

Christmas 2002

This week we will celebrate God becoming man. I hope you were able to attend one of the Christmas dramas in the Verde Valley. If not, you can still attend the Christmas drama at the High School done by the Christ Center at 2pm this afternoon. I love this Season because you can't get away from it being about Christ. Many try, but the traditional songs, the manger scenes, the church dramas all remind us it is not just any holiday. I was in a coffee shop by NAU and the music was continually about Christ. I love that! One Church sign read: To our Christian friends, Merry Christmas. To our Jewish friends, Happy Hanukkah. To our atheist friends, good luck. Well, what else can you say? If you have no hope that there is a God – why celebrate? All there can be is a hope that the odds are in your favor to have a comfortable life.

Just what do we as Christians celebrate? It is probably the most debated miracle of all time. If the miracle of the incarnation truly happened, then all the other miracles are not a problem to explain. The Creator can turn water into wine, change the weather, restore limbs, and restore life. But did the Creator enter His creation?

A little boy and his father were in the forest watching ants labor to haul some plant seeds to their nest. It seemed to be such a monumental task for the ants. They would bring the seeds up an incline. One would lose its hold, and the seed would roll back down. After a few times of seeing this happen, the little boy started to reach down to help. The father interrupted his son and warned him that his hand would frighten the ants. They wouldn't understand his intervention. They would perceive his hand as a threat and not a help. The little boy thought for a while and said, "If I could become an ant, then I could help."

It is a very simple analogy to a very complex subject, but it gives us a perspective we can relate to. God planned for His one and only Son to become a man before creation began. It was always the plan. This morning we will search the Scriptures to find out why.

He became a man as fulfillment of the prophecies. Numerous prophecies were fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. The chances of them all being fulfilled in one man are astronomical. But that does not tell us why He came. It only tells us that God foreknew and told men what to look for.

Jesus was born to reveal God in an expression we could understand. Like the little boy with the ants, God had to relate to us in a way that we could fathom. When Moses met with Israel at Mount Sinai, the people asked Moses to go up there and represent them. His holiness was too frightening for the people to go anywhere near. So, 2000 years ago, God set aside His glory, that awesome expression of His heart, that we might hear and see what God would be like as a man. We can relate to that. It doesn't frighten us like a booming voice from heaven would. We think we would like some miraculous manifestation, but when one occurs, we are so

frightened that we act like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration. "Can I build three huts so you guys can hang out here awhile?" The miraculous tends to short-circuit our minds. But God as a man, we can relate to that.

In that sense, He came to show us how to live. What would a perfect man act like? Observe the life of Jesus and you will know. It's total dependence on God and completely yielding to the Spirit of God. It is clinging to the Word in the face of temptation. It is asking the Father to make your decisions. It is speaking faith when there is a need. It is meeting needs around us at the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is being a servant. It is laying down your life for others. The "What Would Jesus Do" fad encourages us to consider Jesus' example in dealing with life as a man, and then follow that perfect example. How else would we have ever had a standard to live by, unless God became man? Are you observing the life of Jesus and following His example?

This week I had the privilege of preaching at the chapel service of Cornerstone Christian High School. I shared with them about David's mighty men and how they must have been inspired to courageous acts by the example of David. They watched him and were encouraged to be all out for God. We have the example of One greater than David. The author of Hebrews tells us to fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. We should meditate on what He said and how He responded to situations in life. The incarnation made that possible. We see the exact representation of the invisible God in Jesus. (Hebrews 1:3)

He became a man to speak to us the Word's of life and light. He could speak through His prophets and He has, but He is the Word made flesh. (John 1:14) Every word from His lips was instruction from God to man. When God did speak in a booming voice He said, "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!"(Mark 9:7) Jesus said the truth sets us free. The words He spoke were truth. We need to study the words of Jesus. They are life. They are wisdom. They are truth. They are light. In John 12:46 (NIV) Jesus told us, "*I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.*" Listen to how Jesus expressed it to Pilate, "*You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*"(John 18:37 (NIV)) He has clarified for mankind what truth is. Are you listening to Jesus?

