

Sermon on the incarnation prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas is astonishingly good news for us.

Many of us have our favorite Christmas movie. The movie we watch to kick off the season, the film that has formed a tradition for your family.

For us it is Elf. For some of you it is Die Hard! And for lots of people it is Home Alone.

We are getting close to the point where Home Alone is no longer a common memory for adults! But this week I saw a meme visualizing what would happen if the storyline of Home Alone happened today. Kevin texts his mom saying he is home alone and she responds that they just boarded the plane but will get off and come right home. End of story.

Boring. Missed would be the adventure, the maturing, the mayhem, the wonder. Because of innovation.

The meme stirred me to think of ways we innovate out of wonder. Things meant to astonish us become routine and meaningless. Enter Christmas.

Have we adapted enough to domesticate Christmas? Do our routines and traditions dilute the scandal of the birth in a manger?

Today I want us to reclaim some of the wonder and set our hearts to singing of this good news of great joy.

I want to make two observations from Luke's account of the birth of Christ that should set us right - warm our hearts and fill them with hope.

This babe, the son of Mary, he is God, and he is humble.

He is God

Angels to shepherds announcing good news of great joy, a Savior who is Christ the lord is born.

Luke 2:12–14 “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

[14] “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (ESV)

This is God.

Incarnation. God became flesh for us.

The angels praise God because he is lying in the manger.

Divine in Human Form: The concept of God taking on human form is startling. In the incarnation, Jesus is both fully God and fully human. This union of divinity and humanity in one person challenges traditional views of the divine as transcendent and distant from human experiences.

This is the eternal Son.

John 1:1–5 “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.” (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.” (ESV)

“Along with the Father and Spirit, the Son fully and equally shares the divine nature. As the image and exact correspondence of the Father (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), the Son is fully God. All of God’s perfections and attributes are his since Christ is God the Son (Col. 2:9). As the Son, he participates in the divine rule, receives divine worship, and does all divine works as the Son (Ps. 110:1; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:9–11; Col 1:15–17; Heb. 1:2–3; Rev. 5:11–12).”

Not a prince born to a royal house, this is God entering our existence. Not even a kingly experience, He enters into the most vulnerable moments of humanity and takes it on for us.

Luci Shaw, in her beautiful poem “Mary’s Song,” says:

Quiet he lies

whose vigor hurled

a universe. He sleeps

whose eyelids have not closed before

Where we might expect God to be distant and unapproachable, he is not far off. He is so interested in our lives that the eternal Son sets aside the power we might expect to work something glorious for us.

Philippians 2:6–11 “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by 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. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (ESV)

He knows your frame and only He can save.

What child is this? He is God the Son, the One whom the angels sing of.

“Ultimately, the scandal of the incarnation is a profound mystery that challenges human understanding and expectations. It invites believers to reconsider their

preconceived notions of God and embrace the humility, vulnerability, and love demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ.”

“God is, according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. He made heaven and earth, and He works all things according to the power of His will. He is holy, holy, holy. The God who sits enthroned in heaven and to whom the nations of this earth are like a drop in a bucket—this God condescends. God who is superior to us, in whom we live and move and have our being, is a condescending God.

The greatest and most wonderful example of God’s condescension is in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus: God became man and took on flesh. The Creator became a creature; the One who hung the stars lay helpless in a manger. The One who we teach our children is so big, so strong, and so mighty became so tiny, so weak, and so powerless. The King of the angels was made a little lower than the angels. The Creator of time entered time. The One whose everlasting arms are underneath His people lay vulnerable in His mother’s arms.

There is no greater condescension. It’s beyond illustration, beyond comparison. That God condescends is our only hope in life and death. Without God’s condescension, there would be no salvation for you and me. There would be no good news. It is the glory of our God that He condescends.” Paul Levy

God has taken on flesh. Amazing.

But there is more.

He is Humble

Luke 2:7 “And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” (ESV)

Was it a cave, a stable, a stall with animals. Whichever, it was humble.

The awaited Christ - surely he would have been born in a palace - His lineage untainted by outsiders and sinners... Instead, he is laid in a manger.

He is not out of reach and the manger is the sign.

“The sign is the manger. In fact, this must have sounded so wildly scandalous, the shepherds probably did not think they heard the angel correctly...Savior. Christ. Lord. That’s who the angel said had been born. Savior: deliverer from all our enemies — maybe more! Christ: the Messiah, the fulfiller of all the promises of God. Lord: as in “an angel of the Lord appeared to them,” and “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Luke 2:9). This Savior, Christ, and Lord is lying in a what?

This is the sign. No other king anywhere in the world was lying in a feeding trough. Find him, and you find the King of kings. And you will know something. Something utterly crucial about his kingship.” John Piper

He is approachable, relatable, humble, and able to save. Mysterious. Wonderful.

And his life will bear it out, and his ministry will make it clear. (*Confirming he is the One that has come*)

Matthew 11:25–30 “At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; [26] yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. [27] All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. [28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (ESV)

The Messiah lies in a manger. A picture of his humility toward us. His heart is one of mercy and grace. The babe born to Mary will bring rest to weary souls like ours.

The manger is meaningful. God has come to save, he is near and joyfully gives what we need for forgiveness, salvation, purpose, and hope to get through our days.

A gift to be received.

Not a ladder to climb, not a program to perform. But belief in the One who has come. That calls the restless to himself. To find satisfaction. To find forgiveness. To find his kingdom.

This is who the Child is. Our rescuer. Our king.

“The incarnation displays the greatness of God. Our God is the eternal God who was born in a stable, not a distant, withdrawn God; our God is a humble, giving God, not a selfish, grabbing God; our God is a purposeful, planning God, not a random, reactionary God; our God is a God who is far above us and whose ways are not our ways, not a God we can put in a box and control; and our God is a God who redeems us by his blood, not a God who leaves us in our sin. Our God is great indeed!” Joseph Scheumann

Hail, hail, the Word made flesh, the babe the Son of Mary.

May we see his heart for us, may we rejoice at his arrival, may we be forever changed by his grace.

God really has taken on flesh. He really has humbled himself even to the cross for you. The greatest gift. That which makes every angel sing. That which becomes the compass of our lives forevermore.

Christmas is astonishingly good news for us.

Augustine: “The Word of the Father, by Whom all time was created, was made flesh and was born in time for us.

He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course, wished to have one day set aside for His human birth.

In the bosom of His Father, He existed before all the cycles of ages; born of an earthly mother, He entered upon the course of the years on this day.

The Maker of man became Man that He, Ruler of the stars, might be nourished at His mother's breast;

that He, the Bread, might hunger;

that He, the Fountain, might thirst;

that He, the Light, might sleep;

that He, the Way, might be wearied by the journey;

that He, the Truth, might be accused by false witnesses;

that He, the Judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge;

that He, Justice, might be condemned by the unjust;

that He, Discipline, might be scourged with whips;

that He, the Foundation, might be suspended upon a cross;

that Courage might be weakened;

that Healer might be wounded;

that Life might die.

To endure these and similar indignities for us, to free us, unworthy creatures, He who existed as the Son of God before all ages, without a beginning, deigned to become the Son of Man in these recent years.

He did this although He who submitted to such great evils for our sake had done no evil and although we, who were the recipients of so much good at His hands, had done nothing to merit these benefits.

Begotten by the Father, He was not made by the Father.

He was made Man in the mother whom He Himself had made, so that He might exist here for a while, sprung from her who could never and nowhere have existed except through His power.”