

2016-12-03

Christ before conception in Mary #1

Hi all,

We all know Jesus wasn't born on December 25, but there is certainly no harm in celebrating the birth of the greatest gift man has ever been given. After all, we regularly rearrange the celebration of our own birthdays or of those we love for convenience sake, so we can certainly do the same for the Lord.

The pagan roots of December 25th's Saturnalia festival doesn't bother us because knowing about the pagan roots of Christmas doesn't mean we are practicing nor condoning it any more than does the giving of flowers on Valentine's Day to our loved one.

You remember Valentine's Day, February 14 - Did you know it was the fertility festival of Lupercalia, the day young women's names were written on paper and put in a jar to be chosen by young men to have sex with, scourging them first with whips as it was believed that enhanced their fertility before sex. February 14 and Lupercalia started nature's 'mating season' it was believed.

But I don't care about those pagan roots of Valentine's Day any more than I care about the pagan roots of Christmas, for my celebration of Jesus' birth and the celebration of my wife's and my love for each other are both unto the Lord. Our celebration is unto the Lord even as they who choose not to celebrate the day do so unto the Lord, and He accepts us both. We are therefore at peace with one another, as directed by scripture in Romans 14:1-12 in particular.

Now to the subject: The son is given, the child is born

Isaiah 9:6 tells us, "Unto us a son is given, unto us a child is born, and the government shall rest upon His shoulders..."

The Son had to first be given from heaven so He could become the child born in Bethlehem.

"Father! Give me glory in your presence now, the same glory I had with you before the world was made." John 17:5

"Father! You have given them to me, and I want them to be with me where I am, so they may see my glory, the glory you gave me, for you loved me before the world was made!" John 17:24 (both quotes are from the Good News Translation)

"For as the Father has life in Himself, so too has He given the Son to have life in Himself, and given Him the authority to execute judgement because He is also (became) the Son of Man." John 5:26-27

The person of Christ, the Word, in the Old Testament

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and lived among us." John 1:1-2, 14

So what did John mean in 1:14 when he said 'The Word (of the Father) became flesh and lived among us.'?

The boy Samuel

In I Samuel 3 we find the boy Samuel serving Eli the high priest in the tabernacle. Verse 1 sets the stage saying "The Word of the Lord was rare in those days, there was no open vision." This forever links seeing the Word of the Lord to a vision.

The Lord calls out to Samuel by name for the first time in v4, and the boy thinks it is Eli calling for him, as v7 says "For Samuel didn't yet know the Lord, neither was the Word of the Lord revealed to him."

You know the story - the Lord calls to Samuel three times, each time by name, "Samuel, Samuel", and each time he goes to Eli thinking it is him. Eli realizes what is going on that third time and tells Samuel it is the Lord, and to answer when he hears His voice.

Up to this point you might think the voice of the Lord was something like a voice in Samuel's mind, or maybe somehow an invisible but audible voice. Both those assumptions would be wrong, for v10 says: "The Lord came and stood as He had at the other times, and said, "Samuel, Samuel."

We know this was indeed a vision of the Lord for verse 15 says "Now Samuel was afraid to tell Eli about the vision." Samuel saw the Person of the Word of the Lord. He came into Samuel's room and spoke to him...amazing.

But wait - there's more! The Word of the Lord

Verse 21 sums it up and sets the course for all prophets that would follow Samuel: "And the Lord appeared again (to him) in Shiloh, for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel as the Word of the Lord."

Samuel was called a seer, which was another name for prophet because seer's can see into the Spirit realm, and because he was the first of the prophets to Israel and ushered in Israel's first king, he is the paragon - the perfect example - of all prophets to follow.

This means when we read the Old Testament prophets and they say "The Word of the Lord came to..." they are not talking about a voice in their mind, nor are they saying an unseen hand guided their pen to write down 'words' for Israel or Judah or some individual.

When they say "The Word of the Lord came to..." they are saying as with Samuel, they had a vision of the Person of the Word of the Lord and He said to them whatever that message was that was later included in, and as part of scripture.

Jeremiah 1:1-9 is a great example

"The Word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and called you to be a prophet to the nations.' I said 'But Lord, I am a child' (Hebrew word used here for 'child', na'ar, indicates he was not yet a teenager)...but the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, saying 'I have put my words into your mouth'..."

