



Come, Let Us
Adore Him
An Advent Devotional



Week 4

**“When the supreme
somebody became
nobody”**





A REMARKABLE HUMILITY

When we look into the night sky along with the shepherds, we see a host of angels. The shepherds are going through their normal duties of keeping sheep when suddenly the sky is filled with splendor and magnificence and song. Inevitably, this surprised them.

But in light of where this child came from, the real surprise is not in the presence of an angelic throng; the real surprise would be the absence of an angelic throng. What would be surprising is if God could come in a moment in time, and do so in a way that wasn't accompanied in some measure by the splendor that had marked him in eternity.

In eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit shared coequally in all God is. The Son who was about to become incarnate was possessed of the glory of God, the likeness of God, the image of God, the splendor of God, indeed, everything that makes God God. Everything that caused the angels to adore God was there in the Lord Jesus Christ. When we begin there, the impact of what follows is staggering.

Sometimes you may hear of someone who is doing something of exceptional worth or kindness, and someone else says about the person, “I’ll tell you what’s remarkable about her. If you knew where she came from, the fact that she comes down here to do what she’s doing is really amazing.” They’re saying that while what she is doing is significant, if you knew her background, where she came from, and what she left behind, you’d understand that it is all the more remarkable she is here.

The hymn writer of the Christmas carol captures it in two lines:

Thus to come from highest bliss
Down to such a world as this.¹

The Holy Spirit wants us to understand where Christ came from. Paul tells us in *Philippians 2:5-7*, “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”

Coming in the very form or nature of God, Jesus didn’t consider equality with God something to be grasped. In other words, instead of holding on to his own uninterrupted glory, he chose to set it aside.

Image: Opposite *Jesus Nailed to the Cross* by Gustave Dore



Paul tells us that “he made himself nothing,” or literally, “himself he emptied.” In the King James Version we read he, “made himself of no reputation.” What does this say?

It says that coming into the world, Christ chose not to arrive in a fashion that was so marked with dignity and style that it would immediately cause people to say, “Oh, this must be God Incarnate.”

In fact, remember what the angel said to the shepherds: “This will be a sign to you. You will find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” What a strange site. Not that the shepherds were unfamiliar with a manger. It was part of their routine activities. But a child in a manger? What child is this that would be laid in a manger? The sign is not a chariot parked outside. It’s not a scepter, but a stable.

Becoming Nothing by Becoming a Servant

He “made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.” In other words, he became as much of an earthly servant as he had been a heavenly sovereign.

We see this same picture in another scene much later in Jesus’ life:

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:3-5)

Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger . . . wrapped in a towel and wiping his disciples’ feet. Taking the form of a servant.

If you look again at Philippians 2:7, you notice that there is a comma after “nothing,” and then you have a verb in the present continuous: he “made himself nothing, taking” There is a link here between nothing and taking.

What did he empty himself into? rather than, Of what did he empty himself?, we will be closer to coming to grips with it.



It's a fantastic paradox. It's what the Lord Jesus took to himself that humbled him, not what he laid aside. He emptied himself, "taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." It was in taking to himself humanity that he became nothing.

Of course, for those of us who think that man is the apex of it all, we can't imagine anyone who wouldn't be absolutely excited to be a man. But if you were God? Imagine. To be God and come down a birth canal, to be laid in a manger, to live as an outcast, to die as a stranger, to bear the abuse and the curse of the law—it sounds like "nothing" to me.

Being Emptied in Order to Serve Others

There's no analogy that is adequate to express this, but it doesn't stop me from trying. Those of you who follow professional golf will know that Andrew Martinez has been a caddy on the PGA tour for a long time for many champion golfers.

Andrew is well known among his friends. He's intelligent and athletic. He is, in his own right, a good golfer; he's a better tennis player; and he's an even better backgammon player. Andrew as Andrew is a somebody in his own right. But on the occasions that I've been with Andrew when he has made the transition from Andrew, friend and companion, to Andrew, caddy, he's gotten out of the car and walked into the clubhouse and reappeared in white overalls. He has poured himself into something. He has emptied himself by taking.



He's still Andrew—athletic, golfer, intelligent. He's still Andrew in all of his essence as Andrew, but by taking to himself, he has emptied himself.

It is not by a weakness that he makes himself nothing. It is by an addition that he makes himself nothing. He has not ceased to be who he is. But by wearing the overalls—by pouring himself into them—he constitutes a completely different entity. He who is a somebody in his own right has become a nobody in order that he might serve others.

Jesus did not approach the incarnation asking, "What's in it for me, what do I get out of it?"

In coming to earth he said, "I don't matter."

Jesus, you're going to be laid in a manger.

"It doesn't matter."

Jesus, you will have nowhere to lay your head.

"It doesn't matter."

Jesus, you will be an outcast and a stranger.

"It doesn't matter."

Jesus, they will nail you to a cross and your followers will all desert you.

And Jesus says, "That's okay."

This is what it means. He "made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."²

Notes:

1. Edward Caswall, "See, Amid the Winter's Snow," 1851.
2. Alistair Begg. "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus: Experiencing the Peace and Promise of Christmas" Wheaton, IL, Crossway Publishers. 2020

