

The Incarnation

It's Christmas Time

It's that time of the year again when all around the world, nations pause to celebrate the birth of Jesus. It remains the greatest event in all of history – so significant that it split the dating of every event prior to, and after its happening.

Much of Christmas has become about arguing over what to buy, what to eat, where to lodge, where to holiday.

But whatever efforts are made to recast Christmas, we win!

Jesus remains front and centre.

This is when a hostile crowd start singing about Jesus – think about the Myer Music Bowl on Christmas Eve.

- we start hearing songs about Jesus – being reminded of his birth
- you go into shops, into malls
- Christmas trees are being installed all round town
- the Christmas movies start up on TV
- the music you start hearing is about the birth of Jesus,
- nativity scenes pop up
- wandering stars appear
- houses are lit up in the streets

And it's beautiful!

And for Christians, there's no better time to share the message of Christ but at Christmas time. It's easier than say July!

So today, we're going to delve into the first Christmas event and study what happened, what makes it so beautiful and so glorious and how we relate to it as the people of God.

The Incarnation

This moment in time, Christmas, this extraordinary event – is the incarnation of Jesus, the moment that God took on flesh and walked and dwelt amongst us.

 **Isaiah 9:6-7 (NKJV)**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

 ***Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.***

This is a fascinating text – much loved and often read by Christians. It reveals a prophetic event some 600 years before it occurred.

Matthew Quotes It

We see in the New Testament, that Matthew quotes from this chapter as he is describing the launching of the ministry of Jesus in chapter 4. It's just after Jesus is tempted by Satan and he says, '***The people living in darkness have seen a great light, and on those living in the land of the shadow of death a great light has dawned...***'

Apologetics and Jesus in the Old Testament

And this is one of the encouraging things to us as Christians who are defending the Christian faith that as we look into the Old Testament scriptures Jesus can be revealed all over the place. We recall that Jesus had a conversation with some disciples on the road to Emmaus, and he showed them where he was found in the scriptures. The bible study of the century!

Jews Could Not See It

And yet it is fascinating that the Jews had these writings – they would read them and be unsure of how to apply them – it was not until the coming of Jesus that the meaning of these scriptures became clear.

For God to become one of us,

- to walk amongst us
- to take away our sins
- this was such an affront to the religious Jews
- that God was going to humble himself like a servant

And yet it was clearly foretold - it was what freaked out the Jews so completely.

Jesus Says “I AM”

They're trying to wrap their heads around God standing before them, saying things like in John 8 “Before Abraham was ... I am (Aegoy yemay)” – they pick up stones to kill him. Why? Because he was declaring himself to be Yahwey.

The Jews saw this as offensive – a man of flesh declaring himself to in fact be God. We're talking about monotheistic Jews .. so for a man to claim equality with God was entirely blasphemous.

And this is the incarnation – God wrapped in human flesh. And that's what so great about Christmas!

Why the Incarnation?

Consider one of the favourite songs sung at Christmas time – people sing this all around the world and check out what they're singing:

Joy to the World

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her king;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,*

*Joy to the earth! the saviour reigns;
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,*

You note that the words are describing the blessing of the coming King, while also addressing the withering of creation – that's talking about the curse, about the fall.

And that's what it's all about.

- God becomes a man.
- He does the work that you and I could not do.
- He lives as God's perfect image bearer.
- He is God's perfect covenant keeper.
- He is God's perfect law keeper.
- He dies a death we deserve.
- He's buried like a criminal paying for the sins of you and me.
- He conquers death and He rises back to life.
- He ascended to heaven where he's seated on His throne, right now.
- Today He is enthroned in glory.
- And the scriptures tell us that He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

And he has done all this to bring the **blessing of His salvation to his rebel creation** – to bring light in the darkness, and life where there was death. As far as the curse is found .. Jesus is restoring everything – that's the beauty and majesty of Christmas.

The Power of the Incarnation

In order to understand the power of the incarnation, we need to go back to the beginning of the bible.

 **Genesis 1:26-27 (NKJV)**

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

 ***So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”***

In the Image of God

So this is where we started. He is the creator. We are the creatures designed by God, in the image of God – so that when you look at our first parents, you are supposed to see what God looks like. It’s as if God shines His light down on them and then reflects it out into the world – and it’s beautiful.

God says, ‘**multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, take dominion over it**’ and their job was to tend the garden, cultivate it, fill the earth with God’s glory...

And we know the story ...

God puts His image in the garden, He is in covenant agreement with his creatures. God tells man what to do, and what not to do. And Adam, the image of God, raises his will against that of His creator – and all of creation falls – when his image rebels against the creator.

But look what happens when Adam sinned – God steps and says the following:

 **Genesis 3:15 (NIV)**

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Getting Crushed

This is an awesome statement – you got to stop and take note of how big this is. God addresses His statement to Satan and says ‘this is what’s going to happen’. You’re going to get your head crushed by her Seed.

Notice it’s between her Seed (not Adam’s) – which was unusual talk for that time – because it was always along the line of the males seed. But this is about a man (He) that will be from the woman who will crush the head of the serpent.

This simultaneous action – a moment in time, it’s a heel to head wound.

And so God speaks directly to the cause of the injury to his creation – Satan. And yet, creation was invaded by the power of that decision to rebel, and sin entered the world.

And this was the fall.

And this explains it all – it’s where all the brokenness comes from. It’s where all the depravity comes from. It comes from us; the rebels – we continue to revolt against the creator – we organise ourselves into revolutions against His will.

We can see the glory of God and the light of God and **yet we prefer the darkness**. That’s the problem with the human condition.

The Beauty and Glory of the Incarnation

We hear it so many times – God became man. We can become jaded to the message. We’ve seen the movie – read the books – heard the sermons.

