

Christmas in a Nutshell p.1: God IN Us - 12.13.09

Intro - Play Christmas in a Nutshell video (2:00).

God PRESENCE in our lives is the greatest PRESENT in our lives. And since you are in church I believe you know this to be true. But sometimes we can begin to know something, but not fully appreciate it. Have you every received a PRESENT that when you opened it you didn't fully appreciate the benefit of it until much later?

STORY OF CAR CHARGER FROM JOHN

The present of God's PRESENCE is like that. On first opening the gift of Christmas, we see a baby in a manger. And who isn't moved by the birth of new life. Compound it over many times when that new life is also God! This is a gift that gives over and over again and that we can never fully appreciate. What I'd like to do over the next two weeks is to give you Christmas in a Nutshell - help you appreciate how great this gift is!

Two Aspects of this GREAT GIFT from God:

1. God IN man - what we call INCARNATION - this week
2. God WITH man - what we call EMMANUEL - next week

Incarinate (Latin *in carne*) means: **IN THE FLESH**

Read Luke 1:30-32: And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." (ESV)

One of the orthodox beliefs of Christianity is that Christ is FULLY God and FULLY man. That God became man through Jesus at Christmas is the single greatest gift mankind has ever received. We tend to think of Christmas just in terms of Jesus as a baby. But this gift is so much more than that! Here are my top 10... I hope they can be a gift to you.

Top 10 Reasons Why God's Incarnation Matters

#10: God gets a **BIRTHDAY**! Luke 1:30-32
(and we get to celebrate it!)

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman."
Galatians 4:4 NIV

This is no small thing! Think of it. The God who exists eternally, who has no beginning and no end, who is the ultimate begatter... nothing exists that doesn't have Him as the ultimate reason for being. He now Himself has a BIRTH day!

It's clear that He has in mind that we should celebrate. Heaven had a party that day. Angels singing to shepherds. Star leading wise men. We also should celebrate with one another. Gifts entirely appropriate! But we should never forget the ultimate GIFT GIVER and the ultimate GIFT!

#9: Prophecy Fulfilled - God keeps his PROMISES!

¹⁷ The book of Isaiah the prophet was given to him. He opened the book...

²⁰ Jesus closed the book, gave it back to the assistant, and sat down.

Everyone in the synagogue was watching Jesus closely. ²¹ He began to say to them, "While you heard these words just now, they were coming true!"

Luke 4:17-21 NCV

The ninth best reason that God in Flesh matters is because we know that God keeps His promises! For hundreds of years the special people of God, the Jewish people, had been looking for a Messiah, for a Christ. He had promised in dozens of Scriptures, including Isaiah. Can you imagine how great (and how scary) it must have been on that day when Jesus said, "This day the prophecy is fulfilled in your hearing!" God is the ultimate PROMISE KEEPER. So what He promises about His daily Presence in our lives, about our ultimate resurrection and eternal life with Him are also promises we can count upon!

#8: We have an EXAMPLE of how humans should live.

"This is the kind of life you've been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step." 1 Peter 2:21

The Message

God gave us His instructions, in His Bible, about how we should live out our lives. It's one thing to read the instruction manual, and it's another thing entirely to watch someone live out the instructions. We all need a teacher to not only tell us the answers but also to show us how to live out the answer. Jesus is that example in our life. We not only have the privilege of reading his teachings, but also to read the accounts written about how he lived out his human life...

#7: God lived AS A MAN. So he knows what it's like...

to be vulnerable, hungry, angry, disappointed, betrayed, happy, tired, excited...

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." John 1:14 NIV

Don't you sometimes - when times are difficult - want to say, "But God You don't understand. You're God. I'm just a man. But God lived as a man through Jesus. So He knows what it's like to be vulnerable. Imagine the MOST POWERFUL, the ALL POWERFUL being completely vulnerable as a baby. To be hungry. Imagine his emotional anger at the misuse of His Temple. His disappointment with the disciples in the Garden. His betrayal by Judas. Everything you and I experience, He experienced. You come to a God who understands! **And because of that...**

#6: We have a perfect PRIEST between us & God.

