

At the Corner of Man and God: *The Incarnation Part II*

Matt. 1:18-25

The angel told Joseph that the child within Mary was conceived of the Holy Spirit. This child would have no human father, his Father would be God. Matthew then states that this is the fulfillment of a prophesy given 700 years earlier, that a virgin would conceive and bear a son and that child would be Immanuel, *God with us*. The Incarnation is God becoming a man. There is no greater miracle in the Bible than the Incarnation when God, who is infinite, meaning He can't be measured, He has no fringes, no edges, and no ending, became a man with very real fringes and edges. Jesus was fully man and he had limitations and weaknesses, just like all of us do. He got hungry, cold, and tired. He didn't know everything. He never sinned in thought or deed, but the Bible tells us he was tempted by sin just as we are. And he died on the cross. And at the same time, Jesus was fully God and he didn't give up any of that Godhood for a moment, so he was at the same time, all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere at once, and unable to be tempted or to die. How these two seemingly contradictory realities could be true at the same time is the great mystery and miracle of the Incarnation.

Last week we considered the mystery of the Incarnation, when God became a man. This morning I want us to consider *why* God became a man. Why would Jesus subject himself to cold, hunger, weariness, mocking, rejection, and ultimately death when he was God and didn't need to experience any of these human limitations and suffering? Why the incarnation?

This question needs to be considered in three layers. The first layer is simply what was the purpose of Jesus' coming? In other words, what was God out to accomplish with the Incarnation? The second layer of that question, why did God become a man, was why did He choose to do it *this way*? Couldn't God have come up with an easier way to accomplish the same thing without Jesus having to go through all the pain and sacrifice? If God is all powerful and well, God, couldn't He have done it some other way? Why this way? And the third layer to that same question, why did God become a man, attempts to go deeper than just what He sought to accomplish or the tactical means He chose to accomplish it, and glimpse His heart in all of this. What was it that motivated God's heart to send His Son as God incarnate? What motivated Jesus' heart to take on the form and nature of a man, forever after to be both God and man for all of eternity forward?

1. When God became a man: *what was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth as a man?*

When we look at the manger and baby Jesus, we don't have to guess why he came. The angel Gabriel answers that question in verse 21: *you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. At Christmas we celebrate a Savior who was born to save us from our sins.

A slogan that was popular among Christians in the 70's was "Jesus saves". I like it, it's short and direct. But like the term "born again" it soon became a buzz phrase that was emptied of a lot of its meaning. Being "saved" came to mean you said "praise the Lord" a lot, carried a Bible, and had a bumper sticker with a fish on your car. To this day, when people say, "are you saved?" it often doesn't mean much more than, do you go to church, read your Bible, and believe in Jesus? But being saved means a lot more than that.

Jesus came into the world to save the world because it really needs saving. Most of us lead relatively safe and peaceful lives and Christmas can come to mean decorations and Christmas carols and eating

too much. These are rich traditions and I thank God for them, but we can tend to forget that we live in a very dark world that desperately needs saving. Isaiah chapter 9 makes this prophesy about Jesus: *the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*

Without Christ we live in a land of deep darkness. This past week, in Pakistan, 132 children and 10 teachers were killed by Taliban terrorists. In NYC yesterday two young police officers were killed execution style. In PA a man killed 6 people, including his ex-wife and her family, before taking his own life. Two weeks ago in Iraq, four Christian children were beheaded when they refused to convert to Islam. I'm not sharing these things to depress us, but to remind us that we live in a dark world that desperately needs saving. There is evil and there is brokenness. There is cruelty and there is heartbreak. There is the vicious inflicting of sin and there is the devastation of sin.

But we don't have to go halfway around the world to find this darkness. The same toxic sin that eats away at this world, resides in all our hearts, separating us from God and sending us down a path of sinful acts against ourselves and one another, and ultimately it was leading to an eternity separated from God in hell. What I needed saving from most wasn't the evil guy down the road, but the evil guy within my own heart.

The world was, and is, a dark place, a land of deep darkness, but into that darkness a great light has shone. And the darker the darkness, the brighter the light shines. Before those four young children were beheaded for refusing to convert to Islam, they told their executioners, "we love Jesus, we have always loved Jesus." There was a light shining in their hearts that the world and death couldn't take away from them. And now they are standing in the presence of the Savior they loved and still love. Christmas celebrates that wonderful and holy day when that great light, Jesus, the Son of God, was born to save his people from their sins. Jesus was born to save us from our sins. The angel brought good news of great joy: the light of Christ has overcome the darkness of sin. Why the Incarnation? Jesus came to save his people (which is anyone who believes in him) from their sins.

2. When God became a man: *why did God choose this particular method for saving us?*

Someone might ask, *if God can do anything, why didn't He choose a different way of saving us? An easier way that didn't require so much pain and sacrifice?*

The answer is *there was no other way God could save us from our sins!* There is a misconception out there that God can do anything. It's an understandable misconception since God is all powerful and the Bible says nothing is too hard for God. Some clever person came up with a trick question to try and stump God: *can God create a rock too big for Him to lift?*

The question sounds like it creates a quandary for God. If He can't create a rock too big for Him to lift, then there's something He can't do. On the other hand, if He can create a rock too big for Him to lift, then there's something He can't do. It sounds like it creates an unsolvable problem for God. Except that it's based entirely on a false premise, that premise being that God can do anything. God *can't* do anything. There are some things God *can't* do. Specifically God can't do anything with one attribute that would deny or contradict another attribute of God.

