

Christmas 2017 — Christmas Eve — What Happened When Jesus Was Born?

December 24, 2017

This morning, we learned about Jesus showing up in the Old Testament. We learned the angel of the Lord took on a body in Mary's womb to save us from our ultimate enemies — Satan, sin and death. He also took on a body to bless us in ways he couldn't before. The resurrected Jesus in his flesh-and-blood body is the most highly exalted being in the entire universe. Every knee will bow and tongue confess the resurrected Jesus as Lord. As Christians, we are his adopted brothers and sisters. That means we are also the most blessed beings in the universe and our identity is in Christ.

Tonight, as we celebrate Christ's birth, I want to reflect on what else changed when Christ took on flesh.?

Jesus gained the ability to identify with us completely.

In the early church, there was a lot of discussion as Christians tried to understand the full implications of what happened when God took on flesh in Mary's womb. While Jesus has a human body, did his mind remain fully God? Did Jesus also have a human mind? Did Jesus learn things? How human was Jesus? Can Jesus understand us? Some of the important verses the early church studied came from Philippians 2.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5–8 (ESV)

These verses are occasionally misunderstood. When it says Jesus emptied himself, some people have thought that means Jesus set aside part of his divinity to take on humanity. A closer examination of these verses reveals that is not what they teach.

When Paul said Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, that means Jesus before Bethlehem was and still is fully equal with God the Father, but Jesus didn't insist to hold onto the rights of his identity. While still being fully God, he turned aside from receiving all of the worship he rightfully deserves in heaven. He set aside all the rights he had as God as completely equal to his father and he took on the role of a servant. He fused himself with flesh forever in the womb of Mary. Jesus maintained his divinity but he set aside enjoying the rights, privileges and adulation of his identity to completely identify with us. He added to his divinity complete humanity not just with a human body but by also taking on a human mind so he could be like us in every way.

When Jesus chose to take on human flesh, he set aside some of the powers of his godhood so he could completely identify with our manhood. This means that while Jesus is the one who created water, he allowed himself to experience thirst. While Jesus never needs rest, he so completely identified with us that he became exhausted. He was so exhausted that he could sleep in the bow of a boat while in a storm, yet when he awoke he maintained the power to still the wind and waves. While Jesus as God never experienced sadness, Jesus in the flesh understood the pain of death as he wept over his friend Lazarus at his tomb. Jesus before flesh never experienced pain, but Jesus as a man

experienced excruciating pain. To obey his father's wishes, he fasted for 40 days before he began his three years of ministry to bring him to the brink of death.

Jesus experienced 40 days without food as a man.

Jesus so completely identified with us that when it came to facing everyday temptations, Jesus faced them just like us in his manhood. He didn't insulate himself from temptation with his godhood. When Jesus faced temptation, he had to learn to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit for strength to overcome the seduction of sin, just like you and me. When the angel of the Lord, that is the second person of the Trinity, took on flesh, he completely identified with us in every way. He didn't use his godhood to insulate himself from any of the pain and grief in life that we face. My point is Jesus identified with us completely. He understands the pain of real life.

When we are facing the loss of someone we love, when we are facing heartbreak, in our hearts we long for someone who understands what we are going through. While we look for another human being who understands us, we often neglect Jesus who understands us better than we understand ourselves. The angel of the Lord took on flesh so he could identify with us completely. Jesus understands what we are going through so we can call out to him in our times of need.

Jesus gained the ability to empathize with us.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:14–16 (ESV)

When Jesus remained God, yet completely identified with us in body and mind, he gained the ability to not just understand the pain we face in life but he could then empathize with our pain in a way he couldn't before he took on flesh. This holiday, some of you are grieving the loss of loved ones. Jesus understands the pain of losing someone you love. He doesn't just understand your pain but his heart is broken too. He empathizes with you. On earth, he felt the pain of the death of those he loved, like Lazarus. Some of you are feeling lonely. Jesus experienced loneliness. He doesn't just identify with that feeling but he empathizes with you. In his heart, he feels your pain with you. Some of you are just tired. Jesus knows what it is like to be tired. He felt fatigue. He empathizes with your fatigue. Every single weakness and human emotion we face, Jesus faced a similar weakness and he feels that emotion with us because he can identify with that emotion.

Not only did Jesus face the same weaknesses we face but he also faced the same temptations we face. Are you tempted to burst out in anger? Jesus knows the exact same temptation. He felt it on earth. He literally understands how hard temptation is to resist. Are some of you tempted with discouragement and to doubt the wisdom of God's plan? Jesus literally felt that same temptation to doubt his father's plan. Imagine the temptation to doubt his father's plan when in the Garden of Gethsemane as he faced the cross.

Are you tempted to lust? Jesus felt the same feeling while he was on earth. He identified with us in every way so he can empathize with us and so he can help us in our times of need.

Some of us wonder if it was hard for Jesus to resist temptation or if he used his divine strength for supernatural help. He didn't. The temptation to sin faced by Jesus was a greater temptation than any one of us has faced, yet he did it without sin. I like the way C.S. Lewis put it.

A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army only by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means - the only complete resist. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pg. 124-125.)

Jesus understands the weaknesses and temptations we face. Some of us are beat up by life. Since Jesus took on flesh, he knows what it is like to be heartbroken. He knows what it is like to face temptation and keep resisting. Thank goodness he knows.

This means that when our world is falling apart, we can call out to Jesus and he understands. He genuinely cares. We can call out to him and he promises to give us grace and help in our time in need.

In music, there is something called sympathetic resonance. That means that if you play a note on a stringed instrument, all the other string instruments in the room that have a string tuned to the same note, will begin to vibrate and playing that same note because they can completely identify.

When Jesus took on a body, he gained the ability to have real sympathetic resonance with us as we face weaknesses and temptations. Jesus took on a body so he understands.

Tonight, I don't know what you are going through but because Jesus took on flesh in Bethlehem, he actually understands your pain. We can call out to him, and he doesn't just promise to understand, he promises to help in our times of need because he knows what we need in the problems and temptations we face.

Jesus gained the ability to be a once-for-all offering for sin.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:12–14 (ESV)

The best part of Jesus taking on flesh and being born in Bethlehem is that he gained the ability to be a perfect sacrifice for our sin. Jesus didn't come to just fully identify with us or to fully understand and help us with our weaknesses and temptations, but he came so he could be the perfect sacrifice for our sin so he could take away the guilt and penalty for our sin once-and-for-all.

That is the greatest reason the angel of the Lord, the second person of the Trinity, took on human flesh.

Conclusion

This Christmas, as we celebrate Christ's birth, we remember that while still being fully God, Jesus chose to voluntarily limit his power to completely identify with us. Jesus didn't just identify with us by taking on a human body, but he also took on a human mind so he could understand every weakness and temptation we face.

Jesus took on a body so he could gain sympathetic resonance with us. When we hurt over the loss of someone we love, he feels that pain with us. He understands us. When we feel discouraged, he feels discouragement with us because he can identify with us. Since he can identify with us, he knows just how to help us in our times of need.

Most importantly, he came to completely identify with us so he could completely save us through his death and resurrection.

We are going to give you a chance to respond in a time of personal worship and gratitude to Jesus as we take communion together. The bread and juice of communion is the reminder that God took on real flesh and blood. He died on the cross to save us. He rose from the grave.

If you are not a regular part of CrossWinds, but you know Jesus as your savior, we invite you to join us. The ushers will come and dismiss you by row. The communion is in the four corners of the room. We invite you to take that time to celebrate the Lord taking on flesh to completely identify with us, to gain the ability to feel our pain and to help us in our times of need.



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