

Why God Became Man

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Good afternoon, dear friends, and welcome to our first talk on Why God Became Man with our Pray More Novena Retreat. I'd like to thank first of all, John-Paul Deddens and his wife, Annie, for the invitation to be with you during this Advent. And I ask that you pray for me as I pray for you, that this Advent will be a very special time of service to God and the people, and of the loving God more through our meditations together on Advent. So as we begin this consideration, this thoughts of why God became man, I'd like to lead us in a prayer.

Opening Prayer

Let's begin in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your mercy and Your love, especially that You sent Your son, Jesus Christ, to be our savior and our Lord. We thank You for the gift of His life on the earth, His church on earth and His Eucharist that allows us to be lifted up to you in love and in mercy. Help us during this Advent season. Fill us with the Holy Spirit that we may be able to love You more, to love You more near and dearly, to serve You more nearly, and follow You more dearly. We ask all of this through Christ, our Lord, Amen. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What Was Everything Like Before?

Well, dear friends, let's begin. As we think about this theme of Why God Became Man, as a sort of a journey on which we begin with the widest scope possible, and then gradually narrow down and focus our attention upon Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Later, I'm going to be giving you a second talk on the particulars of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, as they're revealed to us on the pages of the gospels of Matthew and Luke. But for this first talk, I'd like to think about the broader question of why God became a man. Many people never reflect upon the fact that Christianity is unique. Because it believes not in an Almighty God, or a God that is present everywhere in the universe, but that this God, this Almighty God, actually became a human being at a particular moment in history.

So, as we think about this question, let's cast our net very wide or keep the lens of our focus very wide at first. And think about, with me, if you will, for just a moment. what it must've been like before God created the universe.

We know that there was probably somewhere between 14 and 15 billion years old, that it began in a big bang and has been expanding out from that big bang for about 14 billion years. We know

that the earth was, came into existence sometime between four and five billion years ago. What was everything like before that big bang? Well, the answer that question in one word. What was there before the creation? Simply God. Not space, not time, not anything. Not matter, not atoms, not molecules, just God. Can you imagine what that's like? There was no place that God was. There was no space in which God dwelled. There was no time in which God lived. No, there was just God.

We Are Unique

Albert Einstein taught in the theory of relativity that before the big bang, there was no space and no time. Imagine that. Well, it's hard to imagine, isn't it? Because for us, everything that we do is in a matrix, or a context of space and time. But God created the world out of nothing simply by speaking things into existence. And as we narrow our focus just a little bit more, we realize that God loved human beings above all the creatures of the earth. Oh, I could give you all kinds of scientific evidence to show it. But one thing is very clear, if we look with clear eyes that us human beings are unique among all the creatures of the earth.

Consider just one example, what I'm doing right now, and what you are doing in listening to me, we are using a uniquely human gift of language. There's complex rules and symbolic system that we use to communicate with one another can only be done by human beings. But you say, wait a minute, I thought dolphins had language or honeybees had language. Well, they do have communication systems, but compared to human language, they are so rudimentary as to be in a completely different world. Human language on the other end, and every human being has it. Human language is such a unique gift to human beings, that it's what allows us to have rationality.

The next step up you might say. Because rationality is our ability to think, to reason, to dream of worlds that don't exist. To imagine the past and to imagine the future. It's that rationality then, that gives us gives birth to free will. And in human beings, having free will, we have something that is like God. That's why the scripture say in the very beginning, in the first chapter of Genesis, that man was created in the image of God. But, man and woman, together, created in image, the image of God, did not remain in that pristine state. Of course, we know in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve disobeyed God and that one commandment. Only one commandment that He'd given them. And they ate at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And what's interesting about that whole third chapter of Genesis, which could be another talk in and of itself.

But that whole third chapter is when it says in Chapter 3:21, "And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife, garments of skin and clothed them." The animals were killed in order that human beings may be clothed. And from the very early church fathers right up to today, biblical commentators see in that action, a pointer, a type, a figure of what was to come. Because in

scripture, later on, we find that God has called. God calls upon His people to put on garments of righteousness so that the clothing that we wear reflects the righteousness within, rather than the sin that infected the hearts of Adam and Eve. Well, this entrance of sin into the world is then a major block or a step in the story of the human race. From there, we find the focus narrowing even a little bit more as the biblical story goes on, and it talks about the call of Adam. I mean, the call of Abraham to be the father of many nations. And so Abraham becomes the father of Isaac and Isaac of Jacob, and Jacob of the 12 sons of Israel.

Father of Many Nations

But the important thing to remember here is that God's intention was not just to have one nation to be as people, but as He said to Abraham, "In you, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. And you will become the father of many nations." So with Isaac and Jacob, and then we have the birth, really, of the nation of Israel in the story of the Exodus. Where Moses leads the people out of the slavery of Egypt into the promised land. And as the children of Israel settle in the promised land, they become God's unique possession as a word. And there's a beautiful word used in Hebrew, "Segullah" which means a treasured possession. Israel, the children of Israel, are called the treasured possession of God. And so what we find in this development of the history of Israel is that the people of Israel are called to be a light to the nations. Remember that God said to Abraham that "You'll be the father of many nations."

