

The Doctrine of Hypostatic Union

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These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, “**For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God.”** (John 3:16–18). “**I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!**” (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). **If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

This doctrine was taken from the study of the book of Luke ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)) (lessons #70–71, 99).

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Preface: The Hypostatic Union is a term which refers to the union of God and man in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:40 **And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor [= grace] of God was upon Him.**

In the previous lesson, we studied the **Doctrine of Kenosis** ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)), which is the voluntary emptying of the Lord of His Deity. There are certainly discussions to be had as to just how far He went when it came to setting His Deity aside. One might argue that He never accessed His Deity when here on earth; and others will point to Scriptures where His Deity appears to be on display. At this point, I think that such a discussion misses the point.

Let me give the example of the plagues which God did to Egypt, at the hand of Moses. There is some discussion on whether these plagues are complete miracles or if there was a natural progression which took place. Did God create the frogs out of nothing, or did they appear suddenly, as a result of natural

processes? Quite frankly, I don't know, even though I lean towards every plague in Exodus being a natural phenomenon (perhaps excepting the final two plagues). But, in the great scheme of things, this argument yields us little by way of spiritual growth (by *little*, I mean *nothing at all*). Since the Exodus, there have been similar things take place throughout the world—maybe not at the same scale as happened at the hand of Moses—but a large enough event so that we can at least concede that *maybe* what God did in Egypt was orchestrate a great many natural events to end up with plagues that devastated all of Egypt. We don't know for certain; and our spiritual growth is not engaged, no matter how passionate the argument that we form, either for or against the plagues being miraculous.

In the passage that we have been studying, Jesus grows in knowledge; which leads us to the conundrum, *how can He grow in knowledge if He is divine?* If Jesus is Divine, then He is also omniscient. How does omniscience learn anything?

If you have been under good Bible teaching, you know that God never learns anything. He is never surprised by something which we say or do. He knew what we would do in eternity past, and, when necessary, He made perfect provision for it.

We studied one piece of the puzzle, which is the Doctrine of Kenosis, where Jesus has emptied Himself of His right and ability to access His divine nature. Instead, He is operating within the plan of God the Father. Only if God the Father allows Jesus to make use of His Deity, may the Lord access that aspect of His Being.

Jesus is made up of two natures—human and divine—where these natures are not mixed. One nature is not modified by the other, nor does one nature of one change the other in any way. This is known as the Hypostatic Union.

There are several pastors who have done excellent work on this topic. I will quote this particular approach, and provide additional links at the end.

The ESV; capitalized is used throughout (some exceptions).

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I. Definition of terms

- A. **Hypostatic** is a term taken from the Greek noun hupostasis (ὑπόστασις) [pronounced *hoo-POE-staw-sihç*], which refers to the union of the two natures (the original Greek word, found 5x in the Bible, does not mean this). Strong's #5287. When used of Christ, the English term signifies the union of His two natures, the divine and the human, in His person
- B. **Incarnation** is the term which refers to the act whereby the eternal Son of God "became flesh". It also refers to the whole experience of His human life. It also embraces the fact that Christ bears His humanity forever. The term can be traced to the Latin version of John 1:14. The closest Greek equivalent is en sarki (ἐν σαρκί) [pronounced *ehn-sahrk-EE*], which means, *in the flesh*. 1John 4:2
- C. **Condescension** means a voluntary descent from one's rank or dignity in relations with an inferior. The verb *condescend* means to descend to a less formal or dignified level. It is used of the willingness of God the Son to assume or to take on the nature of man. Philip. 2:6 (to be studied in more depth later) presents the fact of His condescension.
- D. **Kenosis** comes from the Greek verb kenoō (κενόω) [pronounced *kehn-OH-oh*], which means, *to empty*. It is found in Philip. 2:7, and refers to the manner in which Christ chose

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to restrict the use of His divine attributes during His humiliation.

