



Incarnational Love

Text: Luke 2:1-7

Men's Grow Group and Discipleship Coordinator

1. What are your family traditions (like the setting out of a Nativity scene) that remind you of the story of Christmas in this season?
2. In what way do you relate to Adam's description of how the Christmas story, which should amaze us beyond belief, sometimes loses its impact on you over the years, due to familiarity, or at least the semblance of familiarity?
3. Read Luke 2:1-7. As you read, take your time and really try to picture the more accurate scene that Adam described in his message.
 - a. What sticks out to you in ways that it may not have before?
 - b. To what do you attribute Messiah's birth in a stable? What message does the manger convey to modern-day disciples?
 - c. How far do you think Jesus "emptied himself" by being born a human? (See Study Deeper for more)
 - d. What aspects of his divinity did he retain during his time in human flesh? What aspects did he lay aside?
 - e. How has your understanding of and response to the incarnation – the fact that the Creator God of the universe became a baby – been deepened because of a fresh look at this story?
4. From the time of Moses to the last prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi, God had been regularly speaking to his people through prophets for approximately 1,000 years. The space in our Bibles between the book of Malachi and the four gospels that tell the story of the life of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) is, in one sense, simply the turn of one page. What is often lost on us is that that page turn represents nearly 500 years of silence - nearly 500 years without a prophet or seemingly any contact from God in any way to the people of God. What do you think it must have felt like to have been an Israelite "between the times" of the Old Testament and New Testament?
5. We, too, are people living "between the times." Christ has come and has inaugurated his Kingdom. Advent is a time when we prepare our hearts to celebrate the arrival of our King! But his Kingdom has not been fully consummated yet because it won't happen until he comes again. So this is also a time of longing for the return of our King and the full establishment of his Kingdom. Theologians often call this living in the "already but not yet" of the Kingdom.

- a. How have you experienced a little of what it means to live in the “already” of the Kingdom? Where have you experienced light breaking into the darkness?
- b. How have you recently experienced or are you experiencing what it means to live in the “not yet” of the Kingdom? What are the pain points in your life right now that are sober reminders that for now we still live in a broken and fallen world?
- c. How has or can a fresh look at the Christmas story and a greater focus on preparing your heart this Advent season aid you in celebrating more greatly than ever before the “already” you have experienced and/or give you greater hope in the “not yet” of the Kingdom?

Challenge: Who do you know that is in need of some hope right now? How can you intentionally reach out to them with the hope of Christmas in the coming weeks?

Prayer: An Advent Prayer for the Lord To Come

This Advent, Lord, come to the manger of my heart.
 Fill me with Your presence from the very start.
 As I prepare for the holidays and gifts to be given,
 Remind me of the gift You gave when You sent Your Son from Heaven.
 The first Christmas gift, it was the greatest gift ever.
 You came as a baby born in a manger.
 Wrapped like the gifts I find under my tree,
 Waiting to be opened, to reveal Your love to me.
 Restore to me the wonder that came with Jesus' birth,
 When He left the riches of Heaven and wrapped Himself in rags of earth.
 Immanuel, God with us, Your presence came that night.
 And angels announced, "Into your darkness, God brings His Light."
 "Do not be afraid," they said, to shepherds in the field.
 Speak to my heart today, Lord, and help me to yield.
 Make me like those shepherd boys, obedient to Your call.
 Setting distractions and worries aside, to You I surrender them all.
 Surround me with Your presence, Lord, I long to hear Your voice.
 Clear my mind of countless concerns and all the holiday noise.
 Slow me down this Christmas, let me not be in a rush.
 In the midst of parties and planning, I want to feel Your hush.
 This Christmas, Jesus, come to the manger of my heart.
 Invade my soul like Bethlehem, bringing peace to every part.
 Dwell within and around me, as I unwrap Your presence each day.
 Keep me close to You, Lord. It's in Your wonderful Name I pray.
 ~Renee Swope, "The Manger of My Heart" from Proverbs 31 Ministries

STUDY DEEPER

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 made himself nothing, 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. — Philippians 2:5–8

This passage is so rich; we only have space to examine one jewel. It's the phrase, He "made himself nothing" (v.7a). Notice, Jesus "made Himself." He didn't get a memo. He wasn't pushed out of heaven. He was fully engaged in God's whole plan!

That phrase there, "made himself nothing," is actually the basis for a lot of false teaching. Some translations rightly put it, "He emptied Himself." Then the question becomes, emptied Himself of what? Some falsely suggest that Jesus emptied Himself of Deity and that He literally became a first-century Jewish man; that there was no God, just Jesus, the man. But the Bible teaches the Incarnation of Jesus, 100 percent God; 100 percent man, undiminished Deity dwelling in humanity.

You ask, "Well, what did He empty Himself of then?"

Answer, at least five things:

- He emptied Himself of glory. In John 17:5, Jesus prayed, "Glorify me...with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." He gave up the adoration of the saints and angels when He came into this world.
- He emptied Himself of independent authority. In John 5:30, Jesus said, "I can do nothing on My own." He brought Himself into a different relationship with the Father, where ALL of His activities and actions had to be cleared in that unusual way. Though equal with the Father, now uniquely submissive to Him.
- He released the voluntary exercise of His divine attributes. Compare John 1:43–51 with Matthew 24:36 to see how Jesus sometimes was omniscient and sometimes not.
- He gave up eternal riches. I just want you to try to imagine for a moment the treatment that the Son of God, the King of the universe, gets in heaven. Yet 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "...though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."
- He gave up His intimate relationship with the Father. Who can describe the fellowship that exists between the first and second Person of the Trinity? And to hear Jesus on the cross in Matthew 27:46 shouting, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He made Himself nothing— for you and me.

Taken from "Jesus' Selflessness" by Walk in the Word Ministries (used by permission).