

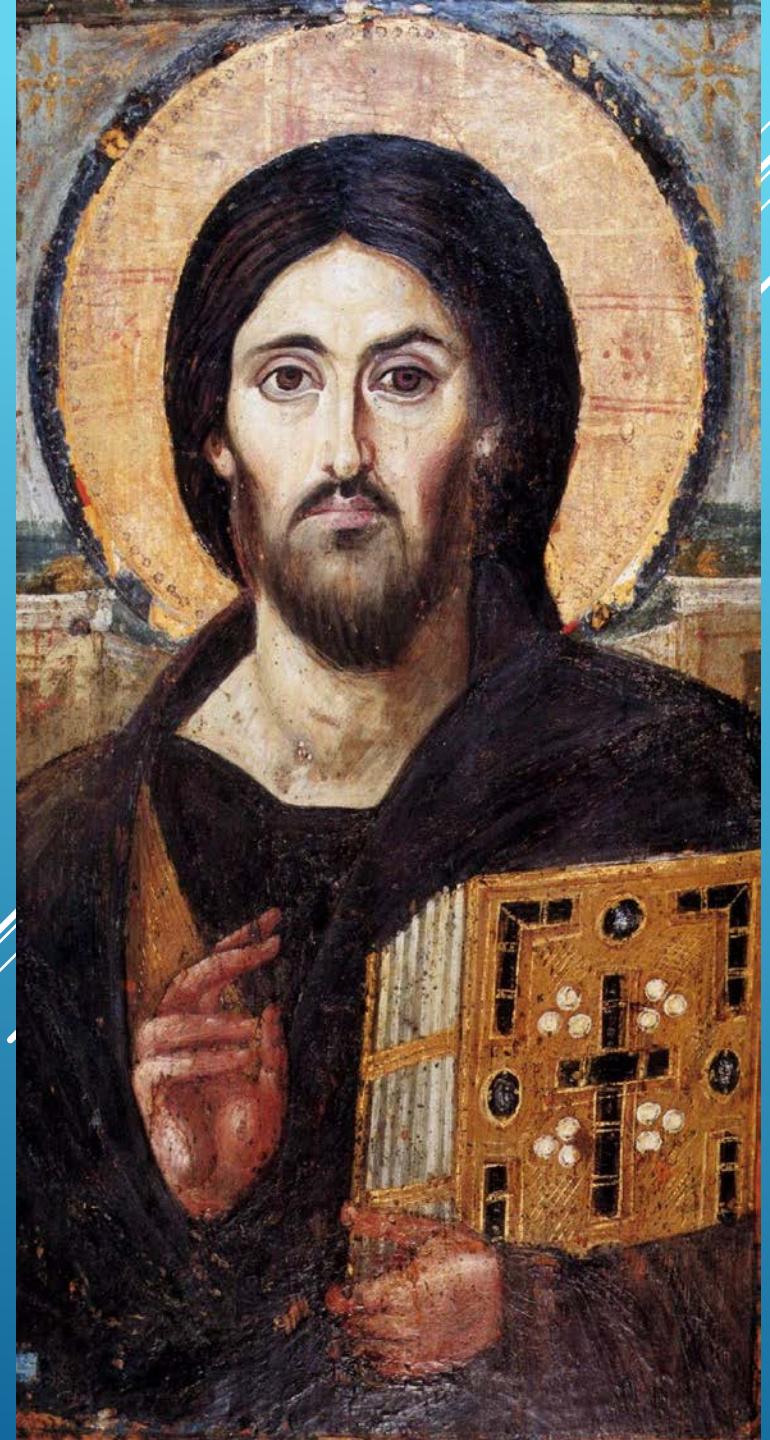
INCARNATION:

DIVINE ACTION AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Christ Church Georgetown

