

## **The Preincarnate Christ**

### **Introduction to The Pre-incarnate Christ**

When looking at the doctrine of Christ chronologically, the natural place to begin is a study of the pre-incarnate Christ. *Pre-incarnate* simply means existence prior to the incarnation. In other words the study of this doctrine deals with the existence of Christ as the Second Person of the Godhead prior to His incarnation at the virgin birth.

"Only of Christ can it be said that His birth did not signal the beginning of His existence. Prior to His birth, he had existed for all eternity with the Father and the Holy Spirit...Christ created the universe in all its vastness, continually sustained it by His own intrinsic power, made many pre-incarnate appearances to Old Testament saints, helped His people in time of need, and much, much more. In fact, the scriptural testimony is that Christ was exceedingly active prior to His becoming a man in the Incarnation." [Ron Rhodes, *Christ Before The Manger*, pp. 35]

### **The Concept Articulated:**

*Positively Stated:* In His essential being Jesus Christ never began to be; He existed from eternity as the Second Person of the Triune Godhead.

*Negatively Stated:* In His essential being, Jesus Christ did **not** begin to exist when He was conceived in the womb of His mother, Mary.

*Practically Stated:* The Second Person of the Triune Godhead made a conscious and gracious decision to lay aside the glories and reputation of deity to take upon Himself the nature of man and the form of a servant (Philippians 2:5-11).

As we examine the doctrine of the pre-incarnate Christ, there are three areas of necessary emphasis: His pre-existence, His eternity, and His activity prior to the Incarnation. It is important to note that a study of this doctrine is crucial to the Christian faith for an accurate understanding of the person of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, one of the most crucial problems in approaching a study of the doctrine of Christ is the question of His existence prior to His incarnation. In fact it was this very issue, which aroused much antagonism from the Jews. In John 8:58 Jesus said, "*Before Abraham was born, I am.*" The Jews accurately understood what He was saying. They understood that He was claiming to have existed prior to Abraham. In other words, He was pre-incarnate. He was pre-existent. He was eternal! The Jews understood that by this He was claiming to be God very God. This is demonstrated in their response recorded in John 8:59, "*Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him.*"

In the history of the church this controversy came to a head at the council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. This was when the Arian heresy, which taught that Christ was the first of created spirits, but not eternal was denounced. Fortunately in the Nicene Creed, the pre-existence of Christ was affirmed and plainly stated.

## The Pre-existence of the Pre-incarnate Christ

One cannot simply begin with Jesus' birth at Bethlehem. His life on earth certainly began there, but His existence as a person did not, for He always has been, still is, and ever will be. His birth in Bethlehem was simply His incarnation, not His origin. There are three areas that must be highlighted regarding the pre-existence of Christ: The meaning of pre-existence, the importance of Christ's pre-existence and the Biblical evidence to support the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence.

### The Meaning of Pre-existence:

"The Pre-existence of Christ means that He existed before His birth. For some writers it means that He existed before Creation and before time. But strictly speaking, pre-existence is not synonymous with eternity. Practically speaking, they stand for a similar concept, for a denial of pre-existence almost always includes a denial of eternity and vice versa." [Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, pp. 273] Simply stated Pre-existence is in relation to Christ's physical birth at Bethlehem. To say that He is pre-existent is to say that He existed as a person prior to His birth at Bethlehem.

### The Importance of Pre-existence:

Why is the doctrine of pre-existence so important? Christ's pre-existence is not just a matter of academic interest, but it is the foundation on which the superstructure of the Christian faith rests. If Christ was not pre-existent and came into existence at His birth in Bethlehem, then He was not eternal and no eternal trinity exists. If Christ was not eternal then He could not possibly be God very God. He could not be God because one of God's attributes is the fact that God is eternal. If He is not God, then He cannot be Creator and Redeemer. Also, if Christ was not pre-existent or eternal then He lied, because He claimed to be. Then the question arises as to what else He might have lied about. So the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence is a crucial element in the defense of His deity.

