

What Christmas Meant to Christ

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WHAT CHRISTMAS MEANT TO CHRIST

The blessed events involved in the Christmas story will be forever characterized as miraculous and mysterious. How could it be otherwise? The eternal Creator-God became man—and that forever. While the Scriptures reveal much about the birth of Christ, certain aspects of that wonderful event will forever remain a mystery. It will be well to remember Moses' words in Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

In our sermons, devotionals and songs about the events of Christmas, one aspect of our Savior's birth is generally overlooked, and that is, what Christmas meant to Christ. What changes did the eternal Son of God undergo to become one of us? It is well to consider, as much as the Scriptures permit, what Christ the Creator experienced when He became Christ the Redeemer.

1A. The Miracle of His Conception:

When we talk about the virgin birth of the Lord, we should point out that there was nothing supernatural in the emergence of Jesus from the womb of Mary, what normally is referred to as the "birth" of a baby. The whole process of embryonic and fetal development was normal. We are told that when Mary's time had come, she gave birth. It is well to pause for a moment to note what a "normal conception" is really like. Both for Christ and us the conception was the same and yet miraculous in its own way. Dr. James Le Fanu reports:

The single-celled embryo, at the moment of the fusion of egg and sperm brings together two sets of genetic information from mother and father in the form of the DNA code which, when spelt out letter by letter, would fill twenty-four volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. These twenty-four volumes are packed into the nucleus of the cell, which is one-5,000th of a millimeter in diameter, which cell has the ability to replicate itself within a few hours and divide billions of times, eventually producing a fully formed human being.

This trillion-times miniaturized, 24 *Encyclopedia Britannica* volumes worth of DNA information knows first how to instruct the single-cell embryo to form the basic structure of the fetus with a back and front, head and limbs; and then to instruct the cells to acquire the specialized function of a nerve or muscle or liver; and then instruct them to link up together to form the metabolic factory of the liver or the pumping heart or the brain with its billions of connections; and then to instruct them to grow synergistically through childhood and adolescence to adulthood.

The extraordinary potential of the biological information locked in the nucleus of each and every cell can best be conceived of as the precise mirror image of the infinite size and grandeur of the universe (*Sunday Telegraph*, December 19, 1999, cited by Geoff Thomas, pastor of Alfred Place Baptist Church in Aberystwyth, Wales, in "The Virgin Birth," *New Horizons*, December 2002).

The Lord himself shall give
you a sign; Behold a virgin
shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall call his name
Immanuel
(Isaiah 7:14)

1b. A supernatural begetting:

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones is known for this little statement, "As the Lord's divine nature had no mother, so his human nature had no human father."

Theologian John Murray writes:

Jesus was not conceived in the womb by the conjunction of male and female, by spermal communication from the man to the woman. He was begotten by the Holy Spirit, and the miraculous consisted in this supernatural begetting. It is the absence of human begetting that made the birth a virgin birth. In this connection it is not proper, strictly speaking, to say that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. . . What is said of Elizabeth in reference to John (Luke 1:24, 26) is here said of Mary. The Holy Spirit begat, Mary conceived (cf. also Luke 2:21). (*Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, 134).

2b. A supernatural person:

A virgin birth by itself does not mean invariably that someone became incarnate. If God so chose, He could supernaturally beget a thousand babies. What is significant about this conception is that it was the second person of the Godhead who was joined to Mary's ovum. He, "left His Father's home above, so free so infinite His grace." As the Son left the Father in heaven, His destination was the virgin betrothed to Joseph. What was special about the baby which Mary bore was this,

It was the eternal Son of God in respect of his divine nature. *He* was begotten of the Spirit and conceived by the virgin in human nature. The most stupendous fact of all is that this was the begetting, conception, embryonic development, and birth of a supernatural person. Because of this, there was no point at which the supernatural was not present. The incarnation was supernatural through and through, because at no point was the supernatural identity of the person suspended (cited by Geoff Thomas, "The Virgin Birth," *New Horizons*, December 2002).

3b. His supernatural preservation:

It must be stressed that part of the miraculous in Christ is due to the fact that the sin nature of the Virgin Mary was not passed on to her offspring and thus He could be the sinless Son of God, tempted as we are, (Heb. 4:15) but totally free of sin. Not only did He not sin but He could not sin, thanks to the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit at His conception.

When He was a human, He was humanness without sin, His was not a humanness without temptation, nor a humanness lived out in a sanitized spiritual environment, but from His conception there was no prenatal sin, whatever that may be. From His first breath, He had no propensity to sin, no affinity with sin, and no stain of sin ever came upon Him although He was bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh. He was the Word of God become the Lamb of God, without spot and without blemish. As Geoff Thomas suggests, "The little Lord Jesus no crying He made, that is, no crying which was characterized by petulance and

anger and greed and attention-seeking and boredom and pride, as every other baby makes. He was not like any other baby, this virgin-born Messiah" ("The Virgin Birth," *New Horizons*, December 2002).

