

Every Christmas we should contemplate the wonder of the incarnation. It is essential that everyone that calls themselves a Christian understand what took place. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:14). God took on a tent of a human body. This was not a new thing. God tabernacle with Israel in the wilderness and during the days of their first and second temples (Exodus 25:8). The tabernacle was specifically designed to reveal things about the coming Messiah. As anointed and divinely inspired as it was, it was still made with human hands. The body of Jesus was fashioned by His Father. That life more clearly shows us the nature of God in ways that we could relate. He came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

To perform His mission to save us, He first needed to become human. It was a human that lost the right as prince of this world. A human needed to reclaim the title. Satan had taken it in the Garden, and since that time every human falls far too short of the glory of God to take the title back. We who commit sin are slaves to sin (John 8:34). Someone who was sinless needed to make a way for us to be justly forgiven while defeating Satan and taking from him the keys of death and hell (Revelation 1:18). Only God could do that. That is why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God so loved the world He sent His only Son.

This morning I'd like for us to consider what had to take place for God to enter the work of His hands. Our salvation is free to us, but God paid dearly. The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the instrument of creation (John 1:3). It was through Him that God created all things. Scientists estimate that there are 10^{90} atoms in our universe. Do you realize that Jesus knows every one of them? The author of Hebrews tells us that by He holds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). He knows each electron in every orbit and each time it shifts to the orbit of another atom. At the same time He knows every galaxy and every star and planet and asteroid in it. He knows our every thought (Psalm 139:2).

It is sadly humorous to see some people claim to be god. They can't even tell you how many cells are in their little fingernail let alone where they are in the universe. They'd like to think they can move a molecule with their mind or bend a spoon. No one has ever proven they could do such an insignificant thing. What a vast difference there is between man and the infinite mind of God! How pathetic man is to claim he is a god (Ezekiel 28:9).

I mention that to say by contrast how great is our God! He not only knows every particle and sustains it, He spoke each into existence. He knows each one's past and future. He knows all things. It was this all-powerful, all-knowing God that determined to

Commented [notes1]: John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Commented [notes2]: Exodus 25:8 (ESV)

⁸ And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

Commented [notes3]: John 8:34 (ESV)

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

Commented [notes4]: Revelation 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Commented [notes5]: John 1:3 (ESV)

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Commented [notes6]: Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Commented [notes7]: Psalm 139:2 (ESV)

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

Commented [notes8]: Ezekiel 28:9 (ESV)

⁹ Will you still say, 'I am a god,' in the presence of those who kill you, though you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of those who slay you?

enter His own creation in the form of a helpless fetus in the womb of a young girl in a tiny town of Davidic Jews in the Galilee (Luke 1:35). To do that, He had to leave everything to the Father with Whom He is one, emptying Himself, and exposing Himself to the brutality and depravity of man and this fallen world.

Paul describes this in his letter to the Philippians. It is called the emptying passage. We should pay special attention to it, not only because it describes the wonder of what God did for us, but because under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul says we are to take the same mindset for our life. *⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

The greatness of an act is not only measured by the deed itself, but by the cost to the one that performed the deed. When I was five-years-old, I saved a little baby from drowning. It cost me nothing. In fact, I was watching her play at the side of the pool and thinking how great it would be if she fell in and I saved her. What a hero! When my son disappeared in under the muddy current of the Verde River, my friend risked injuring himself to jump in from a high rock to save him. That is quite a bit more heroic. In New York, a man jumped into icy water to save some kids from drowning. After getting the last child up onto the ice he disappeared under the ice and drowned. That was an even greater act. If he was just a single man with little to give up, it would still be an incredible act of sacrifice. If he was married and with children and prosperous, it would seem an even greater sacrifice. **Jesus came from perfection into the depravity of this world to suffer and die to save us.** How great an act of sacrifice is that?