Well, how was that to come about? Except, through the mission that God gave to the people of Israel, Abraham's descendants, to take the message of the true and living God to all the world. Over, a banner is written over the story of Israel's history, told to us in the Old Testament. It's a story of a few successes and, mostly, failures.

You see that in the Book of Judges where God brings a judge, or a show fate into the people of Israel, and they conquer their enemies under the leadership of a judge like Gideon, or Samson, or Deborah. But then, as soon as that judge dies, they fall back into their old ways, and they fail.

And so, we find at the end of the Book of Judges, it tells us this awful statement, which characterizes that time, that there was no king in Israel and people did what was right in their own eyes. Israel needed a king and God gave that king to them in David. And so, in the glory days of Israel's history, under David and Solomon, and then their successors, we find that Israel is at the top, or the zenith of its success as a nation. But just as soon as the son of Solomon, Rehoboam, comes to the throne of Israel, the kingdom is divided into the Northern kingdom of Israel, led by Rehoboam, I mean, led by Jeroboam and the Southern kingdom of Judah led by Rehoboam.

The rest of Israel's history. From 931 BC, all the way to the exile in 586, is a story mostly of tragedy. And yet, this is the period of the writing prophets. The great prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, and even the minor prophets like Hosea and Joel, Amos, and Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, and Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zachariah, Malachi. It, sort of like sprinkles of pepper among the salt. And God gives indications of the great Messiah that He is going to bring.

The Mission of Emmanuel

For example, we hear in Isaiah 7, "The promise that is given, the Lord will give you a sign. The Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call his name Emmanuel." God is going not only to save the people of Israel, but He's going to come and live and dwell with them. Because as later as explained in the book of Matthew, Emmanuel, are two Hebrew words that mean God is with us. El, God, Emmanu means with us. And so this Emmanuel, this child that is to be born of a Virgin, will be nothing less than God in the flesh. What's the mission of that Emmanuel?

Well, two chapters later in the Book of Isaiah 9:6, we hear these words. "A child is born to us, a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." In other words, this one who is going to be God with us is going to bring the Kingdom of Heaven down to earth. This is all preparation for the coming of the great Messiah. And even we find that this great Messiah will come as a son of righteousness in the Book of Malachi. God is going to come, and He's going to be with us. He's going to live with us, He's going to dwell.

So, you see why the story of Jesus' birth is told in the way that it is? There we find that out-of-the-way-place that backwater, little town named Bethlehem as the place where the Savior is born, because in Micah, the prophet Micah 5:2, we hear the words, "*Oh, you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, you are too little to be among the clans of Judah, but from you will come forth one for me, who will be a ruler in Israel.*"

That Messiah will come as prophet, priest, and king. And when he is born to the people of Israel, he will then emerge as a leader, as a king, as a prophet, as a priest, like none other that has come before him.

An Act of Humility

In the second book that I will do later, I'm going to talk more about the particulars of Jesus' birth. But here's the more important point I'd like you to remember at this point in time. Going back to that fundamental question, why did God become a man? And we've seen throughout Israel sister,

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that promise was kept alive for the people of Israel, really for the whole world. Why did God become a man? Why did He come in the form of a small baby who is helpless and dependent upon others? The answer I think is given for us, at least in one way. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 9 where it says, *"You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how, even though he was rich for our sakes, he became poor. That by his poverty, we might become rich."*

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, exchanged the glories of heaven for the poverty of earth. So that enriching our poverty, we might be lifted up to the glories of Heaven. And this is an act of humility beyond belief. And that's why Saint Francis of Assisi once wrote to his friars when he spoke about the Eucharist in the same way, he said, "Oh, sublime humility, that the Lord of the universe, the son of God, so humbles himself for our salvation, and he hides himself under the form of a morsel of bread."

Well, before that, he hid his divinity under the humanity of a small babe. Why did God humble himself in this way for us and for our salvation? Well, it indicates to us two things about our salvation, two problems as it were that needed to be solved, in order for us to be saved.

The first was the problem of our sin to restoring us to that righteousness, which Adam and Eve had lost by their own sin. But think about it for just a moment. Could God not just have forgiven the human race, sort of salvation by Fiat? Why did he not do that? He could have just said I forgive everyone. Perhaps you, like I, were told by your parents when you were growing up that in order to appreciate things, sometimes we have to work very hard for them. If things are just given to us, we sometimes don't appreciate them.

No, there had to be sacrifice involved. There had to be, sometimes, pain and suffering for us to appreciate the wonderful gift of forgiveness. By coming into the world, the Savior of the world, the eternal son of God brought us the gift of forgiveness from our sins. But even that was not enough because salvation is not just being forgiven of our sins. It is being united finally. And once, and for all with God. The Father in Heaven wanted more than forgiveness. He wanted us to share in His life. He wanted us to share in His love. He wanted us to be united forever.

