



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

## SERMONS FOR ADVENT

### Sermon Notes

*The Nature of the Incarnation: The Carmen Christi*

Philippians 2:5-11

[Hebrews 1:1-5]

December 18, 2005

### INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW

- ❑ Many scholars believe that Philippians 2:5-11 was an early church hymn, often referred to as the *Carmen Christi*, or the “Hymn to Christ as God.”
- ❑ Further, some commentaries view this also as an early church creed.
  - In these few verses, we read [at least in part] of such foundational doctrines as:
    - The Deity of the Son
    - The Incarnation of Jesus Christ
    - The Two Natures of Jesus Christ [Fully God and Fully Man]
    - The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ
    - The Exaltation [Resurrection and Ascension] of Jesus Christ
    - The Trinity
- ❑ However, before one embarks on a study of the Incarnation, he or she must first understand one important aspect of God’s nature: His **incomprehensibility**.
  - In few places is this truth more clear than when studying the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. God’s incomprehensibility means that He cannot be **fully** understood; NOT that He is **unable** to be understood. Therefore, we must diligently seek to know God as He is revealed in Scripture, while realizing that He is so great that we will never reach the point when we know everything there is to know about Him.
- ❑ In this passage, we will examine six truths:
  - **The Nature of our Sin**
  - **The Nature of the Son**
  - **The Nature of the Incarnation**
  - **The Humility of the Son**
  - **The Exaltation of the Son**
  - **The Natures of the Savior**

## I. The Nature of our Sin

- a. Before we can understand our *need* for a Savior, we must first understand the *nature* of our Sin.
- b. Dr. Wayne Grudem defines sin as, “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.” Furthermore, sins can be intentional or unintentional.
- c. As we study the very nature of who God is, in his absolute perfection and holiness, we begin to gain a sense that even the “smallest” sin is of a seriousness that is beyond our comprehension.
- d. Sin, indeed, separates us from God. Moreover, sins *all* of humanity has sinned [we are even born into sin], *all* of humanity is in desperate need of a **Savior**.
- e. This was the very reason for the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.
- f. Yet, before we can understand the Incarnation, we must first seek to understand the nature of the Son *prior* to the Incarnation.

## II. The Nature of the Son

- a. When we understand [to the extent that we can] the nature of the Son *prior* to the Incarnation, only then do we stand in awe of the incredible nature of the Incarnation.
- b. “He existed in the *form* of God” [emphasis mine]
  - i. The word **form** is the Greek word *morphe* [μορφή], meaning the “outward display of the inner reality or substance. Here it refers to the outward display of the divine substance, i.e., divinity of the preexistent Christ in the display of his glory as being in the image of the Father.” James White, *The Forgotten Trinity*
  - ii. As John MacArthur describes, the word “**existed** translates a present active participle of the compound verb *huparcho* [υπαρχω]...and denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. It stresses the essence of a person’s nature, that which is absolutely unalterable, inalienable, and unchangeable.”
  - iii. Another Greek word, *schema* [σχημα], means “form,” but in a much different sense. William Barclay underscored the significance of the word *morphe*, by contrasting it with *schema*:

*Morphe* is the essential form which never alters; *schema* is the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. For instance, the essential *morphe* of any human being is humanity and this never changes; but his *schema* is continually

changing. A baby, a child, a youth, a man of middle age, an old man always have the *morphe* of humanity, but the outward schema changes all the time.

- c. A parallel passage – Hebrews 1 – states that “He is the radiance of His glory and the **exact representation** of His **nature**,” (Hebrews 1:3)
  - i. The word translated **exact representation** is the Greek word *character* [χαρακτηρ], meaning, “precise reproduction in every respect.”
- d. Further, we read in John 1:1 that “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word **was God**.”
- e. Therefore, it is very clear that Paul is asserting the full deity of Jesus Christ **prior to** the Incarnation.

### III. The Nature of the Incarnation

- a. Other than this passage, perhaps no verse in all of Scripture more clearly **proclaims the truth** of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ than John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us...”
- b. However, possibly no other passage in all of Scripture better explains the **nature of the Incarnation** than this passage.
- c. Paul states that the Son “emptied Himself...and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man...”
  - i. The Incarnation can be summed up in four words: **the Son emptied Himself**.
    - 1. Throughout the history of the Church, this verse has generated a great deal of controversy; however, proper exegesis leads to only **one** proper interpretation.
      - The first point that must be considered is that **as fully God, the Son cannot change**.
        - i. **Therefore, the “emptying of Himself” cannot denote any change in His nature whatsoever.**
      - Secondly, this passage is in the **active voice**. In other words, Jesus was the one emptying Himself...He was NOT emptied [by an object other than Himself, i.e. the Father]. Jesus performed the action.

Therefore, Jesus “emptied Himself” **voluntarily**.

- Thirdly, Jesus **never ceased being God** [Once again, this would have implied a change, which would violate one of God’s eternal attributes: His immutability]. Therefore, as the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ was **fully God**.

In Colossians 2:9-11, the Apostle Paul affirms this truth, stating, “For in Him **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form...**”

- Fourthly, Jesus Christ “emptied Himself” of at least two things:

### i. His divine riches and heavenly glory

1. “When the Lord walked this earth, men did not see Him as a glorious heavenly being, for His glory was hidden, veiled.” James White
2. This is why Paul states that Jesus Christ was “Found in appearance as a man...”