- E. **Humiliation** is the term which refers to the action of Christ's humanity by which He voluntarily agreed to submit Himself to the sufferings and limitations associated with His life on earth, including His death on the Cross. Philip. 2:8

II. The three phases of Christ's existence include...

- A. His eternal preexistence as the Son of God, which is affirmed in Scripture. John 1:1,14 8:58 17:5 Philip. 2:6 Col.1:16,17 Rev.1:8
- B. His humiliation as the God-Man, extending from His birth to His death. Heb.5:7
- C. His exaltation by means of His resurrection and ascension as the glorified God-Man into the eternal future. Jesus will remain in this form forever. 1Thess.4:17 1Tim.6:14–16
 1. The fact that a Member of the Godhead will choose to remain in this form forever is quite powerful as a concept.
 2. This is done, along with the bearing of our sins, in order to provide us with eternal life.
 3. Most of us are fully aware of our own shortcomings, lusts and our own rebellings against God—so that God would do this on our behalf is a divine love which can only be imagined.

III. The humanity of Christ in the hypostatic union. Philip. 2:8a **And being found in appearance as a man**

- A. The doctrine of the true humanity is as indispensable to Christian faith as is the doctrine of His deity (see **Doctrine of the Deity of Christ**).
- B. The evidence for His human body is seemingly even more compelling than the evidence for His deity.
- C. According to the Scriptures, Christ was born of the virgin Mary, fulfilling in this notable historical event of His incarnation all that would normally be expected of a human birth.
- D. The Scriptures also testify that His body possessed flesh and blood. Heb.2:14 1John 4:2,3
- E. The life of Christ subsequent to His birth in Bethlehem reveals the same normal human development and growth, Luke 2:52 **And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.**
- F. He experienced in His life similar feelings and limitations as other human beings and His physical movements were such as correspond to a genuine human nature and human body.
- G. He, according to Scriptures, was able to suffer pain, thirst, hunger, fatigue, pleasure, rest, death, and resurrection.
- H. Both before and after His resurrection, He could be seen and felt. His human body was tangible to human touch. John 20:24-29
- I. His true humanity is also recognized in scripture by the human titles which were given to Him, such as "Son of Man", "the Man Christ Jesus", "the Son of David", etc.
- J. The Scripture also declares that He possessed a rational human soul and spirit. Matt. 26:38 John 13:21
- K. For those who accept the Bible as authoritative, there can be no question that Jesus Christ was in all reality true humanity.

IV. The union of the divine and human natures.

- A. The evidence from both the deity and true humanity of Christ makes it evident that these two widely differing sets of attributes were brought together into a personal union, which will continue forever.
- B. Though sometimes Christ spoke and operated in the sphere of His humanity, and in other cases in the sphere of His deity, in all cases what He did and what He was could be

