

The Incarnation And What It Requires.

Matthew 1:18- 25 & Philippians 2.5-11

Advent 4 - 2019

Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Message

Advent 4

Incarnation: What it Requires

Intro:

We come today to the last Sunday of Advent. For some of us this is effectively your Trinity Christmas before you fly off to be with family. So far this Advent we have had a focus on the towering figure and message of John the Baptist - "Prepare the way of the Lord."



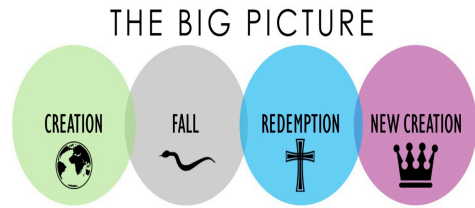
For those who have already left for overseas this might be their take away Christmas message?

John's message was a challenge to be genuine in seeking God as King in anticipation of his coming.

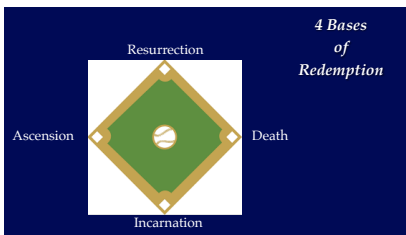
Today we moved forward to anticipating Christmas through the story of Joseph and Mary. As everyone knows, it takes about nine months to prepare a birth so the birth of the Saviour will not come as a total surprise, even though there are births reported from women who did not know they were pregnant. Mary certainly knew, as did Joseph and probably the whole village.

I want to consider this today as a feature of the Gospel from God's perspective as set out in the Scriptures. Let's start by orientating the birth of Jesus in the bigger Gospel.

This is a summary of the whole Gospel I frequently include in my preaching. It's the big story of God and humanity we find in the Bible. It's the big Gospel Story that describes what has happened, what is happening and what will happen. Right now we are in the space between Redemption and New Creation.



So we have four chapters or developments that for our grand frame of history describe what God does and what we may expect next. The Jesus story we read in the four gospels from birth to Ascension all fit in the third chapter entitled 'Redemption'.



I set out the Redemption Chapter as being about the ministry of God in Jesus as a baseball diamond. *Sorry if baseball not familiar.*

Home base is 'Incarnation'. Nothing else can happen towards redemption without incarnation which is what we Western Christians celebrate in Christmas marking the birth of Jesus the Redeemer.

The four bases relate to Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and the Ascension.

So placing the 4 points of Jesus' ministry as our redeemer within the 4 chapters of the total Gospel Story from Genesis to Revelation we may list them like this:

All Clear?

Are you now ready for the exam?

Redemption Within The Gospel Story

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Redemption = Incarnation, Death, Resurrection & Ascension.
4. New Creation

This may have felt a bit technical and bookish until now but I want us to appreciate the context of the christmas story as incarnation. It sits in this total story of faith in which we trust, hope and live. This is what we believe. This is our meta-narrative which shapes our world view and leads us to live differently to those who do not believe in God's Creation, Humanity's Fall, Jesus' Redeeming Work or the coming Transformed New Creation with the return of Jesus to rule at the end of the Age.

Text

With that in mind could you listen to the epistle reading from Philipians for what it says about Incarnation and Jesus as Redeemer. Listen out for what Jesus did in order to take up God's redemption plan and what made the birth possible?

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Epistle

Philippians

Chapter 2, verses 5 to 11

As I heard it here Jesus did three things towards becoming our redeemer:

1. Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.
2. He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
3. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

3 Redeeming Requirements

- 1) Though he was in the form of God, *he* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.
- 2) He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
- 3) He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

What we celebrate at Christmas is the second aspect: He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

That is described as ‘Incarnation’, the invisible and infinite God becoming a finite and visible human being.

Without that our redemption would not have progressed.

We are told it was possible because: Though he was in the form of God, *he* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

This is very significant.

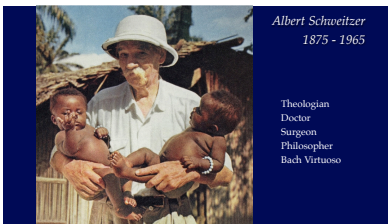
In any society whether it involves two legged creatures or four plus legged creatures there are social levels. Status is a factor in how things happen. Some animals - four or two-legged - have more social status than others. I think I can say that in some human societies this is very strong and in others it is less so. A tribal chief has status that a street cleaner does not. A member of government has status that a school child does not. Status can be a very big issue. It is sometimes contested and often disputed.

“Who are you to say that? What gives you the right to do this? etc”

Current race and gender controversies are at least in part about status.

As creator of the universe, God has the ultimate claim to status. The members of the Trinity share this.

So let’s apply what incarnation might involve.



A childhood hero of mine was Albert Schweitzer. In later years I appreciated him as a theological pioneer who woke up European scholarship, He was a writer, a philosopher, a Bach organ virtuoso who changed the interpretation of Bach. He trained as a doctor and surgeon. He was a polymath, an outstanding figure in his civilization.

In 1908 at the age of 33 he left all this to be a medical missionary in Gabon, Africa. He left his status and achievements to connect with people who needed a missionary doctor. He stepped into their world and their lives. This is not total incarnation as it’s obvious he was born somewhere else but that is what incarnational mission involves, becoming one with those you seek to reach and serve. It involves giving up superiority and entitlement.

Comment

The purpose of incarnation is to come close – very close. This is what is involved when the infinite holy God wants to reach out to fallen humanity. It requires a great amount of love to do this. This is a mission to seek and save the lost, to give life to those destined to die, to draw into fellowship through personal connection those who are for whatever reason out of fellowship.

God so loved the world that he gave his son.... It began with this.
Christmas marks the point when this became visible - after nine months of pregnancy.

Application:

This theology of the Atonement is not rolled out in Philippians for academic reasons.
The passage begins as application:

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

We are called to be agents of reconciliation sharing this ministry with Jesus by getting close to people and sharing life with them as they are.

In doing this, we like Jesus we will give glory to the Father for personally overcoming alienation and broken fellowship. We ourselves will be exalted in Christ when we follow that same pattern. Let's hear again what he did:

- Not consider status something to be grasped.
 - Whatever status you may have, hold it lightly. *eg: business card and priestly clothes.*
- Empty ourselves of our selves.
 - Could this equal the colloquial "Get over yourself."?
- Take on the attitude of a servant, one who is there for others.
 - Live to serve and give, not to be served and get.
- Practice obedience.
 - Listen for God's voice and seek his glory, not your own - His Kingdom not our own empire

Application

- ◆ Don't consider status something to be grasped but held lightly.
- ◆ Empty ourselves of our selves.
- ◆ Practice obedience. God's glory and Kingdom not our own.

So here is the golden opportunity.

We are encouraged to have this mind of the incarnated Redeemer among ourselves as people living the life we share in Christ. We are encouraged that as we share that mind with Jesus we can look forward to seeing Jesus acknowledged and glorified in the final act of the Gospel When Jesus returns to rule.

¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

This is the mature and spiritual way to celebrate Christmas – live the spirit of the Incarnation, God coming among humans as a human to redeem and restore.