Reunited with Us Forever

Let's think about a tragic situation for just a moment. And extrapolate it to God. I've been blessed to be the father of three children and 11 grandchildren. And I sometimes think what if I lost one of my children, or my grandchildren? Would I be as a word, devastated, emotionally? Oh, yeah, you bet I would be. But suppose even worse, that one of those children or grandchildren, took their own life. Could I forgive them? Oh, I certainly hope and pray that I would be able to. But forgiveness can never bring that person back. All I can do is cherish that person within me, but I can't have a living union with that person who has died.

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God did not want just to have a living memory by forgiving us. God wanted to be united with us forever. And so, in sending His son down to be a baby in Bethlehem, He was going to unite us with him so that we would be forever with Him in Heaven. But let's become practical now, and think about this question. Why did God become man? If he wanted to unite us to himself, how was he going to do that? Well, what do we need to do during these next few weeks, during Advent, to be more closely united to God?

Well, I have an answer that might surprise you. And the answer that is in scripture and said in different ways in different times, we don't do anything. No, we do nothing. God is the one who has done everything for our salvation. We don't need to initiate anything. He has been the one who initiated salvation and given us the gifts whereby we may grow closer to Him.

Two Important Gifts

And so as we go enter into this Advent season and then think about being able to be there as it were at the manger with Jesus, I'd like us to think about two great gifts that God has given us, that will bring us back into union with His only begotten son.

The first gift is the gift of confession. And I hope that during this Advent season, you will go to confession once, twice, maybe many times. And in going to confession, bring your past to God. And, sometimes, a good priest can help us to deal with that past. Not only what we have done, but what others have done to us so that we can live a life of freedom. Freedom from the past. There's an old saying in Catholic circles that goes like this. "Leave the past to God's mercy, the future to his Providence, and live in the moment." But often, if you're like me, our past haunts us. Both with the sin that we have done and things that had been done to us.

So, I want to urge you to go to confession because you see, in that you can hear those beautiful words spoken by a priest, and listen very carefully. "God, the Father of mercies for the death and resurrection of His son, has sent the Holy Spirit into the world for the forgiveness of sins. By the ministry of the church, may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you of your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. When a priest standing in the Place of Christ, says those words, you can be assured, my friend, your past is forgiven.

And so, we need to grab hold of that, those words of absolution, and know that God is there to forgive our sins. But as I said earlier, it's not just enough to be forgiven. God wants us to be united with him in an intimacy of friendship and love.

The second most important answer to that question is the Eucharist. How do we enter into this Christmas season, and grow more deeply in our faith? It's by receiving Jesus Christ, body, blood,

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soul, and divinity in the Eucharist. And in that regard, I'd like to call upon one of the great ancient church fathers, Saint John Chrysostom, who lived in the late fourth, in the early fifth century. In one of his homilies, he says that the table, the table, the altar of the church, is, fulfills the order of the manger. Consider those words for just a moment. What could it possibly mean that the altar of the church, or the table, as he calls it, fulfills the order of the manger of the past.

What could that mean? I'd like to suggest to you that he means this, that God established an order of salvation history in which Jesus lying in the manger is the beginning of the fulfillment of God's redemption of us. But the same acts of redemption, which Jesus fulfilled on earth, climaxing in his death, in his resurrection, that same order of salvation history is what is given to us on the altar of the church. When the bread and the wine are properly consecrated, all that Jesus did in salvation history is given to us in the appearance of humility. The appearance of just what looks like bread and what tastes like wine.

You see, the table of the church fulfills the order or the purpose of the manger. And so when we come to the church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, and we received Jesus in the Eucharist we are receiving the same one, the same baby who lay in that manger in Bethlehem. And he, and only he can bring us back to the Father. He has done everything for us. All we have to do is to receive him into our lives and then try to live in accordance with his truth. If you doubt me on this, hear the words of our Lord himself, who, when he became a man and said, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life within you.

Think of it this way. Again, Saint John Chrysostom, in his Homily 15 on 1 Timothy puts it very poignantly. He says, taking on the voice of Christ, "I don't give my food in the way others do. Rather, I feed you with my own flesh. I furnish you, I furnished myself to you, and want all of you to be lifted up to be as noble as I extend thoughts and kind hopes for your future. For I wanted to become your brothers, and so I shared flesh and blood for your sake. And now I distribute again the same flesh and blood by which I became your kinsmen."

Isn't that amazing. I give you now the very flesh that I took from you from you human beings, through the agency of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he became a true man in his mind, in his soul, in his body, and is that full and living Christ, which we receive in the Holy Eucharist. So, you see my friends, we have gone from the very creation of all the universe, and we have gone to focus in on this Babe of Bethlehem, whom we receive in the Holy Eucharist. And it is this Jesus, this Christ who has become for us, our salvation, our sanctification, our redemption. And it is he whom we want with all of our hearts to desire and to love.

Closing Prayer

And so we pray in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Merciful, Heavenly Father, You, who, through the death and resurrection of Your son has purchased for us the rewards of eternal life. Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may draw closer to Jesus and ultimately to You, Father, as we pray Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus, Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, in the hour of our death, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God bless you, and I hope to see you again as we talk about the specifics of Jesus' birth.