I would like to explore the humanity of Jesus with a simple question: exactly what sort of human nature did Jesus assume as the incarnate Son of God? In other words, did God the Son, the living Word, assume our fallen human nature when He became flesh or did He not? If so, was Jesus identical to a sinful fallen man in His humanity or was He not? If He indeed assumed fallen human nature, would it not mean that He could potentially and actually sin in His human life? If that was the case, would it not be tantamount to saying God could actually sin? This would be an unthinkable proposition! For a sin-capable God would no longer be holy and perfect. But biblically speaking, we know that God is unquestionably and sovereignly holy and perfect. Thus, God could not be capable of any sin at all. He could not possibly fall short of His own standards. In light of God’s holy perfection, how can we understand Jesus’ humanity?

Let us explore this question through the lens of several scriptural passages (I thank Wilfred Yeo for pointing out the Greek terms and their implications in these passages to me). We look at verses in Luke 3 and Revelation 22 in particular.

**Luke 3:23** — Καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὦσεὶ ἔτων τριάκοντα ἀρχόμενος ὄν ὡς ἐνομίζετο υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Ἡλί

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli,

**Luke 3:24** — τοῦ Ματθαίου, τοῦ Λευ τοῦ Μελχὶ τοῦ Ἰαννᾶ, τοῦ Ἰωσήφ

the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,

**Luke 3:38** — τοῦ Ἔνως τοῦ Σῆθ τοῦ Ἄδαμ τοῦ θεοῦ

the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

**Rev 22:16** — Ἐγώ Ἰησοῦς ἔπεμψα τὸν ἄγγελόν μου μαρτυρῆσαι ὑμῖν τὰ ἑταί ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις· ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ρίζα καὶ τὸ γένος τοῦ Δαβίδ, ὁ ἁστήρ ὁ λαμπρὸς καὶ ὁρθρινός

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

Note the Greek τοῦ in Luke 3 simply means “of” and not “son of,” contrary to many English translations of this verse. Thus: of Heli, of Matthat ... etc. This suggests the possibility of maternal genealogical lineage of Jesus. If I am not wrong, I believe Augustine thought this was the case too. That notwithstanding, the more important issue is whether there is credible biblical support for arguing the case of maternal genealogical lineage of Jesus. To this end, Luke 3:23 and the subsequent verses that follow can be informative. The Greek τοῦ or “of” (not “son of”) in these verses could be seen as availing an alternative interpretation of the genealogy of Jesus – one that suggests a maternal rather than paternal line. In other words, there is a possibility of reading Jesus’s genealogy as proceeding through His mother’s (Mary’s) ancestral line. As an aside, several scriptural verses in the Old Testament may be suggestive of the notion of Jesus as biological progeny in the line of David—the so-called “Branch prophecies” where Jesus is identified as the Branch of David (that is, descendental of David) that sprouts from the stump of Jesse. See, for example, Isaiah 4:2; 11:1 and Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15. If that is the case, the only way for this to be possible would be through the genealogical line of Mary traced back to David. The overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit upon Mary in the conception of Jesus would rule out the possibility of paternal ancestry of Jesus through his earthly father, Joseph.
Note the Greek γένος (genos) in Revelation 22:16 means “offspring/progeny.” In particular, the use of Greek “genos” seems strongly indicative of Jesus’ self-declaration as the progeny of David. What does that then tell us about Jesus’ biological heritage? Where would his genomic content come from? Though tentative and speculative, the most direct answer would be this: it comes from none other than his mother Mary who was biologically descended from David. Is this a possible scriptural support for the case that Mary was a natural, not surrogate, mother of Jesus? In other words, is it possible that the Son assumed fallen human nature by and through assuming the fallen humanity of His mother, Mary? If so, could we fathom that the identification of Christ with humanity was not merely symbolic or partial (in some sense) but substantive and complete?

Be that as it may, this biological point alone does not negate the fact that Jesus was born sinless and could never ever sin. For the assumption of fallen human flesh via Mary did not consign Jesus to having a sinful human nature throughout His life. Quite the contrary, God’s sovereign power is such that fallen flesh could be instantaneously sanctified and transmuted into perfect sinless flesh at the moment of incarnation. Thus, though the human nature fully assumed by the Son was fallen, it did not remain fallen. Jesus’ human nature indivisible from His divine nature was sanctified and perfected from the moment of His incarnation. But assume fallen flesh in the first instance He certainly could if He wanted to, for the unassumed is the unredeemed (as church father Gregory Nazianzen would say). Hence Jesus—whose assumed fallen humanity was supernaturally sanctified at the point of incarnation—was qualified to be the unblemished sinless lamb of God upon whom could be imputed all the sins of the world. God the Son as Son of Man, Jesus Christ, remained sinlessly perfect and holy throughout His earthly life. He was perfectly obedient to Father every moment of His earthly life to the point of death on the cross. He was thus perfectly fit to be the perfect sacrifice for humanity’s atonement and salvation.

In a deeply heart-moving way, this view of the Son’s incarnation enables us to fathom the depth and magnitude of God’s redeeming grace in the sanctifying redemption of the totality of fallen human nature. The rich and deep import of the incarnation of the Word, God the Son, becomes more explicit and its poignancy heightened. We see the extent and scope of God’s condescension in light of a radical reading of the ‘frail humanity’ that He took. But such a view does even more. It shows just how much more the glory of God was magnified in the extent that He was prepared to go to redeem sinful fallen humanity. This far-reaching act He accomplished by irrevocably assuming and sanctifying the totality of our fallen nature. Thus, began the arc of redemption that was drawn through His perfect sinless life right into His final atonement for us on the cross of Calvary. In such an act of redemptive incarnation, God’s glory was thus expanded to a superlative degree.

Experientially, seeing Jesus as having assumed sinful humanity so as to fully redeem that very humanity tells us the extent of God’s saving love and grace. It also demonstrates the expansion of God’s glory to the zenith, even as savoring our gracious God and exulting in His self-emptying love kindles our greatest and most exquisite joy. It draws our hearts even closer to the One who not only condescended to be born, live a perfect human life, suffer persecution and torture, and bear our sins and their penalty even unto death on the cross, but who literally became one of us in all our fallenness without even a sliver of separation. This is truly union of God with man so that man can be united with God in Christ, through his self-emptying incarnation leading to death on the cross, resurrection, and exaltation. This is grace indeed!
Questions:

1. What is the mainline Reformed theological view of Christ's human nature?
2. What is the scriptural basis of this mainline Reformed view?
3. How much of this basis is solid and irrefutable and how much veers towards speculation, albeit supported on rational grounds?
4. Are there alternative ways of viewing Christ’s humanity that are based on Scripture and reason yet differ from the mainline view?
5. How would these views affect the way we relate to Jesus, Father and Spirit? Would our walk of faith be strengthened, deepened, or enriched (or otherwise) by these views?
6. Are there pastoral implications of mainline and alternative views? If so, what are the positives and negatives?