

The Purpose of the Incarnation

John 1:1-18

Read the Definition of Chalcedon.

During the Christmas season we take special occasion to reflect upon the birth of Jesus Christ. Why do we do this? Because in this baby, in swaddling clothes lying in a manger, we have the Only True God.

The secular world in which you live is not impressed. The ease with which public opinion has cast Jesus aside is mind-boggling. For those of us who still believe that Jesus is truly God in the flesh, it may be tempting to berate our culture. But the unbelieving opinions of an unbelieving world are to be expected. What matters to me are your opinions, and your thoughts.

Honestly, how much time and attention do you give to reflecting upon the wonder and beauty of the Incarnation?

I fear that while continuing to believe the basic facts of the Incarnation, we have failed to see its wonder and beauty, or its significance for us as believers.

It is my purpose to explore the doctrine of the Incarnation, the enfleshing of God. This enfleshing of God should, no, must, stir our imaginations until we burst forth in adoration and praise!

I do not expect that the world around you will much care about what is said here over the next three weeks. But as the world increasingly refuses to reflect upon Jesus during this season, my prayer is that you will do so all the more. Do not so much bemoan the insanity of an unbelieving culture. Use this time as a sort of reset to your faith.

Silently, Jesus came into the world. Few took notice of his birth. Angels announced it but to whom? A few shepherds... a few kings from afar...

Did that matter to Him? Hardly... He knew the full significance of what He was doing, who He was becoming. He did not need the affirmation of an unbelieving world. But He was interested in those whom He would call to Himself. He wanted, even demanded, that they bow in humble adoration and praise.

The coming of God into our world in the womb of the virgin Mary is truly the most astounding event in all of history. The entirety of the Christian faith depends upon God becoming flesh. In this One Person, the distance between the Creator and His creation has been forever bridged.

It is rightly said, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight"

Today I want to explore "The Purpose of the Incarnation".
Next week, we will lay out "The Details of the Incarnation."
And on Christmas Morning we will consider "The Application of the Incarnation."

Today, I want to explore the "Why?" of the Incarnation.

If someone were to ask you today, "Why did the Son of God have to be born in the womb of the Virgin Mary?" what would you say?

I know that there are many good answers to that question. But if you could only give one answer, what would it be?

It was the only possible way for God make Himself known to fallen humanity.
Jesus came in the flesh so that we might truly know God.

Any other answer does not get us to the true and final goal of the Incarnation.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism question 1 asks "What is the chief end of man?"
Paraphrasing: What is man's ultimate purpose?
The answer is clear and simple: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

We might adjust the question to say: What is the chief end of the Incarnation?
The chief end of the Incarnation is that man would glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

The enjoyment of God is the fruit of truly knowing God.
Glorifying God is reflecting back to God His worth and beauty.

This is why we were created. And only the Incarnation makes it possible. And more than making it possible, the Incarnation guarantees this final goal.

It is easy to think of “the knowing of God” or “the enjoying of God” as something that we do. And there are certainly actions that we must apply if we are ever to know God. We will consider some of these in our third message on Christmas morning.

But the knowing and enjoying of God is not first and foremost achieved by what we do. It would be better to see it as achieved by what God has done. But it is equally important to see that knowing and enjoying God is the fruit of who Jesus IS.

Both the person of Jesus Christ, who he is, and the work of Jesus Christ, what he has done, are vital to our redemption, and to our knowing God.

As a whole, I have followed the Western Tradition and have given more attention to Christ’s work than to His person.

But it is the person of Jesus Christ, who He IS in the Incarnation, that most reveals the purpose of the Incarnation: the bringing of man to God, for the purpose of knowing God.

As I read John 1:1-18, pay particular attention to the person of Jesus Christ, and to the goal of the Incarnation.

Read portions of John 1:1-18. (skipping the verses referring to John the Baptist)

In the beginning was the Word,
and
the Word was with God,
and
the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things were made through him,

and
without him was not any thing made that was made.

