

12,18,25 The Incarnation

We know what the Birth of Christ, the Incarnation, means – that 2000 years ago, God became Man. But what I want to do this time is to look at some of the *implications* of the Incarnation. And to do that, I will share some of my own thoughts but also some considerations of this by authors and teachers who have really thought this through and realize the wonder of what most of the world either doesn't believe or doesn't care about.

1) Heaven's loss

First, from Spurgeon;

I believe the angels must have wept when they lost the company of Jesus—when the Sun (S'u'n) of Heaven bereaved them of all its light. But they went after him. They descended with him; and when his spirit entered into flesh and he became a babe, he was attended by that mighty host of angels, who after they had been with him to Bethlehem's manger, and seen him safely laid on his mother's breast, in their journey upwards appeared to the shepherds and told them that he was born king of the Jews. The Father sent him! Contemplate that subject. Let your soul get hold of it, and in every period of his life think that he suffered what the Father willed; that every step of his life was marked with the approval of the great I AM. Let every thought that you have of Jesus be also connected with the eternal, ever-blessed God.

2) The Invisible God Made Visible

This is from Watchman Nee;

The word of God informs us how in olden times through His servants God revealed to mankind His heart's desire of love towards us by diverse portions and in diverse manners, but man failed to comprehend. He thus had no other way but to come himself to this world to become a man, and this man is Him whom we know of as Jesus Christ.

The God of glory condescends himself to be a man. What humility is this! He who is far above all has emptied himself and taken upon the likeness of a man. Let me say that the entire earthly life of the Lord Jesus was for the purpose of expressing (not just explaining) the loving heart of God towards men. In His thirty-three years on earth, Jesus manifested nothing less than the heart of God. The way He treated people on earth is the way God always treats us.

3) The World's Response

What was the world's response to coming face-to-face with God in the flesh? I can't count the times I've been told by people I'm witnessing to that if God would just come to us and show Himself to us, we'd believe in Him. Well, He did – and we killed Him. If He came in every generation and said and did what He did 2000 years ago, our response would be the same. He's not only different from us, all that He stands for is our exact opposite, so much so, that with the exception of those who's minds have been renewed (those who see Him as He is), the rest of the world doesn't just dismiss or ignore Him – they hate Him.

(John 15:18-19) "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

4) The World's Response To Christ's Second Body

Our Lord has been manifested through the faithful vessels of His second Body in every generation since the outpouring of His Spirit; and for those whose lives are a true representation of His indwelling presence, they have been hated just as He was. But in this world there have also been a remnant of men and women who feel the darkness that has enslaved them and they have sought the Truth. So, rather than hate the Lord or His followers, they have joined them, and the torch is passed from one generation to the next.

(2 Cor. 2:15-16) We are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.

(Matt. 7:13-14) Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and few find it.

(Matt. 12:30) Whoever is not with me is against me.

5) God Experienced Human Existence

Another important implication of the Incarnation was that it provided a way in which God's Son was able to experience the difference between sympathy and empathy. First, here's an explanation I shared a few months ago between those two forms of relationships as applied to the Church;

At the Cross our Savior was crushed and broken, but out of that breaking has come the Life which you and I have, and which so many in all the nations have received. That is

true, in a measure, of His Church. It was out of the breaking and crushing of the Church that the Life came to the world. And that is true of every member. If we are to fulfill this true, living ministry, it will only be through breaking. Paul said: "We were pressed out of measure, above our strength" (2 Corinthians 1:8 – A.V.) – but look at the Life which has come out of that man's pressure! It is like that. We are talking about this great ministry of Christ living His Life through us. It may be passed on to others through preaching, or through teaching, or through living, but if it is His Life it will come out of experiences of travail. A preacher or a teacher who has never suffered will never minister Life.