2A. The Mystery of His Incarnation:

There are three states of His existence as the one Son of God; the pre-incarnate Son, the incarnate Son, and the exalted Son. The eternal Word became flesh, dwelt amongst men and now is ascended back to God. When Christ became man He took on a human nature and a human body. These were joined to His eternally divine person. Theologically, this is called the hypostatic union, or the union of the divine and human nature in one person.

1b. The definition of hypostatic union:

The hypostatic union can be defined as "perfect humanity and undiminished deity united in one person forever." Christ is one person with two natures, one human, one divine.

2b. The distortions of the hypostatic union:

1c. Docetism:

Docetism taught that Jesus only seemed to be a man; His body was only an apparition. This view and that of the Gnostics is refuted in passages such as 1 Jn. 4:2-3 and 2 Jn. 7 ("deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh").

2c. The Arians:

Since Christ was begotten, He must have had a beginning. This heresy was condemned at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 225.

3c. Armstrongism (Worldwide Church of God):

Christ was not fully God until His resurrection.

4c. Jehovah's Witnesses:

Christ does not possess a fully divine nature. He is less than absolute deity. In their New Testament they mistranslate John 1:1 as "...and the Word was a God."

5c. Liberalism:

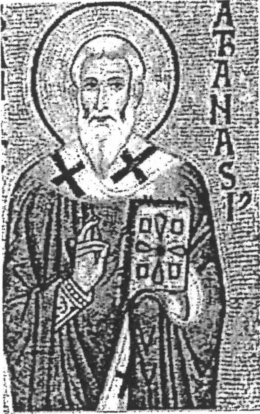
Christ was totally man, more God-like than anyone else, but certainly not deity in the flesh. Liberals like to speak of the divinity rather than the deity of Christ.

The incarnation meant addition, not subtraction. God, the Son, remaining the immutable second person of the Godhead, joined to Himself *the human nature of*



one particular man, the true biological son of Mary, who married a carpenter and lived in Nazareth, in whose home the God-Man Jesus Christ grew up.

Athanasius, a deacon from Alexandria, is the originator of the famous dictum: "Jesus became what He was not; He continued to be what He was." In other words, Jesus continued to be what He was. And what was He? He was God and His deity was never terminated. He retained His personal identity as the Son of God throughout the whole of His redemptive work. He was the Son of God in the cave at Bethlehem. He was the Son of God when He confronted Satan in the wilderness. He was the Son of God when He wept over Jerusalem. He was the Son of God when He sweat drops of blood in the garden. He was the Son of God when He cried from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"



As the songwriter wrote:

"Who is he on yonder tree
Dies in shame and agony?
'Tis the Lord, O wondrous story!
'Tis the Lord, the King of glory!"
(Benjamin R. Hanby, 1839-1867)

3b. The debate over the hypostatic union:

In the early church the union of Christ's two natures was hotly debated. The Nestorians taught that Jesus had two personalities, the Son of God and a man, under one skin. The Eutychians were teaching that Jesus' divinity or deity had swallowed up His humanity. The Apollonarians taught that the one person of Christ had a human body but not a human mind or spirit, but that the mind and spirit of Christ were from the divine nature of the Son of God.

In the year A.D. 451, the Council of Chalcedon met and came up with a splendid formula which contains four famous Greek adverbs. They acknowledged the "God-Man" to be in two natures, "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."

3A. The Marvel of His Humiliation:

John Murray's memorable words have often been quoted:

The Infinite became finite: the Eternal entered time and became subject to it: the Immutable became mutable: the Invisible became visible: the Creator became created: the Sustainer of all became dependent: the Almighty became weak; God became man

(*Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, 135).

1b. The biblical term: *kenosis* from *kenoo*, Philippians 2:7: to empty oneself, exinanition.

2b. The contemporary theories:

1c. Christ gave up all of His divine attributes.

"Emptied Himself of all but love. . ." The theologically correct wording would be, "Emptied Himself because of love. . ."

- 2c. Christ gave up some of His attributes.
- 3c. Christ gave up the use of the divine attributes.
- 3b. The scriptural *kenosis*:

