

## **When Did Jesus Know He was God?**

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D.L. Moody was the most famous evangelist in the world in the late 1800s. People came from around the world to attend his Bible Conferences in Northfield, Massachusetts. One year a large group of pastors from Europe were among the attendees. They were given rooms in the dormitory of the Bible school. As was the custom in Europe, the men put their shoes outside the door of their room, expecting them to be cleaned and polished by servants during the night.

Of course there were no servants in the American dorm, but as Moody was walking through the halls and praying for his guests, he saw the shoes and realized what had happened. He mentioned the problem to a few of his students, but none of them offered to help. Without another word, the great evangelist gathered up the shoes and took them back to his own room where he began to clean and polish each pair. Moody told no one what he had done, but a friend who interrupted him in the middle of shining the shoes and helped him finish the task later told the story of what had happened. Despite the praise and fame he received because of God's blessing on his life and ministry, Moody remained a humble man and servant.

This episode in Moody's life reminds me of the humble condescension of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and King of Heaven, to this earth. Jesus had the right to possess heavenly honor, praise, and receive continual worship in Heaven. However, to be our Savior, He laid aside His glory and humbled Himself, setting aside His privileges and prerogatives as God, and became a lowly servant. This is supremely illustrated not only in the death of Christ but also at the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the King of Glory, was born as a baby. Nothing can be more humiliating than this!

This brings up the question, “When did Jesus know He was God?” Notice that I did not ask, “When did Jesus become God?” This would be heretical to pose this question! Jesus was always God. At no time did He ever cease from being the eternal



God (Heb. 1:3, 9). The question is this. Was there a time when Jesus did not know He was God. Did Jesus know He was God when conceived in Mary’s womb? When He was a baby in the manger? Did He know that He was God as a little toddler running around the countryside? Did part of His humiliation as a lowly servant and baby involve the setting aside of His knowledge or understanding that He was God?

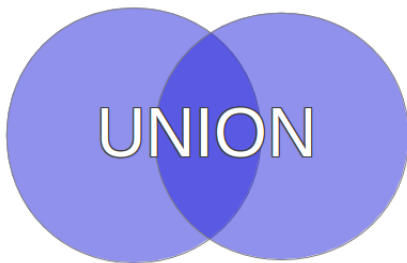
These are questions that theologians have tried to resolve throughout the history of the church. Of course, the Bible does not give us a direct answer on the specific question when Jesus knew He was God. But it does mention about Jesus’ early childhood and it teaches the theology of Christ’s kenosis, condescension, self-emptying, and various human limitations He placed upon Himself prior to His exaltation at God’s right hand (John 17:5).

Of course, we know that Christ’s *divine nature* which was part of His human and earthly existence, always knew that He was God. This is because God cannot ignore himself, or not know of His own eternal existence, otherwise He would not be God (1 John 3:20; Rom. 11:33; Col. 2:3). If God did not know that He was God at any given point of time, and ceased to possess perfect omniscience, then He would no longer be the God revealed in Scripture. But as we will see in a moment, Jesus did not always choose to use and express this side of His nature on every level and at all times during His earthly life and ministry.

But the question still remains, when did the side of Christ's *human nature*, which possessed limitations like every man's human nature, know that He was God? After all, both the human and divine natures of Jesus coexisted perfectly together during His earthly existence as God. None of these natures acted independent of one another but they both had their specific function in the earthly life of Jesus. The divine nature would know all things when Jesus chose to exert it (John 1:48-50) while the human nature of Jesus chose at times to limit His knowledge, even during His later life (Matt. 24:36). The Bible teaches that Jesus gave up the prerogatives (exclusive rights and privileges) of His deity, which means He did not always outwardly express certain facets of His deity. This means that Jesus as God, during His earthly ministry, could choose to limit various expressions of His deity – His glory, perfect knowledge, and power (Phil. 2:5-8).

A. H. Strong concludes:

“Limitations in knowledge as well as limitations in power are related to the human nature and not to the divine.”



We are talking about the mysterious union of Christ's two natures. There are deep mysteries here that no one can fully understand or explain, but we have no problem accepting them by faith.