Well, this may not seem a very pleasant outlook, but it is true. The best doctors and nurses are those who know something about suffering themselves. Some are just professional, treating you as a case – you are just a number. But there are others who treat you as a person, a human being, who care for you. If you ask why, you may find that they have a background of suffering themselves. They know just a little of what you are going through. We have read in the Letter to the Hebrews: "We have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are... He is able to comfort those who are tempted" (Hebrews 4:15, 2:18). He has been the way of the Cross and we have received the benefit.

Our Lord doesn't just sympathize with our suffering and stand at a distance watching us; He personally empathizes with all we go through because He went through it Himself.

There have been times over the last 2000 years when God's people who deeply felt the pain of others have been moved to leave their own place of safety and suffer with those who were suffering in order to reach them. This is exactly what our Savior did. Like Him, these believers didn't just sympathize for others and pray for them from a distance; they 'incarnated' themselves into the midst of those who needed them and laid down their lives for them. I'll use the historical account of the Moravians to show what this looks like;

The Moravian missionaries under Count Zinzendorf stated that they were willing to become slaves if it was the only way to reach the slaves. Many sources claim that they actually followed through, sold themselves, boarded a ship, and were never heard from again. In fact, after being sent out by Count Zinzendorf, he and Nitschmann traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark, where their plan initially met with strong opposition. When asked by a court official how they would support themselves, Nitschmann replied, "We shall work as slaves among the slaves." "But," said the official, "that is impossible. It will not be allowed. No white man ever works as a slave." "Very well," replied Nitschmann, "I am a

carpenter, and will ply my trade.” After some difficulty, the missionaries found support from the Danish Queen and her court, and although the Danish West Indian Company refused to grant them passage, a ship was eventually procured. Leaving Copenhagen on Oct 8, 1732, they arrived in St. Thomas two months later on December 13. While in the St. Thomas, they lived and preached to the slaves.”

Zizendorf had received Christ’s love for the unreached slaves; for Hudson Taylor it was the Chinese; William Carey went to India. Others considered the whole world their mission field and went anywhere and everywhere a door opened.

All of this is a direct application of Phil. 2:5; “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . .” I don’t know if you recognize the context of this exhortation by Paul, but it was his introduction to the doctrine of the “kenosis” or Incarnation.

“Kenosis” in Phil. 2:7 is a Greek term meaning "emptying," and is a theological concept referring to the self-emptying of Christ, where he voluntarily relinquished His divine attributes to enter fully into human life, knowing exactly what that would cost Him. This was the “mind that was in Christ Jesus” that Paul wants us to have; it’s the mind that governs those who desire to follow in the Lord’s footsteps.

6) Through the Incarnation, God Secured His Own Inheritance In His Saints

(Eph. 1:18) I pray... that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.

We know what *our* inheritance is in Christ, but we don’t spend enough time considering what Paul calls, “*His* inheritance” in *us*. Here’s Spark’s take on what that means;

What is Christ’s inheritance in the saints? What are the riches of the glory of Christ’s inheritance in the saints? It is that the saints are to provide Him with the means of the universal manifestation of Himself. It is a part of the arrangement in those counsels of the Godhead, that Christ shall be the central fullness, but that the fullness should not be manifested, or displayed, in an isolated way. There would be no purpose in that, because He could have done that in Deity without incarnation, He could have possessed the fullness in that way, and that is what the letter to the Philippians says. He was equal with God, and had all the fullness, but He emptied Himself. Why? In order that others might be brought into the fullness, that He might not hold it all for Himself. The Lord Jesus let go in order to bring others in.

He sacrificed His own rights in order that others might come into them and get the benefit. So, the inheritance of Christ is this: that He is made heir of all things, but He can have all things only as He has the saints, and He gets “all things” through and in the saints. It is a part of the arrangement, the agreement. He is not to have everything as one isolated unit in God’s universe. It is to be in a corporate sense, and not only in a personal sense.... The Lord is not satisfied with His people just being saved, and the Lord is not satisfied that people should just remain saved. The Lord has fixed this as His goal: the *full* knowledge of Him. It is indispensable to the Lord. His inheritance is bound up with it. The need today is that the Lord’s own people should come into a knowledge of Himself which they do not possess, into a position in relation to Him which they do not occupy; in a word: into the full knowledge of Him.