He came so that we could be assured that He understands our condition. There is no doubt in a mature Christian's mind that God completely understands all we feel and experience, but the young believer needs the assurance of knowing that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are. (Hebrews 4:15) We often wonder if God can understand our trials and the difficulties that we go through. When we look at the life of Christ we know He not only can but He did experience those things. He had to become a man to do that. He is fully able to relate to everything in your life from your physical perspective. Yes, God is above and over all, but He is right there with you in your suffering and pain, your joy and victories, your sorrows and human weakness. He can relate. In fact, no one can relate to you better than Jesus.

Commented [Q1]: 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.
Heb 1:3 (NIV)

Commented [Q2]: 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14 (NIV)

Commented [Q3]: 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.
Heb 4:15 (NIV)

He came to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 2:2 (NIV) tells us, *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."* The blood of sacrificial animals did not cover sin. They were only a picture of the sacrifice that would be acceptable to God, that of Jesus. Speaking of His crucifixion Jesus said, *...it was for this very reason I came to this hour.* (John 12:27 (NIV))

The Apostle Paul said that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. (1Timothy 1:15) The only way to save them was to be that atoning sacrifice, the just dying for the unjust, in their place. He paid for our sins in full, a price He alone could pay. The justice of God was completely met. That favorite of verses, John 3:16, tells us that God loved the world. It is preceded by an Old Testament type of the cross, the story of when Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness to heal them of a deadly snakebite. We have a deadly snakebite, sin. God sent His one and only Son to be lifted up to take all the venom from us into Himself. That is why He has come. Here in the Southwest, if a rattlesnake bites someone, a good friend might try and suck the poison out of the puncture holes left by the snake's fangs. If you have an open cavity in a tooth and try that, you won't live long. That is what Jesus did for us. He took all the venom in all of mankind upon Himself. He who knew no sin became sin for us.

He came to conquer death and hell for all mankind. In Rev. 1:18 (NIV) Jesus said, *"I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."* Through the cross He broke Satan's claim on our eternal destiny. The second-death and hell have no claim on us. But deliverance had to begin with a baby. It had to be a man that took back what man lost. It had to be a sinless man to take the sins of man on Himself. So there had to be the beginning of that life in a manger in Bethlehem. And to be the sinless Son of God, He had to be born of a virgin.

A little girl asked her mother, "Which virgin was Jesus mother, the virgin Mary or the King James virgin?" That's cute, but the fact that Jesus was born of God through a virgin so that He could die in our place and take the keys of death and hell is something for which we will forever praise God! And because of that we can list one more reason He came.

He came so that now and through all eternity He can sit at the right hand of God with the marks that testify to our redemption. The receipt for the payment of our sin debt is at the right hand of God forever. If you've accepted what Jesus did for you, you need never fear an accusation against your presence in heaven, not now, not ever. Jesus is there to intercede on your behalf and proclaim you "not guilty".

These are the reasons He came. All of them are for you! God gave the first Christmas gift, His only Son! He sent Him to show you how to live. He sent Him to show you He understands what you are going through. He sent Him so that you would have the light of His words and the example of His life, to bring light into our

Commented [Q4]: 15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. 1 Tim 1:15 (NIV)

dark world. God sent His Son to save you from your sins and make it possible for you to be in His presence and favor throughout eternity.

How do we know this is all true? It certainly sounds too good to be true. Most things that sound too good to be true are. But this is one great exception. We have proof that a virgin did conceive. That proof is in the life and resurrection of Jesus. None other than God could raise Himself from death. Only the visible presence of a man once dead but now alive could inspire the cowering disciples to boldly proclaim it true and die as martyrs doing so. Over 500 at one time witnessed the risen Jesus. It is true! What will you do about it?

Of all the gifts you could receive
What would you value most?
So great a gift, who could believe,
But still you dare not boast.

So great it makes all others pale
As such a distant second.
So grand it sounds a fairy tale.
Yet to you He beckons,

"Come take my life; I lay it down
So you can be reborn."
Shepherds, wise men gather roun'
Our God, a baby born.

"Christmas is love - tugging men's hearts back to God - with the powerful grip of a tiny hand - reaching out from a bed of straw." Molly Brown

Will you let the hand of that little baby grip your finger this morning and pull you to God? There is no better time to receive all that Jesus came to do for you than right now. Since God did all that for us, the only appropriate response is to surrender our lives back to Him.

We invite you to join us for Christmas Eve Communion at 5pm on Tuesday. There will be a short message and mini drama along with a few more Christmas carols. Have a Christ filled Christmas!