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- attributed to His one person.
- C. Even though it is evident that there were two natures in Christ, He is never considered a dual personality. He is not a schizophrenic.
 - D. The normal pronouns such as *I*, *You*, and *He* are used of Him.
 - E. The hypostatic union of the human and the divine natures in Christ is given explicit treatment in at least seven passages. Philip. 2:6-11 John 1:14 Rom.1:25 9:5 1Tim.3:16 Heb.2:14 1John 1:13
 - F. These passages make it evident that the eternal Son of God took upon Himself a complete human nature and became a man.
 - G. The act of the incarnation was not a temporary arrangement that ended with His death.
 - H. His earthly body, which died on the Cross, was transformed into a resurrection body suited for His glorious presence in heaven. We will have a body like His at our resurrection. Philip. 3:21
 - I. The continuance of His humanity is reflected in such verses as Matt. 26:64; His post resurrection appearances, Matt. 28:9; and His bodily ascension into heaven.
 - J. The human name Jesus is associated with the final judgment. Philip. 2:10
- V. The relationship of the two natures.
- A. The two natures are united without any loss of any essential attributes, and the two natures maintain their separate identities.
 - B. Through the incarnation, the two natures were inseparably united in such a way that there was no mixture or loss of their separate identity, and without loss or transfer of any property or attribute from one nature to the other.
 - C. The union thus consummated in a personal or hypostatic union, in that Christ is one person, not two.
 - 1. The closest parallel that we have to this is, each one of us is a product of our mother and our father.
 - 2. The genetic makeup of our father and the genetic makeup of our mother are combined to make one person.
 - 3. Obviously, this is less than a perfect analogy, given that the parental attributes are clearly intermixed.
 - D. It should be clear that the divine attributes must necessarily belong to the corresponding divine nature and that human attributes belong to the corresponding human nature. Furthermore, the attributes of both the human and the divine nature belong to the person of Christ.
 - E. Because the attributes of either nature belong to Christ, Christ is *theo-anthropic* in person, but it is inaccurate to refer to His natures as being *theo-anthropic* as there is no mixture of the divine and human to form a third new substance.
 - 1. *Theo-anthropic* (or, *theanthropic*) comes from two Greek words:
 - 2. *Anthrôpos* (ἄνθρωπος) [pronounced *ANTH-row-pos*], which means, *man*. Strong's #444.
 - 3. *Theos* (θεός) [pronounced *theh-OSS*], which means, *God*. Strong's #2316.
 - F. The human nature always remains human; the divine nature always remains divine.
 - G. Christ is, therefore, both God and man, no less God because of His humanity and no less human because of His deity.
 - H. The two natures of Christ cannot lose or transfer a single attribute.
 - I. During the incarnation (the phase of His hypostasis from His birth to death), no attribute of the divine nature was changed, though there was a change in the manifestation of His

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deity.

- J. This is sometimes referred to as the kenosis doctrine or the self-emptying of Christ. I have suggested that the necessary functions of the Lord's essence occurred much in the same way that our various bodily functions occur (e.g., our heart beat, blood flow, digestion, etc.). The brain automatically regulates these aspects of our bodies, apart from human volition. Let me suggest that, this is how the Deity of Jesus Christ functioned. He continued to *hold the universe together* (Col. 1:17 Heb. 1:3); but there was no (human) volition required to make this happen. One might argue that there is no volition, as we understand it to be, as it relates to the function of Deity. However, the humanity of our Lord clearly had volition.
- K. It is clear that Christ, while on earth, following His incarnation, did not manifest the pre-incarnate glory of God except on rare occasions (i.e., transfiguration). Nevertheless, He surrendered no attributes.
- L. This union should not be viewed as deity possessing humanity or humanity being indwelt by deity.
- M. This union of the two natures was not one of sympathy alone or merely a harmony of will and operation (liberal view).
- N. Jesus, when He spoke, could be speaking from His Deity, from His humanity or from His hypostatic union:
 1. John 8:58 *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."* This is true of His deity only.
 2. John 19:28 *After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."* Only Jesus' humanity can thirst.
 3. John 6:62 *Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?* This passage describes Christ according to His human nature, but the predicate of ascending up where He was before could have reference only to the divine nature. John 14:6 *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* Our salvation is based upon the hypostatic union of our Lord (although, quite obviously, we do not possess any sort of sophisticated understanding of the Hypostatic Union at salvation).

VI. The doctrine of His kenosis as related to the hypostatic union.

- A. This concept addresses what was involved in the condescension and humiliation of Christ in becoming man.
- B. How could the eternal God take upon Himself human limitations while retaining His eternal deity?
- C. The proper interpretation of Philip. 2:5–11 deals with this subject.
- D. Some have interpreted the significance of His self-emptying (i.e., kenosis) in the sense He gave up part of His deity to become man.
- E. In opposition to all kenotic views which deny His deity during the incarnation, it must be pointed out that God cannot change His nature by an act of His will any more than any other being can. Just as you cannot will yourself to be taller or shorter; Jesus cannot will Himself to be divested of His Deity.
- F. What Jesus can do is not make use of His power; just as we may simply shut our eyes, no longer making use of our vision.
- G. This is inherent in the divine attribute of immutability which is expressly affirmed of Christ, Heb.13:8 *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* This is, quite obviously, not true of His humanity.
- H. Further, a loss in attributes would mean in effect that Christ was not God at all, which is

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contradicted by innumerable Scriptures and specifically by the gospel of John (see **Doctrine of the Deity of Christ**).

