

Christmas Sermon 122510  
Isaiah 9:2-7, Psalm 96  
Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-14(15-20)

In the name of God who became human and entered fully into our existence, Amen.

The idea of the Incarnation, of God becoming a fully ... human ... being is not only difficult for us to understand, for some people it is an absolutely impossible concept. And when you add to this idea the fact that God came to earth in the form of a small, helpless infant – born to working-class parents – in a small town in the middle of nowhere, the story can be a bit mind boggling. Thankfully though, we have both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible from which to get our support for the truth of the story.

In the reading from the prophet Isaiah that we heard a little while ago, we heard this:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; ...  
For a *child* has been born for us, a *son* given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God*, Everlasting *Father*, Prince of Peace.  
His authority shall grow continually, ....

Now this is not the only place in the Old Testament where we read such things. And having the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, we can look at what the prophet was talking about and see that – just as the Gospels assert – Jesus, the infant born in Bethlehem, was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. The birth of *this* child is still being celebrated by people all over the world, over 2,000 years after the event itself. And there are estimates that 33% of the people in the world, some 2.1 *billion* people claim to be Christians. I would submit to you that that qualifies as “His authority” growing – just as Isaiah said.

Then there is the wonderful telling of the Nativity event in Luke's Gospel. Three times in Luke, angels appeared and announced the coming of Jesus – the Messiah; the Christ; the Savior of the world. In the second chapter of Luke, we heard that immediately after Jesus' birth shepherds received one of those angelic visitations and were told to go into town to visit a new baby, who was to be their Savior. And the angels' instructions were so detailed that these men were able to find the one stable in town with a new baby in it. They gave glory to God when they saw the child, just as the angelic visitors had said.

I truly *believe* that when one looks at *all* of the Scriptures – the prophets and the Psalms which make reference to Messiah, along with the accounts of Jesus' life and teachings in the New Testament – it is hard to escape the conclusion that the baby born on this night, two millennia ago, was indeed God in human form – the Incarnation – or as Isaiah said in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter, Emmanuel (God *WITH* us).

But all of the “evidence” in the Bible – and even the amazing 2000 plus year survival of the Christian Church in a world that is often hostile to it – cannot explain *why* God decided to lower God's self far enough to become a fragile, powerless, economically disadvantaged baby.

I'd like to tell you a Christmas story that might help.

Once upon a time, there was a man who looked at Christmas as a lot of silliness. He wasn't a scrooge. He was a kind and decent person, generous to his family, upright in all his dealings with other people. But he didn't

believe all the stuff about The Incarnation that churches proclaim at Christmas. And he was too honest to say that he did believe.

‘I am truly sorry to upset you,’ he told his wife. ‘But I simply cannot understand this claim that God became man. It doesn't make any sense to me.’ On Christmas Eve, his wife and children went to church for the midnight service. He refused to go with them. ‘I'd feel like a hypocrite,’ he explained. ‘I'd just rather stay at home. But I'll wait up for you.’

Shortly after his family drove away, snow started to fall. He watched the flurries getting heavier and heavier. ‘If we are going to have Christmas,’ he thought, ‘at least it's nice to have a white one.’ He sat by the fireside and started reading his newspaper. A few minutes later, he was startled by a thudding sound. It was quickly followed by another, then another.

When he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled in the snow. They'd had been caught in the storm, and in a desperate search for shelter had tried to fly through his window.

‘I can't let them lie there and freeze,’ he thought. So he decided to get them into his barn. It would provide a warm shelter. He put on his coat and galoshes and tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds didn't come in. ‘Food will bring them in,’ he thought. So he hurried back to the house for bread crumbs, which he sprinkled on the snow to make a trail into the barn.

Much to his dismay though, the birds ignored the bread crumbs and continued to flop around helplessly in the snow. He tried shoeing them into the barn by walking around and waving his arms. They scattered in every direction – except into the warm, lighted barn. ‘They see me as a strange and terrifying creature,’ he thought. ‘And I can't seem to get across to them that they can trust me. If only I could be a bird myself for a few minutes, perhaps I could lead them to safety ....’

And the church bells began to ring. He stood silently for a while, listening to them peal the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow. ‘Now I get it,’ he whispered. ‘Now I know why you had to do it.’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Author unknown. Adapted from <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/2/273.html>

And that is the point of Christmas. God became one of us for one simple reason – because we *needed* to be saved.

The Old Testament tells us countless stories of God making covenants – or agreements based upon promises – with human beings. In every instance, God kept God’s part of the bargain, but the people did not keep theirs. No matter how many times nor how many ways God tried, people (in their free will) would never love and worship God as they should – because people simply could not see God for who God is. They always saw God as a “strange and terrifying creature,” full of vengeance and anger. And then, on that Christmas Day in Bethlehem of Judah, God became one of us.

God created this world and truly loves all of creation. But of all in the world, human beings are God’s favorite creation. God loves us and wants desperately for us to love God back. In Jesus we can see the *face* of God – the face of true, unconditional and pure love. And because God chose to become human in the circumstances of a poor, peasant child and to live out his life in service to those whom society looked down upon, we can experience the breadth of God’s love for the *entire* world and can draw strength and understanding from His service, so that we might perform our own.

Improbable though it might seem - The Incarnation is real. On this day, God became one of us; thereby opening the way to salvation and giving us an example of complete, whole, perfect love. Now it is up to us to take that love from this place and spread it throughout the world – one person and one situation at a time – taking out into

world, Jesus' promise to bring us into the kingdom of God and to give us life in all its fullness. Amen.