

God in a Manger

When Jesus came to earth at Christmastime, it was to reveal God to us. When we look at the incarnation, (where God took on flesh) we see several important reasons: the first and primary was to accomplish salvation.

Second, it was done in such a way as to fulfill the Scriptures.

Third, it was to reveal what God was like to us.

Corrie Ten Boom made this comment,

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

From God’s perspective it was because of His intense love for us. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

(John 3:16)

We have been looking at Jesus’ birth in anticipation of Christmas celebration.

According to John chapter 1, Jesus was God who was born as a baby.

He wrote,

“And the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh ...
and dwelt among us. (John 1:1 & 14).

Then we read from Matthew’s gospel where the angel spoke to Joseph that Jesus’ birth would be the fulfillment of the prophecy, which spoke of a virgin giving birth to a son who would be called “***Emmanuel*** – which is translated, ***God with us.***”

So today I want us to take a close look at Jesus who was ‘God in a Manger.’

The Hymn writer penned,

What child is this who laid to rest on Mary’ lap is sleeping?

Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,

While shepherds watch are keeping?

This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing;

Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary

Why lies he in such mean estate

Where ox and ass are feeding?

Good Christian, fear; for sinners here

The silent word is pleading.

So bring him incense, gold and myrrh,
 Come peasant, king, to own him;
 The King of kings, salvation brings,
 Let loving hearts enthrone him.¹

Christmas is not about the Savior's infancy; it is about His deity.
 Can we even fathom what it meant for God to be born in a manger?
 How does one explain the Almighty stooping to become a tiny infant?
 MacArthur writes,

"It was, of course the greatest condescension the world has ever known or will ever know. Our minds cannot begin to understand what was involved in God's becoming a man. We will never comprehend why He who was infinitely rich would become poor, assume a human nature, and enter into a world He knew would reject Him and kill Him. Nor can anyone explain how God could become a baby. Yet He did. Without forsaking His divine nature or diminishing His deity in any sense, He was born into our world as a tiny infant"²

That's the miracle...

I. The Character of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus took on human flesh it was a humbling experience...

- **He was humble.**

Paul wrote,

"Who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

Not only is this context a lesson on humility toward others, but it's example is the emptying that took place when Jesus, who was equal with God the Father, became a man. In humbling Himself Jesus gave up everything.

Then the Author of life surrendered His life to death.

¹ William Chatterton Dix, English, before 1642.

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Miracle of Christmas*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 86.

Jesus was content with a stable when He was born,
that we might have a mansion when we die.

The incarnation was the greatest example of humility possible, especially when we realize the purpose was to die as a sinless sacrifice to save sinful man. In becoming man Jesus voluntarily suspended the full application of His divine attributes.

“He didn’t give up being God, but He willingly gave up the independent use of the privileges and powers that were His as God.”³

- **Jesus was also righteous.**

Isaiah’s prophecy tells us the character of the coming Messiah:

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from the roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with **righteousness** He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth ... Also **righteousness** will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist.”

(Is. 11:1-5)

When Jesus was on the earth He demonstrated righteousness. The next section gives us a snapshot of the changes Jesus’ righteous rule will make at His return.

“And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Then in the day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.”

(Is. 11:6-10)

³ Ibid.

More than simply a baby born Jesus grew into who He really was – a righteous man who walked the earth, demonstrating His righteous and holy life to all.

Isaiah prophesies that the Son to be born will rule over the throne of David.

“For unto us a child will be born ... a Son will be given... There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore.” (Is. 9:7).

II. The Divine Nature of Jesus Christ

What did it mean for Jesus – God the Son, to be dwelling with us as a man?

- **Jesus was the incarnation of God**

When Paul wrote the epistle to the Colossians, he captured the essence of Jesus’ divine nature.

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

¹⁷He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” (Col. 1:15-20).

By way of background, Paul specifically is addressing the false teaching of the Gnostics that was influencing the Christians at Colossae.

MacArthur writes,

“This was the product of an elitist, heavily intellectual cult who fancied themselves the only ones who had access to the truth. The truth, they believed, was so complex that common people couldn’t know it. They taught among other things the philosophical dualism that matter is evil and spirit is good.”⁴

The gnostic teachers would say,

⁴ MacArthur, p. 88.

Because God is a spirit He is good, but He could never touch matter which is evil.
They concluded that God couldn't be the creator of the physical universe

– If God made matter He would be responsible for evil.

God could also never become a man

– He would have to dwell in a body made of evil matter.

So instead, He begot spiritual emanations which begot other emanations; over a long period of time they evolved into physical form, from good to evil.

They taught that Jesus was one of the very early spiritual emanations from God. His body couldn't be real; they explained away the incarnation:

'Jesus was a good angel whose body was only an illusion.'

Paul affirms:

- **Jesus is the fullness of God**– Creator and Sustainer of everything

¹⁶For by Him all things were created

...all things have been created through Him and for Him.

¹⁷He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

¹⁹For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

Col. 2:9 adds,

"For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form."

- **Jesus is the Image of God**

– eikon – perfect replica, precise copy,

a duplicate more like the original than a photograph.

Heb. 1:1 parallels these verses

"...in these last days has spoke to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power..."

- **Jesus is the first-born of God.**

Prototokos – Jesus' rank not origin

Firstborn of a Hebrew family was the heir, the ranking one who had the rights of inheritance. In a royal family the firstborn had the right to rule.

This is clearly seen in verses 18:

and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Concerning Jesus' character, we understand Him to be...

Humble

Righteous

Concerning Jesus' divine nature, we understand that He is...

The Incarnation of God

The Fullness of God

The Image of God

The First-born of God

Billy Graham said,

“Christmas is not a myth, not a tradition, not a dream. It is a glorious reality. It is a time of joy. Bethlehem's manger crib became the link that bound a lost world to a loving God.

From that manger came a Man who not only taught us a new way of life, but brought us into a new relationship with our Creator. Christmas means that God is interested in the affairs of people; that God loves us so much that he was willing to give His Son.”

Life with Christ is an endless hope;
Life without Christ is a hopeless end.