

The Essence of Christmas

John 1:1-4;14 Philipians 2:6-11

To get our Christmas story we basically go to two books of the Bible... which are two of the gospels... Matthew and Luke... the other two gospels do not have the historical account of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...

The gospel of Mark doesn't begin with the birth of Christ... Mark begins with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus Christ... the launch of Jesus' earthly ministry... some nearly 30 years after His birth. The gospel of John begins much like Genesis... the first book of the Bible begins... **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth....** John begins **In the beginning was the Word...**

What follows those words in John are perhaps the most profound words in all of Scripture... but none of them describe the historical birth of Jesus Christ.... So you have to go to Matthew and Luke for the "story".

Matthew 1-2 gives information about Joseph and Mary when they fled to Egypt to escape Herod's cruelty... Matthew includes the story of the magi from the East. Luke 1-2 does not mention the magi but focuses on Mary and various others (Elizabeth, Zacharias, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna) who praised God for the Incarnation.

Luke tells us about the angel Gabriel and his baby announcements... Luke also tells us about the group of shepherds who visit Jesus in the manger.... Both Matthew and Luke anchor the birth of Christ to history through two genealogies...

Bottom line... Mary, Joseph, Bethlehem... the star... the shepherds... the stable and manger... the angels... the wisemen... all of what makes up the Christmas story is found in these two gospels... I might add that some have made a big deal about the birth of Jesus ONLY found in two gospels instead of four... casting a shred of doubt on the whole story.... my response is how many times must the Bible proclaim something until it is true?..... ONCE!

I like the question MacArthur proposed one Christmas... *"What would the Christmas story be with no stable, no manger, no Joseph, no Mary, no Bethlehem, no shepherds, no angels, no star, no wise men and no baby?...what would the Christmas story be?"*

I'll answer that... it would be the gospel of John's profound account in John chapter 1.... John does not present the historical elements of the Christmas story... but it does present in its most profound sense... the Christmas story.

That's where I would like to begin this morning... with John 1... but I want to marry John 1 with another profound incarnation of Christ passage that is seldom mentioned at Christmas which gives us insight into the purpose of this baby and that is Philipians 2.

So think of it this way... a simple two part outline... 1. *Jesus the eternal Son of God*... who Jesus is... and 2. *Jesus the God-man*... what He came to earth to do.... I hope to show you how the two are inseparable.... I hope to show you why Christmas represents one of the three greatest events in history along with the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ....

Let's begin by reading the passages... the meaning of Christmas is inexhaustible, but it's filled with theologically powerful, life-changing truths.

Where these two passages take us is to where few dare to go on Christmas... these passages strip through everything we've added to Christmas... to the very essence of Christmas... so much has been added to Christmas over the last two thousand years...

Shopping since August... Christmas cards, caroling, office parties, presents and presents... lights on the house, a tree in the living room... cookies... family dinners... so much has been added to where the essence... what it truly means... has been covered up with all the wrappings of the season of Christmas...

To many of you these are familiar words... consume them this morning as if for the first time... to others maybe the first time you've heard them... at first they will seem strange... listen carefully... they are exquisite words!

Read John 1:1-4 and 14 Philippians 2:6-11

Let's begin with John.... Jesus the eternal Son of God... John gives us six attributes of who Jesus is.

1. Jesus is eternal

(1). In the beginning was the word... got that?... understand that?... it's not going to get any easier!... In a minute I will show you this is talking about Jesus... this verse tells us that Jesus did not begin in a manger in Bethlehem... Jesus did not begin after Mary gave birth to a son... no... Jesus did not have a beginning!

I know that most of you intellectually already knew that... but bask in this... wrap your brain around it.

You go as far back as you can possibly go back in eternity past and you come to the moment of creation... the day that Genesis 1 is talking about ... **In the beginning God created**... that day of creation where before it was nothing and after it was something... everything... in all that no space... no physical matter... no time... no anything... what did exist is what theologians call the Godhead... the Trinity... God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the beginning... already was.. **the word**... grasp that?... I know this is deep... I did mention this morning will not be entertainment right?... let's talk about the word... the Greek word *Logos*...

Notice John doesn't define terms here... He doesn't give a dissertation on what the word *logos* means... that is because those hearing these words for the first time knew what *Logos* meant... The word *Logos* was loaded with meaning...

The Greeks understood Logos in many ways... 1. As a body of knowledge ... think “psychology”, “sociology”... “archeology”... logy which comes from logos would mean the body of knowledge in those fields...