As John Bunyan has Mr. Greatheart say, in Part II of *Pilgrim's Progress*: “He of whom I am now to speak is One that has not his fellow. He has two natures in one Person, plain to be distinguished, impossible to be divided.”

Theologians call the joining together of Christ's two natures the hypostatic union of His human and divine natures. The hypostatic union is the term used to describe how God the Son, Jesus Christ, took on a human nature, yet remained fully God at the same time. Jesus always had been God from

eternity past (John 8:58, 10:30), but at the incarnation Jesus became a human being possessing a body (John 1:14). The addition of the human nature to the divine nature of Jesus resulted in Him becoming the God-man – the only God-man (1 Tim. 2:5) that ever lived on the face of the earth. This is the hypostatic union, Jesus Christ, one Person, fully God and fully man, fully human and fully divine (1 John 4:3). Jesus is both God and man. Jesus became a man so that He could die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins as people of the human race (1 Timothy 2:5; Philippians 2:5-11).

In view of the union of Christ's two natures, how can we answer the question as to when Christ knew or became aware that He was God? Some have suggested that during His early days as an infant child, Jesus did not always know He was God. I tend to agree with this conclusion and will try and support this in the remainder of the study. Philippians 2:7 talks about Jesus emptying Himself of some of the outward expressions of His deity during His earthly ministry.

For this reason, Jesus chose to set aside some of His divine attributes while living on earth, even during His early days as a child. He could willingly choose to not know that He was God during His conception, while He was a baby, infant, toddler, and young child on earth. Of course, this does not contradict the fact that Jesus has always been and will always be fully divine (John 1:1). It simply means that Jesus chose to be limited in some respects, such as requiring nourishment and sleep as a human, and also limiting certain aspects of His knowledge as a normal baby and child during his humbly condescension.

Others make the argument that Jesus did not limit His divine attributes or become any less in the outward expression of His deity while living on earth. In other words, He was always all-knowing during his earthly life. It's then concluded that Christ may not have expressed this knowledge during His early years, but this does not detract from Jesus knowing He always was God.

Colossians 2:9 teaches, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead." This is why others suggest there was never a moment that Jesus became less than one hundred percent omniscient (all-knowing) as a human. It's concluded by some that Jesus was born of a woman and grew similarly as other humans. Yet, He always knew He was God in human form or that He was divine. Although Jesus did not express this understanding until later, it is likely that Jesus always knew of His divine nature.

So when did Jesus know that He was God? I fall on the side that Jesus did not know He was God while being formed in the womb of Mary, or while He was as a baby, infant, and young child living on earth.

Philippians 2:6-8 is a key passage that helps to understand this:

*"Who, being in the form of God (in Christ's preincarnate state He shared God's nature, equality, and existence – sharing the divine form of God or that which is intrinsic and essential to the being of God), thought it not robbery to be equal with God (Christ did not regard His former manner of existence in Heaven, His exalted position as God – the glories and prerogatives of God, something that He wanted to hold onto). But made himself of no reputation (a self-emptying), and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (possessing a human nature): And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

If you have ever gone to the dollar store to buy batteries, you have probably discovered that the cheaper batteries lose their charge very quickly. The self-emptying of Christ can be compared to a battery losing its charge. It loses its former power and significance. The expression "made of no reputation" is the Greek word "kenoo" (to make empty) from which the word "kenosis" (the self-

Philippians 2:7



Kenosis

emptying of Christ) is developed. This is a profound statement and very graphic description. Although Jesus was equal with the Father in the Godhead He humbled Himself by taking on the form of a servant. Part of this act of humility was to empty Himself of some of the outward expressions and attributes of the Godhead during His earthly ministry.

Of course, Christ did not empty Himself of His deity or He would have ceased to exist as the only true God. Christ did not empty Himself of any portion of His deity. Christ didn't exchange deity for humanity. In other words, Christ did not stop being God and start to become man at His incarnation.

