

# Fully God, Fully Human: The Dually Good News of the Resurrection

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Scriptures: Revelation 1:9–19; John 20:19–31

The stories that we tell reveal a lot about us. They can remind us of what is truly important. They can show us the ugliness of human nature. They can cast a vision for a brighter future. A good story can even serve as a reflection on God or on humanity's relationship with the Divine. But of course, all stories are not created equal. Some stories have something to say, and that thing is a bad thing or untrue thing. Some stories reflect a broken perspective. Sometimes, the broken perspective is intentionally so (I think of Raskolnikov the murderer in *Crime and Punishment*). A storyteller can use such a negative or false portrayal to get us to think or appreciate the way that things truly are. And now you'll forgive me as I pontificate about the Marvel Universe for a minute.

And before you worry about spoilers, fear not, as I now have a baby at home, you can pretty much guarantee that my movie references will be at least six months old from now on. And so it is with the *Eternals*, a movie I thought was ok, not great, but brought up some very interesting theological questions.

The Eternals are the titular heroes of the movie and the comic books of the same name, a band of angelic-like beings who are embedded with the people of Earth to help them ward off powerful foes. They look like humans, live among humans and grow to love humans. The Celestials are the all-powerful gods in the story. They created the Eternals, and as the plot of the movie reveals, they are using them to nefarious ends. The Celestials have placed the Eternals on Earth, and this is where it gets whacky, to get the Earth's population to a high enough level so that a new Celestial can be born out of the core of the Earth, destroying the planet and all its people. When the Eternals learn of this plan, they have to fight against it to save the Earth and the people that they love. And if you want to figure out how it ends, you'll have to watch the movie yourself!

The Celestials are a false representation of God. They don't love humanity and they see people as a means to the end of making more Celestials. They are all-powerful, but completely disconnected from humans. The Eternals are also a false representation of God. They are created beings themselves and while they do love humanity, they lack the power and authority to truly protect them. The Eternals are helpless in the face of death.

So what might we learn, on this second Sunday of Easter, from these partial and therefore false portrayals of the Divine? One of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith is the dual nature of Jesus, that he was fully divine and fully human. God is love, and that love is throughout both Jesus' full divinity and his full humanity. Where the Celestials are unconcerned with humanity, Jesus took on flesh. Where the Eternals cannot overcome death, Jesus himself shatters the grave on Easter morning.

These two natures are both on display throughout the Scriptures. We see moments of both in the Gospels. I think of the Transfiguration as a moment when his divinity was on full display and his prayer in the Garden, asking for the cup of crucifixion to pass on from him or his tears at the tomb of his friend Lazarus as moments of humanity.

From John's vision in Revelation today, we have a definite picture of Jesus' full divinity. Listen to John's description of seeing Jesus in Revelation:

"I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like

burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.”<sup>1</sup>

Now that is a striking image of Jesus as God Almighty. And aside from the striking visuals of the physical description, there is a very important phrase that ties this image of Jesus directly to his identity as the Jewish Messiah. It is that phrase “one like a son of man.” And I want to pause here on this title for just a minute because it points to Jesus’ full humanity and full divinity.

Now, you may recognize that title “Son of Man” from the Gospels. It is a name Jesus regularly uses to describe himself, but the tradition extends back to the book of Daniel. Where the “one like a son of man” is given a power and an everlasting kingdom.<sup>2</sup> This image was particularly important to the Jewish people in times of persecution, where the Son of Man was a figure who represented the hope of God’s salvation from the oppression of Israel’s enemies. And so when Jesus claims that name for himself under Roman occupation, or when Revelation reminds the persecuted Church that this is part of Jesus’ identity, the Son of Man

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<sup>1</sup> Rev 1:12bff

<sup>2</sup> Dan 7

brings great encouragement to those who are suffering. Saying that Jesus is the Son of Man speaks to his power, his glory, and the guaranteed nature of his coming kingdom. The Son of Man brings divine power to bear on those who trample God's people.

But also notice the humanity of this image. Son of Man. That is a very terrestrial sounding name. And Jesus says elsewhere in John's Gospel that the Son of man must be lifted up, that is coming up from the Earth. So this title Son of Man it has in it both the sense of divine majesty and full humanity.

But the strongest witness to the dual nature of Jesus is what we are celebrating and feasting over for the second straight Sunday this week - the Resurrection. It is perhaps in the Resurrection that we see the divine and human natures, as paradoxical as they may seem, dwell together in the one person of Christ most clearly.

There is nothing more human than dying. It is something that will happen to all of us until Christ's return, and despite what the popular phrase says, it is even more sure than taxes. Try as we might, none of us can escape death. In taking on human nature, Jesus was signing up to die on our behalf. And so not only did Jesus experience death through personal grief and loss of family such as John the Baptist, and, we can

probably assume, his earthly father Joseph, but he suffered and died himself. When the writer of Hebrews says of Jesus “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,”<sup>3</sup> this sympathy extends up to and through the point of death. Think about the full extent of Jesus’ experience of human suffering for a minute. He is not far off from our broken world. He’s here. Good Friday shows us the full extent of Jesus’ humanity. He died on the cross.

