

Reflections on the Incarnation

Intro: For centuries many believers in Jesus have celebrated the miracle of the incarnation of God at this time of the year. Though there is little evidence that Jesus was actually born on December 25th (much to the surprise of many), there is no doubt that His coming was one of the most important events in the history of the world; and it is always helpful and edifying to reflect upon it, whether in December or the middle of the summer

The apostle John considered it an essential truth of the gospel and strongly pushed back against those of his day who denied it:

“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” (1 John 4:2–3)

An ancient church writer Irenaeus tell us that John wrote his gospel in part to refute those who denied that Jesus was the Son of God and that He, as the Son of God, had come in the flesh. Not surprisingly then John’s gospel strongly affirms:

The Reality of the Incarnation

Though the Bible does not use the word “incarnation,” the word “incarnation” is a fitting description of what happened over 2000 years ago. For God came into the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. John puts it this way:

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Note John’s language, “the Word became flesh.” That’s incarnation!

The incarnation implies two things about Jesus

He had an existence prior to His birth on earth. John makes that clear to us in the opening prologue of his gospel:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (John 1:1–3)

That He was sent by the Father with a mission to accomplish on earth.

And in that connection, it is interesting that John does not record the birth narratives of Jesus as proof of the incarnation; but rather the claims that Jesus made and the evidence that supported those claims. John wants us to think about these questions: What did Jesus say about himself? Why was He sent? Why did He come? How did He perceive His mission?

While on earth Jesus claimed that both these things were true!

Jesus claimed to have had an existence in heaven before coming to earth!

He claimed to have been in heaven with the heavenly Father!

Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world. They said therefore to Him, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (John 6:32-35)

He claimed that He alone had seen the heavenly Father, not in theophany as some OT characters did in history, but in reality before coming to earth!!

Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. (John 6:46)

He claimed that He knew the Father by being with Him!

I know Him; because I am from Him, and He sent Me. (John 7:29)

Jesus uses the Greek verb from "oida" indicating "absolute knowledge, the knowledge of intuition and satisfied conviction."

In all of these statements Jesus clearly claimed to have an existence with the Father before coming to earth!

Jesus claimed to have been sent by the Father with a unique mission to accomplish on earth.

He claimed that He was sent to earth by the Father!

Jesus therefore cried out in the temple, teaching and saying, "You both know Me and know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. "I know Him; because I am from Him, and He sent Me." (John 7:28-29)

He claimed that He came to reveal the Father to mankind!

"I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him." (John 5:43)

To come "in the name of the Father" is to come by His authority and in a deeper sense to represent all that is true about Him, since the name of God stands for all that He is!

To Phillip Jesus said:

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'? "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. (John 14:7-10)

John captures the idea in his prologue:

"No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." (John 1:18)

He claimed that he was equal with the Father!

But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working. (Jn. 5:17)

The Jews understood this to be a claim to have a unique relationship with God as His Son.

For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. (John 5:18)

He claimed that He came to enlighten a world in darkness!

"I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness." (John 12:46)

Before Jesus' coming the world was lost in darkness. It existed under the rule of the prince of darkness. Here is how the apostle John expressed it:

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." (John 1:4-5)

"There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." (John 1:9)

He claimed that He came to bear witness to the truth!

When Jesus came into the world not only had Satan filled the world with the darkness of sin, but spread His lies about God and His relationship to mankind all over the world. Those who believed His lies were enslaved by Him and lived in the darkness of His kingdom. But God had in His Son a witness to the truth about Himself and about His relationship to the creation and His plans for it.

"For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." (John 18:37)

That truth, Jesus said, would make us free from bondage to sin (Jn. 8:32)

He claimed that He came to do the Father's will!

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (John 6:38)

Jesus' mission was not self-determined; but rather one of obedience to the Father. For Jesus, doing the Father's will meant not just keeping the Law of God, but suffering on the cross to provide a real remedy for sin.

He came to give His life as a ransom!

The Hebrew writer explains that blood of animal offerings that the Jews had offered for centuries to God could never take sin away; but could only serve as a reminder year by year of the sins that had been committed. But Jesus came with the mission of offering himself as a sacrifice for sin. Thus the Hebrew writer places the words of the psalmist in his mouth:

"'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE ROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.'"' (Hebrews 10:7)

That's why John said of him:

“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

And that why Jesus predicted his death by crucifixion with this statement:

““Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.”

(John 12:27)

“Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”” (John 12:31–32)

Nothing less than the blood of God’s Son could take sins away; and that is why Jesus came.

Clearly Jesus explained the purpose of His incarnation to reveal God to us, to speak the truth, to enlighten us, and to save us from our sins.

And in all these statements we have a clear explanation for who Jesus thought He was and why He came to this earth. So then, how should we respond?

The Response to the Incarnation

We cannot read the gospels without being confronted with the doctrine of the incarnation of God and Jesus’ claims that He is the incarnation of God!

Jesus’ claims will not allow us to reduce him merely to a good man, even a great moral leader and teacher. If His claims are not true, then he is either the imposter of the ages or one of the greatest “nut jobs” that ever lived on earth!

But on the other hand, to believe that His claims are true is to acknowledge the unique claim that He has made upon our lives as our Creator and to acknowledge our need for the unique blessings He provided in coming to earth.

So how have we responded? How you responded?

Have you confessed Him as the Son of God?

Have you come to know God through Him?

Have you believed in Him as the Christ of OT prophecy?

Have you been enlightened by His light?

Are you been freed by His truth?

Have you accepted His sacrifice?

It is amazing to think when God came to earth, the world He had made did not recognize Him. John sadly reports:

“He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

The very ones He had created did not know Him when He came to earth. But even worse, those to whom God had revealed Himself in the past did not know Him when He came.

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.” (John 1:10–11)

God entered our world; yet the world rejected Him! It still has! Let's not that happen to us. John tells us that eternal life hangs in the balance. To respond to the incarnation of God is to believe in the Son of God, receive Him into our lives, and take hold of the eternal life that only He can give!

Conclusion: A popular talk show host said recently, "I'm a CE Christian. I go to church on Christmas and Easter." The incarnation of God demands more than an annual visit to a Christmas service. It demands far more from us than lighting some candles and singing some Christmas songs. It demands faith, repentance, obedience, worship, courage, faithfulness, commitment. It means allowing Him to fulfill His mission in our own lives!