We cannot comprehend the giant step from the heavenly realm into the womb of Mary in this sin sick world. Before He made that step He knew the pain He would endure. He knew the rejection He would suffer. He knew betrayal of those closest was certain to come. He knew He would face the wrath of God upon the sins of the world, and still He came! What a giant step from ordering all things to so empty Himself of knowledge and glory that He would grow up as a little boy in a subjugated nation in a poor family with the destiny of suffering that lay before Him. He did not cling to equality with God, but set it all aside to save you and me (2Corinthians 8:9).

Commented [notes9]: Luke 1:35 (ESV)

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God.

Commented [notes10]: 2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

He made Himself nothing. He was everything! Man is nothing compared to Almighty God. Though He emptied Himself, He still had the nature of God. He took on the form of a servant and was found in the likeness of man. In this description we see what remained of the Godhead. God is a servant. Jesus said the greatest among you will be your servant (Matthew 23:11). In His gracious serving actions each day, He showed us the very heart of God. I know it's a bit confusing, because we are used to those who are great being served. But that is because sin turned everything upside down. Serving is true greatness. You share in the joy of those you serve. You have the joy of all those you serve and the joy of serving to boot. It is loving, and God is love (1John 4:8)

Why would God do such a thing? Why is there Christmas? Why would He humble Himself to the point of becoming a man? It's the nature of God for God is love. He didn't create us as an experiment. He knew when He created Adam and Eve that they would rebel, that sin would bring a curse upon the earth, that man would be separated from Him and destined for judgment, that He would send His only Son as a man with Whom He is one (John 10:30). He knew He would die for us. He knew He would conquer death and hell. And He knew we would forever be grateful. Recently we saw in our study in Romans just what He was after. He wants us to be like Him. We saw that in Romans 8:29.

That is why this passage about emptying Himself, becoming nothing, and serving begins with the command to let this mind be in us. He is about the work of transforming us. Jesus came to do the will of the Father (John 4:34). He is fulfilled in doing His will. That is His joy! He so loves the Father and is so completely one with Him that their desire to see us saved and transformed is the same (John 14:31). And as we are transformed, we will increasingly find our fulfillment and joy in doing the will of the Father (John 15:10-11; 17:13). Jesus was so fulfilled and satisfied with the Father's love and doing His will that this world had nothing to offer. The temptations that He faced could not capture His imagination because His heart was so fulfilled in the love of the Father. The selfishness and greed of the world couldn't find any space in His heart to take root. That is what He wants for us as well.

Jesus came to that giant step down to the manger with the mission of dying for our sins so that we could receive the Holy Spirit and turn our thinking right side up. He wants our hearts so full of love from and for the Father that we can stand against temptation like He did. Then we can empty ourselves and serve in His power and know the joy of the Lord in the process. Do you know how you can spot the difference between Christians that operate out of duty and those that operate out of abundance? Check the smile. Look for the joy. It's not that we are always happy, for this world is filled with

Commented [notes11]: Matthew 23:11 (ESV)

¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant.

Commented [notes12]: 1 John 4:8 (ESV)

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Commented [notes13]: John 10:30 (ESV)

³⁰ I and the Father are one.

Commented [notes14]: Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Commented [notes15]: John 4:34 (ESV)

³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

Commented [notes16]: John 14:31 (ESV)

³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Commented [notes17]: John 15:10-11 (ESV)

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Commented [notes18]: John 17:13 (ESV)

¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

sorrow and loss, yet we have a deep abiding joy in the Lord and His service. It is a fruit of His Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

We are too easily satisfied with the passing temporal pleasures of life. C.S. Lewis said it was like being satisfied making mud pies when you could be enjoying a vacation by the sea. It isn't that we are too hard to satisfy, but too easily satisfied with the things of this world. We need a holy dissatisfaction that can only be met by the enormity of God and His goodness and total abandonment to His will. What if we did let this mind be in us that was also in Christ Jesus, who didn't cling to what He had but let it all go to become nothing and serve as a man? What would that look like?

