

**Living the Essentials of the Faith: Everywhere, Everyone, At All Times**  
**RAISE – Revelation, Anthropology, Incarnation, Sanctification, Eternity**  
*Incarnation Part 1 – Who do we say that God is?*

**Key Concept:** The authoritative answers to the questions of God’s (and Jesus’) identity are found in the church’s definitions of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

**Summary:** The foundation for the Old Testament understanding of God’s identity is summarized in the *Shema*, the Hebrew prayer from Deuteronomy 6:4 – “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One.” This prayer affirms two essential ideas: the oneness of God, and the name of God (the LORD, or YAHWEH in Hebrew).

In the New Testament, however, Jesus repeatedly claimed by word and action that He Himself was God. He also spoke extensively of His Father, and also of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit. This suggested an apparent contradiction between Old and New Testament concepts of God, and presented early Christians with several essential questions: In what sense was Jesus, God? How can God be both One and also Father, Son and Spirit? Was Jesus God, human, or both? If both, what does that mean?

Ultimately, the church decided that these revelations were complementary, not contradictory. The church stated that God, the LORD, is Three Persons (in Greek, *hypostatizes*) in One Substance (*ousia*). Everything that is essential to being God, the substance of being God, is common to all three Persons. Moreover, these three, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, are so perfectly united in their love for each other, and in their will and actions, that they are literally both Three and One. This insight into God’s identity we name the Trinity, and it is the most basic Christian definition of God. When a Christian says “God,” he or she means “the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

The whole work of God’s creation makes sense in light of the Trinitarian reality. God desires to be in a relationship with humanity precisely because God Himself is a relationship. The image of God in humankind is our ability to reflect the unity of the Trinity within our human relationships.

Yet while the Trinity establishes that Jesus, the Son of God, is *homoousia*, or “of one substance”, with the Father, it does not address the connection between His humanity and divinity. The church’s authoritative answer to this question is found in the concept of the Incarnation. The church stated that Jesus is one Person in two natures (divine and human) that combine without confusion, change, division or separation. In other words, a human body and soul was united with God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity, to form Jesus, who has one will and identity. Jesus is always and fully God and always and fully human. Those natures are united and yet still distinct.

The Incarnation reveals God’s desire for humanity. In Jesus, we see that we can be drawn into the perfect relationship of the Trinity and experience a mystic union with our Creator, yet remain distinctly ourselves. Jesus literally embodies our hope for reconciliation with God.