

Advent Midweek II
Galatians 4:4-7
St Paul proclaims the Incarnation: “Incarnate *for us*”
December 10, 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,

What do you make of this phrase: “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate...” How do you hear that phrase? Is it the rote recitation of mindless adherents of an old, dusty creed? Or is it the solemn joy, spoken in unison, of men and women, youth and aged, throughout the world who rejoice that their need for salvation was answered once in human history... who know, despite all the scoffing and jeering of a disinterested and arrogant (and, ironically, depressed and despondent) society, that the mysterious Incarnation of our God gives us daily and eternal reason for hope, a clear conscience before God, and a sincere love of our neighbor who also is meant to be the beneficiary of those words and of the historic truth those words confess: “who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary.”

That is the *reason* for the incarnation, isn't it? – “for us men” - a reason that can never be lost on us, lest the incarnation be viewed from merely a philosophical pontificating of *how* such a feat

could be accomplished? “*How* could the divine become man without losing the essence of the divine?” we could ponder, if that was the only thing that really interested us regarding that phrase.

Yes, isn’t that the subtle, but justifiable accusation to be leveled against much of the teachers and false prophets of the rationalistic protestant world? They spill a lot of ink and waste a lot of energy arguing about *how* the Christ could be both true God and true man at the same time, *how* the infinite could relate to the finite when the finite is incapable of the infinite! But, the very fact that those teachers, prophets, and the churches they lead spend so much time on the *how* of the incarnation is because they take for granted and don’t actually teach with pure joy the *why* of the incarnation. *Why* did God become man? That question doesn’t interest much him who believes he is saved by his elect status or by making a decision of great faith for the unknowable God, or even the one who thinks his works will get him far in heaven. But, when you realize you are a poor, miserable sinner worthy of condemnation and powerless to justify yourself before the holy God, part of the condemned and fallen line of Adam, then the breathtaking news that the holy God chose not to destroy His creation nor forsake it, but chose to become man has only one follow-up question: not “*how?*” but “*why?*”

Of course, even that question could be asked one of two ways: (1) with cynical sarcasm: “*Why?! – why would God want anything to do with man?*” OR (2) with a flicker of hope: “*Really? God*

became man? Do I dare risk asking why God might be willing to become man?"

In other words, the "for us men and for our salvation" – that phrase of the creed – or, more intimately, the "for you" of the incarnation is the joy of the gospel. If the incarnation itself is the *heart* and source and foundation of the gospel, the "for us men" is the *joy* of the gospel. If the incarnation itself is the substance of the manger, the "for you" is the joy of the shepherds. And of course, we could say, if the wine of the cup is the substance of Christ's own blood, then the "for you" is the forgiveness and hope of the Christian.

Yes, the "for you" is your joy, too. Christ did not become man to be the subject of mind-bending philosophy, nor a fairytale phenom, but to pay for the sin that eternally separated us from God... to be that atoning sacrifice, that we may be reconciled to Him and redeemed to the life everlasting God had planned for us in the creation, to bring us back into the paradise of forever dwelling, body and soul, in unity with God.

Indeed, one cannot properly appreciate Christmas if his meditation kneels forever at last week's focus on the quiet majesty of the incarnate God. *That* God became flesh is not the full truth of Christmas. Where theologians like John Calvin have (functionally) wrestled with questions of the incarnate God's essence, they have failed to rejoice in his *motive and purpose and benefit*. Where they

have pondered only his natural glory, they have accidentally prevented themselves from the joy of his merciful grace.

Thus, as St Paul proclaims the Incarnation, in last week's meditation from Colossians 1 on the incarnate *God*, Paul includes this subtle move from Christ's (the incarnate God's) *essence* to Christ's *motive* and *purpose* and *benefit*: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (essence), and through him *to reconcile to himself all things* (motive and purpose)... *making peace by the blood of his cross*" (your benefit). In that one sentence, Paul hints at the wondrous "for us men and for our salvation" truth. But, what he hints at there, he greatly elaborates on for the Galatians... and, in doing so, gives us one of the most beloved passages heard during the Christmas season... that season of meditating upon the good news of Christ in the flesh *for you*. Paul proclaims:

"In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive adoption as sons."