Adult Forum—February 12, 2017

Barry Jay Seltser



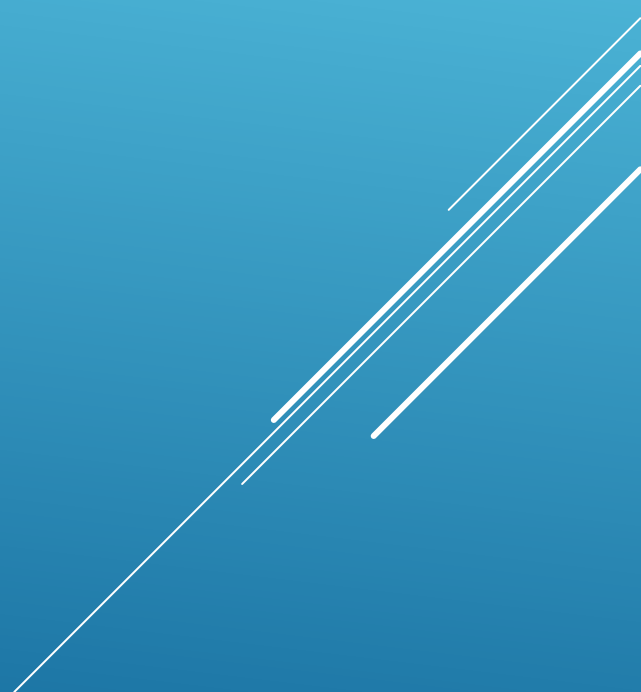
OUTLINE FOR TODAY

- ▶ A few comments on belief
 - ▶ Centrality of incarnation
 - ▶ Meaning of incarnation
 - ▶ Key Biblical passages
 - ▶ Interpretations and Images
 - ▶ What “incarnation” rules out
 - ▶ Mystery and purposes
 - ▶ Summary
 - ▶ Questions and Comments
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BASIC POINTS ON BELIEF

- ▶ Reason and belief
- ▶ Bases for belief
- ▶ Beliefs as mystery



A REMINDER

“Nothing is so firmly believed as that which a man knoweth least.”

--Montaigne

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OPENING QUOTATION

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, of his boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is."

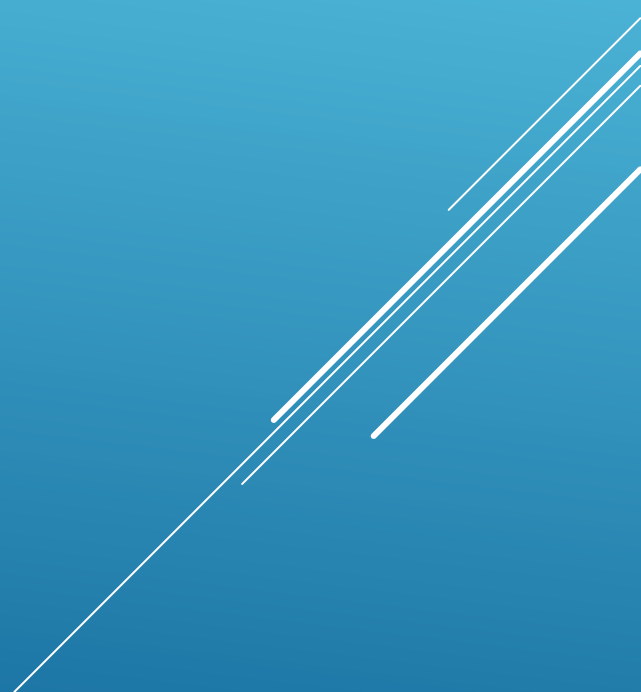
--Irenaeus

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CENTRALITY OF THE INCARNATION