Notice the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, and put forth His hand. Like Samuel who lived 600 years before him, the Word of the Lord was still appearing as the Person of the Word of the Lord to the prophets. When the prophets say 'The Word of the Lord says', they are just repeating what they heard in their vision the Person of the Word of the Lord say.

Time and space would fail me to go into detail, from Genesis 15:1 where the Word of the Lord appears to father Abram and tells him to count the stars so many will be his descendants, to Ezekiel 1:3 when Ezekiel says the Word of the Lord comes to him in a vision as he stood on the banks of the river, to Jonah who had the Word of the Lord come to him and tell him to go to Nineveh, to Isaiah and all the 'minor' (smaller books) prophets who all say 'The Word of the Lord that came to...' and 'The Word of the Lord says...'

(I go into more detail in my 'I AM; Who Jesus is and where He came from' series if interested in pursuing this line of study.)

The Word became flesh

And now consider what the apostle John said in 1:14 when he said 'The Word (of the Lord) became flesh and lived among us.' What an amazing statement! That the Person of the Word of the Lord who had appeared to Abram and to the prophets starting with Samuel down through the centuries, has now become flesh and lived among them - wow!

What must have been running through the minds of John and Peter and the others -the Word that spoke to Abraham, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the rest - and He was right there eating dinner with them, walking with them, teaching them...wow.

How did that transition happen, to go from the Word of the Lord who appeared to people down through the centuries, to a baby conceived in a teenager's womb?

That's next week! Until then, blessings,
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2016-12-10

Christ before conception in Mary #2

Hi all,

Last week I shared how the Son had to first be given so that He could become the child born, but how did that transition happen?

How did the Son given become the child born?

What was He thinking?!

Before I get into the mechanics of how the Son transitioned from heaven to conception within Mary, first let's look at His humble heart, because we wouldn't even have the babe conceived in Mary if He wasn't so humble.

Philippians 2: 6-8 says the Son "...existed in the form of God, but He did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped", but emptied Himself, taking upon Himself the form of a person, being made like a man and finding Himself in the form of man, submitted Himself to death, even the death of the cross."

The Son did not regard equality with the Father as something to be 'grasped'. That just doesn't come close to the Greek Paul used when writing this. The Greek word is 'harpagmos', from the root 'harpazo' which means 'to seize and carry off by force.' It was used in both active voice and passive, meaning it can mean something active - that of a person seizing something and caring it off, or passively as in the case here, meaning someone who holds onto a prize (or doesn't hold onto it).

We would say it this way: "Christ...counted it not a prize to be held onto that He was on an equality with God."

This is an amazing revelation about the humble nature of Jesus. When He later said "...learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart"*, He was telling the truth. He IS meek and lowly in heart. Meek means 'gentle, mild' and lowly means 'humbleness, lowliness of mind'. The meek Messiah King is described* as "Look! Your King comes to you meek and riding on a donkey, even a colt, the foal of a donkey." *Matthew 11:28-30, *Matthew 21:5

The other key phrase is 'emptied Himself' - He did not empty Himself of His Godhood nor cease to be what He eternally was - He simply gave up all the rights and privileges of being God's only Son that He might live as a mere man. In this way, the truth of who He was and is must be spiritually discerned and known in the heart.

This is why...

He isn't Hollywood Jesus. He isn't impressed by the fancy trappings nor hierarchy through which He is presented. We can measure how well a person actually knows the person of Jesus by the degree to which they are impressed with 'things' and the appearance of 'things'. The Son given HAD to be humble of heart in order to become as one of His creations, the child born.

It is because of His humility that He is at ease no matter His surroundings, from the most opulent palace to the most humble home, for He is neither impressed nor offended - that is our Lord. The passage in Philippians 2:5 above starts out, "Have this same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus..."

Do we have that same humility? Are we equal parts unimpressed with 'things' and presentation as we are not offended when surrounded by the humble and lowly? Do we curl our noses up at someone poorly dressed at a store, or do we see them humbly, through God's eyes? Do we react to well dressed and beautiful people differently than we do the average looking and humbly attired?

Do we assert ourselves over others in conversation, or just state the facts? If we truly know Him and spend time with Him in our hearts, we will gradually become transformed into His image of humility...so if you see the opposite in someone labeled 'Christian', be aware they are still growing. "Have this same mind in you, which was first also in Christ Jesus..."