- I. The humiliation of Christ was the veiling of His pre-incarnate glory.
- J. It was necessary to give up the outer appearance of God in order to take upon Himself the form of man, Philip. 2:6 **...Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.**
- K. In answer to the prayer of Christ to the Father (John 17:5), the eternal manifestation was restored in connection with His resurrection and ascension.
- L. The glory was still evident as seen in His transfiguration. Jesus was able to access His glory as God only as the plan of God required.
- M. Second, during the incarnation, Christ did not surrender the attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience, but He did embark on a discipline to submit to a voluntary nonuse of these attributes. An analogy we might understand is, we can limit the function of our sight either by being in a room without light or by closing both eyes.
- N. Christ did not exercise His divine attributes to make His way easier, but they had abundant display in His miracles.
 1. Let me footnote this point. We really do not know whether the miracles done at the hand of the Lord came from His Deity or not.
 2. It is very possible that, most or all of the Lord's miracles were done by God the Father or God the Holy Spirit; and Jesus essentially pointed towards these acts (much as Moses did when God placed the 10 plagues upon Egypt).
- O. When Jesus commanded the waves to be still and caused Lazarus to be raised from the tomb, this was not necessarily a function of His Deity. God the Father could be the One effecting what Jesus called for.
- P. Many of the Lord's miracles were performed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Matt. 12:28 Luke 4:14–18
- Q. The act of kenosis as stated in Philip. 2 may therefore be properly understood to mean that Christ did not surrendered any attribute of deity, but that He did voluntarily restrict their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and under their limitations.
- R. Given the Lord's self-limitation, does this mean that His Deity was not a part of any miracle which He did? I could not say one way or the other; but I would submit to you that this is likely a non-issue.
 1. When I refer to something as a non-issue, this is something which God the Holy Spirit has chosen not to reveal in Scripture.
 2. If something is not revealed clearly in Scripture, then this is not something which we need to know during our time on earth.
- VII. The relationship of the two natures to the self-consciousness of Christ.
 - A. When did He, within His humanity, become aware that He was God?
 - B. As His human nature developed and with its self-consciousness, He, as a man, became aware of His uniqueness.
 - C. This, of necessity, must have occurred early on, even as a very young boy.
 - D. He had both a divine and human self-consciousness, and these were never in conflict, and He sometimes spoke and acted from one or the other.
 - E. This is also a difficult concept, and a parallel which I can provide is when we, as growing human beings, have God-consciousness. There is a day when a child—often between the ages of 3 and 5—begins to ask a lot of questions. This may take place all at once. *Why*

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is that? What is that? What these questions inevitably lead to is, consciousness of God. That is what the child is asking about, even though he does not know it. The parent can explain things in terms of God; the parent can tell the kid to shut up and stop asking so many questions; and the parent can give the child false information (refusing to cite the Person of God). Jesus would have possibly reached God-consciousness and Self-consciousness simultaneously. I would not be surprised if, when hearing some prophecies from the book of Isaiah, say, "That's Me!" (both of the Lord's parents would have been familiar with the prophecies in Isaiah)

