

Wonderful Words of Eternal Life

Incarnation

Steve Flatt

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What is the most startling doctrine that a human being could imagine?

God would become a man. That's it: that God would become a man and that is the definition of the word, "Incarnation," God coming in the flesh. Today in our lesson I want us to stretch our minds to try and encompass what that means.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." (John 1:1) "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him...Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God---children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:9-10, 12-14)

"No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made God known." (John 1:18) Somebody has made God known. Isn't that amazing to think about? Knowing God, it's a good thing because we're born with this natural insatiable desire to know about God. Pascall once said there is a God-shaped vacuum in every human heart. Children want to know about God, don't they? Do your children ask you questions about God? My children asked, "Daddy, does God have a beard?" Or Daddy, "Where is Heaven?" Or Dad, "Tell me how old God is." They want to know about God, but so do we too.

We've been in Christian evidence classes or maybe we've thought it through on our own and we find that we can draw some conclusions about God just by what we see around us. You look up at all the stars in the sky at night and you think about how far they are, how big they are, and how many there are. You think there must be a God and he must be awfully powerful.

Then you look around at what you see on the earth and you see the order of things. Just look at the human body. Think about the fact that in your body there are a hundred thousand miles of blood vessels. Think about all the intricacies of the human eyeball and that the most magnificent filter in the world is the human kidney. There are all kinds of detail and order. You think to yourself, there must be a God and He must be extremely intelligent.

We look at those things and they're only flickers of light. They tell us there is a God, but they don't let us know God. They don't let us understand God. If we are ever really going to commune with Him and if we are ever going to trust Him with our life, then we're going to have to meet. If we're going to meet God, we're going to have to meet him in the same element, but the problem is we can't go to His element. The good news is God came to our element. The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld the glory of the only begotten of the Father.

There are a lot of tenets about Christianity that skeptics have a hard time believing. Skeptics read about a miracle of Jesus walking on the water and say, "Do you really believe that?" Do you really believe somebody walked on the water? Or they read about Jesus dying and physically coming back from the grave and say, do you really believe that? Or that do you really believe that an execution of a man can do away with a world of sin? These are stumbling blocks to them.

Do you know what the real stumbling block is to the skeptic? The real stumbling block is the same thing that bothered Jesus' original critics. It's the doctrine of incarnation. The really staggering claim about Christianity is that God became man. That Jesus somehow took on humanity without ever losing his Deity. Folks, it's here that we part company with the world's religions. The world's religions will make a place for Jesus but they will not tell

you that he is God come in the flesh. Oh, they'll say he's a good man, he's a prophet, he's a teacher, but if that's all you believe about Jesus, then you run into problems with the New Testament.

But if Jesus was the Son of God, if Jesus is the Son of God, then nothing else presents any real problems. Jesus walking on the water. If he made the water, why couldn't he walk on it? Do you have any problem believing that if Jesus came from Heaven, that he could come back from the dead? Is there any problem believing that one who is Divine, who is God, that if that one chose to die, is there any surprise that his death could have a saving significance? The most startling claim in history is in John 1:14, "The Word became flesh." Underline it, write it down and memorize it. If you can believe that, you can believe everything else that's in this book. That's incarnation.

By the way, have you ever eaten Mexican food? You say, "what does that have to do with anything." Have you ever had chili con carne? Do you know what chili con carne is? It means chili with meat, that's what the con carne means. Incidentally, that word carne is the same root word from which we get the word incarnation. You know what, that's what God is saying. That's what John is writing us in his prologue. Do you know what incarnation is? It's God with meat. It's God with flesh. God con carne. That's what John is saying in John 1:14. He dwelt among us and the Greek word there in John 1:14 for dwelt means he pitched a tent or he tabernacled among us. Now that's a fascinating thought too. He dwelt among us, he tabernacled among us.

When you hear that word tabernacle, you students of the Bible, what do you think of? You think of the Tabernacle in the

Old Testament, don't you? How the Israelites used to carry it around and it revealed the presence of God. Do you remember? The Tabernacle was where the glory of God was. You read all kinds of things about the Tabernacle. One time in a war with the Philistines, the Tabernacle was taken from Israel. Shortly after that, a woman gave birth to a child and she was so distraught. Do you know what she named her son? She called him Ichabod, meaning the glory has departed.

