

Advent Midweek I
St Paul Proclaims the Incarnation: "The Incarnate God"
Colossians 1:13-23a
December 3, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You might say, it was with near "fear and trepidation" that I chose for us to sing "Of the Father's Love Begotten" this evening. It's so beloved as the grand and glorious Chief Hymn on Christmas Day, I almost hated to reduce the anticipation for singing it Christmas morn by singing it already in early Advent. But it's fitting to do so because, in similar form, I'm also risking reducing anticipation for beloved Christmas passages of Sacred Scripture, as we meditate in this Advent midweek series on wondrous Epistle Readings we typically hear during the Christmas season... wondrous words inspired by the Holy Spirit as written proclamation by St Paul, whereby the mystery of the Incarnation is made known to the unsuspecting gentile world – that's us.

By considering these words before the time comes, some may think we are celebrating Christmas early – almost like those radio stations that, the weekend after Halloween, stretch the secular seasonal sentimentalities from early November all the way through the 25th (only to miss the actual Christmas season that goes into early January!). In truth, it's not about *extending* the seasonal sentimentalities but about meditating upon the words richly *outside*

the seasonal sentimentalities, but in *just close enough proximity* that – when the season actually arrives – we may appreciate the depth of the divine mystery of the Incarnation and not so heavily lean on sentimentalities to enjoy the true season of Christmas, “Christ in the flesh.”

So, as St Paul once in history proclaimed the Incarnation of Christ Jesus, for the benefit of every generation and for the faithful marveling of every year’s annual meditation in the centuries since... as St Paul proclaimed the Incarnation, let us consider carefully the various details that make the Incarnation the divine mystery that it is.

Tonight, the first detail is that St Paul proclaims the Incarnate *God*. If that mysterious phrase – the Incarnate God – doesn’t immediately *stun* you and leave you utterly speechless, such shows how *privileged* you are to have the good news of Christ Jesus constantly in your ears and your life. We ought just stop and meditate on this great reality of the truth of the incarnate God tonight. To be honest, not much ‘division of Law and Gospel’... just meditating on this marvelous truth:

Would not the first gentiles to hear the news have been awestruck at the claim – not only that there is only one God (they were a bunch of polytheists) – but that the one true Almighty God over all creation (the mountain, seas, land, everything therein) would choose to become a man with flesh and bone! Perhaps, going back

further in history, we could give Adam and Eve a *slight* pass if they were not totally awestruck at the thought when first proclaimed, as they had known perfection and walking in the garden with God... but for Adam's fallen line, even down through Abraham's branch of that line, the Incarnation was such an unthinkable, unfathomable truth to come to pass that – when it actually *did* – the Jews themselves could not believe that a son of a carpenter could be the One of whom they had for centuries not even dared say His Name (Psalm 8: “O LORD, our Lord”) and had replaced the great YHWH with a substitute name so as to honor His holiness... and now He stood here in their midst as a humble man! Unbelievable!

So, that *you* find it commonly in your ears, an almost mundane ‘talking point’ among Christians, that we confess the Incarnate God should give you pause, and you ought hear it again with a renewed appreciation for the breathtaking mystery that it is.

And yet, certainly not a mystery that is unique to the proclamation of St Paul, or even to the Evangelists. No, from Eden – from the time of that very first gospel proclamation, God promised this mystery – “Between your seed and *her seed*,” God triumphantly prophesied over the Serpent. And that first prophecy of the Incarnate God is echoed throughout the Old Testament, so that we hear it again in tonight's first reading... a reading we tend to hear sentimentally: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you be little among the clans of Judah” – and, about that point we tend to think,

“Ah, it’s Christmas season again.” Or, “I remember memorizing this for the children’s Christmas program.” Or, “I love hearing this with all the candlelight of Christmas Eve.” Okay, great!... but consider the magnitude of the words regarding Bethlehem Ephrathah: “Out of you shall come forth one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from everlasting. Therefore, [God] shall give them up *until the time she who is in labor has given birth*.” There’s the Incarnate God. Not just the incarnate one *sent* from God. But God Himself, from everlasting... now, to him, given birth! Now flesh and blood.

But *that* this mystery is announced throughout the Scriptures is not our only joy. Rather, that it is *meditated upon*, dwelt *richly* upon, by the Scriptures themselves gives us reason to marvel in joining that meditation. Consider, for example, Proverbs 8. Proverbs 8 leads the reader to meditate upon ‘the wisdom of God’... and Proverbs specifically says that wisdom is not simply some teaching, some philosophical wonder; it is a *person*... indeed, it is *the* Person (if you will), the Incarnate God himself. Listen to how Proverbs proclaims it:

[22] “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work...

