

“The Incarnation”
John 1:14
(Preached at Trinity, Christmas Service, December 23, 2018)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. This Tuesday is Christmas; tomorrow is Christmas eve. We've been in the Christmas season for several weeks. Who among us does not enjoy this time of the year, so full of family traditions and memories. Our minds are full of images of garland and bows, of twinkling lights and Christmas desserts; of family gatherings to exchange gifts. The well-known Christmas song made popular by Andy Williams says it well:
*It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you be of good cheer
It's the most wonderful time of the year*
 2. The retail world puts its own significance upon the Christmas season. Most retailers are dependent upon Christmas to end the year in the black. In fact, the first Friday after Thanksgiving is called Black Friday, the day that carries the retailer into profitability.
 3. For Christians, however, this time of the year affords us opportunity to consider the significance of the incarnation of Christ. We recognize that most of what we call Christmas today has been created by the secular world. And we understand that Scripture does not charge us to observe this annual holiday. But what a wonderful time to meditate specifically upon the wonder of the incarnation of Christ—the eternal Son entering into the human condition by becoming man.
- I. Jesus Christ finds His existence in eternity
- A. **John 1:1** declares “Jesus was” – “In the beginning was the Word”
 1. John is declaring the deity of Christ—His eternal existence. He has existed from everlasting to everlasting. When all of creation came into being by the omnipotent word of our Creator, when time began, Jesus *was*.
 2. As the second Person of the Godhead, Jesus is self-existent, eternally existent. He finds His being in Himself. God declared Himself to Moses as “I AM.” As the Father *IS* and the Holy Spirit *IS* so is Jesus Christ. All things find their existence in Christ.
John 1:3 NAU - "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."
Colossians 1:15-16 NAU - "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him."

3. All that we understand of God is true of Jesus Christ. Jesus possesses all of the Divine attributes. When Isaiah saw the vision of the heavenly throne he was gazing upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 6:1-3 NAU - "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. ² Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

- B. John wrote in his Gospel, "And the Word became . . ." –
 In **Verse 1** John says Jesus "was" using the imperfect tense of the verb "to be." It describes continuous action in the past.
 In **Verse 14** John says Jesus "became" using the aorist tense indicating an action at a point in time.
John 1:14 NAU - "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."
 1. The eternal God became man.
 The One who was above time has entered into time.
 The eternal became temporal.
 The infinite became finite
 The One who knows all things would grow in wisdom and stature
 The self-sufficient God would hunger and thirst.
 The One who is Creator of all things, the source of all life, must die
 2. This is a mystery that is beyond our comprehension. The Eternal God became man. And yet, He remained God. We call this the hypostatic union – the union of the human nature and divine nature into one person, without the confusion of either.

II. The Incarnation was God's revelation of Himself in bodily form

John 1:14 NAU - "and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Colossians 2:9 NAU - "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form"

- A. God cannot be known except through revelation – He is transcendent, meaning God is infinitely beyond creation. He is above us, beyond us, apart from us.
Romans 11:33 NAU - "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"
 1. He is beyond our comprehension.
 LBC: Chapter 2: *Of God and of the Holy Trinity*
 "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself . . ."
 2. God has been pleased to give a self-disclosure of Himself
 God's revelation of Himself is divided into two types:
 - a. General or natural revelation – creation and providence – God's disclosure of Himself through His divine activity upon the earth.

- b. Special revelation – three types:
 - (1) External manifestations – Most often seen in theophany. The thunders and lightnings on Mount Sinai. The pillar of cloud and fire, the burning bush.
 - (2) Internal suggestion – characteristic in prophecy, visions, dreams
 - (3) Conursive operation – the inspiration of God upon the writers of Scripture working in, with, and through them.
 - 2. Scripture is God's revelation of Himself
- B. God's ultimate revelation of Himself is through the Divine Logos, the Word. The incarnation of Christ is God revealing Himself to man as Redeemer and King.

Hebrews 1:1-2 NAU - "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."

 - 1. This could only take place through the second person of the godhead – the eternal Son of God – "The Word became flesh"
 - 2. Neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit has ever appeared in bodily form. The eternal Son of God has come in visible form – He became man

Matthew 1:23 NAS - "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us."
- C. The Bible declares that Jesus is both God and man
 - 1. Divinity and humanity are joined together as two natures in one person
 - 2. It is not a union of persons:
 - a. In the Trinity we find a unity of persons: the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The union of three persons in one God
 - b. Jesus Christ is not the union of two persons; but the union of two natures in one person
 - c. The doctrine is known as *communicatio idiomatum* (Latin for "communication of properties"). It is the teaching that the attributes of both the divine and human natures are ascribed to the one person of Jesus.
 - d. But in this union of natures both natures stay intact. The Divine nature is not weakened, nor is the human nature somehow enhanced by the Divine.
 - 3. In the person of Christ God has fully revealed Himself as the perfect God/Man

Colossians 2:9 NAU - "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form"

