Conception, for Matthew and Luke, is the begetting or beginning of Jesus.
4. Luke 1:35 - "The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.' "There is a causal clause here; Jesus is "Son of God" because, or the reason that, he was uniquely conceived in history by the Holy Spirit, not because he had preexisted as somehow begotten in the heavenlies in eternity past.
5. The point of John's prologue (John 1:1-18) and "the Word became flesh" is that the impersonal became personal in the birth of Christ, that is, "an impersonal personification became embodied as a human being." Logos was not understood by the Jews as a person but as a plan, as the wisdom of God (cf. Prov. 8:1-36), His counsel, His self-expressive activity. The meaning of John 1:1-3 is thus as follows:

"In the beginning was the creative purpose of God. It was with God and was fully expressive of God. All things came into being through it ..."

Like a building constructed from an architect's idea, Jesus is the plan of God "fleshed out."

6. The pre-existence of Christ is only in the foreknowledge of God. I Pet. 1:20 - "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God who raised Him from the dead ..." The few references in scripture that indicate previous existence or glory of Christ (e.g. John 17:5, 24) are "prophetic pasts" (i.e. future at the time spoken, but past in the sense that they are determined in the counsels of God) much like God's words to Abraham "To your descendants I have given this land," (Gen. 15:18) when Abraham at that time had neither descendants nor a square inch of soil.
7. John's statements about Jesus having "descended from heaven" (3:13) or "coming down from heaven" (6:38) are no more literal than the idea that the manna from heaven which the Israelites ate fell down through the skies.
Cf. James 1:17 "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of ... lights" (NIV).

8. The "sending" or commissioning of Jesus to do what was required of the Messiah does not require pre-existence. The prophets and John the Baptist were also "sent from God" (cp. John 1:6).
9. Jesus being "before" John the Baptist (John 1:15) or Abraham (8:58) reflects his superiority in the plan of God, not his chronological place in human history.
10. Allusions to the role of Christ in creation mean that Jesus was the central purpose for all creation, even though he did not yet exist. In some passages, the spiritual creation (God's people) rather than physical creation is in view. The Old Testament teaches that the Father alone created the world (Is. 44:24).