4 In him was life,

and
the life was the light of men.

5 The light shines in the darkness,

and
the darkness has not overcome it.

(Skipping vv. 6-8)

9 The true light,

which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world,
and
the world was made through him,
yet
the world did not know him.

11 He came to his own,
and his own people did not receive him.

12 But
to all who did receive him,
who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God.

13 who were born,
not of blood
nor of the will of the flesh
nor of the will of man,
but
of God.

14 And
the Word became flesh
and
dwelt among us,
and
we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

(Skipping v. 15)

16 And
from his fullness
we have all received,
grace upon grace.

17 For the law was given through Moses;
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God;
the only God,
who is at the Father's side,
he has made him known.

Verse 18 makes clear that the Word becoming flesh is for the purpose of making God known.

the only God,
 who is at the Father's side,
 he has made him known.

How is it that the Father was made known?
It was in the Word becoming flesh.

John assumes that the making of God known is a big deal. He assumes that the knowing of God is desirable. Of course, knowing God truly is only desirable to those who have been born again, born from above, born of the Spirit of God.

Unless God is born in you, you will not care that God was born in the world. This is what it means to be dead in sin. We are dead to God. But everyone should care. Because everyone has been fashioned to run on God. He is the fuel of our joy. No human can ever be truly happy until they experience God to their fullest capacity.

In the first 5 verses John establishes that the Word was God. He was with God, and He was God.

The Word reveals the invisible God as the spoken word reveals inner thoughts.

The Word is light as God is light, in whom there is no darkness at all.

Using the images of word and light we see that the Son of God is the revealer of God.

Jesus does not merely save us from God, He brings us before the face of God.

We are also told that in the Word is life. It is this enfleshed Son of God who has the right to impart life, the eternal life of God. Life is not an abstract concept that can be enjoyed in isolation. Life flows from the being of God, and is enjoyed as we know God.

Jesus' greatest statement of His purpose in becoming flesh and blood is found in John 17. This is what is often called Jesus' high-priestly prayer.

John 17:1-3 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, **to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.**

³ **And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**

Is there a clearer statement as to the ultimate goal of the Incarnation?
The Father sent Jesus Christ so that they might know Him – the only true God.

John 14:6 ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.**

Peter agrees with John that the purpose of the Christ was to bring us "to God."

1 Peter 3:18 ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, **that he might bring us to God**, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

As does Paul. Paul prays:

Ephesians 3:17-19 ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

I am not really sure I can even imagine being "filled with the fullness of God." I don't really know what it will be like to "know God" in such glory. But somehow, I know that this is the very thing for which I exist. Of all the things that make me happy in life they all pale in comparison to this inner yearning to know God to my full capacity and to be fully known by God.

The Incarnation alone bridges the gulf that separates us from God. Only by God Himself taking on flesh and blood, can flesh and blood know the Creator.

ESV **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

I want you to listen to this same verse in the Old KJV.

KJV **John 1:14** And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

He who was God became flesh, was made flesh. Before the Incarnation, God was not flesh and blood. In the Incarnation, God "was made" flesh and blood, without ceasing to be God. John does not explain how this is possible. He simply states that it is so.

The enfleshed Word does not remain in heaven, but He “dwelt among us”. The word for “dwelt” means tent or tabernacle. It is a reference to the glory of God that descended upon the Tabernacle in Moses’ day. So, when John says, “We have seen his glory” he is making reference to the Shekinah glory of God, the pillar of cloud and fire over the Holy of Holies.

The Israelites of old saw the glory cloud over the Tabernacle. But we cannot say that they “beheld the glory of God in the way that we behold God’s glory in Jesus.”

If that were so, then why would Moses plead with God to see God’s glory?

Exodus 33:18-23 ¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹ And he (God) said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." ²¹ And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

By God’s own testimony, Moses experienced greater fellowship with God than any other man alive at that time. But the fullness of God’s glory Moses did not experience. This is the very thing for which Paul prays for the Church, that they may be filled with the fullness of God.