Now, we have just meditated on this verse pretty thoroughly in Sunday Bible Study, and I've brought it up in multiple recent sermons... so let us only briefly review a few key points in the context of our Advent meditation, the incarnate God for you:

First, that the incarnation of the Christ happened in the fullness of time because (in a sense) it is the fullness of time. In the incarnation, all of God's promises come to pass; for, once the world

sees that God has kept His Genesis 3 promise to provide the seed of the woman, there can be no doubt that He will keep His promise through that Seed to crush the head of the serpent. In other words, the fullness of the promised answer to the world's longing and need and hope is made flesh-and-blood at this moment in history (that moment of history of the incarnation of God) and, with that flesh and blood (and in that moment), faith gives way to sight. Just as we long for faith to give way to sight in the glory of our own resurrected incarnation, so faith first gave way to sight when the prophetic word of the coming Christ was proven by flesh-and-blood in the manger to be true... and, therein, all of God's promises were proven to be trustworthy. Indeed, time was fulfilled, God's deliverance of His fallen creation was fulfilled, when the Christ who would accomplish all things at the cross and there *declare* it fulfilled... when he was first made flesh and laid in the manger, it was all already guaranteed.

Secondly from Galatians 4, "God sent forth His Son" – yes, the Father sent the Son to become true man... *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father; by Him, all things were made... who, for us men and for our salvation*"... was "born of woman." The incarnation, by definition, is for you... not for him!... for you.

Yes, if tonight we quickly move past that second point – the incarnate *God* – if we quickly move past that point tonight, it is to 'balance' that phrase (if you will) with this **third** point: "born of

woman”... which is to say, the incarnate God is breathtakingly the incarnate God... not just that the flesh hides God, but that God *is* visibly flesh and blood! ... Not only is the man Jesus before us God, but God deigns to stand before us, to share with us in human flesh and blood, share with us in human birth, be born of woman... and be named Jesus. For, in this Jesus – this God-man – He will save His people from their sins. Again, the *name* is for you, not for him, but for your benefit. He will save His people from their sins.

And thus, “born under law”... willfully subjecting Himself to His own Law, the holy will no sinner can rightly live or cherish because of the Fall, the God-man subjects Himself to it, dedicates Himself to it, makes sure to keep and honor every holy point... why? The benefit can’t be for him! He’s above His own law! But, why? – “to redeem those under law.” In other words, “for us men and for our salvation.” How easily do we forget or take for granted that the incarnate God humbled himself, not only by *dying* in the sinner’s place, but also by *living* not in the glory of the One who is to *be* worshiped, but in the humility of the One who is *to* worship. That’s what true man is to do, right? – worship! And Christ lived in the humility of the one who is to worship. Yes, before He could go to the cross to die as our substitute sacrifice, He also needed (for us men and for our salvation) to live, to worship and honor God perfectly as our substitute servant. And, having actively lived righteously for us unrighteous, having actively perfectly worshiped, He could then

passively suffer under the judgment of God and die to redeem those who could not redeem themselves. He could die for those who supposed themselves alive, so that – by his death – he could bring immortal life to those truly dead in trespasses and sins.

And, for those who lay lifeless in death, not only must salvation be *won*, but it must be *given* and *applied*. And so, Paul says,

Baptized! – “that we might receive the adoption as sons”...

And yet, the adoption is no mere *spiritual* concept, for it directly ties the work of the Holy Spirit to our bodies, makes our bodies his temple, and brings our bodies into the inheritance of the resurrection of the incarnate God. Thus, “who for us *men*” – not merely, “who for us souls” or “who for us “spirit-beings”... Adam was made flesh and bone, and true life and spirit was breathed into that incarnate man; now, the New Adam birthed by water and the spirit is equally an Adam of flesh and bone. And baptism into Christ means that the incarnate God, He who is true and perfect Man, gives new life to us men, for the salvation of our bodies just as for the salvation of our souls. “Who for us men and for our salvation”... salvation of the soul from sin (in the crucifixion), salvation of the body from death (in the resurrection). The incarnate Jesus giving true life to all those incarnates who hopes in Jesus.

Thus, the gifts of salvation are as tangible for us as are our own bodies. The water of life that we can touch, the bread of life that we can eat, the blood of life that we can drink... we can touch

and taste them precisely because our God delights in the incarnate, for He made it, He became it, that He might save it and sanctify it, and forever dwell with it... forever dwell with you.

And, at the same time, the benefit for you in such tangible means is just as spiritual, just as divine, as the very God who forever committed himself to flesh and blood. How many despise the benefit as merely earthly: “Who cares that this is given and shed for you? It’s a remembrance, even an ordinance, something for you to do!” They despise it because they cannot get past the notion that the holy God would do spiritual things in tangible means. Then, they ought not also believe in the incarnation. But, if they believe that the holy God became man and gave himself to be laid in a manger and upon a cross, then they ought also believe that the same incarnate God gives himself to be swaddled in bread and poured out in wine.... His very body and blood, once on the cross for you, now – in the sacrament – distributed and poured out (or, we say “given and shed”)... and all *for you*... the intended recipients and beloved beneficiaries of the great “for you” of the Incarnation of our God.

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