

The example of Christmas

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This Christmas, as you think of buying gifts to give to those you love. I want to tell you about a present you can give God this Christmas. God does not only want us to believe in Jesus this Christmas. God wants you to act like him. God does not only want us to be amazed at Jesus and what he did in coming at Christmas. God wants you to copy his example. Children become like their parents not only because of genetics, but because that is the image they see every day. God placed inside every child the heart to want to become like those they love and admire. Even in the business world, interns become like their mentors. In the sports world, athletes become like their coaches. We were created by God to follow examples, not just hear and obey laws. Being a missionary and Pastor all over the world has taught me that so much of what we are as people is caught and not taught. You will become like those you admire. You will become like your heroes. Your heroes are your examples. Whether you know it or are aware of it, many things about you are copied from someone else unintentionally. But we can also choose to copy others. Today let us hear and see three examples of Jesus in the story of the baby in the manger.

Here is what we are going to talk about today:

1. Jesus is the Creator who became flesh.
2. Jesus is the Savior become flesh.
3. Jesus is the Explanation of God in the flesh.

John's telling of Jesus Story starts with one of the deepest and most memorable verses in the Bible:

“¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.”

Later, John says in verse 14:

“¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Then finally he speaks plainly:

“¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

The Word is the God-man Jesus Christ. But why would John call him the Word? Why would he not just say Jesus or the Son of God?

In the beginning was the Son of God, and the Son of God was with God, and the Son of God was God. I believe John is using the term “Word”, as a symbol that would bring at least three thoughts to the minds of his readers. First, when he says, “*in the beginning was the Word*”, what thought comes to mind? Creation. The first verse of the Bible starts with “in the beginning”. The creation story of Genesis 1 says that God spoke and created the world. So God created through his Word. So John wants you to see that Jesus was there at the beginning and that he was the Creator God of Genesis 1. Look how he says it plainly in verse 3:

“³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

Then in verse 10:

“¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.”

So Jesus is the Creator. That is clearly taught in this passage. But the most amazing statement comes in verse 14:

“¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

So the Creator became flesh and dwelt among us. When Jesus comes in to the womb of Mary it is not just a little baby, it is the Word, the Creator. God the Father had a plan. Not only to send his Son at the right time, but to teach us about Himself through Jesus birth. God is humble. God could have planned for Jesus to be born in a palace and placed into a golden crib and wrapped in silk. But he did not. God planned to have his Son to come into this world in humility. He was born in a place that was used to keep animals. He was laid into an empty wooden trough that was used to keep animal food. All of that was on purpose. If you are going to follow Christ’s example this Christmas, you need to start with humility. I don’t know if we can really grasp how much humility it took for the Creator to become a man. But there have been many great people who have followed his example.

Let me tell a story about humility. There was a monk who had just arrived at a new monastery that was high on the side of a hill. It was a long walk down to the bottom where the town was. He was assigned to go into town and deliver several messages for the head of the Monastery. His superior in the monastery told him to grab any monk and hurry down the mountain to deliver the messages. So being obedient he walked out of the Monastery’s office, and the first monk he saw was an older monk carrying

books. He said with an authoritative voice, "You come with me. We need to go down to the city to deliver messages." The older monk put down the books and followed. As they walked down the long hill, the older monk had bad knees and walked slower. The younger monk shouted at him, "Hurry up!" As they finally reached the town, the younger monk became aggravated by the older monk. Then he noticed that as they walked down the street, people began to come out. They walked to talk to the older monk. They bowed low as if he was a king. A child ran and brought bread, and another flowers. Now the younger monk was getting worried. Then he decided to ask the older monk his name. The older monk said. My name is Thomas Aquinas. (You may not know that name, but he was an extremely famous theologian and teacher.)

Humility is a powerful thing. We think of bossy and pushy people like the young monk as being the people who get things done. But sometimes, the greatest example you can give is to serve those around you in humility. Many times we believe the lies of the devil that keep us from following Christ. We believe the lie that our personal value is in our financial success. If we are poor, then we are of no value. If we are rich, we are of value. If you believe these things, you will mistreat and ignore the poor. God says, look at my son Jesus; He is the most valuable thing in the universe, even though he is born in material poverty. Don't believe wealth equals value. Don't believe either that your work status is your value. Jesus washed feet, and by doing so taught that greatness was in willingness to do the lowest person's service and not in his status as teacher of all things. Are you too good to serve your wife? Are you too good to play with your children? Are you too good to have a meal with people from a different tribe or nation? Follow Christ, who being the Creator washed people's feet.