What gives Paul such boldness, such confidence, such audacity?
Only the truth of the Incarnation.

In the cradle of a manger in Bethlehem lay the fullness of God’s glory enfleshed in a helpless baby.

John describes Jesus as “the glory of the only Son from the Father”. The KJV translates this “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.”

The Greek is monogenes. Mono meaning only. And Genes meaning birth. Literally, the only born one of the Father.

When a parent looks upon their newborn child there is a mystery. That child is begotten of their parents. The little baby is not the parents and yet is of the parents. This

incredible mystery is designed by God to help us in the mystery of what we have in this little baby lying in a manger some 2,000 years ago.

Jesus is the eternally begotten One of God.

Translators have been hesitant to follow the KJV because they do not want people to conclude that there was a time when Jesus did not exist, but then was birthed. Nor should we think that this refers to Jesus being birthed “from the womb of Mary”. Jesus is begotten of the Father. He is eternally the Son of God, eternally flowing from the bosom of God. We will explore the details of this next week. For now, I want you to see its importance to our knowing God.

The same Greek word is used in verse 18.

ESV **John 1:18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

Everything the ESV says is true. But I still think it fails to capture the weight of what is occurring in the Incarnation. Listen to the KJV.

KJV **John 1:18** No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

No man has seen God at any time. That in itself is a powerful statement. Did not Adam walk with God in the Garden? Did not Moses talk with God face to face? Did not Abraham meet with God on multiple occasions? None of their experiences brought them to “see God” in the way that John means.

But, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father. This person now enfleshed and lying in a manger... this one person has declared God. In Jesus, we see God. We can know God. We can behold God.

Jesus was not once in the bosom of the Father, but now is outside the bosom of the Father. Jesus eternally exists in the bosom of the Father, even while he now also exists in our flesh and blood. In this way, He is the link between Creator and creation.

In the person of Jesus Christ, He who has no beginning or end... He who is not a part of this creation... He who is Himself Eternal Light and Life... is forever joined to the flesh and blood of man.

It is sometimes argued that we are too small and limited to really know God. How could the unlimited God ever be understood by our very limited minds. While it is healthy to remind ourselves of how very small we are, we are also to accept that in Jesus Christ the way has been manifest to know God, to be filled with the fullness of God.

Did Jesus, as a man... with a limited human brain... know His Father?

Of course, Jesus was God. As God he would have full knowledge of the entire Trinity. In His eternal being as God He would have knowledge of Himself, and the other members of the Trinity.

But what I am asking is whether Jesus, as a man... with the limited capabilities available to Him as a man... did He know the Father?

Of course, we must answer that He did, for this is the whole purpose of the Incarnation. In the person of Jesus, man knows God.

And the knowledge of God that exists within the human nature of Jesus is the same knowledge that is available to us who are united to Jesus Christ by faith.

Jesus makes known to us the invisible God.

Jesus does not simply reveal himself to us. He reveals God to us.

Jesus truly bridges the gulf between man and God. We can no longer say that God is unknowable, for the text is absolutely clear. Jesus has made God known to us.

This knowledge of God is far more than the mere disclosure of facts. This is the problem of theology. We are speaking about the reality. But our words are not the reality.

But it is what we are given. We are not given pictures of Jesus. We are given the Bible, the Word of God – the Word of Jesus.

1 John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life- ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us- ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Next week, when we look at the details of the Incarnation, you may find yourself being bored or confused. I have felt both as I have read theologians wax eloquently on the Incarnation. "I have also experienced joy and wonder."

occurring. But recently, I watched the Ron Howard movie about it called *Thirteen Lives*. If you have not yet seen it, it is well worth watching.

After practice, a boys soccer team, ages from 11-16 years of age, decide, with their coach (25), to explore a nearby cave. If you have never been into a cave it can be a lot of fun, especially to young boys. But shortly after the boys entered the cave, the Monsoon rainy season came early and flooded the only exit. The boys were trapped deep within the cave. As more rain fell, more and more of the cave became flooded. And the rainy season would last for several months.

