

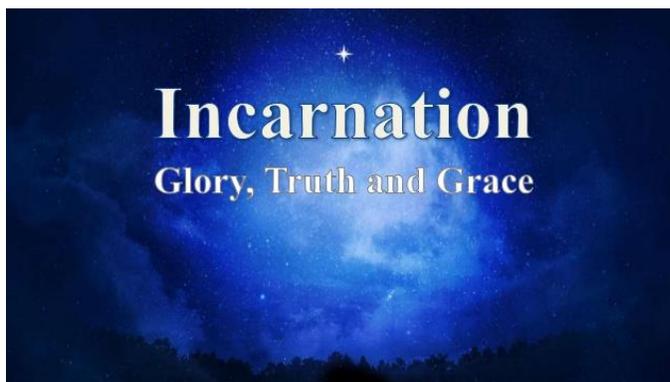
New Hope Global Christmas Sermon 2020 – INCARNATION

A Confession

I have a confession to make, beloved. When I first was considering being a Christian, I did not believe in the virgin birth of Christ. It was another of the miracles that made no sense to my secular, doubting mind. And I became a Christian without that proper Biblical understanding. I even maintained to others that I didn't think accepting the virgin birth was necessary for salvation. I still think that is literally true, because I believe many of these more complex or miraculous doctrines of Christianity require the Holy Spirit's illumination – which comes after we accept Christ.

But the incarnation (which involves the virgin birth) is the topic the Lord brought for our Christmas sermon this year. And as I have studied this issue over time, and in depth this week, I marvel again at the wisdom and grace of God that is layered in a fuller understanding of Christ's incarnation. It's been said that the incarnation is when "God became a real man, had a real birth, and had a real, physical body. This is an essential point of the Christian faith"

(Henry Hon, [ONE: Unfolding God's Eternal Purpose from House to House](#)). It is "an essential point of the Christian faith" indeed! So here are 5 reasons why believing in Christ's incarnation can be so impactful for our Christian lives today.



The significance of the Incarnation

1. The Incarnation Is How We Can Understand Who God Is .

Jesus told the disciples, "the one who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9-10). Ellen White says, "'That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly; God was made manifest in the likeness of men.'" (Ellen G. White, [Christ's Object Lessons](#)). Dietrick Bonhoeffer adds, "It is not enough to give man a new philosophy or better religion . . . In Jesus Christ the image of God has entered our midst, in the form of our fallen life, in the likeness of sinful flesh. In the teaching and acts of Christ, in his life and death, the image of God is revealed. In him the divine image has been re-created here on earth. The Incarnation, the words and acts of Jesus, his death on the cross, all are indispensable parts of that image. But it is not the same image as Adam bore in the primal glory of paradise. Rather, it is the image of one who enters a world of sin and death, who takes upon himself all the sorrows of humanity, who meekly bears God's wrath and judgment against sinners, and obeys his will with unswerving devotion in suffering and death, the Man born to poverty, the friend of

publicans and sinners, the Man of sorrows, rejected of man and forsaken of God. Here is God made man, here is man in the new image of God.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship)

The Gospel writer John says, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”(Jn.1:1, 14). Hebrews says “in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son...The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Heb. 1:2-3). Jesus came to reveal the nature and purposes of God to all humanity. “Christ’s conception, ministry and resurrection are nothing short of declarations of his divine nature which impels us to regard his claims upon our lives as second to none” (Michael Wilkins, NIV Application Commentary, Matthew, p. 89).

2. As Fully God And Fully Man, Christ Came As Immanuel, God With Us.

“Matthew’s gospel attests to both human and divine natures in the remarkable conception of Jesus. The child has a human lineage through King David and the patriarch Abraham (1:1-17), a human name, ‘Jesus’ by which he identifies with his people (1:21), and a human birth (1:25). But the child also has a divine relationship through the Holy Spirit (1:25), a divine description, ‘Immanuel – which means God with us’(1:22) and a divine origin through the Holy Spirit in his conception by the virgin mother (1:18,20) . . . The significance of Matthew’s interpretation of Jesus’ name as Immanuel cannot be overstated. God has come to be with his people to fulfill the deepest meaning of the covenant [from the OT promises]. In Jesus, God is now with his people personally as their Savior. This theme forms the heart of a personal relationship of Jesus with his followers that comes to characterize his unique form of discipleship.” (Wilkins,p.83-84).