Phil. 2:5-8

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

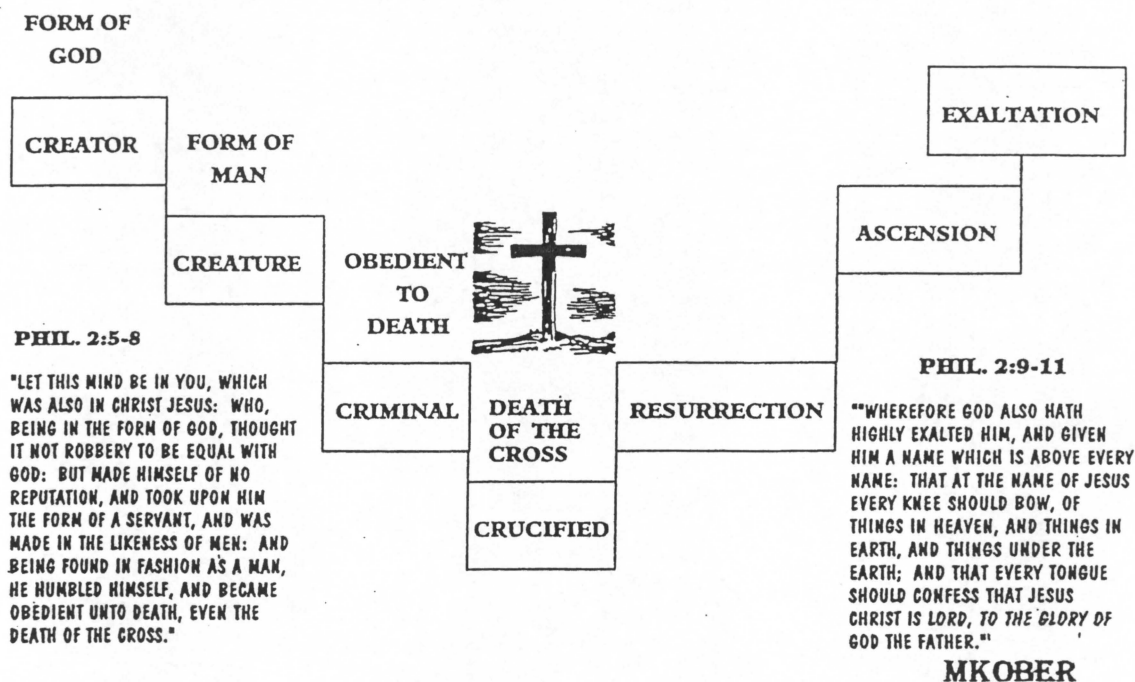
⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

- 1c. The eternal existence of Christ: "He existed"—His eternity
"in the form of God"—*morphe*, in His whole nature and essence Christ was eternally very God.
- 2c. The servant state of Christ:

THE SELF-EMPTYING OF CHRIST

PHIL. 2:5-11



What exactly did the self-emptying entail? To have lost any of His divine attributes would have made Jesus Christ less than God and therefore incapable of being the Savior. Charles Wesley in the hymn "And Can it Be?" must not have thought the matter through theologically when he said that Christ emptied Himself of all but love. What about His righteousness? What about His holiness? What about His eternality? The humiliation of Christ involved the following factors:

- 1d. A veiling of His eternal glory (Mt. 17:2 and Jn. 18:6 are exceptions):

Jn. 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Mt. 17:2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

Jn. 18:6 As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.

Jn. 17:5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

- 2d. A dependence on His Father:

Jn. 8:26-29 I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.

²⁷ They understood not that he spake to them of the Father.

²⁸ Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

²⁹ And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.

- 3d. A voluntary surrender of the independent exercise of **some** of His attributes **some** of the time.

1e. Christ did not give up deity, but added humanity. He assumed a human nature and a human body.

2e. It would have been impossible for Christ to give up some of His attributes such as eternality and holiness.

3e. Christ voluntarily did not use some of His attributes such as omniscience and omnipotence.

Mt. 24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

Mt. 4:3-4 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

⁴ But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

4e. At other times Christ used the same attributes:

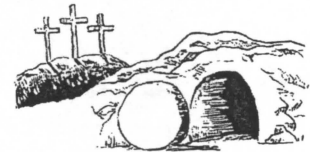
Lk. 5:22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

4A. Conclusion:

Why did the eternal God permit Himself to be born as a babe in Bethlehem? His main purpose was to assume a human body so that He could die for the sins of mankind. But what motivated Christ to do that? A statement in Hebrews 12:2 may well be the answer:

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

He left heaven's glory to become one of us in order to
(1) bring glory to God,



(2) make possible the salvation of man. John Gill's observations are much to the point: He came "for the sake of having a spiritual seed, a numerous offspring with Him in heaven, who are His joy, and the crown of rejoicing; for the sake of the salvation of all the elect, on which His heart was set; and for the glorifying of the divine perfections, which was no small delight in measure to Him." Thus the cross was a constant source of joy.

Interestingly, this is intimated by the reading of Isaiah 53:11 in the Qumran scroll. The rendering is, "Out of the suffering of his soul he will see light and will find satisfaction. And through his knowledge his servant, the righteous one, will make many righteous and he will bear their iniquities." The Septuagint also contains the phrase "light." Christ rejoiced in anticipating bringing many sons to glory.

(3) to fulfill OT predictions. The writer to the Hebrews quotes our Savior, "a body hast thou prepared for me. . . lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10: 5, 7). This means that the Son of God joyfully anticipated His incarnation as predicted in Isaiah 9:6, for example, to become a child in order to become the human offspring of the house of David to sit on the throne of David reigning as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. As someone has well said, "Without a cradle, no cross, without a cross, no crown." Praise the Savior for the miracle of His conception, the mystery of His incarnation and the marvel of His humiliation. With joy He anticipated to become one of us so that we could be like Him in His sinless image, for all eternity!