On the Incarnation

St Athanasius · c. 296 – 373 · Text: trans. Archibald Robertson (NPNF, 1892)

Who wrote it

Athanasius attended the Council of Nicaea (325) as a young deacon and became bishop of Alexandria in 328. He spent decades defending the Nicene faith that the Son is fully divine, and was sent into exile five times. On the Incarnation, an early work, is the second half of a pair with Against the Heathen.

What to look for

- The "divine dilemma": why God could neither abandon humanity to corruption nor simply set aside His word (sections 1–10).
- How the Word restores the image of God in us, like a portrait repainted from the original (11–19).
- Why Christ died publicly, on a cross, and rose on the third day (20–32).
- His answers to Jewish objections from the Scriptures (33–40) and to Greek objections (41–55).
- The closing advice that understanding Scripture requires a good life (56–57).

Reading plan

Session 1	Creation, the Fall and the divine dilemma	Sections 1–10
Session 2	The knowledge of God restored	Sections 11–19
Session 3	The death and Resurrection	Sections 20–32
Session 4	Answers to Jews and Greeks	Sections 33–55
Session 5	Conclusion	Sections 56–57

Discussion questions

1. According to Athanasius, what was wrong with humanity that only the Incarnation could fix?
2. Why could repentance alone not solve the problem, in his view?
3. What does the image of the restored portrait teach about salvation?
4. Why does he think it mattered that Christ died publicly rather than privately?
5. What evidence for the Resurrection does he point to in his own day?
6. Why does he end by connecting holy living with understanding the things of God?

Tips for a group

Read each session's pages before meeting. Bring one sentence that struck you and one question. Keep discussion to 45–60 minutes and end by sharing one thing to carry into the week.

Read it free

The full text is free to read online, with EPUB and plain-text downloads:
ancienttalks.com/books/athanasius-on-the-incarnation.html