7) The Lord’s Possession Of An Eternal, Unending Kingdom

Finally, on the implication side of the Incarnation, we have the coming of Christ and His accomplishment at the Cross and Resurrection as laying the foundation for an eternal government reigning over an ever-increasing kingdom.

(Isa. 9:5) Of the *increase* (lit. “expanse”) of His government and peace there will be no end.

Once the enemy is fully removed and this creation is pure as Christ is pure, the Lord will continue to create and expand His kingdom forever – of this “increase” there will be no end. He will never cease to create new ages and wonders, and His governance of His ever-expanding kingdom will encompass all He brings into being. The following comments show the intended effect of this reality on us;

The Christian life here is meant to be one of continuous growth and development and progress, but that only takes place as we come to know more, and still more, of the meaning of the Lord Jesus. This progress will not stop when we leave this world, and when time gives place to eternity: "Of the increase of His kingdom there will be no end." Stagnation is no mark of Life, and Life there will be ever manifesting itself in new and more wonderful fullness and forms. Therefore, the knowledge of Christ which will, in time and eternity, be the secret of growth and progress, will continue in heaven, and it will take eternity to exhaust it....

Seeing He is so vast, so immense, so many-sided, we can only see Him from one standpoint at a time; we have to move round to see Him from every angle. And at this

time, we are just looking at the Lord Jesus from one of the many angles, or points of view, which is this particular aspect of His significance: that He, in His Person and in His work, stands related to an eternal, heavenly order. He Himself, in His wonderful, complex Person, is the very embodiment of all the principles and laws of a great heavenly order. When everything is conformed to Christ and takes its character from Him, it will be one harmonious whole, perfected into one glorious unity. Tonight, I have only opened a window to you through which you can peer into a universe.

All of these things, and each of the seven implications we've looked at, are only a foretaste of all that has resulted because of the second Person of the Trinity taking on human flesh to accomplish an eternal purpose which was once hidden the secret counsels of the Godhead, but is now made known by supernatural revelation through the apostles and prophets of the Church to those with ears to hear what the Spirit is revealing to us in Christ.

Let's pause for a minute and make sure we have a solid *overview* of what the birth of Christ represents.

The entire Bible is concerned with one thing- the will of God. When Lucifer rebelled, another will entered the Universe and creation was thrown into conflict. Jesus told us to pray that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven, because God's will, His purpose, is now opposed by the enemy, and by those who have chosen to take his side against the Creator.

There has never been a generation in all of human history when we see greater effort on the part of Satan and Mankind to counter God's will in every way possible.

The Bible is a revelation of God moving according to His purpose. He is motivated by one final and all-inclusive goal, which we understand in Paul's writings as "God's eternal purpose in Christ".

The following is an example of the Lord's perspective on this;

The last section of the Old Testament, the Prophets, is occupied with the tragedy of lost purpose. The cry of the Prophets is that God's will has not been realized and fulfilled. It is a tragic cry of failure and disappointment, and we must listen to it, for as we listen to these Prophets and hear their anguished cry over their people, we are hearing this: 'What God meant has not been realized, and that is a terrible thing!' The Prophets have a voice of tragedy, pathos and anguish, because God has been disappointed over His purpose in these people; they have missed what He intended for them.

When we studied Revelation, we saw a similar challenge in the 7 letters to the churches in Rev. chs. 2 & 3. Only two of them were steadily moving according to God's purpose and the last one, the one that most represents our time, had completely lost any understanding of what God is after, just as Israel did during the time of the prophets.

So, when we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, God moves again; He's always acting to restore and advance His purpose – this time He moves in the coming of His Son. God's eternal purpose is now embodied and personified in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In John 14:6, Jesus said He was "the way, the truth and the life". What is "a way" for? It's to get somewhere. A way implies moving toward a location, a goal.