Yet we should fight for joy, it is totally distinct and different. The eternal God humbled himself and took on human form. That God sacrificed everything for his rebel creatures.

- The Holy God,
- The limitless God,
- The uncreated God he took on flesh.
- He got pimples.
- He got stomach aches.
- He suffered hunger.
- He got tired.
- He had his beard pulled.

- He was whipped.
- He was smashed in the face – by His rebels.

It almost seems sacrilegious to talk about God that way.

PE John 1:1-3 (NIV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

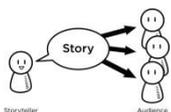
PE *There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.*

PE *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

PE *14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth..*

Jesus, the unique and one and only God was in the bosom of His father, and He has made the Father known to us.

God has become flesh and dwelt with us.



At a Christian Group I hosted I asked – “How do you know Jesus is God?” Everyone looked at me blankly.

Jesus says in John 8, “Before Abraham was, I am” – they pick up stones to kill him. Then in John 10, he says, ‘I and the Father are one’ – and they pick up stones again to stone him.

And he asks, **‘Many good works I have shown you from the father. For which of these do you stone me? They replied, ‘For your good works we stone you not, but for blasphemy that you being a man make yourself God.’**

They Knew What He Was Saying

They knew what he was saying. They understood exactly what Jesus was meaning. They could see it. It was there in front of their faces. They knew it.

And even when Jesus rises from the dead, and he returns to the 12 – Thomas is there. He won’t believe unless he can touch the wounds on Jesus, and Jesus invites him to do just that. **‘Handle me and see. A spirit does not have flesh and bones.’**

And what is Thomas’ response? His reply is telling. He says literally in the Greek, **‘The Lord of Me and the God of me!’**

He is exclaiming, **“You are Yahwey, You are God!”**

They knew who He was.

Jesus Reveals God to Us

 **Philippians 2:1-8 (ESV)**

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

 ***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

The Glory of the Incarnation - our motivation as Christians is to become like Jesus – it’s all about him and what He was like.

The glory of the Incarnation is that God enters into His own creation - into a sin soaked world, He centres himself in a sin cursed creation, living among us, surrounded by His rebellious creatures, being abused by them – he clothed himself with flesh and took on humanity. He became for us the perfect image of God – he is the light of the world – he did as the second Adam what Adam was supposed to do – to shine out and reveal the glory of God.

The glory of the incarnation is that God in the flesh shows us the way to live – he models for us what God is like; how we should be in this world.

And Paul is so aware of this fact – that he says, **'You be like Jesus'**.

This is the glory of the incarnation – that Jesus reveals God to us, and we are called to be like Him.

Let this mind be in You, which was also in Christ. He humbled himself, and ***did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.***

"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy" – then you to, in community with each other – be like Christ – in His humility, in His love.

And because we understand the incarnation, because we know it took place and God is revealed to us – so we also know that is what we are aiming to become; that God will move us towards as we allow Him to transform us and change us – we too become more like God – in our thinking, in our actions, in our love.

The world is broken – it is filled with evil and hurt – people are wretched towards each other. But what is the world supposed to be like? Well He came, and walked among us and showed us what to be like.

So what are we saying to a broken world? It's not come to God and tick a bunch of boxes and obey a bunch of rules, be good little boys and girls, try to be moral people – rather it's come to Jesus, receive His gift of salvation – be joined to Him through faith and be saved - and then be conformed to His image. To be like Him.

 **Col 1:15-20 (ESV)**

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

 ***And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.***

How do we relate to the Incarnation?

In the light of the magnitude of what God has done for us, it's important that we stop and consider our response. The greatest act of grace and kindness was that of the living God – the person of Jesus who left His home in heaven – He left His father, perfect community, perfect love, perfect harmony.

- He clothes Himself with the humanity.
- He felt what we felt | hunger | thirst | pain | grief

He knows what it is to lose someone close to you –

- he knows what it feels like to have your friends turn and leave you
- to be rejected, mocked and laughed at
- he knows what it is to be abused
- to be physically beaten

He experienced what we experienced.

This is the God of all creation. He enters our world to identify with us.

You want to see God – here look at Jesus.

The message of the gospel is very simple:

- God became man for a reason
- we as rebels deserve death
- as we are we can never stand before God
- there is nothing that we can do that can save us from punishment for our rebellion
- a punishment that God would be entirely just in serving out.

And yet Jesus comes into our world – he lives a perfect life. He satisfies every requirement of God. He is blameless – he is referred to as the “spotless lamb of God”.

Why? Because his perfect life would be given in exchange for your imperfect life.

- As a lamb, he was led to the slaughter
- he was the sin sacrifice that paid the price for all sin, for all time

- for every tribe, tongue, nation and people
- He would take on your imperfection and sin
- and pay the price that you and I deserve.

And now we have a representative before God, someone who will stand for us – as we are joined to Christ in faith – so we are found “In Christ”. Paul mentions that phrase 70 times in his writings.

You join yourself to Jesus through faith – you are found ‘In Christ’. And the beautiful thing is that He becomes your righteousness. It’s a gift from God.

That’s the deal. It’s a gift to you. The righteousness of the perfect Christ becomes yours through what? Simple faith .. by placing your faith in Christ.

In Summary

The wonder of the incarnation is that it shows us where God is taking us. To be conformed to His son.

It’s more than a message of salvation – it’s about seeing Him, and becoming like Him.

- walk
- talk
- love people
- serve others
- express faith
- show mercy
- love God
- love the Word

The glory of the incarnation – the God of all creation came, and dwelt among us.

And today, we get to remember that incredible gift – and in a few weeks we get to celebrate together that incredible event.