No contact was made with the boys for more than a week. Finally, two British cave divers, located the boys some 2 ½ miles deep inside the cave. They were shocked to find any of the boys alive. Instead, they were **all** alive.

But finding them alive was only the beginning. Only the most exceptional of divers would even attempt to make their way through the dangerous caverns with ever changing currents. To make it from the entrance of the cave to where the boys were trapped took anywhere from 4-6 hours.

Most of us would panic and be killed during such a dive. How could boys endure the trip out without panicking? As I watched the film, I had no idea as to all that was involved in getting those boys out. I will not tell you the details if you want to watch the film.

But the rescue effort involved as many as 10,000 people, more than 100 divers, scores of rescue workers, representatives from about 100 governmental agencies, 900 police officers, and 2,000 soldiers. Ten police helicopters, seven ambulances, more than 700 diving cylinders, and pumping of more than one billion litres of water from the caves.

All 12 boys and their coach are rescued. It may be one of the greatest rescue missions of all time.

One former Royal Thai Navy Seal dies during the rescue. And another Royal Thai Navy Seal dies later from a blood infection contracted during the operation.

The film really helps you to feel each stage. I must say, I was in awe of all that went into saving those boys. Of course, the enormity of what Jesus has done to rescue us from our sin is far greater. But as I have been meditating on the Incarnation, what struck me most was that these boys simply returned to their normal lives.

Maybe they did not go caving anymore. Maybe they were more thankful for life. But in the end, their rescuers returned to their lives and the boys returned to theirs. The rescue was everything. Maybe some of them kept up with some of their rescuers. I do not know. But for the most part, the rescue simply regained for them the life that they had before.

Not so with Jesus. The wisdom of the Triune God certainly designed a rescue mission exceeding all others. But the rescue did not end in a return to the normal status quo. The rescue gained something entirely new. In the enfleshment of Jesus Christ, he rescues you to God.

The purpose of the Incarnation is to enable you, a lowly creature, to know your Creator. How cool is that?

Next week, we are going to look at the details of the Incarnation. They are details flowing from various passages of Scripture. But they are summarized in “The Definition of Chalcedon”, that we read at the beginning.

This document was written in 451 AD. It marks the culmination of 400 years of struggle to articulate doctrinally who Jesus is.

It is doctrine. But the doctrine is necessary. Fully understanding the doctrine is not what saves you. But the truth expressed in the doctrine, the reality behind the doctrine... this is what saves you.

If you understand the doctrine and then reject it, you do so at the cost you your soul. Denying that Jesus is God in the flesh aligns you with Satan. The Definition of Chalcedon is the belief of all Christendom. To deny some portion places you outside of the Christian faith. It does not distinguish you from other Christians. It separates you from Christ, the true Christ, and so from God entirely.

But more than this, you are forever cast out of the presence of God. You will never truly know God.

1 John 4:2-3 ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Athanasian Creed

But it is necessary for eternal salvation
that one also believe in the incarnation
of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.

Conclusion:

As Christians, we all struggle to know God.

We read and study God's Word that we might know Him better.

We pray that we might engage in real fellowship with God.

We live in community with other believers that we might see God in them and so be
brought to know God better.

We participate in the Sacraments for the purpose of engaging God in faith that we might
know God.

The Incarnation does not make the knowing of God automatic.

But it does guarantee to those of us who believe that we will know God to our full
capacity.

In the Incarnation we see the eternal plan of God.

Like those boys waiting in the cave to be rescued. For a week they had no contact with
the outside world. They had to fight the fears that there would be no rescue attempt.

But once the British divers made it through to them, they knew that a rescue mission
was under way. They were not yet standing outside the cave in the light of day. But they
knew that the Team outside was working to that end.

We may still live in the land of darkness. We may not yet be looking into the face of God,
the light of the full day. But in the Incarnation, we have the assurance that the gap
between God and man has been bridged... and it has been bridged so that we might
truly and eternally "know God".

Amen!