So what did Christ voluntarily give up when He came to earth? In the context of Philippians 2, the kenosis means leaving Christ's preincarnate position of exaltation and taking on a servant position within humanity. In other words, Jesus emptied Himself of His positional equality with God in Heaven (His exalted position as God), which would include things such as the personal riches that He possessed in Heaven (His joys, throne, authority, glory, and honor, and worship which was on full display). Instead of maintaining this positional authority of glory, this favored position of heavenly enjoyment, with all its rights, privileges, and honors, Christ refused to cling on to these, and He was willing to give them up for a season. Jesus became as a poor, humble, servant on earth to ultimately die on the cross on the behalf of sinners. This was His great self-emptying.

Warren Wiersbe states:

“From heaven to earth, from glory to shame, from Master to servant, from life to death, ‘even the death of the cross!’”

“He left the splendor of heaven  
Knowing His destiny,  
Was the lonely hill of Golgotha  
There to lay down His life for me!”

The expression of “the mind of Christ” (Phil. 2:5) is an attitude that says, “I cannot keep my privileges for myself, I must use them for others; and to do this, I will gladly lay them aside and pay whatever price is necessary.” This is what Jesus did when emptying Himself of His heavenly privileges and riches for our sake.

2 Corinthians 8:9

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

Hebrews 12:2 adds:

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

This is humility. It’s Christ’s self-emptying of His heavenly riches, His equal position of authority in Heaven with the Father and everything that pertained to this high and lofty position, all the benefits of this exalted role as the second member of the Godhead.

One author explained it like this:

“Leaving the angelic hosts who flooded his presence with adoring praise, he unselfishly accepted a role that would require his being misunderstood, abused, cursed, and crucified. He unhesitatingly surrendered the fellowship and protection of the Father’s glory for the lonely path of obedience and torturous death. Jesus did it all!”

Others want to climb up the ladder. Not Jesus! He climbed down! And met us at our own level.

Hudson Taylor was scheduled to speak at a large church in Melbourne, Australia. The moderator of the service introduced the missionary in eloquent

and glowing terms. He told the large congregation all that Taylor had accomplished in China, and then presented him as “our illustrious guest.” Taylor stood quietly for a moment, and then opened his message by saying, “Dear friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master.” Hudson Taylor understood what being a servant was all about. But Jesus portrayed the greatest example of humility in descending from His Heavenly position at the Father’s right hand to die on the cross.

Of course, there are other ways that Jesus emptied Himself when He came to earth. The Scriptures reveal other areas of Christ’s self-emptying. For certain, Jesus gave up the full display of His heavenly glory while living on earth (John 17:5). Jesus covered up His glory. He veiled it while He lived on earth. There were glimpses of it in His words and actions but it was largely veiled. Christ also emptied Himself of His own independent authority as the Son of God. In other words, He submitted to the Father’s will which ultimately included dying on the cross (Mark 14:36; John 5:30). On the cross, Jesus also gave up His relationship with the Father for a very short period of time (Matt. 27:46). But during His earthly ministry Jesus also temporarily set aside the prerogatives (exclusive right and privilege) to not always outwardly express certain facets of His deity. In other words, there were times He set aside the voluntary use of His attributes.

This does not mean that Jesus stopped being omniscient or omnipresent, or immutable (the unchangeable God). In the self-emptying of Christ, He did not stop being anything, He simply chose to not use certain attributes. We know that Jesus did at times choose to express His omniscience and omnipresent attribute as God though His divine nature because He saw Nathaniel when He wasn't even where Nathaniel was (John 1:48-50). However, many times Jesus chose to not exert His divine nature. For instance, Jesus said in Matthew 24:36, “But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” This is limiting His knowledge by choosing not to retain the time of the Second Coming.



There is something we must understand. In the kenosis (the self-emptying of Christ) Jesus didn't give up any of His deity and attributes associated with His deity, but He humbly gave up the free exercise of these attributes and limited Himself in outwardly using and expressing these attributes.

John Walvoord states:

“The act of kenosis as stated in Philippians 2 may therefore be properly understood to mean that Christ surrendered no attribute of Deity, but that He did voluntarily restrict their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations.”

Robert Lightner adds:

“Voluntarily he chose not to use some of his divine attributes during his earthly pilgrimage (Matt. 24:36).”