2. Logos represented all reason and order in Greek thought... some thought of Logos as the actual source of all knowledge... most Greeks looked at Logos as something very impersonal... a force... a powerful force.... What John was communicating to those listening to him was...

That this logos... this all intelligence... source of knowledge... all powerful force... was a person... that’s what he’s getting at in John 1:14... **And the Word... logos... became flesh...** Matthew 1 and 2, Luke 1,2....flesh = Jesus.

So Jesus was eternally present the day everything began... Jesus is eternal.

2. Jesus was with God prior to coming to earth.

The Word was with God... this is important...some current cults deny this fact... They say Jesus was created... Jesus was not created... He has already existed... and He already existed WITH God... this supports the Trinity which the same cults deny...

Notice it says **He was with God...** not He existed at the same time with God... Jesus was WITH God... not God’s competitor... he’s not competing with God... He is WITH God...*pros thon theon*...literally “**face to face with God**”...

but if that is too easy to comprehend... John says... **And the word was God....**

3. Jesus is God.

Jesus is eternal... always existed.. He was face to face with God... oh... He is God.... Jesus is both WITH God and is God!... Jesus is distinct from the Father... has face to face communication with the Father... and yet is fully God as the Father is God...

Colossians 2:9 **In Him (Jesus) all the fullness of deity dwells...**

A hymn we sometimes sing... a great hymn... Charles Wesley “*And Can it Be That I Should Gain*”... when we sing it I don’t think we see just how amazing all this is... *He left His Father’s throne above, amazing love how can it be that thou my God, would die for me.....*

He left His Father... came down to die for us... and who’s is that?... God! *How can it be that thou my God would die for me...* Jesus IS God.

4. Jesus is the creator

(3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being...

The Word that was there in the beginning, who was with God... created all... everything that followed that beginning!.. you and I were created by the very one who would come and die for us!.... He didn’t just created masses... He didn’t just put a lot of molecules on earth...

5. He is the giver of life.

Jesus breathed life into each one of us! John 5:26 are truly profound words...listen to this... **For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so, He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself...**

There are two Greek words for “life”.... one is “*bios*”... which is physical life (biology)... and “*Zoe*” a much larger term... all of life... the soul, the spirit... the physical the mental... it is the broadest term for life in the Greek...

Jesus is not just the giver of “physical life”... *bios*... LIFE WAS IN HIM... HIS LIFE WAS NOT GIVEN TO HIM FROM ANOTHER SOURCE... JESUS IS LIFE... and because He IS life... He can and does give life... finally skip to verse 14

6. Jesus became human to live among us.

(14) And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth.

That is Christmas!... that is the greatest summary statement regarding Christmas in all of Scripture... and we see that Jesus is the eternal Son of God...

What he literally says is, “**The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.**” John is deliberately taking the Greek word that readers of the Old Testament in the Greek translation, which was very common back then ... It’s called the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.... He uses the very word for *tabernacle* that was used of the tabernacle that under Moses was set up in the wilderness.

Just to make it absolutely clear what he’s trying to talk about, he says, “**The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and now we beheld his glory.**” He’s making us remember the fact that when Moses was on the mountain, he said, “I want to know you. I want to know you, Father. God, I want to know you. I want intimacy. I want power. I want connection, so show me your glory. Let me see your face.”... Exodus 33

Do you remember what God said?... “*I can’t. It’ll kill you. You will not survive it, but here’s what I will do. Let’s build a tabernacle, a great tent, and that will be my dwelling place. In there you’ll have the sacrifices and the priests, but I will dwell in the Holy of Holies behind the veil, because my glory must be concealed. You can’t behold it. You can’t have it. You can’t know it. You can’t touch it. It’ll be there, but it’ll be concealed in the tabernacle,*” which is exactly the opposite of what we’re told here.

When Jesus is the tabernacle, we behold the glory Moses couldn’t have... when it says, “**The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,**” and the tabernacle is the place of sacrifice, here’s what we’re being told: Jesus Christ came to earth to become vulnerable. Why? So he could become killable. Why? So he could be the sacrifice... He could pay the price, and he could close the gap. That’s the reason why at Christmas you have the glory of God become a baby.

The whole point of Christmas is he's the Word made flesh. What does that mean? The Word made soft.... The divine made human.... More than that, the Word made *The Word made killable*.

Timothy Keller gave a good illustration of all this...