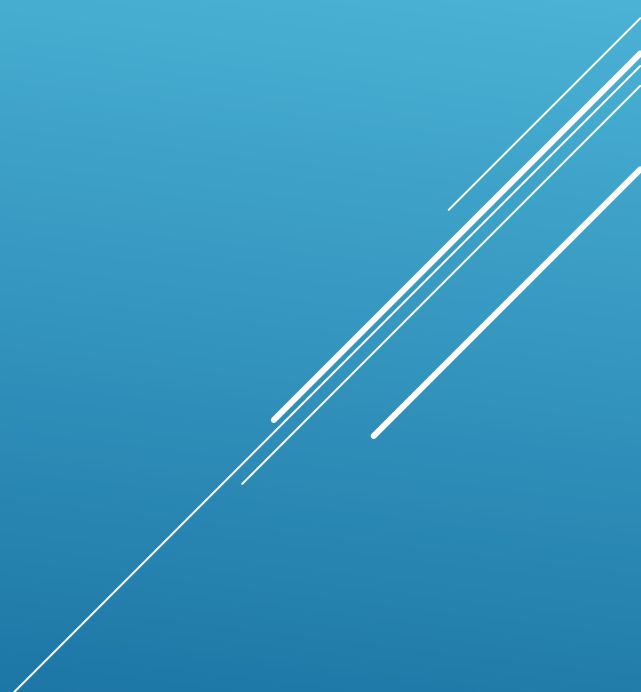
- ▶ Incarnation as fundamental doctrine
- ▶ Uniqueness of the doctrine
- ▶ Incarnation and Christian practice





MEANING OF THE INCARNATION

- ▶ Key Creedal statements
- ▶ Trinitarian Framework
- ▶ Variety of Biblical Images, including:
 - ▶ Word (logos)
 - ▶ Son
 - ▶ Lord (kyrios)
 - ▶ Wisdom