### The Evidence for Pre-existence:

The Biblical evidence for Christ's pre-existence and eternity are virtually the same. We will examine first the Biblical evidence highlighted in the Gospels, primarily the Gospel of John. Then we will examine the evidence from the New Testament Epistles. As we examine the Biblical evidence, it will become clear that there are 6 specific areas of evidence: 1) His direct claims; 2) His heavenly origin; 3) His work as Creator; 4) His relationship with God; 5) His divine attributes; and 6) His relation to John the Baptist.

#### ***1. Evidence from the Gospels:***

The Direct Claims of Christ:

1. John 8:58 "*Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **before Abraham was born, I am.**"*

Although Abraham lived 2,000 years before Christ, He could say, "*Before Abraham was born, I am.*" The present tense here is very important. It expresses a continuous action. Christ was continuously existing. This emphasizes an ageless open-endedness of Christ's existence and brings out the continuity between his incarnate life and pre-incarnate past. Christ is directly claiming His pre-existence, emphasizing His eternity and ultimately claiming to be God very God. This is noted in the statement, "*I am.*" This statement is a reference to His deity and is a claim of equality with

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Yahweh (Jehovah). The phrase, "I am" refers to Exodus 3:14, in which God identifies Himself to Moses as "I AM WHO I AM." The Jews recognized Christ's statement to be a claim of pre-existence, eternity and deity. Thus their response was to pick up stones to stone Him to death as they thought that His statement was a statement of blasphemy.

- John 17:5 "*And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee **before the world was.***"

In this passage Jesus directly claims to have existed prior to His life on the earth. He existed in glory with God the Father. In fact He spoke of the glory, which He had with the Father before the world existed. Although this is a prayer of Christ, He still clearly communicates a state of pre-existence prior to the creation of the world. Thus He is not only pre-existent to His birth in Bethlehem, but He is eternal as well.

### *The Heavenly Origin of Christ:*

Verses that claim heavenly origin for Christ attest to His existence before His birth in Bethlehem. There seem to be a plethora of these verses in the Gospel of John.

- John 3:13 "*No one has ascended into heaven, but **He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.***"
- John 3:31 "*He who comes from above is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. **He who comes from heaven is above all.***"
- John 6:33 "*For the **bread** of God is that which **comes down out of heaven**, and gives life to the world.*"
- John 6:35 "*Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life..." (cf. John 6:48)*
- John 6:41 "*Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, I am the bread that came down out of heaven." (cf. John 6:50; 51; 58)*
- John 6:62 "*What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to **where He was before?**" (cf. Acts 1:9-10)*
- John 8:23 "*And He was saying to them, You are from below, **I am from above**; you are of this world, **I am not of this world.***"

Six times in John 6 Christ claims to be the bread of life, which came down out of heaven. A direct statement to Nicodemus in John 3:13 also identifies Christ, the Son of Man as coming down out of heaven. In fact Christ affirms in John 3:13 that He is the only Man who has been in heaven and was then on earth, while the statement in John 3:31 makes it emphatic by repeating the fact that He came from heaven above. Once again in John 8:23 Christ directly claims to not be of this world, but from above. Conclusion: If Christ came down from heaven above then Bethlehem cannot have been His beginning. He was clearly pre-existent because He claimed a heavenly origin.

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### *The Work of Christ as Creator:*

If Christ was involved in creating, then, of course, He had to exist before creation and is thus pre-existent.

- John 1:1-3 *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."* (cf. Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2)

Clearly John 1:3 along with Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2 teach that Christ was intimately involved in the creation process. In fact no Scripture is more conclusive to the pre-existence of Christ than this. The thought of eternal existence is expressed by the use of the imperfect tense here. This carries the idea of a continuous action like a motion picture. So He was continually with God and He was continually God. Since He was with God, since He was God, and since He was involved in the creation process, then we can conclude that He existed prior to His birth in Bethlehem and is thus pre-existent.

