

Incarnation

The Scripture:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5)!

The thought:

God, in his great wisdom, seeks to reach out in love to an estranged mankind. He does this through a total identification with the human condition, yet without sin. This act of God can be referred to as the incarnation. As John puts it, “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). This means that the God of the universe takes on human form in the son, Jesus. The incarnation is what is truly celebrated at Christmas each year since it is through the incarnation that true salvation and redemption can be provided to humans. Because God chooses to come to us as a baby, a way is thereby provided for our salvation through the incarnation.

Throughout the Old Testament, there is the development of the concept of sacrifice along with that of the deep sinfulness of man. For salvation to come to mankind there needs to be a perfect sacrifice who can take upon himself the sins of the world and thereby redeem mankind. Although originally presented in the use of animal sacrifice, redemption can only be found through the ultimate sacrifice; through the perfect human. This is Jesus, who gives up all he has in heaven with God and comes to earth in the form of a human baby. Jesus not only comes but is obedient to the point of the cross and gives his life a ransom. Mark tells us “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that although Jesus identifies with our weaknesses he does so without sin. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to

sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

The incarnation is really the means of reconciliation and atonement. It is the means of breaking down the wall of separation between God and man. Without the incarnation, there would be no way for God to be able to communicate his love fully to humankind. Without the incarnation, humans would not understand that the way to God is through Jesus, the perfect son.

The song:

*Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th’angelic host proclaim,
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”*

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King!”*

*Christ, by highest Heav’n adored;
Christ the everlasting Lord;
Late in time, behold Him come,
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail th’incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel.*

*Adam’s likeness, Lord, efface,
Stamp Thine image in its place:
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in Thy love.
Let us Thee, though lost, regain,
Thee, the Life, the inner man:
O, to all Thyself impart,
Formed in each believing heart.*

--Charles Wesley (1739)

The question:

How is Jesus resident in my heart and mind? How do I identify with his sacrifice on a daily basis? How can I say “thank you” to Jesus for the sacrifice he has made on my behalf?

The experience:

In a sense incarnation is like identification. Incarnation means to be made into flesh—to take on a human body and mind. God becomes flesh and reveals himself so that we can understand or know him. He also comes to understand us. One could argue that “God becoming flesh so that he can understand us” is heresy since God already knows everything. But the incarnated one, Jesus, humbles himself and is thereby enabled to be “made in human likeness”—to understand the human condition in all its brokenness and pain.

There are some parallels between being incarnated and becoming a missionary or maybe even an immigrant. A missionary or an immigrant needs to move from one culture to another. He needs to give up some of his traditions, rights, and styles to move into a new culture or a new way of being in this new world.

Even as Jesus, the son of God, gives up some aspects of communion or true reality with God to be made a servant, so a missionary gives up some of the familiarities of his homeland in order to go to another place. There he experiences reality in a different way so that he can be a channel to communicate the truth of Christ to a new people. Similarly an immigrant leaves his homeland and chooses a new home where many expectations will be different.

The only way people can know God may be through the missionary who translates the truth into the new culture. The only way we may know about “the old country” is to hear about it from the immigrant who has actually lived there. In the same way, we can only really know God is through his son, Jesus Christ, who has come to bring us the truth of God’s true character.

Years ago my mother referred to an old anonymous poem which expresses this so well:

*It’s a wonderful story, the Gospel of love,
As it shines with Christ’s life divine.
Oh, that its truth might be told again
In the story of your life and mine.*

*You are writing each day a letter to all;
Take care that the writing is true.
It's the only gospel some people may read,
The gospel according to you.*

We are called to be the gospel example to the world; to incarnate God's truth to others. Simply put, we are called to be Christlike. Every day we are "translating" God to people around us.