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The Incredible, Incomparable Incarnation

by Harold L. Willmington

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16).

Without doubt, one of the most (if not the very most) mind-boggling events in the history of the universe was the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Even though 20 centuries have elapsed since the Bethlehem scene, the concept of the Incarnation still staggers the human mind. Think of it. The holy, infinite Creator agreed to wrap flesh and blood around His eternal being, so He might enter this sin-cursed world and eventually die for sinful and finite creatures. Who can even remotely comprehend this?

Nevertheless, it is possible to briefly overview the prophecies, particulars, and purposes of the Incarnation.

The Prophecies. The birth of Christ is a fact. It is first mentioned in Scripture in Genesis 3:15. Neither Adam nor Eve (to whom these words were spoken) had experienced physical birth. Both were directly created, one from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7) and the other from a human side (Gen. 2:21-22).

But the Messiah would be born of a woman. This method of birth must have been shocking, for originally the woman had come from the man, but not so with the future Messiah. He would proceed from the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). Further, He was to be born of a virgin woman (Isa. 7:14). This woman would conceive and bear the Christ child without the involvement of a man.

By nationality He would come from

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Israel (Gen. 12:3). This prophecy was especially remarkable, for Israel did not officially become a nation until the days of Moses, many centuries later (Exod. 19-20). Even then, it would remain a small and insignificant country in the Middle East. She was, however, to have an important mission, for the Saviour of all men would come from her borders.

He would come from Judah, one of Israel's 12 tribes (Gen. 49:10). The oldest tribe was Reuben, and perhaps the most influential tribe was Ephraim, but the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah.

He would come from the house of David, of the tribe of Judah in Israel (2 Sam. 7:12-13). David was the eighth son

of a poor Bethlehem sheepherder, but this family would produce the Saviour of the world.

Christ was born 33 years prior to His death. According to Daniel 9:24-27, His death would occur some 483 years after the beginning of the project to rebuild the Jerusalem walls.

The place of His birth was to be the little town of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). God could have chosen Rome, or Babylon, or even the Jewish religious center of Jerusalem, but instead He picked Bethlehem, the “House of Bread.”

The sign accompanying His birth was a special supernatural light in the form of a star that would brighten the heavens and point to His birthplace (Num. 24:17).

There would be unusual interest in His birth. Wise men would come to Bethlehem to worship Him (Ps. 72:10; Isa. 60:3, 6, 9). Wicked men would come to Bethlehem to kill Him (Matt. 2:16-20).

The Particulars. The following verses in Luke 2 are some of the most well-known and beloved in all the Bible.

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her

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"The Virgin Adoring the Christ Child" by Correggio, about 1523.



**David was
the eighth son
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shepherd,
but this family
would produce
the Saviour
of the world.**

firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:1-7).

There are 31,173 verses in the Bible. The one here in Luke 2:7 is perhaps the most amazing and profound of them all. "And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

One may favorably contrast Luke 2:7 with Daniel 2:11. In this Old Testament passage King Nebuchadnezzar had just ordered the death of his wise men because of their inability to relate a dream he had just experienced. These astrologers protested, exclaiming, "And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

However, this would *not* be the case after Bethlehem. God *would* dwell in flesh. Never in earth's history was such

a babe born. Never was such a birth announcement made. Listen to it.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:8-14).

Well, the shepherds have heard the glad tidings. What will they do?

"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let

us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them" (Luke 2:15-18, 20).

Notice the twofold reaction of these shepherds. First, they "came with haste." God wants individuals to respond quickly when they hear the glorious news of the Saviour. They are to come with haste. Second, they "made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." In short, they shared the good news with others.

The Purposes. Why the Virgin Birth Incarnation? God never does anything without a good reason, and there were a number of excellent reasons for the Incarnation.

To reveal the invisible God. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 14:9).

God loved the world, but how could He get His message across? He sent Jesus into the world to become man and tell God's story in man's language to reveal the invisible God.

To make a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus left the ivory palaces of heaven to come down to this world and enter the womb of Mary, to make a sacrifice for our sins. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

To provide an example for believers. We are told in the Scriptures that Christ suffered, and that He left an example for us, that we should follow His steps. The world often misunderstands the Incarnation. The world thinks Christ is the example for unbelievers, but 1 Peter 2:21 says that Christ has come to be an example for believers. He is not an example for unbelievers. He is the Saviour. He came to save unbelievers and make them believers. Once we are saved we study the life of Christ because He is our example. But there could be no example apart from the Incarnation. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

To defeat the Devil and his works. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

To provide the believer with a High Priest. To become the believer's High Priest, Christ had to be made like His brethren. He passed sinlessly through all human experiences, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in all things pertaining to God, to make atonement for our sins. He was obliged to become completely like His brethren—apart from sin, of course. "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

To heal the brokenhearted. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering the sight to

the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18).

To reconcile man to God. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 Paul reminds us that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

To give life and abundant life. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting

life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

■ **Harold L. Willmington** is vice president of Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia.

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