VIII. The relationship of the two natures to the volition of Christ.

- A. Each nature had its corresponding will.
- B. The human will of Christ was subject to real temptation, Heb.4:15 **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One Who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**
- C. The divine will of Christ was not subject to temptation. James1:1
- D. Because Divine will is, in fact, sovereignty, it is difficult for our minds to understand it. God does not will Himself to be intrinsically good as we might will ourselves to walk from point A to point B.
- E. The question among orthodox theologians is not whether the humanity of Christ was really tempted, but whether, as a man, He was capable of sinning.
- F. All agree that He remained sinless and had no sin nature, but there is a division over whether He could have sinned or not.
- G. If Christ could tap into His deity and have infinite power to resist temptation, then He is not really on an equal standing with those He is supposed to sympathize with.
- H. Infinite power to resist temptation is called impeccability, while the ability to sin through temptation is called peccability.
- I. With regard to all angels and all of mankind from Adam, temptability presumes peccability. Why should the humanity of Christ be the exception?
- J. If, for instance, Christ was tempted at the end of the forty days, but could not have sinned, then He was not our equal in temptation.
- K. In Gethsemane, it was His human will which was tempted to avoid the Cross. Matt. 26:39
- L. To argue that since Christ is now impeccable in heaven, therefore He must have been impeccable while on earth does not follow, since believers are peccable on earth but impeccable in heaven (elect angels also seem to have gone from peccability to impeccability).
- M. To argue that God would not have risked the whole plan of grace on the peccability of Christ ignores the doctrine of foreknowledge.
- N. Certainly the humanity of Christ, possessing no sin nature, had all the resources not to sin short of a total inability to sin no matter what.
- O. The deity of Christ did not, in any fashion, override His human volition in the face of temptation by giving Him infinite power to resist.
- P. There is no passage in Scripture which declares that He could not sin, only that He did not sin. 1John 3:5 2Cor.5:21
- Q. So why postulate that which is not the pattern for other free moral agents? (I have not seen a compelling reason or passage).

IX. The interpretation of Philip. 2:5–8:

- A. Philip 2:5 **Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,...** V.5 exhorts believers to have the same mental attitude as was in the God-Man.

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- B. Philip 2:6 ...Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,... V.6 presents the example with reference to Christ's deity as seen in the condescension phase "who, although He existed in the form of God (this addresses His eternal preexistence as the second person and the pre-incarnate glory of that existence, John 17:5) did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (His deity specifically did not so regard itself as being above entering into an incarnate state. This is the condescension of Christ)".
- C. Philip 2:7 ...but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. V.7 presents the example from His humanity. ...but emptied Himself (this refers to a decision over the course of His life on earth not to exercise the independent use of His divine attributes to make His way easier and so circumvent the sufferings and limitations of the incarnation), taking the form of a bonds slave (His deity agreed not only to associate with an inferior, but with one who was from the lower classes), and being made in the likeness of men (Christ looked just like true humanity).
- D. Philip 2:8 And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. V.8 continues the example as viewed from His humanity: And being found in appearance as a man (His contemporaries recognized Him to be a normal man like themselves), He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (the humiliation of Christ constituted His willingness to undergo whatever was necessary to provide salvation for mankind, including the shame associated with the Cross).
- E. Philip. 2:9–11 Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Vv.9-11 constitute the reward for His condescension and humiliation.
- F. He existed in the form of God [*i.e., He shared God's very nature*], but did not consider [*remaining*] equal with God something [*to continue*] to hold onto. Instead, He gave up what He had and took on the form [*i.e., the nature*] of a slave, becoming like a man, [*and even*] His appearance was found to be like a man's. He humbled Himself [*by*] becoming obedient [*to God*] to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God also exalted Him to the highest position and gave Him the name [*i.e., "Lord."* See verse 11], which is superior to every [*other*] name. [*This was*] so that, in [*honor of*] the name of Jesus, everyone's knee in heaven, on earth and under the earth [*i.e., all rational creatures*] should bow [*i.e., before God*], and that everyone's mouth should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philip. 2:6–11; AUV)
- G. The Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union clearly involves a great mystery that we must accept by faith, 1Tim.3:16 And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

From <http://www.versebyverse.org/doctrine/hypostaticunion.html> accessed January 10, 2020 and edited. Some references below were also used.

Some of these men used the information which they learned from R. B. Thieme, Jr.; and some developed this doctrine from scratch. R. B. Thieme, Jr. may have learned much of what he taught from L. S. Chafer.

