

The Wonder of Christmas
Lester Zimmerman
Matthew 1:18-25
John 1:1-14

This morning we want to pause to reflect on the birth of Christ and the significance of his coming to earth. Jesus could have come to earth in the fullness of his power and glory. He could have taken on the form of a huge angel or some other powerful form. But he took on our weak human form.

We call this the incarnation. This is a theological word and it simply means that Jesus gave up his spiritual glorified body and stepped into a physical body to identify with us.

The incarnation is God, creator of the entire universe, entering into the womb of a young virgin and being born in the flesh as a baby.

It is the great wonder of Christmas – God becoming like us - God becoming a baby.

Let's read the story of the incarnation from Matthew and John's gospel.

READ Matt.1:18-25 and John 1: 1-14

John gives a powerful declaration of the divinity of Christ. Jesus really is God. His existence is eternal. He wasn't created. He always was. Jesus created the world and all things that exist.

Jn 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The incarnation of God becoming human and actually living among us is the Wonder of the Christmas story. Like a news journalist doing some investigative reporting the story we discover behind all the glitter is the incarnation. This is the real story behind the story.

Jn. 1:14 "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us....."

- He who is spirit became flesh and blood
- Jesus, who was eternal, took on the form of the temporal
- Jesus, who is one with the Father, endured separation from God so that those who were separated might become one with God.

We sing of the incarnation in our Christmas carols such as Hark the Herald Angels Sing"

Veil'd in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, th' incarnate Deity:
Pleased, as man, with men to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!

This is more than a theological concept. The incarnation has practical implications in our lives.

1. The incarnation was necessary for our salvation.

Jesus coming to earth isn't just a cute story. It was necessary if you and I were going to have our sins forgiven. The pure Lamb of God had to die to redeem us. He couldn't die in his state of eternal glory so he had to become like us so he could suffer and die.

The Word had to become flesh in order to be tested, tried and qualified to be the payment for our sins. The blood of God had to be spilt so he took on flesh and blood. He came with a mission and that mission was to die for our sins. Before his crucifixion Jesus prays.....

Jn.12:27 "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. (NIV)

The incarnation means that God took our place on the cross because he was counted as one of us.

- He was born that we might be born again
- He became a servant that we might become sons and daughters
- He was forsaken that we might not be forsaken
- He was made sin that we might be made righteous
- He died that we might live
- He descended that we might ascend

2. The incarnation was a huge sacrifice and act of love.

Giving up his place in Heaven and setting aside his glory was no small thing.

There is really no earthy comparison but the closest may be to that of a prestigious godly multi-millionaire living in a mansion with a huge staff that's waits on his every need. He responds to the call to become a missionary and goes to live among a remote tribe in some far off jungle. The people are uncivilized, live in straw huts and eat worms and monkey brains.

Instead of hanging on to the North American lifestyle he lays it all down and becomes truly one of them.

- Their poverty becomes his poverty
- Their struggle to survive become his struggle to survive
- Their way of life becomes his way of life
- He becomes one with them and lives out a culturally incarnate lifestyle
- He lives in a straw hut and eats monkey brains with them

He puts his very life on the line because he has this love burning in his heart for them. He does all this to relate to them and so they will hear the good news of salvation in a language they will understand. And in the end.... they kill him.

Jesus did this for us but to a much greater degree. He gave up so much more.

He wasn't just a man becoming a missionary. He was almighty God becoming a helpless baby.

- He was all powerful becoming weak and defenseless
- He had legions of angels serving him and he became a servant
- He had the riches and comforts of the universe and he became poor

2 Cor.8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (NIV)

Phil.2:6-8 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

The incarnation helps us to understand not only that God loves us but the depth of that love in God becoming flesh and living among us. He didn't just send a messenger – he became the incarnate messenger himself and lived among us. They didn't just kill him...he laid down his life willingly to pay for our sins.

3. This incarnate love lives in us and compels us.

The love that compelled Jesus to come to us now compels us to go to others.

Rom.5:5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

2 Cor.5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

The love of God has taken up residence in us. Our bodies have become the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are not God, but the love of God is incarnate in us. Jesus now lives in us and expresses his love through us to a lost a dying world. This is more than human love and compassion. It is the love of God poured into our hearts.

That's what motivates missionaries to become "culturally incarnate" and give up their comforts of home.

That's what motivates us to risk sharing our faith with our neighbors and friends. It is the love of God that lives in us.

Howard Thurmond writes:

When the song of angels is silent – when the star in the sky is gone
When the kings and princes are home –
When the shepherds are again tending their sheep –
When the manger is darkened still – The work of Christmas begins....
 To find the lost – to heal the broken – to feed the hungry
 To rebuild the nations – to bring peace among people

To befriend the lonely – to release the prisoner
To make music in the heart.

Conclusion:

The shepherds, after seeing the baby Jesus, began telling people what they had experienced and heard.

We have not seen the baby Jesus but we have experienced the risen Christ. We too have a story to tell.

In 2008 let's purpose to love more and share more about the one who became flesh and lived among us and has changed our lives. This is the wonder of Christmas and His name is Jesus!