

Brother in Christ,

In giving my best feeble attempt to answer your question, I will make some preliminary points:

1. First of all, I think we are delving into a great mystery here, i.e. the Mystery of the Incarnation. Its no coincidence that the first words of our Divine Liturgy of St. Athanasius are "Khorhoort khoreen" O Mystery profound... I know for certain, this Mystery can not be fully explained, let alone fully grasped. I'm not even sure if there is a satisfactory answer to your question. As far as I am concerned, it matters not if I can explain how God can become Incarnate: being at once truly God above suffering and truly man capable of suffering. After all, this is THE reason He became Incarnate: to suffer, die and rise for us. All that really matters is that I believe that He did.
2. On the point that the direct experience of God means a cessation of suffering:
 - a. I have heard Catholic and Orthodox theologians make the point that for the ungodly and haters of God, eternal perdition is precisely their direct experience of God for eternity -as His enemies (see Ps. 138:7-8 LXX).
 - b. Some describe the Final Purgation (or in Orthodox lingo, "the Final Deification") to be the experience of those not fully perfected or deified coming into the presence of God who is, among other things, a "Consuming Fire."

Being that we believe Christ assumed our fallen humanity with all of its imperfections, the very Incarnation was a suffering for the Son of God. His entire earthly experience was an act of economia and suffering in order to heal us. I have a short essay explaining this approach called "Why Did Jesus Have to Die" at this web address: <http://www.geocities.com/derghazar/tradition.html> which may be helpful.

But if your are looking for something more indepth, as I assume you are, here is what else can be offered from a Miaphysite Orthodox perspective: When it comes to Christology, we always look to St. Cyril of Alexandria, who articulated the historic Alexandrian Christology better than all. He wrote the following:

"And since on this account He wished to suffer, even though He was beyond the power of suffering in his natrue as God, then He wrapped Himself in flesh that was capable of suffering, and revealed it as His very own, so that even the suffering might be said to be His because it was His own body which sufered and no one else's. Since the manner of the economy allows Him blamelessly to choose both to suffer in the flesh, and not to suffer in the Godhead (for the selfsame was at once God and man) then our opponenets surely argue in vain, and foolishly debase the power of the mystery, when they think they have made a worthy synthesis. It seems that the fact He so chose to suffer in the flesh was somehow blameworthy of Him, but in another way it was glorious, for the resurrection has testified that He is greater than death and corruption. As God He is life and life-giver, and so He raised up His own temple. This is why the divine Paul said... 'the message of the cross is foolishness for those that are perishing, but

to those of us who are saved it is the power of God, and to those who are called, Jews as well as Greeks, it is Christ, the power and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:18, 24)." [On the Unity of Christ, p. 118]. (Btw, if you want a good patristic book on Christology, this is it).

I'll stop there with these thoughts. There is a lot more from this book which may apply to your question. There is also an article by a contemporary Armenian Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan I was thinking of sending you. It explains why the Incarnation can only be explained properly if it is understood as an act of economia. Let me know if any of this helps and sorry for my delayed reply.

Trusting in Christ's Light,
Sdn. Ghazar,

Dear Ghazar,

I hope all is well for you. I need your help. The other day, I was contemplating on the idea of suffering. I do this fairly often. Usually, I take some comfort in the notion that God took on humanity and experienced suffering just like us. He knows what we all go through.

But this time I hit a snag. My thoughts went something like this:

(1) In this world, we suffer. But, in the next, we will experience God directly and that experience is one of such profound joy that it will erase all suffering. We shall not know suffering anymore, due to our "union" with God.

(2) Jesus was both God and man, perfectly united.

Therefore:

(3) Being God and man perfectly united, Jesus could NOT experience suffering. As God, it is a logical impossibility for Him to suffer. As man, He is in union with God, more perfectly than we will ever hope to be; therefore, He can only experience the perfect joy of union with God - no suffering ever.

Such are my thoughts. I know they are wrong somehow, but I don't know why. I know, from revelation, that Jesus suffered. I just (suddenly) cannot comprehend how the God-man can suffer. So, I am asking for your help, sub-deacon, on this thorny question which is currently a thorn in my side. You have a slightly different perspective than I on the nature of the unity of Jesus' divinity and humanity, which I feel will be of help to me in examining this. This question is troubling my Faith, a little bit; but please do not rush to reply nor place this on a high priority. I'll eventually get through it, with help.

I appreciate any advice you have. Thanks.