Jesus is also the truth about what that goal is – He is the first-born of an entirely new race of humanity to be conformed to His image. And He is the life of that humanity, which draws its nature and character from Him.

The new humanity is Christ incarnate in corporate expression.

The incarnation was needed to restore what was lost in the fall by bringing in another Man. At the cross, Jesus was the last Adam; and in His death, He took that fallen race into the grave, so that in the resurrection a "Second Man" could come.

In Christ we see the embodiment of the final outcome. The Old Creation is rejected and buried, the New Creation of Rev. 22 will be the ultimate fulfillment of all God has purposed, and the incarnation has made this possible.

In one of Spark's final messages, he touched on this;

I am trying to be faithful with you young Christians, because I am deeply concerned for you that you do not miss God's best, God's fullest, and so I say that that depends upon your having the Word of God *in* you, so that the Holy Spirit can touch something and say: 'Now, what about this?' I want to be serious on this matter, because it is a pressing issue in Christianity today. The Christianity that is being produced now is a terrible caricature of Christ. Young Christians, having God's fullest and best depends upon your being serious about the Word of God.

Now, let's look at the primary passage that defines and explains the Incarnation;

(Phil. 2:5-8) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God something to be held onto, but made

Himself of no reputation (literally, “emptied Himself”), taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the (exact) likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There are mysteries about the Incarnation that we won’t understand until we see Him face to face. But there are things we *can* understand in terms of showing us what the Lord was willing to do and how that applies to us.

In the Incarnation, God became Man and lived among us (John 1:14). In the beginning, God created Man in His image, but that image was shattered through sin. In Heb. 1:3 we learned that Jesus, as Son of Man, was the exact, expressed image of God in human flesh. Everything we see in Christ is God’s ideal for the ultimate nature and essence of mankind in perfection.

The reason I stress this again, is because what we see in Jesus in our Philippian passage is what God has intended to be characteristic of us also. In commenting on vs. 8, which says, “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death”, C.F. Moule wrote; “Jesus’s self-giving humility is the essence of divinity in human expression”. Anything and everything we could ever discover about the nature of God is expressed in Christ; and the foundation of that nature and expression is humility; the exact opposite of man’s current nature and the nature of Satan.

Vs. 7 gives an exactness to this; it shows what the implications of true humility are in relation to our relationship with God; “(He) made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant.” The word used for bondservant is “doulos”, which means “a slave”; “one who is the property of someone else”; he is not his own.

Jesus’ relationship with His Father is what our relationship to Him is meant to be.

(Rom. 1:1) Paul, a (doulos) of Christ Jesus.

(1 Cor. 6:19-20) . . . you are not your own for you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

Again, from Moule,

Slavery would deny a person the right to anything, even to his own life and person. Jesus so completely stripped Himself of all rights and securities as to be comparable to a slave, absolute and extreme self-emptying, even of basic human rights.

And since He did this perfectly, He is now exalted to the highest position possible in Heaven; more than anyone else, He perfectly expressed the nature of God in His life on earth.

This is what will distinguish us when we get to Heaven; those *most* emptied, will be those *most* exalted; the least will be the greatest; because that which pleases God most, is His ability to see Himself reproduced in a man or woman – to see His image, and specifically His humility, lived out in His creation.

When we look at the most popular pastors and churches in our generation, are the words “broken”, “emptied”, and “humility” the first things that come to mind?

Jesus had the right, because of Who He was, to cling to His equality with God; but if He was to show us what Man was meant to be, He would need to relinquish that right and become a *doulos* to His Father; He would have to live the life of Man in full dependence on God.

I know there are many who teach that the way we know that Jesus was God was because of the miracles He did; but the miracles proved His perfect humanity, not His deity.

(John 14:10) Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but *the Father* that lives in me, *He does the works*.

(John 14:9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father '?

(Acts 2:22) Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which *God did through* Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know.

If we think even for a second that what we do for Jesus has any value at all, we don't know what it means to be a Christian. The only thing that has eternal value is that which comes from Him through us, not from us for Him. There is nothing of less value to Christ in His Church than 'helpful Christians'.