I've often asked people for a show of hands if they've ever been in a service or meeting where they felt like Jesus was walking in their midst. Usually several hands are raised. Then I ask if He ever took over the meeting, ever asserted Himself or inserted Himself into what was happening? Never. He is Lord of all, yet is content to walk humbly among His friends.

I was leading a Bible school chapel service, and during the worship I suddenly saw the Lord walking up the steps of the platform, stopping directly in front of me. I immediately knelt before Him and was

astounded to hear Him say, "I'd like to minister to my people", to which I responded, "You're the Lord, of course, be free to do whatever you want to do."

I stood up and motioned to the woman leading worship to continue, and then turned to watch the Lord walking among the roughly 200 students as they worshipped, stopping here and there to tell people things. After a few minutes He walked back up the steps of the platform to once again stand in front of me, saying, "Thank you for allowing me to minister to my people. So few do. So many stick to their schedule and agenda rather than allowing me to truly touch my people." With that He turned, took His customary 2 1/2 steps, and in the middle of that third step He disappeared.

I thought how humble, how amazing, and how humbled was I that day! I learn so much with each visitation, each time around Him.

So now that we understand the humility of the Lord, to how He transitioned

The author of Hebrews is making his point of the inability of the Old Testament sacrifices to permanently do away with sin, saying they had to be made over and over and over again, and a 1 time permanent sacrifice was needed. That 1 time great sacrifice would take away sin, therefore ushering in a new covenant with man.

"For it isn't possible that the blood of bulls and goats would take away sins. Therefore when He came into the world He said, 'Sacrifice and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for Me...'" Hebrews 10:4-7

"When He came into the world" isn't being born, but being conceived. "...a body you have prepared Me" He said. The Father providing through Mary's egg a human body for the One who emptied Himself of all rights and privileges as God's Son in heaven.

Philippians 2:8 simply says 'And being found in fashion as a man', or, "And being found in appearance as a man", or "And having become man".

When Mary innocently asked how it would happen, the angel Gabriel told her in Luke 1:35 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you (as a cloud), therefore the holy child born of you will be called the Son of God.'

The Son of God emptied Himself of all rights and privilege as God's only Son, while retaining His Sonship, to be conceived in Mary, and upon leaving heaven stated 'A body you have prepared me'. By the Holy Spirit who overshadowed a teenage girl, using her egg to provide a body, He was conceived in her womb.

That is humble, meek, lowly. And we'll pick it up right there next week. Until then, blessings,
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2016-12-17

Christ before conception in Mary #3

Hi all,

Suddenly I was in the Spirit, standing in heaven as a spectator to something I had no clue about. I was standing among a very large number of angels and no one noticed me for their attention was focused in the distance, to our right, where I could see the Father's throne. I noticed there was a path through the angels from the throne wide enough for 1 person to walk, with angels packed in on both sides, looking with such eagerness and those closest to the path were kneeling either on both or at least one knee.

I had been in my living room with the Lord, and my angel was also present, in the Spirit, but He was finished teaching me and told me as He left that I could ask my angel a question. So it was just the angel and me suddenly, and the thing on my heart was "How do you feel about me being in charge of you in the ages to come?"

His response was with an almost horrified look on his face: "Oh! It is right! It is proper!" And when I asked why, he responded, "Remember; We know Him as Creator, but you know Him as Savior!" That's when

without warning, I was in heaven...I somehow knew it was at a time long ago but all was silent, and the atmosphere was very solemn and holy, so I dared not speak.

Suddenly out of the pure light of the Father stepped the Son, walking without looking back, down the path between the angels, each one bowing their head and often shoulders bowed in homage as He passed, walking silently on, out of view to my left. It was the moment He emptied Himself to become conceived in Mary.

What remains with me to this day is the solemn atmosphere in heaven when He left, and how I realized the angels didn't fully understand what was happening before their eyes - they had nothing to compare that with. Suddenly I was back in my living room with my angel's words still ringing in my heart: "Remember, we know Him as Creator, but you know Him as Savior!"

For the first time since the beginning...

