

Christmas Doesn't Make Sense

Philippians 2:6-11

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Though the Christmas story is so familiar, we must not forget how much we need to be reminded that the Word became flesh in order to save the world from sin. Today we will approach this story from Philippians 2:6-11, which is not only the foundation of Christology, but also explains very well the incarnation of Jesus, which we celebrate during Christmas.

In the beginning of Philippians 2, Paul exhorts the Philippians to have the same mindset as Jesus, which he then elaborates on in vv. 6-11. We all think we know the Christmas story, but when we look at it from the lens of today's passage, we realize that how Jesus came to earth makes no sense from the human perspective. It is full of paradoxical ideas that go against all the worldly wisdom we are used to.

The first paradoxical idea is that divine power came wrapped in humility. At the time of Jesus' birth, Caesar Augustus ruled the known world. He exerted his power by mandating a census, through which he could levy taxes and could count the numbers for the army in which he boasted. Yet though the might of Rome paled in comparison to the power of God, in Philippians 2:6-7 we see that Jesus did not come into this world with power. Though He is in very nature God, He did not consider it something to be grasped. Jesus didn't hold on to His position for His own benefit. In Chinese culture people value connections with influential people and see them as a means to achieve easy success. Jesus had a connection with the most influential God of the universe, yet He didn't use this for His own self-advancement. Instead, in order that we might be able to gain the same connection to the Father, Jesus set it aside to take on flesh, the likeness of a mere human, even a servant. Even as a human, He could have been born in the center of power, in a royal court, surrounded by nobility, as befitted His status. But instead He was born in the remote province of Judea, in the small town of Bethlehem, in a stable, among lowly shepherds.

The second paradoxical idea is that royalty descended into this world as a commoner. Romans worshipped the emperor as a god. Augustus had Julius Caesar deified, so that he, being Caesar's adopted son, could claim to be the son of a god. Yet the true Son of God was born in an unimportant city to a common woman with no hint of royalty. We know from Matthew that Jesus is indeed the King, yet He didn't have the birth befitting royalty, and hardly anyone recognized Him as the long-awaited King.

The third paradoxical idea is that the infinite contained Himself inside an infant. The eternal God was clothed in temporal flesh. Jesus could have come in a form that more clearly exhibited His glory, but instead the infinite God came as a finite, weak, frail, and vulnerable child. To the world, it is foolishness that the infinite should contain Himself this way, but this is God's wisdom displayed for our benefit.

Fourth, the God who created life came to give His own life away. We see in v. 8 that Jesus was obedient even to death on the cross. This was His mission from the beginning. Through His perfect life, His sacrifice on the cross, and His resurrection, He took away our sin and gave us a new life in Him. He died so that we may not face eternal death, but instead die to our sin and be made alive in Christ. Such a sacrifice is difficult to understand from the world's perspective.

Finally, the One who was sinless came to bear the sin of the world. Isaiah 53:4-6 explains that Jesus bore our iniquity and paid the price for our sin, so that by His wounds we are healed. Paul explains further in Galatians 3:13 that Jesus became a curse for us. He became sin and died so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God, as fellow heirs to His kingdom.

So what do these paradoxical aspects of the incarnation of Christ have to do with us? 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 explains that these same paradoxical ideas are at play in how God chose us to be saved. Just as Jesus came as a lowly man, He came to claim for Himself the lowly, the lost, and the broken. Human rulers would want only the best in their kingdom, but God includes the lowest of the low. In the #MeToo movement many prominent people experienced the shame and hatred of the people after their misdeeds were exposed, and rightly so. Yet if everyone knew all the sins we have committed, would we all not likewise bear such shame? Yet Jesus takes our sin and our shame away. He puts on our sin and clothes us with His righteousness. The gospel message is not about how good we are as Christians, but how loving God is towards us. Though we are lowly and undeserving, Jesus came down to be like us, to identify with us, and to bring us with Him back to God.

Ray Ortlund, came up with this mantra for his church Immanuel in Nashville: 1. I'm a complete idiot. 2. My future is incredibly bright. 3. Anyone can get in on this. We are all idiots. None of us can impress God with our accomplishments or righteousness. Yet we have a bright future because of what happened on Christmas. We have a new life and hope for eternity. And God offers this life to the entire broken world. Our gracious and compassionate God loves us

enough to come to earth and die for our sins. This Christmas, let us joyfully receive Jesus and keep living the new life He gives us. Let us go out into the world and tell the story of Jesus Christ.