

The crib is now complete. The Christ-child lies in the manger and the shepherds are there looking after the sheep (and not a border collie to be seen). Angels have been singing and have told the Shepherds that Jesus, the Lord, has been born. But what does that really mean?

It actually has a double meaning. Firstly the word "Lord" is the English translation of the Old Testament name for God. Secondly it reminds us that Jesus is our ruler; our king. The angels told the shepherds that Jesus was in charge of their lives, but that he had arrived as a helpless baby, born in poverty, not even able to afford a proper cradle and lying in a manger. What could possibly be divine about that?

The problem is that we struggle to understand what being human actually means, let alone what it means to be divine. To be human doesn't mean simply being beautiful, powerful and strong; after all, many animals can be described as being beautiful, powerful or strong. Human beings are different because we are the crown of creation, but we are still not perfect in every way.

Being human means having the power to think and make conscious choices. That's what Jesus took on when he became human. However, he also took on our limitations. For example, He couldn't be omnipresent (be in more than one place at the same time). He also needed to eat and drink. He needed to rest too; remember when the crowds wanted more he would sometimes go off to a solitary place in order to recharge his batteries.

Jesus also experienced the need to be taught. He needed to learn a particular language to speak. He learned the assumptions and attitudes of those around him. He experienced human emotions. He was tempted, angry, afraid, he laughed and he also wept at various times in his life. He was *just like us*.

The church is often criticised for its failings and inadequacies: quite rightly too! But they are failings and inadequacies because we are human. We get things wrong. We are forgetful. We make assumptions. We take things for granted. The church, whether it's a bishop in his palace, a priest in the pulpit or a person in the pew, is capable of getting things wrong. We're fallible human beings. The important thing is that when we get things wrong we say we are sorry.

Jesus was human too but whereas we are free to disobey God, Jesus chose never to do so. Sinning isn't actually an essential part of being human – we can do without it. Jesus became human, like us, and in so doing changed the definition of what being human means.

He also changed our understanding of what it means to be divine, because he was able to be both fully human and fully divine – the two aren't as incompatible as some would have us assume. In becoming human, God enables us to relate to him as we would to friends and family.

God makes sacrifices for those whom he loves. He sacrificed his divinity to become human and he subsequently sacrificed his life to save us from the sin that we don't need. It is a love that is very deep and personal. God, as revealed in Jesus, is passionately devoted to the poor, open to the outcast, hospitable to sinners and critical of those in authority.

Christmas is a pretty story. It's good to approach the child in the manger with the childlike love and joy many parents see in the eyes of their children when they discover that Father Christmas has visited. But Christmas is also profoundly revolutionary, because the Christ child changes our whole idea of what it means to be human and what it means to be divine. To be truly human, we have to be human in Jesus' way, not in the world's way. He came to where we live and became what we are, in order to make us like him and to take us to live where he lives.