God is the truth, therefore God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). It is impossible for God to sin or be tempted by evil (James 1:13), because it contradicts His character, namely His holiness. So God can't do something with

one attribute (for instance, His power to create a rock), that would contradict another attribute (His power to lift).

Why is this important to this discussion? Because God did have a real quandary, but it had nothing to do with creating and lifting rocks. It had to do with saving fallen man. He loved us, but His love could never contradict His justice, so He couldn't just "forgive" us cause He wanted to or overlook our sin and let us into heaven. There weren't 50 ways that God could have saved us. There was only one way. In the garden of Gethsemene, Jesus prayed, *Father, if there is any other way, take this cup (the cup of the cross) from me. Nevertheless, not as I will but your will be done.* There was no other way, if there were, God would have released Jesus from having to go to the cross.

So God's perfect wisdom combined with His perfect love and His perfect justice and He devised a plan that would display each attribute perfectly, bringing Him glory and us salvation: God would send His Son as a man. As a man Jesus would be like Adam on steroids: he would face temptation after temptation to disobey God, but where Adam failed and sinned, Jesus would succeed gloriously by overcoming every temptation and obeying his Father perfectly. As God, Jesus would perfectly represent God to mankind: what God's like, how He thinks, how He sees us, how He feels about us, what He wants from us. Jesus said, "when you've seen me, you've seen the Father." What's God like? He's exactly like Jesus!!

And then as Jesus hung on the cross, God's ferocious love for the lost and His terrifying judgment of sin would meet and explode outward in saving power for all who believe. His righteous justice was perfectly satisfied by Jesus' substitutionary death, and His unending love for the lost was perfectly satisfied as the way for them to be saved was opened wide.

Why did God choose this particular method to save us? Because it was the only way possible to save us!

3. When God became a man: *what was the motivation of God's heart for saving us?*

We don't have to guess at what motivated God's heart to send Jesus. One of the most familiar verses in the Bible, John 3:16, gives us a window into God's heart: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*"

Isaiah 9 prophesies *for to us a child is born, to us a son is given...* Jesus tells us why that son was given. It was for love. If we could go back in time and quietly enter that stable and look at that manger scene, we'd be looking at the second greatest display of love in history. God gave his Son through the incarnation. Jesus was born to die, and the greatest display of God's love was on the day He gave His Son to be crucified for our sins.

But in the next verse Jesus also gives us a window into what *didn't* motivate God's heart when He sent His Son. *17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* Jesus didn't come to condemn the world – that wasn't his mission, that wasn't what motivated God's heart. The world was already condemned because of sin. God gave His Son Jesus to save the world from condemnation.

Let me pause here and say this is a good reminder of what the Lord calls us to do as well. Some churches get so focused on condemning sin that they forget to love the sinner. They're louder about what they're against than what they're for. We need to take a relook at Jesus' ministry and model our witness after his life and ministry. Jesus didn't come to excuse sin, but he also says that he didn't come to

condemn a world of sinners either. Condemnation wasn't his mission. Love was, and out of love Jesus came to save lost sinners from their sin.

The world is not only dark, it's cold too, with the coldness of a lack of love. The lack of love that entered the world when we rebelled against God, because God is love and the only originating source of love in all creation. We aren't the source of the love we have, any love we have is a reflection of our Creator. And the further the world drifts from God, the less love there is in the world. And without love this world is a very cold place, even if you have all the creature comforts you could ever want. Without love the world is filled with pride, selfishness, betrayal, apathy, and cruelty. Without love people exploit, abuse, and use other people. A loveless world is a cold world.

One of the most beloved songs of the season is the song "I'll be home for Christmas" and I think it's because it speaks to a universal longing in our hearts. To be home when it means the most. To be surrounded by those we love and who love us. It was written in the 40's to honor soldiers who were serving overseas in WWII and it touched the hearts of soldiers and civilians alike because it contrasted the coldness of the battlefield with the warmth of home. *Christmas Eve will find me where the love light gleams. I'll be home for Christmas if only in my dreams.*

At Christmas we remember and joyfully celebrate the greatest love light that has ever gleamed, a light of love that shines down through the centuries and touches lives and hearts to this very day. The warm light of God's love shining in the birth of His Son. It's vitally important that we know *why* God sent His Son. It's not enough to know the information about God's salvation, our hearts need to be warmed by the intense love of God in giving that salvation. Christmas isn't the cold light of a distant God who chose to save us for His own mysterious reasons, Christmas is the warm light of a loving God who, because He loves us so much, chose to come close, and coming close, saved us. Jesus. Immanuel. God with us.

Call band up

I don't want to let this moment slip by without giving anyone here who doesn't know Jesus as your Savior the opportunity for you to ask him to come into your life and to save you from your sin. I've got to be honest with you: apart from believing in Christ, there is no other way to be saved. If there was, God would have spared Jesus from going to the cross. God offers salvation as a free gift to all who will come to Him and receive it by faith, but we need to come to Him, believe and receive that gift. If you've never done so before, will you pray with me now as we close in prayer?