

WHAT WAS GOD THINKING?

Part 4 of ADVENT 2023. Philippians 2:5-11.
Peter Foxwell. Cornerstone Church. December 24, 2023.

HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark, the Herald Angels Sing is a well known Christmas hymn.

- It was written by Charles Wesley in 1739.
- Verse 2 is a memorable statement of the Incarnation.

Christ, by highest heaven, adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the Virgin's womb:
veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;
hail th'incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.

- The everlasting Lord came down from heaven to become one of us.

“Yes, in our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.” – Queen Lucy in *The Last Battle*, by C.S. Lewis.

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

The Incarnation is a mystery and a marvel. What was God thinking?

- The answer is found in the Christ Hymn in Philippians 2.
- The church was in turmoil and conflict due to the stress of persecution.

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV) 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 emptied himself, by 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.

WHAT WAS GOD THINKING?

My suggestion: God thought, “I will do whatever it takes to bring my lost people home. I’ll overcome every challenge at any cost.”

- God manifested the commitment, courage, and love needed.

1 John 4:9 (ESV) In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

First, God found a way to become one of us - verses 6-7.

- God became one of us in Jesus Christ.
- Jesus is truly God - the “form” of God, “equality” with God - verse 6.
- This required a profound act of humility.

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) 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.

- Jesus didn’t “grasp” equality with God (v. 6). He chose not to display his glory or demand his rights. He didn’t use his divine nature to serve himself.
- Crucially, Jesus didn’t use his divine nature to escape the cross. He “emptied” himself (v. 7) by giving up the use of his divine prerogatives.

Then, God found a way to die for us - verse 8.

- Bring us home required satisfying God’s justice and forgiving our sins. This requires a blood sacrifice of infinite value and total innocence.
- Only God could be an infinite and innocent sacrifice. But God cannot die.

- God became one of us to be able to die for us. The human nature of Jesus Christ died on the cross - a complete, sufficient, infinite and innocent sacrificial offering.
- His sacrifice on the cross atoned for our sins and satisfied God's justice:

1 John 2:1-2 (ESV) ... Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation (satisfied God's justice) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

IN AWE OF GOD'S INCARNATION MINDSET

We should respond to the Incarnation with awe and wonder.

- Let's direct our love, reverence, and adoration to our Lord Jesus Christ for his glorious divinity and humble humanity.
- Thomas Watson, a 17th Century English pastor, wrote:

"See here [in the Incarnation], ... the infinite love of God the Father; that when we had lost ourselves by sin, God, in the riches of his grace, sent forth his Son, made of a woman, to redeem us. And behold the infinite love of Christ, in that he was willing thus to condescend to take our flesh. Surely the angels would have disdained to have taken our flesh; it would have been a disparagement to them. What king would be willing to wear sackcloth over his cloth of gold? But Christ did not disdain to take our flesh. Oh, the love of Christ!" (<https://www.fivesolas.com/Watson/humilia.htm>).
- The conclusion to the Christ Hymn also helps us respond to the Incarnation:

Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV) 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.

BONUS CONTENT

In the 4th Century, a priest named Arius sparked controversy by arguing that Jesus, while divine, was a secondary being to God the Father. This “Arianism” prompted Emperor Constantine to call the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. The outcome? The Nicene Creed. One section of the creed is dedicated to the divine-human natures of Jesus Christ. It affirms Jesus’ full divinity as “of one substance” (Greek: homoousios) with the Father. The section reads:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light,

true God from true God,

begotten, not made, consubstantial (homoousios) with the Father;
through him, all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation

he came down from heaven,

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,

and became man.

Many Christian teachers have reflected on the mystery of the Incarnation:

“No other God have I but Thee; born in a manger, died on a tree” (Martin Luther).

“He it is by whom all things were made, and who was made one of all things; who is the revealer of the Father, the creator of the Mother (Mary); the Son of God by the Father without a mother, the Son of man by the Mother without a father; the Word who is God before all time, the Word made flesh at a fitting time, the maker of the sun, made under the sun; ordering all the ages from the bosom of the Father, hallowing a day of today from the womb of the Mother; remaining in the former, coming forth from the latter; author of the heaven and the earth, sprung under the heaven out of the earth; unutterably wise, in His wisdom a babe without utterance; filling the world, lying in a manger” (Augustine, Bishop of Hippo)