James 1:13 says that God the Father doesn't tempt/test/try anyone with evil because He cannot be tempted/tested/tried with evil. The reason is very simple - the Father God doesn't have a physical body with which to be tempted. He has never known what it is to be tired, to be hungry, to have sore muscles, to be rushed by a schedule - the Father can't relate!

But Jesus - Christ became the man Jesus, and for the first time the Creator could experientially relate to His creation. As Philippians 2:8-11 says, He 'found Himself fashioned as a man.'

For the first time ever Christ who had appeared as the Word of the Lord to men and women down through the centuries, popping in and out of our world at will but never with a permanent body, is now confined to one place in one time, with all the limitations thereof.

In the womb He was still the Son of God, for Luke 1:41 tells us that when Elizabeth was six months pregnant and the just pregnant Mary visits her, the future John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb at the presence of the Lord in Mary and her voice. As a baby He was still the Son of God for Luke chapter 2 regales us with stories of angels, shepherds, an old man and woman worshipping.

By age 12 He asked His parents, "Didn't you know I would be about the Father's business?" Luke 2:49

We must understand this: You and I have to renew our minds to the things of God. Young Jesus merely had to fill His (human) mind.

For the first time He was personally limited to one place at one time, to know what it is to be tired, hungry, to control his bladder, to live among people rather than darting in and out of their lives supernaturally.

Hebrews 5:7 speaking of His anguish before the cross says "...He was heard in that He feared", and v8 tells us "He learned obedience through the things He suffered." He had to learn obedience for He was before, King of all! This was all new to Him.

What a humbling experience

We can only imagine life 2000 years ago - the closest most of us get today is perhaps camping. Using the bathroom outdoors or in a latrine, cooking over an open fire, grinding grain by hand with a rock, killing an animal, skinning it, and sorting organs and offal from meat. But that was Jesus' life - to go from Son of God used by the Father to create the universe, to THAT!

As I said, He had to first be humble in heaven, to be lowly in heart and meek, in order to be willing to come to earth to start with.

And then, as Philippians 2: 8 says, "...became obedient all the way to death, even the death of the cross..." Even the death of the most tortuous death the Roman Empire could devise - not just death, but tortured death, and not for Himself, but for mankind. Wow.

Back to Bethlehem - the message of the angels

"Glory to God in the highness; and on earth, peace, good will toward men" is the message from the angels. This has been watered down and misunderstood by advertising agencies and pastors, by children's Christmas programs and moms and dads everywhere.

We start to understand the intent when we look at who made the statement. "There was suddenly with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will towards men."

Heavenly host means 'heavenly army'

We have this image of harmless, maybe cherubic 'greeting card' looking angelic helpers gathered around Bethlehem, supporting the messenger angel charged with the task of letting shepherds know the Shepherd-King has been born. 'Host' means army - that means this announcement is coming from the Father's army in heaven with a message for mankind. Peace on earth and good will towards men.

Put yourself in their shoes. Take it to our time and you are camping in a field. You're sitting around the fire talking about the day, when suddenly an army messenger comes to you, and he is illuminated by an apparent floodlight of such intensity the whole field and area is lit. He tells you not to be afraid for he has good news, but instead you are of course very, very afraid.

Before you can take in the depth of his words, your eyes adjust to see an army of an innumerable number is standing just opposite you. These soldiers are highly equipped, and you know just one of them could wipe you all out. You are at their mercy.

Then they say, 'God says and we are His army; Peace on earth, good will towards men'. What relief! They have nothing but good will towards you, towards us! Able to destroy us, instead the Father God sends His army with a peace treaty! The proof, the down payment on the treaty is in the form of a baby, lying in a food trough for animals, wrapping in soft material used for underwear...

Paul would later write, "That is to say, God the Father was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not charging their sins to them, and has given to us the service of reconciliation." II Corinthians 5:19

The Lord Jesus is so humble, so approachable, but He is like that because as He said, "If you've seen me you've seen the Father". He is just like His Dad. And that is our life long journey called discipleship, being conformed into the image of His dear Son. It is a process, learn to enjoy the process and walk with the Father, include Him in your life by complimenting and giving thanks for little things - a pretty cloud, a well-timed 'coincidence', favor received over the course of a day - include the Father and the Lord conversationally, being amazed at the humility of Almighty God.

Amazing Grace! New subject next week, blessings,
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