That great vision of Jesus in Revelation’s first chapter cannot be separated from the vision that occurs later in John’s account, where John sees a lamb that had been slaughtered. John writes in Revelation 5:

And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain,”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Heb 4:15

<sup>4</sup> Rev 5:2b-6a

Now if you went to the Knoxville zoo, and were standing by the lion habitat, and you heard someone say, "Here comes the lion," and a slaughtered lamb walked out, you would probably be confused. Maybe you'd even think that this lamb was the food for the lion who was about to come out. But in John's vision, the Lion and the Lamb are the same person. Almighty God has laid down his fully human life, and is in appearance as a slaughtered lamb. There's nothing quite so human as dying.

But as we celebrated last week and continue to celebrate today, Jesus' submission to physical death on the cross is only half the story. He had given us hints before. Jairus' daughter. Lazarus. But now, the chips were down. This was it. And Death did not have the last word. The Son of Man was not only lifted up upon the cross, but was lifted up out of the grave. If there is nothing quite so human as dying, there is something purely divine about bringing life out of death. And so there he stands in the room with his disciples minus one, having died and rose again - the one who is truly God. Humans die, but it is only God who can tell death no. Fully God. Fully human. It's not a contradiction. It's the best news that's ever been shared! Jesus embodies both of his natures there in the upper room.

And let's not forget his scars. Those scars, which Thomas was so adamant about seeing, show us that the humanity of Jesus is not something that he leaves behind. Our scars tell our stories. Some of them good, some of them bad. Some of our scars we can't see but they are the ones that hurt the most. Jesus keeps his scars. Jesus knows what it is like to carry scars. But even his scars are causes for glory on the other side of resurrection.

And this good news, that God carries his human scars through death and into resurrected life, it might sound too good to be true. At least, that's what Thomas thought. And listen, if you want my rant about Thomas getting the short end of the reputational stick, I am pretty sure I've preached about that before, but today, I want to relate to him. For Christians, the Resurrection is the whole ballgame and it indeed can sound too good to be true. We very well may want proof for ourselves.

But, I'll tell you that the resurrection of the one who is fully God and fully human changes everything. It means that we don't just have a binary choice between a God who can relate to us and a God that has the power to save us, but that Jesus can do both. It means that our own death is not a period at the end of the sentence, but a comma before whatever our loving Father has for us next. It means that, as Paul writes in Romans 8,

the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us.<sup>5</sup> That is good news! That is why we rang bells and feasted. Hopefully, we are still feasting!

You know, Thomas gets it right pretty quickly. When he is confronted with the resurrected Jesus, he can't help but worship and proclaim his allegiance to him: "My Lord and my God," Thomas says. And if we believe in the resurrection, what other response can we give? What other response can we have to the fully God and fully human savior of the world who has conquered death? If you haven't yet made that proclamation with St. Thomas, I pray you will. Because Jesus stands there, scars and all, ready to receive you.

But I suppose many of us, most of us this morning have joined with St. Thomas proclaiming Jesus as our Lord and God. The question then becomes for us, "Now what?" And here is where I would like to wrap up for this morning because Jesus gives those of us who would follow him three things in his words to the apostles in the upper room.

First, Jesus comforts us. John chapter 20 beginning halfway through verse 19 says that "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his

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<sup>5</sup> Rom 8:11

hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'"<sup>6</sup>

Jesus brings us peace. John says the disciples were in their room at least in part because they were scared. Jesus brings them true comfort and true peace.

Following after the Resurrected One is hard. Life is hard. Jesus promises us that following him will bring us difficulty while we are in the world. But he offers peace, even in the midst of trial.

Having comforted us, Jesus sends us on mission. He continues: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."<sup>7</sup> From the place of Christ's peace, we are called to be his witnesses in the world. As Jesus says to this same group at the beginning of Acts, this call extends all the way to the ends of the Earth. We are called to spread the good news of Jesus in word and deed to the whole world; the people we like and the people we don't like, in places we are comfortable and places where we are uncomfortable, when it is convenient to be a Christian and when it is a liability to be a Christian.

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<sup>6</sup> John 20:19b-21a

<sup>7</sup> John 20:21b

We can't do that on our own power, and so Jesus empowers us with the Holy Spirit to live faithfully on the mission upon which he has sent us: "And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"<sup>8</sup>

When we encounter the risen Christ, fully God and fully human, we are, at the same time, given peace, a mission, and the power to see that mission through. It is a high and holy calling. And frankly, it is a calling that only makes sense in light of Jesus rising from the dead. Easter is the hinge-point of history, the moment when everything changes and changes for the better. Our choice now is how to live in light of that change. What do you say to the resurrected Jesus? Because that is what truly matters most. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> John 20:22