### *The Relationship of Christ with God the Father:*

*First Christ claimed equality of nature with God.*

- John 10:30 *"I and the Father are one."*
- John 17:11 *"And I am no more in the world; and {yet} they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, {the name} which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We {are}."*

*Second Christ claimed that He had equal glory with God the Father, before He had entered the world.*

- John 17:5 *"And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory **which I had with Thee before the world was.**"*

*Lastly, there are passages that demonstrate that Christ the Son was sent out by the Father into the world. Thereby emphasizing that He was existent prior to entering into the world, prior to His birth in Bethlehem.*

- John 3:17 *"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."*
- John 7:29 *"I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me."*
- John 8:42 *"Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come n My own initiative, but He sent Me."*
- John 16:28 *"I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father."*

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- *Matthew 11:27 "All things have been handed over to me by My Father..."*

Clearly these passages offer up evidence for the pre-existence of Christ, since He existed prior to being sent into the world.

*The Relation of Christ with John the Baptist:*

- *John 1:15 "John testified about Him and cried out saying, "This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me."*
- *John 1:30 "This is He on behalf of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before Me."*

*In these verses John the Baptist twice asserted, "He existed before me." A time relationship is indicated here. Though John the Baptist was born before Jesus, John clearly acknowledged that Jesus existed before Him. John was referring to Christ's pre-existence as the basis for Christ's superiority over him.*

### **2. Other Evidence from the New Testament:**

*There are a number of other verses in which Jesus' pre-existence is implied or directly stated. The following are the most frequently used verses outside the Gospels to give support or evidence to Christ's pre-existence.*

- *Ephesians 1:3-5 "Blessed {be} the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly {places} in Christ, just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love **He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself**, according to the kind intention of His will,"*

*Paul's instruction to the Ephesian church implies that Christ existed at the time that we were chosen and predestined, since we were chosen in Christ and predestined to adoption through Christ. When did this take place? Verse 4 says, "before the foundation of the world." Clearly based on this passage alone, Christ existed before the creation of the world.*

- *Philippians 2:5-7 "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although **He existed in the form of God**, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, {and} **being made in the likeness of men.**"*

*"Paul affirms that Jesus eternally has been God. The usual Greek word for "being" is not used here. Instead Paul chose another term that stresses the essence of a person's nature--his continuous state or condition. Paul could have chosen one or two Greek words for "form," but he chose the one that specifically denotes the essential, unchanging character of something--what it is in and of itself." Paul affirms here that Jesus had existed in eternity past in the form of God." [The MacArthur Study Bible, footnote pp. 1822] In other words He continually existed prior to His birth, which is referenced in the next verse by the phrase, "being made in the likeness of men." This phrase speaks of Christ's incarnation when He took on humanity, which took place at His birth in Bethlehem. Christ is pre-existent!*

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- Colossians 1:16-17 "For **by Him** all things were created, {both} in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - **all things have been created by Him and for Him**. And **He is before all things**, and in Him all things hold together."

*This is an especially strong verse to prove Christ's pre-existence and eternity. As God He created all things for His own pleasure and glory. Since He is God and since He did create the universe and all that is in it, then He existed prior to its being created as verse 17 emphasizes, "He is before all things."*

- Hebrews 1:2 "in these last days has spoken to us in {His} Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, **through whom also He made the world**."

*The phrase, "through whom He made the world," is literally translated, "through whom He made the ages." Various scholars have identified the term ages to mean: 1) "the whole created universe of space and time," [F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 4] and 2) "the physical earth, time, space, force, action, and matter." [John MacArthur, *The Superiority of Christ*, pp. 33] Early Church Father, Augustine (A.D. 354-430) held that the universe was not created in time, but that time itself was created along with the universe. [Rhodes, pp 36] Reformed Theologian Louis Berkof agrees, and concludes: "It would not be correct to assume that time was already in existence when God created the world, and that He at some point in that existing time, called "the beginning," brought forth the universe. The world was created with time rather than in time." [Louis Berkof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 96] Hebrews 1:2 carries forth the same argument as Colossians 1:16-17. Since Christ was involved in creating the world, the universe and time, then He existed prior to its creation and is thus pre-existent to His life and ministry on the earth.*

- Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

*There are two significant phrases in this verse that prove Christ's pre-existence and eternity:*

*I am the Alpha and the Omega: This is the statement of Christ. Jesus uses this statement of Himself again in Revelation 21:6 and 22:13. Jesus is the central figure discussed in the preceding verses. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last letter of the Greek alphabet. Jesus refers to Himself as the first and the last in Revelation 1:17, 2:8, and 22:13. This expression stands for totality. It expresses eternity and infinitude. Christ is eternal, which means that He is infinite in relation to time. He is without beginning or end. He is not bound by time but is the cause of time. Christ is infinite. He is without measure. He is not bound by or limited to space.*

*Who is and who was and who is to come: This expression used here of Christ emphasizes His eternal nature. Like God the Father, God the Son is eternal. His existence has always been continual and always will be continual. The emphasis once again is on continual existence. Clearly this emphasis on Christ's eternity supports His pre-existence as well.*

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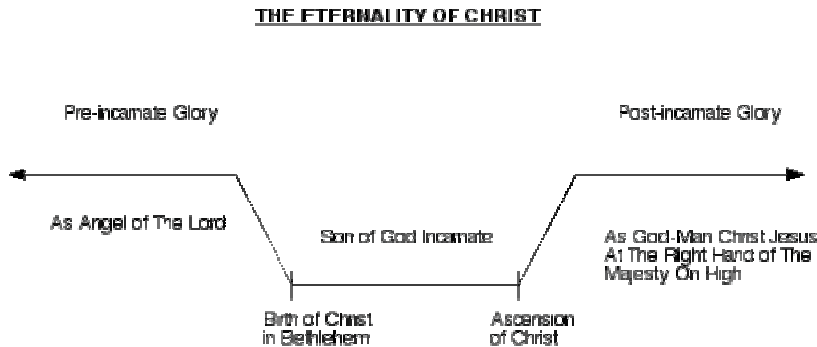
### The Eternality of the Pre-incarnate Christ

"The doctrine that Christ existed from all eternity past has been the orthodox theology of the church clearly annunciated as such ever since the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). The eternity of Christ is not only essential to the deity of the second Person, but also intrinsic in any proper doctrine of the Trinity." [John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pp. 25] Just as we examined the pre-existence of Christ so we will examine the eternity of Christ by exploring the meaning of eternity, the importance of the eternity of Christ and the Scriptural evidence for the eternity of Christ.

#### The Meaning of Eternality:

Eternality means not only that Christ existed before His birth in Bethlehem, or even that He existed before creation, but that He has always existed eternally. Saying that Christ has existed eternally is saying that His existence is infinite in relation to time. The following diagram demonstrates an accurate understanding of the eternity of Christ.

In Eternity future In Eternity Past



#### The Importance of Eternality:

The importance of the Eternality of Christ is the same as the importance of His pre-existence if not more so. If Christ came into existence at His birth in Bethlehem, then He was not eternal and no eternal trinity exists. If Christ was not eternal then He could not possibly be God very God. He could not be God because one of God's attributes is the fact that God is eternal. If Christ was not pre-existent or eternal then He lied, because He claimed to be. Then the question arises as to what else He might have lied about. So the doctrine of Christ's eternity is a crucial element in the defense of His deity.

#### The Evidence for Eternality:

Much of the evidence that was given in defense of Christ's pre-existence can also be used to support His eternity. In order to avoid being redundant, it is recommended that you look above to the section evidence for pre-existence as many of these verses more than adequately support the eternity of Christ as well. However a few additional comments can be made here.

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**First**, since Christ has the same essence as God, then Christ is eternal since God is Eternal. In other words, Christ's deity necessitates His eternity.

- Hebrews 1:3, "And He is the radiance of His glory and **the exact representation of His nature...**"

The term translated "exact representation" is used only here in the New Testament. In extra-biblical literature, it was employed for an engraving on wood, an etching in metal, a brand on animal hide, an impression in clay, and a stamped image on coins. "Person" is a word expressing nature, being, or essence. The Son is the perfect imprint, the exact representation of the nature and essence of God in space and time." [The MacArthur Study Bible, pp. 1897] In other words, Jesus Christ is God very God.

