

**The world says: to have hope when there is no hope is the mark of a fool.
Another world replies: the foolishness of God is wiser than men.**

A Grand Entrance

Born in a manger: how grand is that? Where were you born? Many babies have entered this world in even more rough and rude surroundings than Jesus in a manger. What makes his entrance so special?

We make note of his birth, and even the surroundings of his birth, because of who He is. The Sovereign of the universe entered our world, on our level, becoming one of us – a human – and He did so in a very humble way.

Many have said that God cannot become a human, let alone a baby, and to suggest such a thing is either ridiculous or blasphemous. Of course, the Incarnation, God becoming man, is what sets Christianity apart from all world religions. Incarnation is blasphemy to Jews and Muslims – God is way too holy and pure to come in human form. It is preposterous to many modern thinkers, for how could anything, or anyone, arrive from outside our material reality?

What do you think? Could God come to this world in human form? Why not? God, who created our material reality, can do as he pleases. Those who hear the announcement of God-with-us find true hope and salvation.

Incarnation

If you look up “incarnation” in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary you’ll find this: “the embodiment of a deity or spirit in some earthly form;” or, “a concrete or actual form of a quality or concept *especially*: a person showing a trait or typical character to a marked degree.” When the word is capitalized it means: the union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ.

The Incarnation: that is what we are celebrating at Christmas; Jesus Christ embodied Almighty God and all the traits and character of God. “He is the image of the invisible God, Col. 1:15. *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*, John 14:9.

Many have said that God cannot become a human, let alone a baby - to suggest such a thing is either ridiculous or blasphemous. Of course, the Incarnation, God becoming man, is what sets Christianity apart from all other world religions. Again I ask: could not God come into this world in human form? Again I answer: Why not? God, who spoke and it came into being, God who stretched out the stars and galaxies, God who breathed life into you and me, can do the impossible.

Okay, you might say, but so what? Of course that’s what many, many people have said, and continue to say. By their actions, the lives they choose to

live, people say “so what?” as though God being embodied in the person of Jesus might be an interesting concept but having no relevance to everyday life. They say “so what” even as they celebrate various cultural aspects of the Christmas holidays: trees, gifts, parties etc. But Christmas is about the Incarnation of God and what that means for us, for you and me, and your neighbor, and co-worker, and members of your family.

Understanding The Incarnation

At the heart of the Christian faith is this conviction: ***“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Colossians 1:19-20.*** The Divine, Holy God was pleased to dwell in the human, Jesus of Nazareth. Now, if we totally separate the secular from the sacred in our thinking, we will reduce our understanding of what this means. The reduction goes like this: from God who *became* the created order to God who *stepped into* the creation. But ***if Jesus was not fully human – becoming the created order - like you and me, how could He fully redeem human nature?*** Yet if Jesus were not fully God how could He have any power to do so?

The Christian faith rests on the knowledge that God is both Creator and Redeemer – and by embodying creation, by fully becoming one of us, He is redeeming what He creates. It begins in the goodness of what God has created and God’s original intentions for the creation He brought forth. Yet humans choose to direct life and develop culture outside of God’s intentions – in opposition to God’s direction. This is our “Fall” from the original holiness God gave.

But ***our condition is not an imprisonment in the material world, or in our flesh and blood. Rather, our condition is a spiritual rebellion.*** Instead of doing God’s will and making the world a place to glorify God, humans choose to follow the evil one, turning life toward violence, hate, greed, and the like. It’s easy to see the result: humans, God’s own creation, manifests evil in every aspect of life – political, economic, institutional, ideological, family and personal relationships. Those who are totally honest with themselves can even see and admit that there is evil within themselves. As Paul writes, the whole creation is ***“subjected to frustration”*** and in ***“bondage to decay”*** Romans 8:20, 21.

The biblical and historical understanding of the Incarnation is that God becomes creation. He assumes all of creation into himself in the womb of Mary for the purpose of reversing the effects of sin and ***“bring it into the glorious freedom of the children of God”*** Rom. 8:21. In the life and death of Jesus He takes into Himself all the effects of fallen humanity, which like a cancer has spread throughout creation. ***The death and resurrection of God in Christ is*** not a release of the soul from its imprisonment to the material world (as Gnosticism

and new age spirituality assert), but **a second act of creation**, the making of a new man and the redemption of the whole of creation. Now, because of Christ, the whole creation is pregnant with new life (having been “born again”) and awaiting final redemption. Paul writes, *“the whole creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time”* Romans 8:22.

The ancient church taught, “only that which is assumed can be redeemed.” In other words, through the Incarnation, God took up into himself the entire creation, so that the creation redeemed by God Himself is once again new, as in the Garden, and ready to glorify God.

“The ancient church understood the impact of creation, incarnation, and re-creation on all of creation, and that is why Christians were the leaders in the arts, in learning and in the sciences. The Christian faith narrates the world and gives shape to culture-making and to all of civilization.”¹

Saving Souls and Bodies

It is a temptation to believe that in Jesus God stepped into history to save souls. That makes personal salvation the focus, Christ who saves me, rather than **God** who **redeems the whole world, and brings forth a new creation** – including you and me. ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17.*** Along with hope that one day all of creation will be redeemed: ***Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. Revelation 21:1.*** Since God assumed all of creation into Himself through Jesus, then through Him He could assume all of the sin and brokenness of us and nature itself, and end it there on the cross.

Obviously God has saved me, as I am a part of creation. And the same can be true for you, when you accept Him as your Savior. But we’re just part of the story. **God’s work of redemption narrates the entire world.** The whole of life - political, economic, institutional, ideological, family and personal relationships – has been redeemed because God in the incarnation received all of creation into himself, even up to and through the cross and empty tomb. When he returns to the earth, all of creation will be made perfect. “In his first coming Christ defeated sin and death. In his second coming he will put away forever sin and death and all its consequences, and restore his Garden in the new heavens and earth and rule over all creation.”²

Beliefs that focus only on the soul, and “saving souls,” risk believing that what we do with our bodies and our possessions is unimportant. We are not simply souls trapped in bodies waiting to be set free into some spiritual realm. That is not a Christian belief. That’s more like various notions of “spirituality” popular among some people. If Christ only redeems the soul, then the stuff of this world must not have much significance. If the sacred realm is limited to things of the “soul” and worship, and religion, then the rest of life will be set

apart from God. But: “Creation separated from redemption will always result in the secularization of life.”³ Creation separated from God’s redemption results in the dismissal of care for the hungry, the sick, the lame, the broken-hearted, as well as sexual ethics and handling of money.

God’s work of redemption is the real story of Christmas and that real story is guiding world history. The whole of life – all facets of our doings and relationships – has been redeemed because God in Christ Jesus received all of creation into Himself, even up to and through the cross and empty tomb.

And the human situation – in all its complexities and confusion – is being redeemed, called back to God, and will one day be made whole and holy again.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation... He is before all things, and in him all things hold together,” Colossians 1:15, 17.

¹Robert E. Webber, *Who Gets to Narrate the World?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 76.

² Ibid, 77.

³ Ibid, 77.