So here is how the kenosis relates to our question: “When did Jesus know He was God?” Since the self-emptying of Christ did pertain to certain aspects of His knowledge, it is not improbable that He also chose to limit His knowledge that He was God during His conception, as a baby, toddler, and young child stage of His development.

This would then lead us to ask another question. When during Jesus’s earthly life did He come to know that He was divinity or God? Again, Jesus knowing that He was God has nothing to do with the fact that He was God. Jesus was always God. From eternity past He has been the second Person of the Trinity (Micah 5:2; Rev. 1:8; 22:13) and He always will be. The question of when, after the Incarnation, the human Jesus knew that He was God is interesting, but it is not specifically addressed in Scripture.

What do we know? We discover that, as an adult, Jesus fully realized who He was. Jesus said unto them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). In John 17:5, Jesus confirmed: “And now, O Father, glorify

thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." It also seems that, even as a child, Jesus was already aware of His divine nature and work.



We don't know much about the hidden years of Jesus in Nazareth. However, when Jesus was twelve years old, Joseph and Mary took the family to Jerusalem. On their way home, they were concerned about Jesus being missing from their caravan. They returned to Jerusalem and found Jesus in the temple courts asking the religious leaders questions which boggled their minds.

Luke 2:46-47 records:

"And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

At the age of 12, the religious teachers were amazed at Christ's wisdom (Luke 2:41-50). It's during this same time when Jesus spoke of His knowledge of being the Son of God. Well, His parents finally found Him among the religious instructors and they asked Jesus why He disappeared and worried them so.

Luke 2:49 records the answer of Jesus to His parents:

"And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not (knew ye not) that I must be about my Father's business?"

This is the earliest hint we have of Jesus being aware of who He was, that He was indeed God's own Son. Again, Jesus would have been twelve at this point

of his life. Joseph and Mary did not understand Jesus' words (Luke 2:50). Whatever those around Him did not grasp, it seems that Jesus, at a very young age, did know that He was the Son of God and that the Father had foreordained the work He was to do on earth. So, we can definitely say that Jesus knew who He was by the age of 12, since He was calling God His own father.

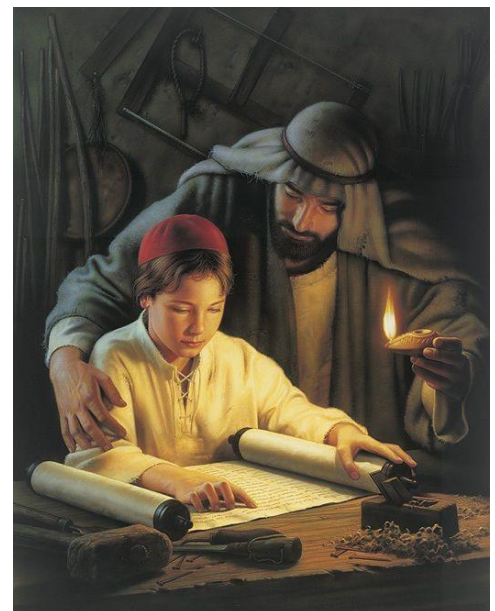
Humanly speaking, much is left unknown regarding how Jesus' human understanding intersected with being God in human form. From birth, those who saw Him realized He was the king and Savior of Israel (Luke 2:1-20). Simeon and Anna recognized Him as the one God sent (Luke 2:22-38).

After the incident in the temple, Luke says something of importance.

Luke 2:52

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

Here is an obvious and important point. If at this specific time in Jesus' human experience He knew everything, He would not need to increase or grow in wisdom. So, it seems that prior to this, as a baby and very young child, Jesus did not possess the wisdom that He was God and God's Son. In the Father's plan, Jesus did not exercise His right to know everything, which means He limited His own knowledge about Himself as being the second member of the Godhead during the time of conception, as a baby, and small child. However, as He increased in wisdom, He came to know and realize that He was God's Son.



Taking on the normal limitations humans have at conception and birth, Jesus chose to not have an awareness that He was God incarnate. Adolescents begin to think logically as they grow in their brain development and understanding. This progression goes on for many years and is always in need of more clarity. The human side of Jesus (he was truly man – 1 John 3:2-3) would have gone through these stages of development. The difference is that Christ's progress would have been unhampered by sin (Heb. 4:15).