- John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

John's statement here emphasizes that Jesus, the Word has all the essence or attributes of deity. The thought of eternal existence is expressed by the use of the imperfect tense here. This carries the idea of a continuous action like a motion picture. So He was continually with God and He was continually God. Jesus the Messiah was God very God.

- Colossians 2:9 "For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form,"

Paul instructs the Colossians here that Christ possesses all the fullness of the divine nature and attributes of God. In fact the thought here is that the fullness of deity permanently resides in Christ. In other words, He is God very God! Since eternity is one of God's attributes (Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were born, Or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, Even **from everlasting to everlasting**, Thou art God."), and Christ possesses the fullness of the divine attributes, then Christ like God the Father is eternal.

**Second**, The Old Testament prophets claimed eternity for Messiah.

- Micah 5:2 "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, {Too} little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. **His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.**" (cf. Habakkuk 1:12)

This is clearly a prophecy of Christ and His approaching birth in Bethlehem. But, more importantly Micah affirms Christ's eternal nature. The phrase, "from long ago" is the same term used in Habakkuk 1:12 translated, "from everlasting." With this phrase, Micah points to the eternal nature of Christ. Moreover, the phrase, "from the days of eternity" is literally rendered, "from the days of immeasurable time." The terms convey the strongest assertion of infinite duration of which the Hebrew language is capable. This clearly places Christ beyond time all together and thus affirms His eternity.

- Isaiah 9:6 "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, **Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.**"



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*"The person of the Messiah is described in detail in Isaiah 9:6-7. Pertinent to our study on the pre-existence and eternity of Christ is the fact that the Messiah is called "Everlasting Father" in verse 6. "Everlasting Father in this verse is better translated "Father of Eternity." The words "Father of" in this context carry the meaning "possessor of eternity." Father of eternity is used here in accordance with a custom usual in Hebrew and Arabic, where he who possesses a thing is called the father of it. Thus, the father of strength means strong; the father of knowledge, intelligent; the father of glory, glorious. According to common usage, the meaning of "Father of eternity" in Isaiah 9:6 is "eternal." Christ as the Father of eternity is an eternal being. So Everlasting Father is simply an idiom used to describe the Messiah's relationship to time, not His relationship to the other Members of the Trinity. [Rhodes, pp. 40-41]*

*Both of the preceding verses are Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah and both emphasize His eternity as Messiah. Clearly the Old Testament prophets recognized the eternal nature of the Second Person of the Trinity.*

### *The Issue of Christ's Eternal Son-ship:*

*As we deal with the eternity of the Pre-incarnate Christ, it is necessary to address a modern issue regarding the Eternal Son-ship of Christ. The title Son of God has been a widely misunderstood title as well as being highly controversial when speaking of the eternity of Christ.*

*Some have misunderstood the title Son of God to mean that Christ came into existence at some point in time and thereby is inferior to the Father. Others have taken the title to mean that since Christ is the Son of God, then He cannot be God in the same sense as the Father. Obviously these misunderstandings reject the idea of Christ's deity.*

*Others have misunderstood the concept of Son-ship as being a role taken on in the incarnation. These individuals do not reject the deity of Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, but they simply emphasize that He did not serve in the role of a Son prior to His incarnation or in other words, He became a Son in His incarnation.*

*However, an accurate understanding of the term, "Son of" will reveal otherwise. The ancient understanding of the term is that it means, "on the order of." For example, in 1 Kings 20:35 the phrase, "sons of the prophets" simply means "of the order of the prophets." It refers to a group of prophets or prophets in training as it does in 1 Samuel 10:5. Likewise, the phrase, "sons of the singers" in Nehemiah 12:28 means, "of the order of the singers."*