[27] When he established the heavens, I was there;

when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

[28] when he made firm the skies above,

when he established the fountains of the deep,

[29] when he assigned to the sea its limit,

so that the waters might not transgress his command,

when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
[30] then **I was beside him, like a master workman,**
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
[31] rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man. (ESV)

How can the mere ‘concept’ of wisdom “rejoice before [God] always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.” No, that’s no philosophical idea of wisdom, it is the Person who is Wisdom. It is the *pre-incarnate* Christ, that very Person who – in the fullness of time – was born of woman... but, who, from the beginning was God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God... as St John says it,

“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 were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

John calls it the Word; Proverbs calls it Wisdom. But “it” was the pre-incarnate God.

With all of that context, we may meditate anew and dwell richly in that glorious truth that St Paul proclaims with divine *authority* just as much as with divine *inspiration*, saying of this incarnate One who was once laid in a manger:

[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [over] all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and

on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (ESV)

Imagine all of that being said of the child in your arms, on your lap, under your care... and you can understand why the Scriptures take the time to note that Mary pondered all these things in her heart. Imagine that being said of the child you behold lying in the straw of the manger or of the child you are led to meet in a humble house... and you can understand why the Scriptures record that the shepherds and magi adored Him. This child is the Creator of all things, the Creator of the stars of night, and – by laying eyes on him – you are laying eyes on the invisible God, no longer invisible, now in human-likeness sharing.

Indeed, the phrase “Incarnate God” is too much for us to comprehend. It would be hard enough to say that God would allow himself to *hide behind* flesh and blood; but he did no hiding, was not ashamed to wear skin and bone, but the Second Person of the Trinity – Wisdom, the Word, from before the beginning – He gladly *became* flesh and blood, took it on as more than a covering, but as a forever-after union of God and Man, Creator and created, infinite and finite.

So incredible is this that all the protestants who seek to *reason* their way through the Scriptures have all types of theories and complaints and excuses about how the clear Word of Scripture on this matter needs to be understood differently than the plain Word says it... and thus, needs to be read *less* clearly but more rationally, making it all convoluted in people's heads and stealing from the beautifully divine wisdom and mystery of the great truth itself!

But, no, the Scriptures are very clear: the Second Person of the Godhead is now and forever-after true Man, your brother. And the man Jesus is, from His conception, now and forever-after true God... so that the title "Jesus Christ" reminds us both of his human name – Jesus, named so by Mary and Joseph once in history, as instructed by the angel – and that title also reminds him of his divinity, "the Christ," sent by the Father as promised in Genesis 3 to atone for the sins of the world and to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Notice that!... by the blood of His cross (and later in the reading it speaks of his "body of flesh"... the very human body, the very human blood that belongs to the One who is the Wisdom of God.

How does one "properly" meditate upon this breathtaking mystery? (Certainly not in 15 minutes!) For, we can all love it as the greatest of theological *concepts*; but the incarnate God is no *concept*,

but is the one true God over all creation, at this very moment dwelling in the heavens, actively visiting us in this hour by the work of the Holy Spirit; in human history, the Second Person of this Trinity entered into his creation by becoming true man, who – in true humanity – grew through childhood, matured to adulthood, walked the earth in daily life so that countless people unsuspectingly passed by the God-man, for example, on their walk to the market... yes, thus we can even rightly say that God Himself, this Jesus, was put on trial by Pontius Pilate, was criminalized by the Roman justice system, was crucified with criminals, died and was placed into a tomb in a garden near the city walls of Jerusalem, and in that same flesh and blood *rose*, and even now sits in the heavenly places – still true God and true Man... a mystery that will be evermore and evermore.

It's incomprehensible... and yet beautifully confessed by the Church for 2000 years of the same human history, so that perhaps there's no better way to meditate on it than through the words of that beloved hymn:

“Of the Father’s love begotten ere the worlds began to be
He is Alpha and Omega, the first, the ending He
of the things that are, that have been, and that future years
shall see evermore and evermore.”

Oh, that birth forever blessed, when the virgin, full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving, bore the Savior of our race,
And the babe – the world’s Redeemer! – first revealed His sacred
face evermore and evermore.

This is He whom seers in old time chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets promised in their faithful word.
Now He shines, the long-expected; let creation praise its Lord
evermore and evermore.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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