3. Christ Emptied Himself Of His Preincarnate Form Of Deity To Become A Fully Human Man . .

. Hebrews 2: 14-18 says:

¹⁴ Since all his “children” have flesh and blood, so Jesus became human to fully identify with us. He did this, so that he could experience death and annihilate the effects of the intimidating accuser who holds against us the power^[a] of death. ¹⁵ By embracing death Jesus sets free those who live their entire lives in bondage^[b] to the tormenting dread of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that he didn’t do this for the angels, but for all the sons and daughters of Abraham.^[c] ¹⁷ This is why he had to be a Man and take hold of our humanity in every way. He made us his brothers and sisters and became our merciful and faithful King-Priest^[d] before God; as the One who removed our sins to make us one with him. ¹⁸ He suffered and endured every test and temptation, so that he can help us every time we pass through the ordeals of life.^[e] Passion Translation

Christ’s incarnation is “in the flesh.” Grudem says, “As a human he had a human body, a human mind, a human soul, and human emotions...Christ did not temporarily become man. His divine nature was permanently united to his physical nature. He lives forever as the Eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity and Jesus, the man born of Mary, and as Christ the Messiah and Savior of his people. He will always have his body (though glorified) Jn. 20:25-27

Luke 24:39,41-42, Acts 1:11, 7:5, 9:5, Rev. 1:13). (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, Zondervan 1994, pp. 532-533, 543).

Yet note, beloved, the cost of becoming man for Jesus. The New Bible Dictionary says, “The mark of the ‘flesh’ (or human person) is creativity, weakness and fragility. ...Christ’s incarnate state was a state of dependence and obedience...of sinlessness and impeccability and of temptation and moral conflict” (New Bible Dictionary, ed. Marshall, Millard, Packer and Wiseman, IVP, 1996, p. 501).

Being made in the likeness of men meant He was “subjected to the law, to his parents, to his low estate as a carpenter’s son, to his betrayal for the price of a bond-servant, to his slave-like death on the cross to relieve us from the slavery to sin and death)” (The Classic Bible Commentary, p. 1340).

4. The Incarnation Is Done By The Virgin Birth.

I had never fully understood the significance of the virgin birth, but Wayne Grudem explains it clearly: “Scripture clearly asserts that Jesus was conceived in the womb of his mother Mary by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and without a human father. (Mt. 1:18, 1: 24-25), Lk. 1:35) ...The virgin birth makes possible Christ’s true humanity without inherited sin...All human beings have inherited legal guilt and a corrupt moral nature from their first father Adam. But Jesus did not have a human father, thus interrupted the line of descent from Adam....This helps us understand why the legal guilt and moral corruption that belongs to all other human beings did not belong to Christ. He was born holy, the Son of God Lk.1:35.”

Grudem adds, “We should believe [in the virgin birth] first of all simply because Scripture affirms it. Certainly such a miracle is not too hard for the God who created the universe and everything in it – Anyone who affirms that a virgin birth is “impossible is simply confessing his or her own unbelief in the God of the Bible. Yet, in addition to the fact that Scripture teaches the virgin birth, we can see that it is doctrinally important...in understanding the person of Christ correctly.” (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, Zondervan, pp. 529, 530, 532). Jesus’ conception by the Holy Spirit meant that he was not defiled by the sin and moral corruption of all other humans. He was born holy.

5. Finally, I found this interesting take on the incarnation: “The Incarnation Is The Biblical Bulwark Against The False Spiritualization Of Christianity” (Arnold Albert van Ruler, [God's Son and God's World](#)).

A bulwark is a defensive wall against enemy or climatic attack. What Van Ruler is saying is that a Biblical understanding of the various implications of the incarnation is needed for one to hold onto a true faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. False representations of Christ abound in our world as people try to reduce Jesus to serve their ends. He is the “pocket Jesus” who is like Santa Claus, and doing good to those who are nice is what true spirituality looks like. Even Christmas itself has been taken over by a materialism that obscures its spiritual meaning. But the incarnation shows that God’s love is not a whimsy, feel-good emotion or baseless promises, as in James when people said to those without clothes and daily food, “Go, I wish you well –

[i.e., I will pray for you] – ‘keep warm and well fed’ but does nothing about his physical needs” (James. 2:15-16). No, the incarnation teaches us that God’s love is compassionate, involved, and committed to the well-being of his people through extraordinary personal sacrifice. It cost God everything. And deserves our “everything” submitted joyfully to His Lordship in return.

I close with Joe Bayley’s Christmas poem:

Praise God for Christmas.

Praise Him for the Incarnation, for the Word made
Flesh.

I will not sing of shepherds watching flocks
on frosty nights
Or angel choristers

I will not sing of stable bare in Bethlehem,
Or lowing oxen,

wise men trailing, distant star with gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Tonight I will sing praise to the
Father who stood on heaven’s threshold
and said farewell to

His Son as he stepped across the stars
To Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

And I will sing praise to the infinite, eternal Son who
became most finite, a Baby who would one day

Be executed for my crimes.

Praise Him in the heavens,

Praise Him in the stable

Praise Him in my heart.

Joseph Bayley, *Psalms of my life in Christmas Treasures* ed. Rubel Shelly, p. 121

Amen.

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New Hope Global Fellowship, December 2020