*The ancient Jews used the phrase, "son of" to indicate an exact likeness, or sameness of nature, and equality of being. In other words, Son of God was understood as being fully equivalent to God. So when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, He was claiming to be God very God. Obviously the Jews understood what He was saying and accused Him of blasphemy and desired to put Him to death (e.g. John 19:7, cf. Leviticus 24:16). Likewise in John 5:18 the Jewish leaders sought the death penalty against Jesus, charging Him with blasphemy, "because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, **making Himself equal with God.**"*

*In that ancient culture, a dignitary's adult son was deemed equal in stature and privilege with his father. The son was considered the same essence as his father. He was heir to all the father's rights and privileges and equal to him in every significant regard,. Therefore as the Son of God Jesus*

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would be understood as the same essence with the Father. It was a title of deity, making Him co-equal with God and must pertain His eternal attributes, not merely to the humanity that He assumed.

Further evidence to this fact is found as Scripture refers to Christ as "the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14; cf. V. 18; 3:16, 18; Hebrews 11:17). The Greek word translated "only begotten" (MONOGENES) literally means, "unique" or "one of a kind." In other words this phrase does not refer to Christ's origin, but to His uniqueness as being of the same essence as the Father.

Other evidence to support the idea of Eternal Son-ship is found in the fact that He is clearly represented as existing as the Son of God before His birth in Bethlehem:

- John 3:16-17, "For God so loved the world, that He **gave** His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not **send** the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him."

To identify Christ, the Son of God as being sent into the world implies that He was the Son of God, before He was sent at the incarnation. This can also be seen in Martha's comments in John 11:27.

- John 11:27, "She said to Him, "Yes Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."

Martha's comments also reflect the sense that the Son of God has moved from the heavenly realm and eternity to the earthly realm and time.

- Proverbs 30:4, "Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or **His Son's name**? Surely you know!"

In Proverbs 30:4 as Agur reflects on man's inability to comprehend our infinite God, He asks a series of questions. The answer to each of his questions obviously must be "God." He speaks of God the Father and God the Son in present-tense terms during Old Testament times.

- Hebrews 1:2, "in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things through whom also He made the world."

Hebrews 1:2 says that God created the universe through His Son. This implies that Christ was the Son of God prior to creation. This would certainly support the idea of Eternal Son-ship. Clearly the Scriptural view is that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity is eternally the Son of God.

### **The Activity of the Pre-incarnate Christ**

A study of the Pre-incarnate Christ would not be complete without examining His activity or ministry prior to His incarnation. Our Lord certainly was not inactive in His pre-incarnate state. In fact the scriptural testimony is that Christ was exceedingly active prior to His Incarnation. As we examine the activity of the Pre-incarnate Christ, we will focus on two main areas: 1) His activity as Creator, and 2) His activity as The Angel of the Lord.

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### His Activity as Creator:

*The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that one of the activities of the Pre-incarnate Christ is His activity as Creator. In fact the Scripture teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were intimately involved in bringing the universe into being. Many passages speak of creation being the work of God (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 96:5; Isaiah 37:16; 44:24; 45:12; Jeremiah 10:11-12), while others attribute it specifically to the Father (Psalm 102:25; 1 Corinthians 8:6), to the Son (Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2; John 1:3), or to the Holy Spirit (Job 26:13; 33:4; Psalm 104:30; Isaiah 40:12-13). So how do we see creation being the activity of the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity? Many have concluded that while the Father may be considered Creator in a broad, general sense, the Son is the agent or mediating cause of creation. It is through the Son that all things came into being. [Ibid., pp. 58]*

*There are three specific New Testament passages that emphasize the activity of Christ as Creator:*

- **John 1:1-3**, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."*

*Notice that John states Christ's activity as Creator in both positive and negative terms. Positively, "All things came into being by Him." Negatively, "apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." John wanted his readers to fully grasp the fact that Christ Himself is the Sovereign Creator of all things; and that Christ was the agent or mediating cause of all things. Clearly Christ was intimately involved in the creation process.*

- **Colossians 1:16-17**, *"For by Him all things were created, {both} in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created by Him and for Him."*

