

CHRIST BECAME ONE OF US

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GALATIANS 4:4

My wife Annie and I would like to wish you and your family a merry Christmas and a joyous New Year. We pray that you and your family will experience the presence of the Lord in a very special way during this season and that you will enter the New Year with anticipation of enjoying the “exceedingly great and precious promises” of God. We are grateful to the Lord for the care and consolation He granted us and our family and for the opportunities to serve Him here and abroad. This year, I traveled to four cities in southern India, preached the gospel in evangelistic meetings, and equipped pastors for the ministry of preaching. I also filled in the pulpit once a month at a Ghanaian congregation in Delaware. I thank the Lord for these and other opened doors to preach His word and strengthen the body of Christ. I pray that the Lord will richly bless you for your partnership to advance the gospel in India, Kenya, Myanmar, and Pakistan. Christmas declares that “God has only one Son and He made Him a missionary.” Let the missionary spirit of Christ empower you to be the voice of hope in a world that is fettered by confusion and hopelessness.

Albert Einstein once remarked: “I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. . . No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.” Who was this luminous Nazarene that graced the landscape of history two thousand years ago? The Bible teaches that He was the eternal Word (*logos*) that became flesh and dwelt among us, whose glory was as of the “only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Nazarene who walked the dusty roads of ancient Palestine was none other than God in the flesh (God incarnate). All too often, in the hustle and bustle, glitter and glamor, lights and sounds of Christmas, this truth is forgotten or missed.

The central message of Christmas is that “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4). When the time was just right, the second person of the Trinity, the eternally begotten Son of God, took upon Himself human nature by being born to Mary through the Holy Spirit. Seven hundred years before His birth, the prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of Jesus Christ: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. . . And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6). Notice, the Son is given, not born. The Son always existed, but the child is born. In taking on human nature, the Son of God became the God-man, with two natures—divine and human—unified in one person “without any confusion, change, division, or separation.”

Historic Christianity affirms that when the second person of the Trinity took on human nature, He did not divest, subvert, deny, or impugn His deity in any way. He remained fully God and fully man at the same time, and when He ascended into heaven, He did not leave His human nature behind. It is forever a part of Him, so that the Son of God who is presently seated at the right hand of the Father is Jesus Christ, the God-man. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews could confidently say, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that

we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15–16). Indeed, the story of the birth of Jesus is the story of divine condescension.

Why did the Son of God take on human nature? The apostle Paul tells us that He did so to redeem us (Gal. 4:4). Incarnation was necessary for a number of reasons, but the one that is at the top of the list is our redemption. The fourth-century Cappadocian, Gregory of Nazianzus, noted, “For that which he has not taken up he has not saved. He saved that which he joined to his divinity.” The author of Hebrews affirms: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. Therefore, when He came into the world, He said, ‘Sacrifices and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me’” (Heb. 10:4–5).

In his book, *Cur Deus Homo* (“why God became man”), Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) argued that incarnation was necessary because only one who was both God and man could save us. As man, Jesus was able to die in our place to pay the penalty for our sins; as God, Jesus could make His death infinitely valuable for satisfying the wrath and justice of the Almighty. As stated before, our redemption was the primary reason for the incarnation. Christmas heralds the glorious truth that God in Christ stooped down to lift us when we could not help ourselves. In incarnation, the infinite moved into the realm of the finite so we may experience the infinite.

Finally, in Galatians 4:4, the apostle Paul reminds us that our redemption in Christ leads to our adoption as sons of God. Herein lie the riches of incarnation. Adoption points to a new status conferred on us by God for His own glory and confirmed by the Holy Spirit, whereby we call the Father Abba. “Therefore,” wrote the apostle Paul, “you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:7). There is no higher position in life than to be called the son (Greek: *huios*) of God, which signifies our brotherhood to Christ and our partaking of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

As you celebrate Christmas, I pray that you will not lose sight of the meaning, purpose, and riches of incarnation. Christmas can only become a living reality in your life if Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, is born in your heart. Would you open your heart and let Him in? The cosmic Lord of all creation wants to be the redemptive Lord of your life! Amen.