In 1964, in Kew Gardens, a 28-year-old woman named Kitty Genovese was going home to her apartment, and she was assaulted on the street by an assailant. She cried out, "*He's trying to kill me... Help me!*"

The apartments lights came on and people looked out. She was screaming. She was saying, "Help me! he's trying to kill me!"

All we know is this: *Nobody came down to see, to help....* Do you know why?... Because you risk your life.... You're vulnerable if you come down.... Nobody came down. When the lights first came on, the assailant ran, thinking somebody was going to come down. When nobody came down, he came back in about five minutes, and he killed her. It's a pretty famous incident.

Do you know what Christmas is telling us? Christmas is telling us that when Jesus, the Lord of heaven, heard our cries... he came down.... He made himself vulnerable.... He didn't just come down the way those people would have come down, at the risk of their lives. He didn't come down at the risk of his life.... When the Lord of the universe came down, he came down knowing it would cost him his life. But he came... because the Word became fleshy.... The Word became vulnerable.The Word became *killable*. Wow! Christmas means that.

Jesus is eternal... He has always been with God...Jesus is God...He is the great creator of all things...He is the giver of life...He became flesh and dwelt among us....what did He do?

Philippians 2

Jesus as the God-Man

Ok....as we look at Jesus the God-man... we will see His mission...we just saw who He is... now we see His purpose on coming to earth....Philippians chapter 2.

Read verse 6

Some have trouble with some of these verses... some think... *see, Jesus was only a form of God... he wasn't really God...* John just told He was God...we get hung up on the word "form". we have to understand what **form** means... there are two Greek words we translate as "form"... one is *morphe* and the other one is *schema* (*schematic*)...*morphe* refers to ***the essential form which never changes***

Schema refers to ***the form that changes from time to time***... let me illustrate... this is big... this is important...I am a man... agree?.... Dan is a man.... Let me really rub our culture... Dan can not be anything but a man... it is who and what I am regardless of what happens to me.

I can have operations but I can't change the essential form that is unchangeable....that is *morphe*...

Now... I came into this world as a baby...went through some changes.... I became an adolescent... then I became a teenager... then an adult.... Now whatever... my “form”... “schema” changes.... See the difference?

I said this is big... here’s where it is big... (6) **although existing in the “form” of God... *the morphe of God... the essential form that never changes....*** In other words.... Jesus... existing as God... 100% God.... Now look down at verse 7

Read verse 7

Taking the *form* of a slave.... That must be “schema”... because Jesus is 100% God, He must be taking on the form of a slave... *schema*, a form that changes... but it is NOT schema.... It is morphe!!!! What’s that mean?

Jesus is in His essential form...unchangeable form is GOD..... and Jesus in His essential unchangeable form is a slave...MAN! 100% God... 100% man!.... this should mess with your brain!... it is one of the great mysteries of the God/Man Jesus Christ....I told you it was big!.... let’s go on.

Read verse 6 again

Did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped..... I used to have trouble with this... I thought it meant that I would have trouble grasping that Jesus was equal to God.... Yes that’s true but that is not what it is saying....

I looked through the various translations and I think the Christian Standard (CSV) says it well... [Jesus] **who existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage....**

In other words... Jesus when He came down from heaven... He came down fully as God.... **But He didn’t use His divine attributes to His advantage...** His divine rights....as we will see... he set them aside.... **This is humility!**

Jesus could have existed here on earth flaunting His power... remember the song... *He could have called 10,000 angels?*...the day He went to the cross.... He could have used His God attributes to save the agony of the cross.... But He didn’t **Jesus “emptied” Himself**

Read verse 7

Jesus “emptied” himself.... What did He empty Himself of?.... Some people have problems with this one as well....some think it means He emptied Himself of His deity... that He left being God in heaven and was only man... but that is wrong.

This is where participles are important... Jesus didn’t empty Himself by getting rid of something... His deity... but rather by *adding* something... **He emptied Himself BY TAKING...** the idea of laying a hold of something... and what did Jesus lay a hold of?

Taking hold of the “form” *morphos of a slave....by being made in the likeness of men....* He came to earth fully 100% God.... That explains why He could calm the storms... heal the sick...

feed the five thousand with a few loaves of bread and fishes... why He could walk on water and never sin.

But He reached out and took ahold of being a man... 100% man which is why He was tempted in the wilderness by Satan... why He would bleed droplets of blood as He agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane... why He suffered on the cross and died.

Jesus did not give up His divinity... He remained fully God... but He laid aside many of His divine attributes.

