

## Athanasius : On the Incarnation

### I Athanasius – key people and events

**A. Nicaea** – the first large gathering of bishops (many more to follow) Can we picture this? It takes place after the last great persecution (Diocletian's)

1. type of bishop (presbyter) attendee
2. other issues debated
3. East / West cracks already seen

**B. Constantine** – the beginning of the end? Or the end of the beginning? What changes here that will now exert an extremely powerful influence upon the gospel, the church and Christianity?

1. role of government / politics
2. use of force follows
3. "truth" linked to political and physical force
4. a marriage made in heaven or hell?
5. no "divorce" until the Anabaptists

**C. Arius** – presbyter from Alexandria (250-336)

Not the only, but perhaps one of the clearest teachers of a "negative" doctrine of Christ; a popularize par excellence!

1. an effort to answer Matthew 16:15
2. Origen taught "subordination"
3. nearly an Arian victory and a long struggle anyway

**D. Antony of the desert and his fellow monks**

Athanasius wrote a book on Antony but even more important was the kind of friendship and mutual respect that existed between them; how does this play a part in Athanasius' story?

1. the monastic movement began with Antony and Athanasius' book
2. separating from a worldly church
3. in but not of – but with many, many visitors

**E. Nicene Creed**

Can a discussion of a non-biblical word be worth all this? – ***homoousios***  
The meaning is "same substance" – a Greek word (word not in the Bible)

- 1. Christ is very God**
- 2. One substance with the Father (same substance)**
- 3. Became human for our salvation**

The other word is *homoiousios*- the adding of an iota changes the meaning in Greek to “of like substance” – most Arians could agree with this. Does it make any difference? Even today? Examples? Remember these early Christians (many in the beginning were Jewish) were re-defining the doctrine of God Himself. Monotheism was changing – a lot (as far as some saw it).

Have you ever “felt exiled” from someone or a place. Athanasius was exiled **5 times** for his view of Jesus Christ. **FIVE TIMES**. Sometimes he seemed to stand alone against the world (*contra mundum*) but stand he did. He never let go of what he believed was the true teaching of the person of Christ – it was something worth dying for and living his entire life for!

## **II Athanasius – ON THE INCARNATION**

Does he even discuss *homoousios*? What are your overall impressions of this short treatise? What prompted the writing?

### **A. Main reason for “the Word of the Father becoming flesh” (1-5)**

How is this coming into the world of the Word linked to creation?

Why does he start with the origin of humanity? (#4) How bad was it? (#5)

### **B. Divine Dilemma (6-10)**

Can't simple repentance bring restoration? (#6,7)

Why is death necessary? (# 8,9)

### **C. Solution in the Incarnation (11-18)**

God makes Himself know by..... three ways of knowing God (#12)

What do you think of his example of the artist re-drawing the portrait? (#14)

Two things the Savior did by becoming man (#16)

What is the great paradox Athanasius writes about? (#17,18)

### **D. Death of Christ (19-25)**

Beyond all this, there is a debt...(#20)...

Why didn't Christ just die privately? (#21-24)

What does Athanasius see in the manner of Christ's death? (#25)

### **E. The Resurrection (26-32)**

What change has the resurrection of Christ made in humans? (# 27-30)

How do we know Christ is not dead? (# 31-32)

### **F. Refutation of the Jews (33-40)**

Why should the Jews believe in his death? (#33-37)

What do they maintain in the face of the life and death of Christ even though it is nonsense? (# 38,39)

What, to Athanasius, is a final proof to the Jews of God becoming man? (#40)

### **G. Refutation of the Gentiles (41-55)**

Why does he use words like “astonishment” and “ridiculous” to describe their unbelief? (# 41)

What examples are there, available to all, of the Word becoming flesh? (# 42)

How does Athanasius use Plato in an argument? (# 43)

Why, contrary to Greek thought, does the Savior need a body? (#44, 45)

How does a universal gospel prove Greek wisdom foolish? (#46, 47)

How does Christ compare to the Greek gods? (#49-50)

Do changed lives prove the Incarnation? (#51-53)

Looking at the sea, trying to count the waves, may be easier than numbering the achievements of Christ (#54)

Athanasius (and Augustine) wrote much about “demons” – why? (#55)

### **H. Conclusion (56-57)**

Athanasius takes us to the Christ that now is, and is returning (#56)

What is necessary for true understanding? (#57)

**Athanasius life and writing stands or falls on his view of the person of Jesus Christ. Who was He? What relation does He have to the Father? Is He unique? Is He the revealer of God (the Image) and the Savior of humanity? If Christ is not God then He cannot reveal the fullness of God; he cannot save us from our corruption and sin; He cannot bestow life on the repentant.**