So the Creator became flesh, but also not only the Creator, the Savior. The second thought behind calling Jesus the Word is that God uses his word to save. So the Word became flesh means the Savior became flesh. Look at how John describes Jesus, the Savior, in verses 11-13:

"¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Jesus made it possible for us to be children of God. So what does it mean for a Savior to become flesh, or what does it mean for the Savior to be born in a manger? Jesus did not save anyone yet, when he was in the manger. Jesus did not automatically save anybody by becoming a human being. Jesus becoming flesh was the first step toward our salvation. It was the beginning of Jesus' accomplishment of our salvation. So his example is this: Jesus left his comfort zone and came to us for our salvation. Many times our comfort is the enemy of our sharing the gospel. One of the greatest reasons people die and go to hell is because we are comfortable with it. We can sit in church and be comfortable with others not being here. We can be comfortable with not knowing the people we work with. We can be comfortable with our own happiness and salvation to the point that we are not who our Father wants us to be. Jesus got uncomfortable. That was the first step in our salvation. I wonder how many people would be willing to listen to you, if you just took the time to take the first step toward them.

Now one last word before moving on to the last thought. There is a certain kind of person that is very active. They serve all the time. They work all the time. Their comfort zone is activity. So if you are one of those people, stepping out of your comfort zone would be to step into to a quiet place. God would like to speak with you, but you are too comfortable with the business and with all your activities to hear him speak. It is only through him that anyone will ever believe. Take time with him. Rest in him. Keep out of your comfort zone and be a father and a mother. Be a friend and a sibling. Call your parents. Face the pain you are hiding. The greatest joy is not found in our comfort, but in the will of God.

Lastly, to say the Word became flesh is to say the explanation of God became flesh. In verses 17-18 John says:

“¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.”

I am about to tell you a secret to reading the gospels. When you see Jesus do something, that is what God would do and is doing. And when you see Jesus say something, you have to understand that this is God would say and is saying. So the whole world wants to know who God is. Look at Jesus and you will know who God is. When you see Jesus walk on water and calm the storms, know that God can calm the troubles of our lives. When you see Jesus say to a crowd of people ready to stone a woman caught in adultery, *“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”* God is saying, why are you people so quick to judge each other, when you are all sinners? Then the crowd leaves and he tells the woman, *“from now on sin no more”*. God is merciful, but God still says don't do that. Jesus is the explanation of God. He is the communication of God. He is the Word of God. The example is to be a person in whom the lost and dying world can see God. You are not God or a god. You are an imitator of God or a reflection of him at times. You were created to be the image of God. Do others see God's love in you? Do they see His mercy?

Examples are powerful witnesses. In 1999, a family took their summer holiday vacation. They all got into the car and drove to the mountains. They were going to rent a cabin close to the edge of a cliff. As they arrived, they parked the car on the high side where the house was, and there was a path that went down 50 meters and off of the cliff. There were 7 people in the car: The grandparents, the parents and their 3 children. All the adults got out. They left the three children inside the car. There were two girls, ages 7&5 and a little boy 3 years old. As they were greeting the owner of the cabin, the car slipped into neutral and it started rolling the down the hill toward the cliff. This meant that the car would go off the mountain with the 3 children inside. The mother was the first to see it. She ran down to the car and got in front of it. She threw her body in front of the car to slow it down. The children say they remember her face as she went under the car. They remember the feeling of the car going over her. It was terrible, but it worked. The mother slowed the car down enough for the grandfather to catch the car and pull the emergency brake. Miraculously, the mother lived, but she also broke her back. Today, she can't feel anything below her waist. She lives her life from a wheelchair, but she has no regrets. That woman's self-sacrificial love is a great example of God's self-sacrificial love. Everyday her children see her sitting in a wheelchair and they can't help but think of the love of their mother for them.

This Christmas be humble, get out of your comfort zones and be a witness not only with your words but also with your example.

Discussion questions:

1. What do you think it means that Jesus is called the Word?
2. Can imperfect people be examples to others?
3. Have you ever known a truly humble person? How did their life impact yours?
4. What are your comfort zones? How do they keep you from following God?
5. How does Jesus show the world who God is? Is it possible for us to do that, even imperfectly?