The world would have you think that being a Christian is a safe and boring life for the simple minded. Reality is just the opposite. The boring temporal pleasures of this world that often enslave us can't hold a candle to an all-out love affair with our Creator. **The things of this world that capture your imagination are never as fulfilling as you thought they would be.** On the other hand, a relationship with Jesus in the increasing revelation of His word always exceeds your imagination. I've been studying the Bible since I was a child and it just keeps getting more amazing and richer as more is revealed to my mind and heart. I've preached 16 Christmas messages and none are the same. It just gets richer and deeper. We haven't seen anything yet! Wait till the trumpet sounds (1Corinthians 15:52)!

Some would argue that dying for us wasn't such a huge price since Jesus knew He would be resurrected. First, of all, crucifixion and scourging were two of the most torturous ways every invented to cause suffering. If you don't think that was such a big deal, go watch *The Passion* one more time. But secondly, that step that Jesus took in love to become a man was, as I understand it, a permanent deal. Yes, He has a glorified body now, but it is in human form. When seen by John in Revelation, Jesus had a glorious human shape (Revelation 1:13-16). He forever bears the marks that caused His death. That is an eternal cost which He considered more than worth the results.

Now let us consider the conclusion of our passage. Jesus took on the form of man and was born that Christmas two thousand years ago so that He could obey the Father even to the death on the cross. He was completely obedient in all things (John 5:19). **He listened and obeyed no matter what the cost. That is the mind we are to have, humble, serving, and obedient.** We empty ourselves that we might be filled with Him. We delight in Him that we might receive His desires into our hearts (Psalm 37:4). There is fulfillment and true joy everlasting. But it doesn't end there. The righteousness and

Commented [notes19]: Galatians 5:22 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Commented [notes20]: 1 Corinthians 15:52 (ESV)

⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

Commented [notes21]: Revelation 1:13-16 (ESV)

¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

Commented [notes22]: John 5:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

Commented [notes23]: Psalm 37:4 (ESV)

⁴ Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

justice of God rewards every action (Matthew 16:27). Jesus' complete obedience to the ultimate extent was rewarded with a name above every name.

Paul tells us in the letter to the Ephesians, ⁹ (*In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?* ¹⁰ *He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.*) Ephesians 4:9-10 (ESV) He descended into the womb of Mary and even to the very lower regions to take the keys of death and hell from Satan. Now He has been given the most honored name. He has returned to the glory He had with the Father before the world began (John 17:5). He is no longer emptied, but outshining with glory, all-knowing, all-powerful, and in the Holy Spirit filling the whole universe. Every particle in space is once again sustained by Him. He fills all things! The petty images of the gods created by man cannot compare. The claims of so called enlightened men fall so incredibly short. **The baby in the manger is now the glorified Christ, Lord of all.**

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He alone is Lord. What else can we do in His glorious presence? The wise men so long ago were wise enough to do so at His birth (Matthew 2:11) When we get just a bit of insight into what He has done and the price He has paid, we will fall to our knees and worship.

Then all will see the silliness of man claiming to be god and the ridiculous worship of created things. Then the hardness of man's heart will be clearly seen and so utterly abhorrent. Then we will wonder why we played with mud pies when we could have been vacationing by the sea – wonder why we were so easily satisfied with the temporal and enslaving pleasures of the world when we could have been enjoying the One that loves us and joyfully serving Him. We will still be wondering about the miracle of the incarnation, that One so great could become so small and seemingly vulnerable. We'll wonder at the love that took such a giant step down and emptied Himself that we might take a giant step up and be filled with Him!

Questions

- 1 When did God live in a tent?
- 2 Why did the word become flesh?
- 3 How great is Jesus?
- 4 What makes a deed great?
- 5 What did it take for Jesus to become man?
- 6 Why would He humble Himself to the point of becoming a man?
- 7 What is God's goal?
- 8 How can you spot the difference between Christians that operate out of duty and those that operate out of abundance?
- 9 Why does the world disappoint us?

Commented [notes24]: Matthew 16:27 (ESV)

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Commented [notes25]: John 17:5 (ESV)

⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Commented [notes26]: Matthew 2:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

- 10 What should our mindset be?
- 11 What will we do when we see Jesus?