III. The Incarnation was a voluntary condescension by the second person of the Godhead.

- A. Jesus left His habitation in glory to dwell among man - See Phil. 2:5-8
Philippians 2:5-8 NAU - "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
1. He was "in the form of God" (μορφή)– Jesus was not merely like God or had the appearance of God - Jesus was and is the exact form of God – He possessed all that makes God God. There was absolute equality.
 2. He did not consider this perfect equality with the Godhead something to hold on to - ἀρπαγμὸν – “to grasp, seize
 3. Jesus voluntarily left this place of exaltation and supreme glory. It was by Divine design, God’s eternal purpose.
 4. “But emptied himself. . .”
 We call this the “Divine Kenosis” - κενόω – to make empty, make void –
 The great question we must answer is, what was it that Jesus emptied Himself of in His incarnation?
 - a. God is immutable - incapable of change
 He cannot grow nor diminish in His being
 - b. Jesus could not have emptied Himself of any of His Divine attributes – He would have ceased being God.
 - c. His emptying Himself could not have been by subtraction but by addition – It was not the existence of the divine nature that changed but the manifestation.
 He became a servant and He became a man.
 He took upon Himself servitude, He became a man of sorrows –
 He became obedient unto to death, even the death of the cross
 5. Jesus, the Son of God, willfully left His place in glory and took upon Himself flesh and blood.
- B. In His humanity Jesus has all of the qualities of man
1. Our ancient confessions describe Him as “truly God and truly man.”
 Our LBC Confession: *Chapter 8:2* - Of Christ the Mediator
 “The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him who made the world . . .”
 2. Many have difficulty in reconciling the two natures in one person – the hypostatic union and the unipersonality of Christ. This has often been the source of many of the heresies of the church—to deny either the deity or the humanity of Christ—or to deny His unipersonality by teaching that He was actually two persons.
 3. In the incarnation the eternal Son of God did not become a human person so that there became a human person and a Diving person. Instead the eternal Son of God assumed a human nature, thus the two natures comprise the one person.

4. This does not mean the humanity of Christ did not possess a consciousness and a will. It simply means that these human elements belong to the nature rather than the person of Christ.
 5. It is hard for us to fathom. The one person of Christ possesses the attributes of both human and divine natures without any mixture or confusion of the two. This is why the divine/human person Jesus received worship.
Louis Berkhof rightly said: “The doctrine of the two natures in one person transcends human reason. It is the expression of a supersensible reality, and of an incomprehensible mystery, which has no analogy in the life of man as we know it, and finds no support in human reason, and therefore can only be accepted by faith on the authority of the Word of God.”¹
- C. Jesus Christ is fully God, yet there were characteristics of Jesus in His humanity that are hard to reconcile with the Divine.
1. He was limited in His understanding – this is unfathomable for us
 - a. The Bible tells us He grew in wisdom. He had to learn to walk and learn to talk.
Luke 2:52 NAU - "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."
 - b. The God who declares the end from the beginning in His incarnation had to see it unfold bit by bit. He experienced events in time.
 - 2.. In His human nature He took on all of the weakness of human flesh
 - a. He understood hunger and thirst. He understood grief and sorrow.
 - b. He experienced pain and suffering. He would have known headaches.
 - c. He could savor all of the enjoyments we know. He tasted each flavor for the first time. He learned to identify all of the aromas that we experience. He could enjoy the coolness of the early morning, but also the discomfort of the noonday heat.
 - d. He also knew the temptations of Satan. Yet He did not sin.
 3. The changeless God in His incarnation endured change
Not in His deity but in His humanity. God cannot change, and yet the life of Jesus was one of continual change.
 - a. He grew. He went from infancy to childhood to adult. He learned to talk, to walk, how to read
 - b. He experienced both joy and grief
 - c. And He suffered and died.

¹ Berkhof, Louis, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1938), 322.

IV. The Incarnation was the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose

- A. The Bible declares that Jesus became flesh according to the will of God
1. God the Father elected a multitude of sinful men unto salvation
 2. The Father pledged to give these people to His Son and the Son agreed to redeem them from their sin
 3. He then SENT His Son into the world. John 3:16 – “He gave”
John 6:38 NAU - "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."
John 7:29 NAU - "I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me."
 4. Jesus came in obedience to the Father
Philippians 2:8 NAU - "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
John 4:34 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."
 5. The entirety of the Old Covenant was a series of covenants, each with the purpose to point forward to the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- B. The Incarnation took place as the result of the eternal love of God.
1. Christmas is love on display
John 3:16
1 John 4:9-10 NAU - "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."
 2. Jesus came to redeem His people from their sins – His precious Bride.
Matthew 1:21 NAU - "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
 3. His name means Savior – He shall be the Savior of His people.
 “He will save His people . . .”
 - a. Who are these people?
 He was promised to the Jews, but they would not have Him
John 1:11-13 NAU - "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."
 - b. Our Lord’s people are those who were chosen and given to Him from the foundation of the world – these are His sheep.
John 10:14-16 NAU - "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, ¹⁵ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd."

4. The whole issue of our Lord's coming was fulfillment of God's eternal purpose to deliver His elect from the curse of sin. Jesus came to redeem His people from their sins.
5. The end of the incarnation is that Jesus would suffer and die that sinners might be reconciled to God—that whosoever shall call upon the Lord might be saved.

Conclusion:

1. Our God is great and mysterious. What condescending grace that He would choose to redeem fallen sinners. What amazing love that God would become man in order to save us. It is the greatest of all Biblical miracles.
Our God is great and greatly to be praised.
2. May it drive us to our knees and cause us to lift up our voices in glorious praise of our King. May it give whole new meaning to our hymn.
Joy to the World , the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.