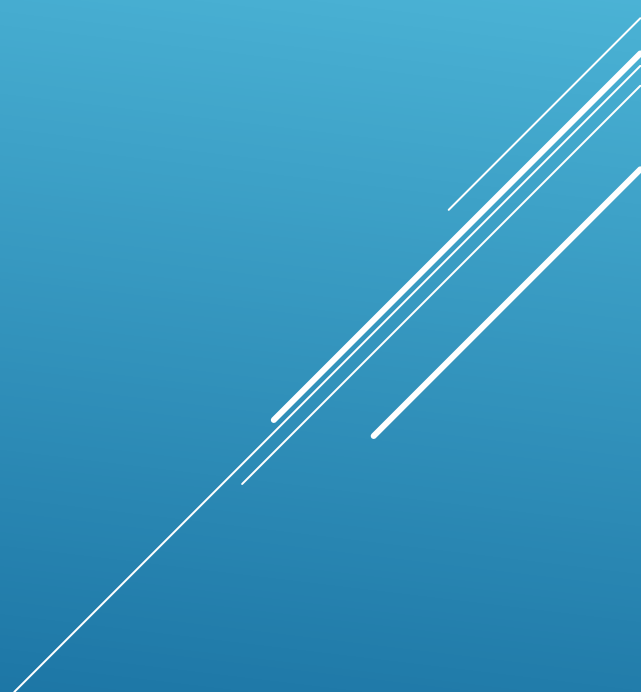




SOME KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES

- ▶ John 1:1-4, 9-14
- ▶ Hebrews 1:1-4
- ▶ Philippians 2:5-11

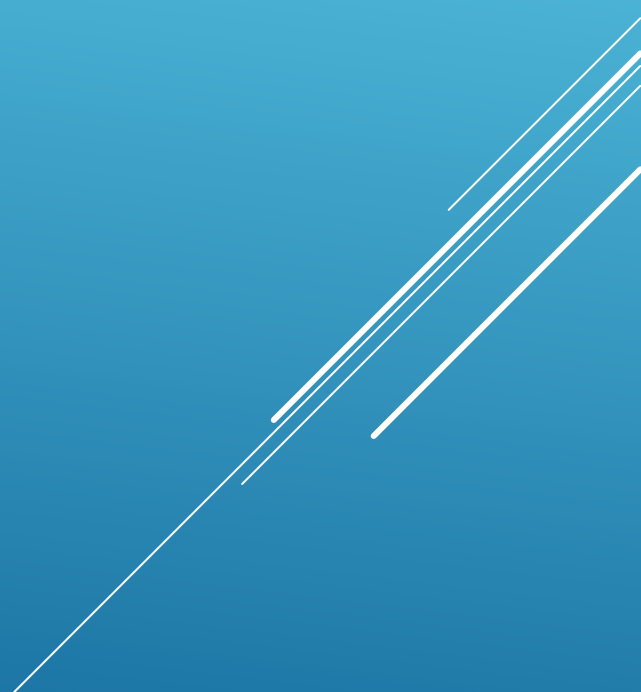
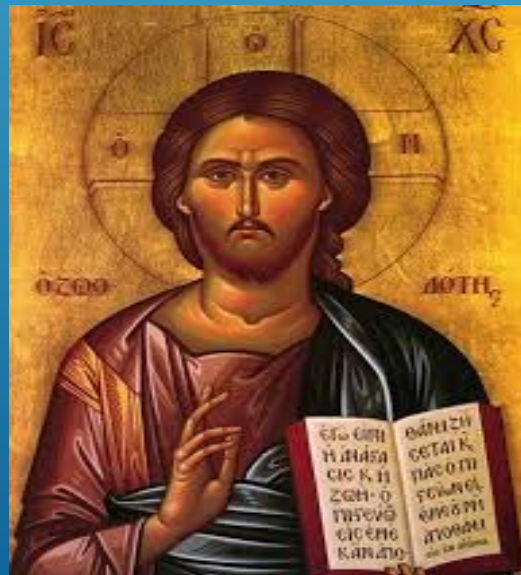
- ▶ Many others, including: Romans 1:1-4, Colossians 1:15-20, Galatians 4:4-6, I Corinthians 8:4-6, 2 Cor 8:9, Romans 8:3-4, Col 2:9, 1 Tim 2:5, 1 Tim 3:16, Romans 9:5.





KEYS TO INTERPRETATION

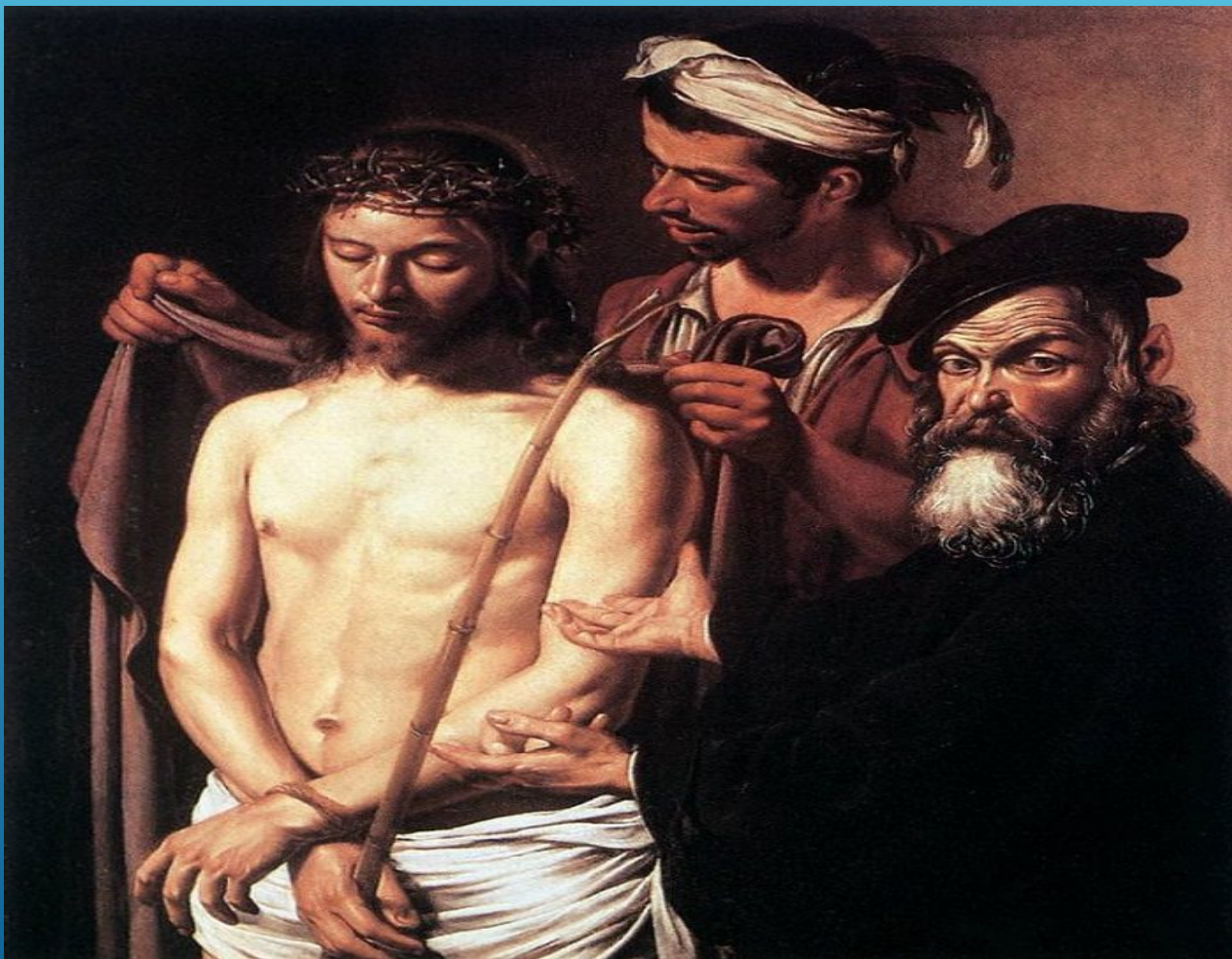
- ▶ The incarnation is a historical claim
- ▶ Jesus incarnates God's love
- ▶ “Incarnation” refers to the entire life and death of Jesus