Links to the Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union

Robert McLaughlin	https://gbible.org/doctrines-post/doctrine-hypo-static-union/
Maranatha Church	http://www.versebyverse.org/doctrine/hypostaticunion.html
Got Questions?	https://www.gotquestions.org/hypostatic-union.html
Stan Murrell	https://stanmurrell.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/doctrine-of-hypostatic-union.pdf
James Allen	http://www.aliveandpowerful.com/pdf/Doc%20of%20Hypostasis-Kenosis.pdf
Wm Wenstrom, Jr.	https://www.wenstrom.org/downloads/written/doctrines/christology/hypostatic_union.pdf
Herman Mattox	https://www.springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/Colossians/notes/2016-09-11Sunday_Morning.pdf

These are all very reputable and accurate sources and pastor teachers.

Luke 3:21a-b **Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,...**

As we have studied, John spoke publically on a number of topics; and also, he baptized the people who came to him. This baptism would not be the same as the Christian baptism, as John was speaking to Israelites during the Age of Israel. So, when John baptized these people, the water represented the Kingdom of God; and John was associating his disciples with the Kingdom of God. He could present the Kingdom of God to his followers because the King was going to reveal Himself (actually, God would reveal Jesus as the King).

Jesus' baptism is unique and it marks His being baptized (which means, being identified fully with something) with the plan of God. John, as the herald of the Lord, baptized Jesus. This would mark the beginning of the Lord's public ministry, and the point at which John's ministry began to be eclipsed by the Lord's. Both men would, for some short period of time, have coterminous ministries, but the Lord's ministry would continue to grow and John's would level off or become smaller. And then, Herod would put John in prison.

Luke 3:21c **...the heavens were opened,...**

While Jesus is praying, and after He is baptized, the heavens open up. Now, we do not know if there was some sort of physical representation of this; or whether this opening is strictly defined by the next phrase. I believe that v. 22 will describe what is meant by the heavens being opened.

Let's look at all of v. 21 first:

Luke 3:21 **Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened,...**

Luke gives us a unique perspective. We know in the other gospels that Jesus came and John recognized Him. They were cousins, so John apparently knew what Jesus looked like (this is an

assumption on my part, as we do not know if there had been any contact between the two men previously¹).

The other gospels tell us that, on previous occasions, John also spoke of Jesus to the crowds. This would make sense, since John's baptism for these people identified them with the Kingdom of God; so John would naturally speak of the King.

John baptized all of the people there, and Jesus was baptized after and then Jesus prayed, and the heavens opened up. What it means for the heavens to open up appears to be defined by the next verse:

Luke 3:22a ...and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove;...

Something which appeared to be a dove (or dove-like) descended upon Jesus. Luke understands that this is the Holy Spirit taking on some sort of physical manifestation. I am assuming that this is what is actually taking place, rather than these words being metaphorical. My assumption is, those who were there tried to describe what they saw, and that the best description that they could come up with is, *the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove*. This is what they saw with their own eyes.

This manifestation of the Holy Spirit—appearing to be a dove coming out of the heavens—is probably how we are to understand the opening of the heavens. Maybe there was some sort of break in the heavens, but nothing like that is described here or elsewhere.

There is actually a bit of controversy here. Some say that the Holy Spirit could not have looked like a dove; but, that He just descended as a dove might. However, the text is clear that the Holy Spirit appears like a dove in bodily form. This simply means that God the Holy Spirit allowed Himself to be perceived as a physical shape, so that those who were there could actually see what was taking place.

We should bear in mind that, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit do not have a physical form that we are able to perceive with any of our 5 senses. We cannot touch God; and we cannot see Him. God created the universe, but God is not confined to the universe or to the physical laws of the universe. The form that God is actually in cannot be perceived by our 5 senses, no more than you can see the soul of any person that you speak to. However, God is able to reveal Himself in His Word and through some of the things which He does where He makes Himself visible and/or audible.

In my study of Exodus, I have many times made reference to the fact that God can be very theatric. He allows things to be seen and heard which are remarkable and remain in the memories of the viewers for a very long time. To us, these are words, and we try to develop a picture in our minds of what is taking place. Apparently Luke the author interviewed people who were there, and they described these things to Luke, as best they could.