The apostle John said in the first chapter the good news is the glory has now returned. Only this time the glory is not in a box, the glory is not in a tent, the glory is not in a temple, the glory is tabernacled in a body. Infinite became finite and the invisible became visible and somehow eternity squeezed itself into time. The apostle John said, "I saw his glory and I listened and I followed and I leaned on his breast, and when I leaned there, I heard the heartbeat of God." What a daring thought. What an exciting thought. But by the way what a divisive thought. I want you to know today that there is no other doctrine of Christendom that has caused greater debate than this doctrine of incarnation. Do you know what it does? The idea of God really coming in the flesh separates the believers from the admirers.

The first chapter of John verse 11 states "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." They didn't understand, they didn't believe. Even his own brothers initially didn't believe that Jesus was God come in the flesh. How many millions still don't believe that? Folks, Jesus was crucified for one reason. He wasn't crucified because he performed miracles on the wrong day of the week. He wasn't crucified because he criticized some of the rabbis' old sermons. He was crucified for one reason, he claimed to be God in the flesh and they couldn't live with that. No issue in the early church was more important than this issue of incarnation.

Many years later, John again under the inspiration of the Spirit, wrote, "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God:

Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world." (1 John 4:2-3) Folks I want you to know that spirit of the antichrist is the spirit that dominates this world. Most of this world, most of the so-called Christian world has rejected the daring claim that God has come in the flesh and there are hundreds of millions who do not believe it, but it happened. Going

back to the prologue in the gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 12 and 13, here's the promise to those who can believe it. "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." John says "Look what can happen to those who can believe this incredible concept about incarnation. If you can believe it, you can become a son or a daughter of God." Folks, that's a wonderful thought. John said if you're willing to accept the fact of the supernatural birth of a child to a Jewish teenage peasant girl, who was a virgin, then you yourself can become a supernatural re-creation of God. His birth and your re-creation are just as much of God as the other. You cannot have one without the other. Incarnation is not just dry theology, it's the good news that God has come to us.

Now some practical lessons about what God coming in the flesh means.

1. If I accept incarnation, it will affect the way I view Deity. If I believe that Jesus was God coming in the flesh, it affects the way I view God. Remember we all want to know God. We're born with that desire. Now John said you can know God. All you've got to do is look at Jesus. You don't have to keep looking at the flickers of light. You don't have to just look up at the stars and say, well there must be a God. I can see God.

In John Chapter 12, verses 44 and 45, Jesus said, "when you look at me, you look at the one who sent me." In John, Chapter 8, Jesus said, "if you know me, you know the Father." In John, Chapter 14, verse 6, he said, "I am the way and the truth and the light", and in John 7, he says, "if you really knew me, you would know the Father." You don't have to wonder about God. You can see God in the life of Jesus. God said you will never get a revelation of me that will remotely parallel what I will show you in Jesus of Nazareth. It changes the way you view Deity when you believe in the incarnation.

2. Incarnation shapes the way I view humility. With precious few exceptions, most of us need to be humbled, and humbled with regularity. We struggle with pride and few things help us combat our pride better than focusing on incarnation. Think about it. How did the King of the Universe come into the world?

History has recorded for us that one time Alexander the Great conquered a city and he entered that city this way. A man leading the parade throwing flowers followed by 200 painted elephants with writers, then by 200 painted camels, then 200 horsemen riding backwards facing a golden chariot drawn by 40 black stallions and after the 40 black stallions drawing the chariot, there were 200 tamed lions bringing up the rear. In the middle of that golden chariot there was an ivory throne and seated on top was Alexander the Great. That's what I call an entrance and I guess if you're King of the World, that's the way you enter.

But how did the King of the Universe enter? He was born to that virgin, teenage peasant woman, in a tiny town, in a stable, carried by the one who would be his earthly father to a feeding trough streaked with saliva and given the common name in the Aramaic of Joshua rendered in the Greek Jesus, and nobody even noticed the wise men. That's ironic isn't it? Wise men couldn't even find him without help. Paul in Philippians 2:6 talking about Jesus stated "who being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (held on to) but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant" and Philippians 2:5 says? "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

3. The incarnation of God come in the flesh changes the way I view mortality. We usually look at the death and the resurrection of Jesus and say, I know that I can come from the grave and I know that I can go to God. I agree with all that, but that was not possible before the death and resurrection of Jesus, he proved that mortality can be spanned when he came to us. That proved to us that mortality and immortality could be spanned, could be crossed, when God came in the flesh.

There is no greater, more amazing, more startling concept than the concept of incarnation. It is our hope, it is that to which we cling. Adapted from Amazing Grace #1069, Steve Flatt 7-19-1992