"But there was an oath regarding Jesus. For God said to him, "The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow: 'You are a priest forever.' "*"

²² Because of this oath, Jesus is the one who guarantees this better covenant with God." Hebrews 7:21-22 NLT

In our first covenant with God, there had to be a priest between us and God. This was a man set apart, holy for his task. But of course no man can ever be perfect in his own covenant with God. No human priest can ever be perfect and so can not represent us perfectly before God.

But Jesus - the fully God and fully man - lived a perfect life. He is the perfect go between man and God, between you and God. Jesus ASCENDED bodily - in his human form and sits at the right hand of God - and yet at the same time is fully God. Hard to grasp. But here is the important part. He knows entirely what it's like to be human. He represents you perfectly to God the Father.

#5: Man GOT TO SEE God!

Jesus: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:9 GNT

"We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning,* whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands." 1 John 1:1 NLT

If you were alive in 1969 when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, you know the world wide feeling that all of mankind shared. Man made it to the moon! Even though we weren't there, we shared in the experience. Still true for all those born after 1969.

Same thing is true for those of us born after 30 AD. Man GOT TO SEE God, something that could never ever have happened without God taking on the flesh of man. We have an accessibility to God because of his taking on flesh that we never would have experienced without it!

#4: Christ DIED FOR OUR SINS !

"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." 1 Peter 3:18 NIV

I know you expect a Christian preacher to always remind you of this most significant fact of Jesus taking on flesh at Christmas time. We can never ever celebrate the birth of Christ without also recalling the death of Christ and the tremendous gift His death provided. We have a relationship with God, can be righteous in His presence, ONLY because of Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross. It is true that there would be no cross without a manger. Think of it... death to an eternally living being, with NO BEGINNING and NO END, is itself an oxymoron. But for God, nothing is impossible. He accomplished this death for our sins by becoming human... by taking on flesh!

#3: The human race may be RECONCILED to God!

"All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also. Our message is that God was making the whole human race his friends through Christ." 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 GNT

Being an enemy to an all-powerful God is a frightening thing to contemplate. Who would want God as an enemy? But the Bible tells us that without Jesus becoming flesh that this was our condition. Think of the scene that has happened at the breakout of peace that happens at the end of a war. This is the celebration we have now with God. Once enemies, we are now not only at peace but fully reconciled - what the GNT translates as being "friends."

#2: God OVERCAME the power of death!

Since the children are made of flesh and blood, it's logical that the Savior took on flesh and blood in order to rescue them by his death. By embracing death, taking it into himself, he destroyed the Devil's hold on death." Hebrews 2:14
The Message

Once we have peace with God, our next greatest enemy is the enemy of death. What good is a relationship with an eternal, forever-living, never-dying, always-loving God if our own lives only spanned a few years. But the Bible tells us that because God overcame death Himself, as a fleshly human, that He has overcome this great enemy for all of us.

This great gift is wonderful. Death no longer has a hold upon those who are a Christ-follower. The resurrection is the second greatest gift we receive through the Incarnation. Paul writes to us in 1 Cor. 15 that our faith is in vain without resurrection. Our resurrection is tied directly to Jesus' resurrection. **I said "2nd most wonderful gift"...**

#1: God is IN ME now!

"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God... Little children, you are from God... he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."
1 John 4:2,4 ESV

Because Jesus came to us as God in the flesh, he left us with His Spirit WHO lives within each one of us now IF we are a Christ follower. And while all the other aspects of God's greatest gift to us are all wonderful, the fact that I can know God intimately every single day, the fact that His PRESENCE never leaves me, is the greatest PRESENT we could ever experience. Next week we'll explore this greatest of gifts: Emmanuel - God WITH us!

Conclusion: How do we leave this sermon today? Two possibilities:
(1) you may be here but might not be able to celebrate this greatest of all good news because you are not following Christ. Maybe you've never made the decision to follow Christ, or it has been so long since you've experienced His PRESENCE that you're not really sure where you stand. You could pray right now to receive this PRESENT of His PRESENCE.

(2) You just need to be reminded. Take this sheet with you. Stick it in your Bible. Over the next week and a half, look at each one of these great gifts each day. Celebrate the gift of Christmas for the GREATEST GIFT it truly is!