### ii. The free exercise of certain divine attributes

1. In other words, Jesus Christ gave up His *rights* as God in order to perfectly fulfill the will of the Father.
  - I believe so many Americans find many Scriptural passages difficult to understand, because we are so obsessed with our **individual rights**. Jesus Christ [and the Apostle Paul, for that matter] cared more about the spiritual welfare of others than their individual rights as humans, and in the Lord’s case, God.
2. Jesus Christ, again, did not cease being God in any way when He was on earth. He simply chose not to exercise certain divine attributes in accordance with His humanity and the will of the Father.
2. For example, imagine a man who had 20/20 vision and decided that he wanted to write a book about what it was like to be blind for one year. So, **he voluntarily put a blindfold on himself in order to accomplish this goal**. During the year he was blindfolded, **he still had 20/20 vision; however, He chose to keep the blindfold on himself**. Had he, at any time within the year, decided to take the blindfold off, he could not accurately say that he was blind for a year.
3. In the same way, Jesus Christ, when He walked the earth, did not cease being omniscient, omnipresent, etc. He simply chose not to exercise those divine attributes because to do so would have violated His humanity. And, if Jesus was not fully human, He could not fulfill His role as our perfect substitution on the cross.

#### IV. The Humility of the Son

- a. As we examine the Incarnation, we observe the **greatest act of humility the world has ever known**.
- b. In theological terms, we say that the Son **condescended** to us. He came down to our level...NOT in our sinfulness, but in our humanity. The gap between the divine and the human is so great, however, that we will never fully understand how great this act of humility truly was.
- c. The Apostle states that the Son “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped...”
  - i. In other words, since the Son was fully God, what Paul is stating here is that, because of the supreme humility of the Son, **He did not cling to the rights He had as God**, in order to fulfill the mission of the Father.
  - ii. Another example of the Son’s humility is that He was **willingly subordinate in function to the Father, while being ontologically equal to Him**.
    1. The application of this truth to our lives is great. For example, in the covenant of marriage, God calls the husband to serve as the leader of the family, while the wife is to submit to him. However, like the relationship between the Father and the Son, this subordination is in *function* not in *ontology*.
    2. Furthermore, within the Body of Christ, similar relationships should be observed in order to fulfill the will of the Father.
- d. Finally, Paul explains the supreme act of humility by the Son: death on a Cross. Crucifixion was a form of torture and death reserved for the vilest criminals, yet, Jesus Christ willingly submitted to it in order to fulfill the will of the Father.

#### V. The Exaltation of the Son

- a. Paul opens the final section of this ancient hymn with the words “For this reason...”
  - i. Because of the obedience of the Son, to the point of death on a cross, God [the Father] exalted Him.
- b. Once again, the Cross of Calvary represents the ultimate glorification of the Son, as it is the ultimate act of obedience. In the Gospel of John, the words “lifting up” of Jesus Christ represent not only the physical lifting up on the Cross, but the exaltation of the Son – the means by which He returns to the glory He shared with the Father prior to the Incarnation, and the means by which He will “draw all men” to Himself.
- c. However, the Cross of Calvary pleased the Father in another way: it was the place where **God fully demonstrated the zeal He has for His own glory** [i.e. the hatred He had for sin – the violation of His glory]. Now, we can understand why the Apostle Paul states, “For this reason, God highly exalted Him...”

- d. John MacArthur states that the **exaltation of the Son** involved four steps: (1) His resurrection; (2) His ascension; (3) His coronation; and (4) His intercession.
- e. As the exalted Son of God, Jesus Christ has **the name that is above every name** [NOTE: in the Ancient Near East, the name of someone reflected the character, nature, and essence of the individual].
- f. However, just prior to revealing that name, the Apostle Paul quotes from a passage in Isaiah [45:21] that was written specifically about *Yahweh*, once again, revealing the ontological equality of the Father and the Son:
 

“I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*.”
- g. Then, Paul states, “every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is **LORD**...”
  - He is truly the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He is the Sovereign over all creation. He is truly God.
- h. Finally, Paul explains the ultimate purpose of the exaltation of Jesus Christ: **the glory of God the Father**.

## VI. The Natures of a Savior

- a. In possibly the most beloved of all “Christmas passages” in the Bible, an angel of the Lord informs a group of shepherds that “for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Chris the Lord.”
  - i. The reason this is so significant is that a Savior could not have been simply a very good person [as if such a person exists]. Also, a Savior could not have been an individual who was human in only one aspect, yet fully God. A Savior had to be **fully human AND fully God**...He had to have TWO NATURES. This was what the Incarnation was all about.
  - ii. He had to be fully human in order to perfectly represent us on the cross as the substitutional sacrifice; and He had to be fully God in order to satisfy the requirements of a perfect sacrifice in the eyes of a perfect and holy God.
  - iii. The Chalcedonian Creed, issued at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 put it this way: “one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures...unchangeably, indivisibly...the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person...”
- b. As we reflect on the Incarnation, let us read what the hymn writer Charles Wesley wrote concerning this biblical truth:

**Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th-incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel.**