Here's where we need to step back and see what Jesus did... When we say Jesus humbled Himself... lowered Himself... do you see how far down He had to come?.... His home is in heaven!.... and He willingly took one gigantic step down.... from the highest pinnacle to the lowest place He could go!

His lowest wasn't being born in a humble animal trough... His lowest wasn't being whipped and cursed as He went down the Via dolorosa to His cross... the lowest was not even being on the cross... the lowest was being forsaken by His Father... the true agony of Christ's death... but necessary to pay the full price of our salvation.... Jesus went so low... yet...

So much higher than us.... and so much lower than us... FOR US... when you realize how far Jesus had to go in His humility.... You begin to see just how unjustified we are to think "we're something".... Think we have any privileges... that we have any status over anyone...

He came to die

Jesus was God... He could have come to live in luxurious royalty as the world's highest king... He could have been the most superior but He chose to come to earth with the mission to DIE!

Jesus knew Isaiah 53... written some 500 years before all this.... He knows it's all about Him...

Isaiah 53:2-10

**For He grew up before Him like a tender [a]shoot,
And like a root out of dry ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we would look at Him,
Nor an appearance that we would take pleasure in Him.
3 He was despised and abandoned by men,
And like one from whom people hide their faces,
He was despised, and we had no regard for Him.
4 However, it was our sicknesses that He Himself bore,
And our pains that He carried;
Yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted,
Struck down by God, and humiliated.
5 But He was pierced for our offenses,**

**He was crushed for our wrongdoings;
 The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him,
 6 All of us, like sheep, have gone astray,
 Each of us has turned to his own way;
 But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all
 To fall on Him.**

**7 He was oppressed and afflicted,
 Yet He did not open His mouth;
 Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
 And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
 So He did not open His mouth.**

**8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
 And as for His generation, who considered
 That He was cut off from the land of the [f]living
 For the wrongdoing of my people, to whom the blow was due?**

**9 And His grave was assigned with wicked men,
 Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
 Because He had done no violence,
 Nor was there any deceit in His mouth**

**10 But the Lord desired
 To crush Him, causing Him grief;
 If He renders Himself as a guilt offering,
 He will see His offspring,
 He will prolong His days,
 And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.**

This is where Jesus leaves us in the dust... we can't do what Jesus did... we can't follow His ultimate example... JESUS CHOSE TO DIE FOR US... Jesus came to earth... Christmas.

The last one is directly related to this one.... But it takes it a notch lower.... Jesus didn't just die...

He came to die the most de-humanizing death possible.

Death on a cross was the worst...most horrible ...humiliating...degrading death imaginable at that time.... the cross was shameful...

Hundreds of years earlier... the horrible death on the cross was prophesied in Psalm 22

Psalm 22:14–18 **“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments**

among them and cast lots for my clothing.” In order for this and other prophecies to be fulfilled, Jesus had to suffer....and He suffered for us!!!

Jesus’ suffering on the cross showed the devastating nature of sin, the wrath of God, the cruelty of humanity, and the hatred of Satan. At the cross..., mankind was allowed to do his worst to the Son of Man as He became the Redeemer of mankind.

Christ came to suffer on our behalf... but not just any suffering...it was dying for a specific purpose... it had to be death on a cross... securing our salvation.... Why did He do it?...

Jesus willingly came to earth to die.... Knowing it would be on that wretched cross... to save sinners from their sin.... To pay restitution for our sins... to pay the ultimate price for our sins.... We need to be reconciled with God... it could only be done through a sacrificial death on the cross by the perfect lamb that God required !

Jesus died on the cross because we were all dying... we all needed to be or need to be saved... we need to be reconciled by the cross....

So... this morning.... If you are here listening to all this...this is all new to you... You are bound to have some questions... this most likely is not all clear to you... come talk to us.... to Randy... Myself... any of the elders...

1 John 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 10:9

9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

Trust in Him

Repent of your sins

Confess Jesus as Lord

Most people live their entire lives not knowing why Jesus came to the earth on what we call Christmas... most people live most of their lives in fear... fearing a virus... fearing tomorrow... fearing what might happen... fearing the IRS... fearing that lump you just discovered in your chest...

Most people haven’t connected the birth of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ to the freedom of all fear... not knowing that God loves them with an eternal, sacrificial love... God placed each one of you in your mother’s womb because He wanted to have a relationship with you!

And make it possible to love Him in return!...Do you believe that?.... Do you realize how much God genuinely loves you?...If not....aske Him to help you believe in His love... If so.... Share His love with others in light of this wonderful Christmas day!

