

Hark, the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes*Phillip Doddridge (1702–1751)*

Hark, the glad sound! The Savior comes,
 the Savior promised long!
 Let ev'ry heart prepare a throne,
 and ev'ry voice a song.

He comes the pris'ners to release,
 in Satan's bondage held;
 the gates of brass before Him burst,
 the iron fetters yield.

He comes the broken heart to bind,
 the bleeding soul to cure,
 and with the treasures of His grace
 t'enrich the humbled poor.

Our glad Hosannas, Prince of Peace,
 Thy welcome shall proclaim;
 and heav'n's eternal arches ring
 with Thy beloved Name.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Tried With Fire: Like Jesus, Part Three***Kevin T. Bauder*

The conception of Jesus Christ and His birth in the manger were events that occurred in history, but they pertained to a person whose life came from outside history. The events represent the point at which an eternal person became Jesus. He already was, but in the conception and birth He began His human residence upon earth. This is the great mystery of Christmas.

From all eternity Christ Jesus existed in the form of God (Phil 2:6). This form (*morphe*) was an outer appearance that corresponded to an inner reality. Jesus Christ really was God, and because He was God His existence displayed all the splendor of the divine glory. For example, Isaiah saw Adonai sitting on a throne high and lifted up (Isa 6:1). The prophet was astonished at the divine splendor and declared that he had seen Yahweh with his own eyes (Isa 6:5). John states in his gospel that on this occasion Isaiah was looking at the pre-incarnate glory of Jesus (John 12:41).

In eternity past, Jesus was visibly and obviously equal with God (Phil 2:6). Nevertheless, He did not consider this visible equality as a thing to be selfishly grasped. In His incarnation and humiliation He could not and did not stop being God, but He did have to lay aside His robes of splendor. He would later call upon His followers to exercise self-denial (Matt 16:24). He earned the right to make this demand by modeling His own version of self-denial, a version that required Him to make a greater sacrifice than He will ever ask of anyone else.

So profound was this divestment of glory that Paul says He “emptied Himself” (Phil 2:7). Theologians have notoriously quibbled over what this self-emptying entailed, but Paul spares his readers from speculation. The apostle explains Jesus’ “kenosis” or emptying in two ways.

First, he states that Jesus received the form of a slave. In other words, during His humiliation Christ voluntarily placed Himself under obedience to His Father. The author of Hebrews has Christ saying, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God” (Heb 10:7). In the incarnation He would learn obedience as a Son (Heb 5:8). Accomplishing His Father’s will was Christ’s whole purpose in the incarnation. He placed Himself entirely at His Father’s disposal.



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Second, Paul says that Jesus “came to be” in human likeness (Phil 2:7). Here Paul uses the verb for becoming, but he does not say that the person of Jesus came to be. Rather, without ceasing to be God, this eternal person added to His deity a complete and sinless human nature. Though He already was, he now became a human being, genuinely and fully.

So the self-emptying of Jesus consists, first, in His willingness to subject Himself as a slave to His father, and second, in His assuming the same nature as those to whom He was sent. Consequently, His outward appearance was strictly human (Phil 5:8). Simply looking at Him, no one would have guessed that He was anything more than a human being. He looked like any other guy. His identification with the human race was complete.

When Jesus entered the human race He became subject to all of its natural weaknesses and liabilities, including mortality. His liability to death was essential to His mission. By fear of death, humans were slaves of the devil, who held the power of death (Heb 2:14-15). For the relatively brief period of His humiliation, Christ was made lower than the angels and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Heb 2:9, Phil 2:8). By suffering death He wrenched the power of death away from the devil and made propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb 2:14-17).

That Christ should experience death is astonishing; that He should endure the death of the cross is appalling. Death by crucifixion was violence rendered in the name of justice. It made examples of the worst sort of renegades and criminals. Crucifixion was so agonizing that the word *excruciating* is still used to describe the severest pain imaginable. Crucifixion was so degrading that the word for *cross* was an obscenity in the Roman world. To endure the cross was to be shamed and vilified. Christ suffered this humiliation, not for any fault of His own, but for our sins.

Christ could not die for our sins if He could not die. He could not die unless He became mortal. He could not be mortal if He were not human. He could only become human by virtue of His incarnation. In His incarnation He not only became subject to death, but to all human weakness and testing (apart from sin). His suffering equips Him to understand our experience because He, too, has experienced it. He merits our reverence, our gratitude, and, most importantly, our trust.

Of course Christ’s death was not the end of His life. God raised Him up, highly exalted Him, and gave Him a name which is above every name. Someday every knee will bow before Him. Someday every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Phil 2:9-10). To His eternal, divine splendor Christ has added the glory of a sinless, obedient, and perfected humanity. His exaltation, however, came after His humiliation. To gain the joy of glory He first had to endure the cross and to despise its shame (Heb 12:2).

Christmas is a season for remembering the incarnation of Christ. The incarnation was first and foremost a self-humbling, a self-emptying, and a self-denying. The Lord Jesus embraced this demonstration of God’s love, not for the sake of good or righteous people, but for us while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:6-8). Before He redeemed us, we had already rejected Him.

Here is the true spirit of Christmas. Paul tells us that we are to think like Jesus thought. We are to adopt His mindset (Phil 2:5). If so, then Christmas is about denying ourselves, refusing to insist upon the privileges to which we may have a right. Christmas is about emptying ourselves, submitting to God, and identifying with those who need Him. Christmas is about humbling ourselves and sacrificing in behalf of those who still reject what is good and true and beautiful. Christmas is about doing all of this because sin has twisted and distorted people who must someday stand before God, and the gospel has the power to cleanse them and to transform them into the very image of Christ Himself.

We live in a world filled with greed, arrogance, and ambition. Christmas reminds us that we who have trusted Christ need to be different because He was different, and He wants to make a difference through us. Christmas is about refusing to capitulate to the attitudes of our age, but instead identifying with Christ by putting His mind on display. That is the Christmas that we need to live both during this season and throughout the entire year.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
