

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: John 1:1-4; 15-18; Col. 1:15-17

"Understanding the Incarnation"(part 2)

A QUICK REVIEW

Happy New Year! God designed our journey on earth with years. And a New Year provides us with a new beginning. And God is the God of the new. We read in **Lamentations 3:22-23** that **"the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness."** We know from the book of **Revelation** that God is making way for a new heavens and a new earth. And we know that in Christ we become new creatures! We will be given new bodies, new hearts and minds. And this is all because of Who Christ is and what He has done.

And so as we continue to celebrate the Christmas Season, we are reminded of the great witness of the Incarnation. What we call the incarnation is at the heart of not only Christmas but the Christian faith. Incarnation means to "come in the flesh." And so, when we say Incarnation, we are referencing the coming of the Son of God in human flesh that Jesus Christ came to earth and became man. It also means that Christ as the Son of God did not come as half god and half man but that He is fully man and fully God. Thus, what separates Christianity from all world religions and all cults is the belief that Jesus is fully God and fully man. Jesus is not a created being but is fully divine and worthy of the worship of all mankind.

So where does such a belief come from? It is based on three things: 1) What is said about Jesus in the Word of God 2) What Jesus says about Himself in the Word of God, and 3) What Jesus has done while He was on earth.

Last week we looked at two passages that declare in detail the truth that Christ is both God and man. Let's look again at those key passages as a brief review. First, from the Apostle John:

John 1:1-5: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. 4In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."*

John 1:14-18: *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" 16For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."*

Now let's look at what the Apostle Paul had to say from his letter to the Colossians:

Colossians 1:15-17: *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or*

dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Now let's turn to the third passage:

HEBREWS 1:1-4: GOD...HAS SPOKEN TO US IN HIS SON

Hebrews 1:1-4: "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. 3And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they."

Note what is being said of Jesus Christ - God has spoken to us in His son. That is another way of saying that Christ is the culmination of God's revelation to us. God may have communicated to our world through a variety of ways throughout human history, but in these last days He has revealed Himself in His Son. And the last days refers to a new and final age - the Messianic Age inaugurated by the coming of Christ. And then what follows are eight propositions about Christ.

1) He is *the heir of all things* - this harkens back to the firstborn title given to Christ in Colossians. Again, Christ has the supreme place in all the universe.

2) *through Christ, God made the world* - Jesus is the means of creation again already affirmed in John and Colossians.

3) *the radiance of God's glory* - Jesus reflects the glory of God - the very presence, brightness and majesty of God

4) *the exact representation of God's nature* - Jesus is the exact representation of God. In other words, the Son is such a revelation of the Father that when we see Jesus we see what God's real being is.

5) *upholds all things by the word of His power* - the very One through whom all things were made, keeps all things together and alive (recall both **John 1** and **Colossians 1**) by His active and powerful word. Nothing is beyond His reach or control.

6) *made purification for sins* - Christ has removed sin (its guilt, punishment, and slavery) in His death on the cross. The rest of Hebrews demonstrates how Jesus is the means for the removal and cleansing of man's sin so that man can enter into an eternal relationship with God. Again, this is another indication of Christ's deity as only God alone can remove and acquit sin.

7) *He sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high* - His work of salvation is complete and He now is in the place of highest honor. Sitting is the posture of rest and "right hand" meant in the ancient world the highest place of honor. So this means that Christ's work is complete and that He now has the place of highest honor. Only God can have the place of highest honor, so again the inference is of Christ's deity.

8) *As the Son, Christ is not only better than the angels, His name is superior to theirs* - this has been visibly demonstrated for all time in His atoning word at Calvary (the cross).

But if it clear is that Christ is God by nature as the Son of God, we now come to the incredible miracle and mystery of His becoming a human being. Please now go right to **Hebrews 2**, the next chapter. Look know what it says:

Heb. 2:9, 14-18: *"9But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone...14Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*

Here we see that Christ had to be made like us if He was to be a sufficient sacrifice for sin. You may say well I thought Christ has power over life and death. If so, how can the devil have power? Recall what the name *devil* means - he is the false accuser, the slanderer. And he knows that we deserve death apart from God's grace. And so the devil can stand before God and all the hosts of heaven and rightfully declare that, based on God's holiness and righteousness and justice, we deserve death. And we remain under Satan's control unless we trust in God's mercy. And that grace and mercy was demonstrated in the Son taking our place by dying on the cross. That is why later in Hebrews we read that there is such a great judgment upon those who reject Christ, because they are basically not only mocking the very suffering and death of Jesus, but they are saying that they don't need it!

He was made like us in all things and even was tempted in the suffering. Tempted how? Tempted to quit, to take a shortcut. Remember when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness? He tempted Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple to make a grand entrance. The Father's angels would come and He could make a grand entrance. Satan was tempting Jesus to take a shortcut. And then in the Garden, Jesus even prayed, "Father let this cup pass away from me."

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-11: The Divine Son of God Becomes Man

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and

on earth and under the earth, 11and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Here we have an incredible description of what the Son of God did by becoming man. If we recognize the 100 percent deity of Christ, then the very fact that He became man is truly just as amazing. Look what is being said. The call to an attitude of selflessness and humility emanates totally from the Incarnation itself. What is then described, that Christ already existed in the form of God, (another way of saying as the essence of God - like the Word of God spoken of in John 1) thus He was and is equal to God; He did not consider it as ***"a thing to be grasped"*** - in other words, to be held onto for himself. His deity was not something that He would selfishly hold onto for Himself; instead, in obedience to His Father and in demonstration of His love for humanity, He emptied Himself. This giving up His divine power, rights and privileges. He did so by becoming man. Hence, the words ***taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men.*** This can be called the divine condescension. In other words, Christ, as Son of God, as Divine, limited Himself; for to be truly and fully human, it means that one must have limitations of time and space and knowledge and power, and of course being mortal. Jesus exhibited all these traits.

He didn't just limit Himself by becoming man, but He became a servant - He came to serve. And not just to serve, but to suffer, but not just to suffer but to die and not just to die but to die a terrible death, death on a cross that was considered a disgrace to Jews but not just to Jews but also to Romans. For such a death was reserved only for slaves, foreigners and traitors. So we have the very Son of God. God, the all-powerful one, the all-knowing one, the One through whom all things were made, making the ultimate sacrifice. Why? To demonstrate God's incredible love and to satisfy God's perfect justice.

As a result, God (the Father) highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him the name which is above every name. There is no greater name than Jesus, and yet the name that God bestowed upon Jesus might in fact be the title LORD. For after Christ's death, then He was raised and exalted and the whole creation waits for the coming of Christ when at His name, EVERY KNEE WILL BOW (cf. **Is. 45:23**), every created being whether good or evil, with joyful faith, or resentment and despair, every one will acknowledge that Jesus is sovereign over all, and this to the glory of God the Father!

And so Jesus came to reveal to us not just the truth and love of God, but God Himself. He came to reveal the true nature of God and how a true follower of God is to live. He came to die and take care of the problem of sin. He was even tempted like us in every respect, but he avoided sin. He became the Son of Man that we might truly become the sons of God. To show us that sin is not only paid for and that we can be forgiven, but that sinning is not a necessary part of being truly human. Yes, it is a trait of all fallen humans, but no, it is not how God made us in the first place. It is not necessary to sin in order to be truly or fully human.

No, He came that we might be set free from sin's slavery, from Satan's accusations, and from death's sting. And for that we should not only be thankful but rejoice, for God now lives in us and we are His children prepared for His Kingdom. What more motivation do we need for this New Year to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and grow in His wisdom and love? In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!