

# Jesus Christ: Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, Salvation

The Orthodox Church affirms that Christ became fully human in order to reverse the effects of the Fall. “What is not assumed is not healed.”

## The New Adam

The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit... The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

*(1 Corinthians 15:45-49)*



Mosaic in apse of San Vitale, Ravenna, early 6th century

Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. *(Romans 5:14)*



Baptism of Christ—Arian Baptistery, Ravenna, c. 500 AD



Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, early 5th century

In the West: primarily juridical understanding. God's anger had to be *satisfied* by the "penal substitution" of his Son as payment for man's sin. Only thus could man be spared from eternal punishment for our sins. And because of *original sin* we are all born guilty!

In the East: a more multi-layered approach to redemption. Eastern approach begins with the Incarnation of the Son of God and emphasizes **deification** as the meaning and purpose of redemption. While not downplaying consequences of the Fall, Orthodox theology sees redemption as more than forgiveness of sins and salvation from eternal condemnation. It sees redemption in the more positive terms of participation in the "divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) through the divine and uncreated energies of God. These "uncreated energies" of God have transfused creation from the beginning but became personally active as a result of the Incarnation of the Son (Logos) of God.



St. Athanasius the Great (4th c.) "God became man so that man might become god." (*On the Incarnation*) Our salvation could only happen if Christ were truly and fully divine and human! Doctrine of the **hypostatic union** (two natures in Christ).

Christ's **Incarnation** completes and fulfils purpose of man's creation to be in full communion with God. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*John 1:14*). "For in him the fullness of divinity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him" (*Colossians 1:9-10*).



His **Death on the Cross** is the means by which our sins are forgiven. In Christ, therefore, “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (*Ephesians 1:7*). “The death of the Cross was effective, not as a death of an Innocent One, but as the death of the Incarnate Lord.” (*Fr. Georges Florovsky*)

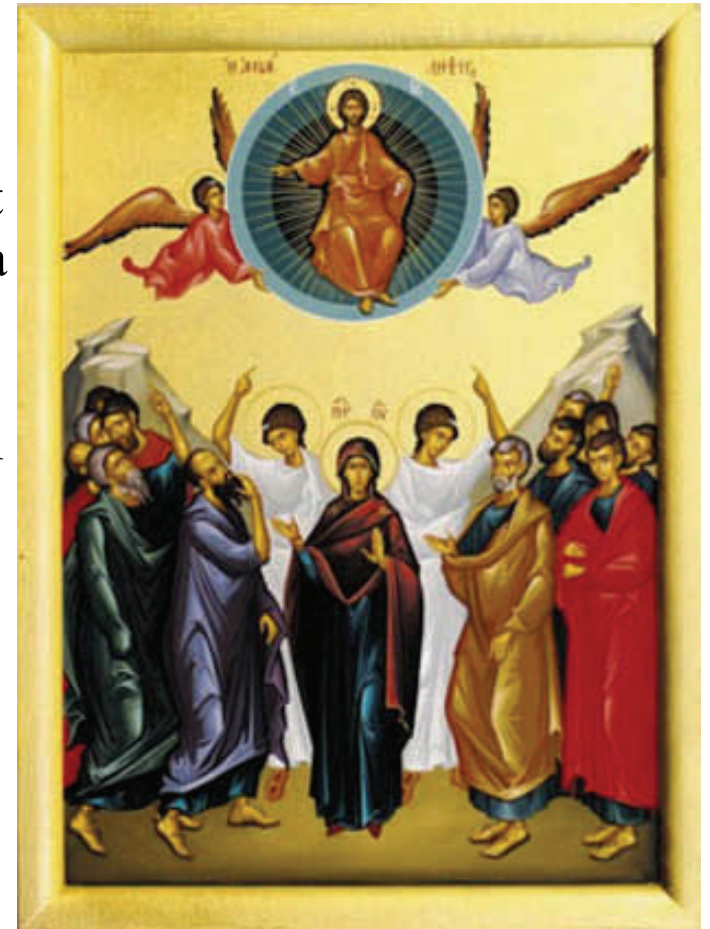


Christ's **Resurrection** is the means by which death, “the last enemy” (*1 Corinthians 15:26*), is destroyed.



His **Ascension** and sitting at God's right hand make his redemptive work beneficial to all human beings, for he is now our mediator and great high priest.

“We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord... But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant... For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. (*Hebrews 8:1-2; 9:11-15, 24*)





**Pentecost** brought to fulfillment Christ's promise of another Comforter (Parakletos) to continue his accomplishment of redemption and deification. Because of the descent of the Holy Spirit into the human realm we are free and able to cooperate with God's grace. The Holy Spirit is "the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people" (*Ephesians 1:14*). In Orthodox tradition Pentecost is also seen as reversal of Babel. This kind of typological interpretation is common.





**Baptism—Chrismation—Communion** re-enact the process of redemption in each person's life.

Regarding deification, a seventh century father, St. Anastasius of Sinai, wrote the following:

“Deification is the elevation to what is better, but not the reduction of our nature to something less, nor is it an essential change of our human nature. That which is of God is that which has been lifted up to a greater glory, without its own nature being changed.”

This is an important statement because it rejects all forms of pantheism. A deified humanity does not lose its human characteristics in any way. In fact, these human attributes become more real since they model the divine according to which they were created.