Christ lived as the perfect Man, showing us that He was fully dependent on the Father for every word and every action He took. Our relationship to Christ as Head of the Church is to be the same relationship that He had with the Father – complete, unquestioning dependence in everything.

In Phil. 2:6 we saw this phrase, “Who, being in the form of God” which is literally, “existing in the exact form and substance of God”. Jesus is the eternally existing God of creation. But for 33 years the Son of Man never drew from His deity as the Son of God. Jesus has always been God, but for that space of time, He “emptied Himself” of the prerogative of deity and lived as Man was meant to live.

Alva McClain put it like this; “His deity was made to yield to the humanity He took on.” So, again for us, if we are going to have “the mind of Christ”, we have to start here. Just as Jesus of Nazareth was the Incarnation of the Father, so the Church, as Christ’s spiritual body, is meant to be the incarnation of the Son.

(Eph. 1:17, 22-23) The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of (manifest) glory . . . has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

(2 Cor. 4:11) We who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

The Church is meant to be a global incarnation of the Son of God to the glory of the Father and the manifestation of the Life of God’s Son.

(Eph. 3:14,15,21) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named . . . to Him be glory *in the church* by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

To sum up what we’ve looked at;

(Heb. 1:1-3) God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He created the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The Incarnation of God in Christ made it possible for our sins to be taken away; it also became the beginning an eternal principle or reality of how God would move past simply verbal communication through the prophets and make Himself known through the indwelling of Christ in His Body, the Church.

When Jesus revealed the Father, He did much more than tell us *about* His Father- by His own life, the Lord revealed the exact nature of His Father to His disciples; and now, the ongoing unveiling of God to Man involves not just words, but life – the life of Jesus made manifest through our mortal flesh.

It's not when the Church talks about God that life is released; it's only when Christ Himself has free expression through broken and available vessels that the world can once again come face to face with the Son of God. And until the Church understands this, all the world will see is Christians doing Christianity, and the true nature and wonder of the eternal Son will remain veiled.

The Incarnation, both then and now, is the only way the lost can be delivered from darkness and the saved can fulfill the purpose of our calling. The Incarnation is both the cause as well as means of reuniting God and Man, and restoring what was lost in Man's alienation from God in the Garden.

When you have time, review these "implications" of the Incarnation, because that which we celebrate on Christmas is more than an historical event. The coming of the Son of God to Bethlehem is the one event in all of human history that made God's purpose for creation able to finally be realized.

A Savior has been born; and the implications of that will take us an eternity to fully understand and appreciate.

I have one final quote from Tozer to share as we close;

You know, it's possible to feel a lot that you don't express. It's possible to have fine intentions you never make known. And how easy it might have been for God to have loved us and never told us. To have been merciful toward us and never revealed it. But the Scripture says, nobody ever saw God but the only begotten Son. Some translations say the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has told us. He came to tell us what the silence never told us. He came to tell us what not even Moses could tell us. He came to tell us that God cares and God loves and God has a plan. And God is carrying out that plan. Before it's all finished, there'll be a multitude that no man can

number redeemed out of every tongue and tribe and nation. That's what He told us. The Son revealed God's being, God's love, God's grace, mercy, good intention, redemptive intention, saving intention. He set it forth. He gave it to us. It's ours. Now, we have only to turn and believe and accept and take and follow. It's all ours.

The Savior did not come just to tell us *about* God and pay for our sins. He came to show the Father to us and to be our Life.

So, yes, a Savior has come into the world. And everything He accomplished was to make it possible for us to not only know Him, but to trust Him and live in Him. And everything that God takes us through is to turn our knowledge of Christ into a deep, abiding faith in Him. It's our life experiences that make our knowledge real.

At Christmas we aren't just celebrating the historical event of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, we are also celebrating the *purpose* and the *outcome* of that birth, which is that Christ is now free to bring His own life into us and abide with us forever.