Of course, we must emphasize that we are talking about Jesus' human experience. Jesus never ceased being God, but He did veil His divinity (deity) and place certain limitations upon Himself in accordance with the Father's will (Phil. 2:5-8). Of course, as a baby, infant, and younger child, this would be evident in Christ limiting His knowledge of being part of the Godhead. Part of the self-emptying of Christ means that Jesus, as the Son of God, subjected Himself to physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual growth. It would indicate



that He did not know that He was God as a baby. This agrees with the fact that Jesus obviously grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52). The Son of God voluntarily put Himself in the position of needing to assimilate knowledge as a baby and younger child, which would include the knowledge that He was God Himself. This was part of His kenosis (self-emptying) and humility in coming to earth.

So when did Jesus know that He was God? From His heavenly perspective (in accordance with His divine nature which has no limitations), the eternal Son knew from eternity past who He was and what His earthly work was to be (Isa. 9:6; John 3:13). From His earthly perspective (in accordance with His human nature and its limitations), the incarnate Jesus came to the realization that He was God's Son at some point early in life. The Scriptures seem to suggest this

when putting together the Biblical evidence that we do have. Just when this point was, when Jesus became aware of His divinity, we cannot know for sure.

The Bible does not tell us exactly when Jesus realized He was God in flesh (John 1:1, 14; Colossians 2:9). As mentioned previously, Jesus cooperated with the limitations of being a man (Philippians 2:5-8). At conception and birth, Christ's divine nature never went "dormant" which means that He was always God. The divine nature of Jesus (representing His eternal being and existence as God) would require that Jesus know all things, but as a man (the human nature and side of Jesus), He did choose at times to limit His knowledge. In His humanity, Christ could choose to limit Himself and His knowledge, but from the side of His deity and divine nature, He could know all things and at times expressed this (John 2:24; 13:11).

Since the Scriptures do not give us enough information on this subject, we cannot dogmatically conclude when the exact time was when Jesus came to know that He was God in flesh. We can only conclude that Jesus chose for a short time, during His earthly days of humanity, and from the perspective of His human nature, to limit His knowledge that He was God. This specific time would be during His life as a baby being formed in the womb, a baby that was born into the world, and as a young child. But at the same time, since Jesus was fully God, He could know who He was from His divine nature. However, there was a time when Jesus humbled Himself and chose not to know that He was God, through the limitations He placed upon Himself in His humanity (Phil. 2:7).

Yes, Jesus left the splendor of Heaven knowing that He was God and the destiny the Father had planned for Him, but He set aside this knowledge for a short period of time, while being formed in Mary's womb and living on earth as a small child. However, in accordance with the plan and timing of the Father, Jesus became fully aware of His person and work, and He longed to

once again be restored to His former glory at the Father's right hand (John 17:5).

When we think of the union of Christ's two natures during His earthly ministry, we are reminded once again of His great act of love and humility He displayed in becoming man (the God-man) and dying on the cross for each one of us. Oh, the wonder of it all!

"There's the wonder of sunset at evening,  
The wonder as sunrise I see;  
But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul  
Is the wonder that God loves me."

Admittedly, there is a certain mystery that hangs over the union of Christ's two natures which occurred at His conception and incarnation. The fact that Christ did place various limitations upon Himself is part of this mystery. As Charles Wesley put it like this:

"Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!  
Who can explore His strange design?"

Martin Luther said:

"The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding."

"Out from Heaven's palaces, splendor filled and bright!  
Came the King and He came to bring,  
To the world new life and light.  
What grace is this that brought my Savior down,  
That made Him leave His glorious throne and crown.  
The one who made the earth, the sky, and sea,  
Who put the stars in every galaxy!  
What condescension, oh how can it be!

What shame He suffered oh what agony!  
And then the death He died, for sinners crucified,  
What grace is this! What grace is this!"

In conclusion, although we can give a general idea when Jesus came to an awareness or understanding that He was God during His early days of humanity, we should not try to answer the question in a specific manner. This is because we would end up in error. Ultimately, "The secret things belong unto the LORD" (Deut. 29:29).