Luke 3:22a ...and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove;...

The Holy Spirit is not a dove; the Holy Spirit does not regularly appear as a dove. And, on top of that, Jesus certainly must have been powered by God the Holy Spirit prior to this. Therefore, I believe that all of this took place for the benefit of the folks who were there. Since God is very theatrical; things like this (a dove coming from out of the heavens appearing to light upon the Lord) help to point out to humankind what we should focus upon.

¹ I would think that there was contact simply because both families seemed to be devout, meaning that they would go to Jerusalem for the various holy days.

"Look upon This Man! Study Him!" is what God is telling the people there.

What people understood from this is, the heavens opened up and the Holy Spirit came down and dwelt upon the Lord.

The people who were there and witnessed this—these were John's disciples. They listened to John's words and, presumably, they tried to live as John said that they should. However, something needs to happen which tells John's loyal disciples that Someone greater than John has arrived (as John himself was teaching).

I believe that the opening of the heavens and the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus were things which people were able to see. This was quite supernatural and certainly dramatic. It would be my assumption that God made these various aspects perceptible to the human eye; and I do not believe that this was a mass hallucination.

There is certainly a reasonable question to be posed at this point: is this the first time that Jesus received the Holy Spirit? If it is, what has He been doing up until this point in time?

From the beginning, and we do not know precisely how this worked, Jesus was sinless, fully human, possessing both the Holy Spirit and Deity. However, it appears that, in some form or fashion, His function as God was set aside (doctrine of Kenosis). It would logically make sense that He actually received the Holy Spirit at the moment of birth. It would also make sense that Jesus did not access His Deity even from the point of birth.

It is not clear when Jesus, in His humanity, would have realized that He is divine; nor is it clear why He knew to not to access His Deity. Whatever interplay or interaction or understanding which existed between Jesus the Infant and Jesus the God, we have no idea.

Because this relationship between Jesus the Man and His Person as God is unique, it is difficult to explain every aspect of that. There are many analogies which can be drawn, but they will fall flat. For instance, there are a number of very recognizable celebrities who use wigs and makeup in order to go out and do things unnoticed in public. They are setting aside their considerable fame in order to enjoy some privacy. For these minutes or hours where they exist apart from their recognizable faces and fame, could be seen as analogous to our Lord setting aside His Deity. Poor analogy, I realize.

There was a second way in which the heavens opened up:

Luke 3:22b ...and a voice came from heaven,...

The second sign of the heavens being opened is the voice which seems to come down from the heavens.

I believe that this voice of God could be audibly heard by John and those who were there to be baptized. All of this was very memorable for those who were there. These people would later share the story of what they saw and heard with Luke and other gospel writers (all 4 biographers record this incident).

Luke 3:22c ..."You are My beloved Son;..."

It appears that Matthew and Luke present the actual words from heaven differently. To the people who are there, they hear, “**This is My Son...**” (Matt. 3:17b) but Jesus heard the words, “**You are My Son....**” (Luke 3:22c). Whether these are separate phrases spoken by God, or if this is the same voice, but perceived differently, we do not know. Is it possible for one set of people to hear one thing, and another to hear something else? I would assume so. No doubt, God is able to do something like this. God is not confined to our universe or nor is He constrained by natural laws.

Literally, Jesus is called *the Beloved of mine*. Often, in the Greek, the application of the personal pronoun is understood. However, here, *of Mine* = *My* is a part of the text.

Luke 3:22d **...with You I am well pleased."**

Again, Matthew and Luke present this differently. In Luke, God speaks directly to Jesus; in Matthew, God speaks of Jesus in the 3rd person. Whether these are two separate statements made one after the other; or one statement heard differently, we are not told. I believe that we may rest assured that both things were heard.

Luke 3:22 **...and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased."**

John baptizes Jesus, followed by two things which were perceived by the people there—something like a dove came out of heaven and descended upon the Lord; and a voice came out of heaven as well. The voice of God. These two things together represent the opening of heaven.

1. In

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