*In keeping with John's testimony, the Apostle Paul also affirms, that all things were created by Christ. The phrase "all things" means that Christ created the whole universe of things. "Every form of matter and life owes its origin to the Son of God, no matter what sphere it may be found, or with what qualities itgreek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians, pp. 51] Paul also states that "all things were created by Him and **for** Him." It was for His own glory and purposes that all things were created.*

- **Hebrews 1:2; 10**, *"in these last days has spoken to us in {His} Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world....And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavenbs are the works of Thy hands."*
- *As discussed before, this passage emphasizes that Christ created the ages. Remember the term world is literally rendered ages. In other words, Christ created the entire space-time universe (i.e. time, space, force, action, and matter). It is all the work of His hands (vs. 10).*

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### His Activity as The Angel of The Lord:

Our Lord's first appearance on earth was not when He was born of His virgin mother in Bethlehem. In fact, it appears that He has made many visual appearances on the earth during Old Testament times in the form of The Angel of the Lord. These appearances recorded in the Old Testament are called "theophanies." This word comes from two Greek words: THEOS ("God") and PHAINO ("to appear"). This is an appearance of God, usually in visible, bodily form. It is necessary to note that a theophany (the appearances of The Angel of the Lord) are different in nature from visions.

"The Angel of the Lord appeared twice to Hagar (Genesis 16:7-14; Genesis 21:17-18), once to Abraham (Genesis 22:11-13, Balaam (Numbers 22:22-35), Gideon (Judges 6:11-22), Manoah and his wife (Judges 13:3-22). He was present at the judgment on Israel after David's numbering of the people (2 Samuel 24:16), and He was the agent of destruction to Sennacherib's army (2 Kings 19:35-36; Isaiah 37:36-37). In a vision, Zechariah saw Him as judging between Joshua the high priest of Israel and Satan their accuser (Zechariah 3:1), and as the One who intervened on behalf of Israel's restoration after their seventy years of captivity (Zechariah 1:12). The Psalmist reerred to Him as the deliverere of His people and the antagonist of their enemies (Psalm 34:7; 35:5-6). Other designations of the Angel of the Lord are "The Angel of God (Genesis 31:11), "My Angel" (Exodus 23:23; 32:34), and "the Angel of His presence" (Isaiah 63:9), all doubtless referring to the same divine being." [Daniel G. Finestone, *Is the Angel of Yahweh the Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 17]

The following five facts [Finestone, pp. 18-19] support that these appearances of The Angel of the Lord are indeed theophanies or in other words, they support the deity of The Angel of the Lord:

**First, the Angel of the Lord claimed to be God.** When revealing Himself to Moses at the burning bush, "the Angel of the Lord (Exodus 3:2) said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (v. 6). Later, He proclaimed Himself to Moses as "I Am who I am" (v. 14), clearly an assertion of deity. In fact the context of Exodus 3:2-22 clearly identifies this appearance of the Angel of the Lord as the Lord Himself.

**Second, the Angel of the Lord is addressed as God.** When the Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar (Genesis 16:7-14), she called the Angel who spoke to her, "Thou art a God who sees" (v. 13). Gideon, believing he had seen God, feared for his life when he had spoken with the Angel of the Lord. He exclaimed, "Alas, **O Lord GOD!** For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face" (Judges 6:22).

**Third, the Angel of the Lord was called God.** The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush and it was the voice of God that Moses heard from the bush (Exodus 3:2, 4). In other words the passage uses the Angel of the Lord and God interchangeably. Manoah, Samson's father, was curious about the identity of the Angel of the Lord (Judges 13:17). When He departed, Monoah said, "We have seen God" (v. 22).