IMAGES OF INCARNATION

- ▶ The word “God” refers to “the wisdom by which the world is a story, the singer by which nature is not just sound and fury but music....[T]he wisdom which made this drama so loved his human characters that he became one himself to share their lives; he chose to be a character in the story, to share their hopes and fears and suffering and death.” –Herbert McCabe
- ▶ “The story of Jesus—which in its full extent is the entire Bible—is the projection of the Trinitarian life of God on the rubbish dump that we have made of the world.”
–Herbert McCabe

“ECCE HOMO” – “BEHOLD A MAN!”



“Ecce Homo” --
Caravaggio



WHAT THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION RULES OUT (1)

- ▶ Understood as “regulatory” language, we are not to believe:
 - ▶ The body/material world are evil or neutral; matter is alien to God; our path to God involves escaping from or rejecting matter.
 - ▶ God is utterly hidden—we know nothing at all about God.
 - ▶ God created “in the beginning”, but then stood aside from the world.
 - ▶ God relates to human beings in ultimate power rather than love.





WHAT THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION RULES OUT (2)

- ▶ Understood as “regulatory” language, we are not to believe:
 - ▶ Jesus is simply one more great prophet, teacher, or miracle-worker.
 - ▶ Jesus is not a real human being.
 - ▶ Jesus’ nature is a mixture of the human and the divine.
 - ▶ There is more than one God.





WHY THE INCARNATION?

- ▶ Different emphases in Christian theology
 - ▶ Reconciliation and forgiveness—our sinfulness is redeemed and remedied
 - ▶ Final consummation—we are taken up into God's love
 - ▶ Moral example



FINAL QUOTATIONS

We have lost our knowledge of the features of Jesus' face: "Some feature of the crucified face may lurk in every mirror; perhaps the face died, faded away, so that God might be all faces."

--Jorge Luis Borges

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FINAL QUOTATIONS

" [In Augustine] God's love brings the eternal Word into the human world, and that same love allows us to face our creatureliness and our sin in honesty, knowing that God's will is for our good....The incarnation here is seen as the act of divine self-offering which, so to speak, gathers up the elements of broken humanity and constitutes thereby a new humanity, integrated in virtue of the divine act which takes and holds the twofold life of human beings, body and soul, bringing them into harmony."

--Rowan Williams

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS?





A CENTRAL MYSTERY OF INCARNATION

- ▶ The unification of the timeless with human history
- ▶ A paradox, not a contradiction?
- ▶ One person, two natures

