

I'm happy to say that I began writing my book How Jesus Became God today. Here is a chunk from the first chapter.

Christianity arose in the Roman Empire immediately after the death of Jesus around the year 30 CE. This empire was thoroughly infused with Greek culture - so much so that the common language of the empire, the language in fact in which the entire New Testament was written - was Greek. And so to understand the views of the early Christians we need to situate them in their own historical and cultural context, which means in the Greek and Roman worlds. In the next chapter I will show that even though Jews had many distinctive views of their own, in many key respects of immediate concern for our study, they shared (in their own ways) many of the views of their Roman friends and neighbors. This is important to know because Jesus himself was a Jew, as were his immediate followers - including the ones who first proclaimed that he was not a mere mortal, but was actually God.

But how was it possible for God, or a god, to become, or to appear to become, a human? We have seen one way with Apollonius of Tyana. In his case, his mother was told before his birth that he would be the incarnation - the "coming in the flesh" - of a pre-existent divine being, the god Proteus. Even though this basic conceptuality was to become the standard theological interpretation of Jesus - that he was God who became incarnate by being born of his mother Mary - I don't know of other cases in ancient Greek or Roman thought of such a thing, where an already existing divine being is said to be born of a mortal woman. But there are other conceptions that are close to this view. Here I will map out the three most common ways ancient people understood the appearance of a god in human flesh.

Gods Who Temporarily Become Human

One of the greatest Roman poets was Ovid, an older contemporary of Jesus (43 BCE-17 CE). His most famous work is the Metamorphoses, a fifteen-book work that celebrates changes or transformations that are described in ancient mythology. Sometimes these changes involve gods who take on human form, in order to interact, for a time, with mortals.

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