**Fourth, the Angel of the Lord was paid divine honors.** According to Exodus 3:5, when in the presence of this Angel, Moses was commanded to remove his shoes, for the place where he stood was holy ground. In Genesis 22:11-12, it appears that Abraham's sacrifice would have been received by the Angel of the Lord since the Angel of the Lord spoke to Abraham saying, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that **you fear God**, since **you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.**"

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***Fifth, the Angel of the Lord promised to do what only God could do.** He promised Hagar that He would make Ishmael's descendants "a great nation" (Genesis 21:18; cf. 16:10). He told Abraham that He would greatly bless him and greatly multiply his seed (Genesis 22:17). When speaking with Moses He said, "I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians" (Exodus 3:8). These promises would have surely been meaningless if the Angel who spoke to them was less than God.*

*Clearly the testimony of Scripture is that these appearances of the Angel of the Lord are appearances of God very God. The question arises regarding which person of the Trinity is the Angel of the Lord? The only sensible explanation is that the appearances of the Angel of the Lord were actually pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity. This conclusion can be based on the following considerations:*

***First, the Second Person of the Trinity is the only member of the Trinity to manifest Himself in visible, bodily form.** Neither the Father nor the Spirit characteristically manifest themselves in visible bodily form. Although at Jesus' baptism, the Father's voice is heard and the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove (Matthew 3:16-17). The Scripture is very definite that God the Father has never made a temporary descent into visibility.*

- *John 1:18, "**No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained {Him.}**"*
- *1 Timothy 6:16, "**who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him {be} honor and eternal dominion! Amen.**" (cf. 1 Timothy 1:17)*
- *John 5:37, "**And the Father who sent Me, He has borne witness of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.**"*

*The Holy Spirit is also described as invisible. Jesus said as much in His Upper Room Discourse.*

- *John 14:17, "**{that is} the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, {but} you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.**"*

*"The presence of the Holy Spirit is known not by a visible manifestation, but by His effect on people." [Rhodes, pp. 86]*

*Jesus Christ is the full manifestation of God in visible, bodily form (John 1:14; cf. Colossians 2:9). According to the above factors, it would seem logical and consistent that it is the role of the Second Person of the Trinity to appear visibly in both Testaments.*

***Second, Christ in the New Testament and the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament were sent by the Father** (cf. Judges 13:8-9; John 3:17). "The similarity of function between the Angel of the Lord and Christ can be observed in the fact that both are sent by the Father. In the Old Testament, the Angel of the Lord is sent by God to reveal truth, to lead Israel and to defend and judge them. In the New Testament, Christ is sent by God the Father to reveal God in the flesh, to reveal truth, and to become the Savior. It is characteristic for the Father to send and the Son to be the sent One. These facts again point to the identification of the Angel of the Lord with Christ." [Walvoord, pp. 46]*

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**Third, Christ in the New Testament and the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament had similar ministries.** "Jesus Christ of the New Testament and the Angel of the Lord of the Old Testament both interceded and called on God the Father. In addition to their ministries of intercession, both were involved in revealing truth, leading Israel, commissioning people for service, comforting the down cast, delivering those in bondage, protecting servants of God, and judging sin. Such similarities argue strongly that the Angel of the Lord and Christ are the same person." [Rhodes, pp. 87]

**Fourth, the Angel of the Lord never appears again after the incarnation.** In fact He is never mentioned again. This sudden disappearance in the New Testament after the incarnation indeed seems strange in light of the substantial ministry of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament. There is no other way to explain such a disappearance except to say that He continues His activity as God-incarnate (Jesus Christ) rather than the Angel of the Lord. It is important to note the appearances of **an** angel of the Lord are not the same as appearances of **the** Angel of the Lord.

**Fifth, Zechariah associated the Angel of the Lord with the Messiah.** This is a minor evidence, but it seems that Zechariah is associating the Angel of the Lord with Messiah in the prophecy of Zechariah 12:8.

- Zechariah 12:8, "In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the one who is feeble among them in that day will be like David, and the house of David {will be} like God, like the angel of the LORD before them."

John MacArthur says, "The house of David, like the Angel of the Lord is most likely a reference to the Messiah Himself, who will be the strength of His people." [The MacArthur Study Bible, pp. 1354] If that is the case then it lends further support to the idea of the Angel of the Lord being the Second Person of the Trinity.

Clearly the above considerations strongly support the idea that the appearances of the Angel of the Lord are indeed appearances of the Pre-incarnate Christ.