

Introduction: Hebrews 7:26 tells us that Jesus “meets our need” and is One who is “fitting” to be our Savior. Everything about Him, including His birth which we will soon celebrate, is designed by God the Father to have a practical, lasting impact on our lives. Let us therefore pursue some of the “practical benefits” of Christ’s birth in the manger.

Monday: Read Luke 2:12-14; Hebrews 10:5 and 2:16. The Christmas story magnifies Christ’s appearance in our flesh, underlining His birth as “the sign” which God revealed as proof of His saving goodwill towards mankind – see Luke 2:12-14. Also, it was God the Father who prepared a body for His Son, (Heb. 10:5), in order that the work of salvation could be accomplished. No wonder the angels break into song, marveling at this wonder! They admired how the Son of God “took hold” of our humanity (not their angelic natures, Heb. 2:16) and wondered at the skill of the Father in weaving together, *out of the sinful flesh of Mary*, a holy, harmless, undefiled, real body of flesh to be used as the dwelling place of God in our nature!

*And ye, beneath life’s crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!*

Pray: “Lord, forgive us that we are so easily crushed beneath, and obsessed with, the disappointments and cares of our earthly lives, while we overlook all that went into the birth of your Son. Though we acknowledge that you sent your Son to this earth – how often do we give sufficient thought to your wisdom in fitting and preparing His human nature to be in every way exactly what we need? Thank you, Father, for designing a body in which your Son will be eternally exalted as our Savior! Create in us an ever-increasing longing to be like Him in His humanity, looking forward to the Day when we shall ‘see Him as He is’ (1 John 3:2). Amen.”

Tuesday: Read Luke 1:35 and Hebrews 2:14-15. The Bible is crystal clear that Christ truly took on “flesh and blood,” in order to destroy the work of the Devil and to deliver us from the bondage of guilty fear under which we all labored in our deadly slavery to sin. (Heb. 2:14-15) But think of what such “flesh and blood” creation through the Holy Spirit of Luke 1:35, actually entailed. As Douglas Milne put it:

Today we know that genetic mixing takes place at conception resulting in the creation of a new human being, when male sperm penetrates and fertilizes a female egg. Since Mary did not conceive in the normal way with Joseph or anyone else and Jesus was male, we are led to believe that the Holy Spirit supernaturally created the embryo Jesus by mixing the male genes with those taken from Mary on the female side. This miraculous method of working meant that the eternal God has become truly, permanently and sinlessly human in Jesus.

Meditate and Pray: Truly, with the Psalmist we can sing in thanksgiving to God, not only for creating us as “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14) but for creating Christ as sinlessly human and therefore truly our “elder brother.” Praise God’s creative power with the words of hymn # 37, verses 1 & 3, realizing as you sing that Jesus the Man could also sing these words to His Father:

*All that I am I owe to Thee,
Thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful praise,
Whose wondrous works my soul amaze.*

*Thy thoughts, O God, how manifold,
More precious unto me than gold!
I muse on their infinity,
Awaking I am still with Thee.*

Wednesday: Read Genesis 3:15 and Hebrews 2:14-15. It ought not to escape us that the first promise in the Bible pointing to Jesus, as the “Seed of the woman,” being born in the flesh, is in Gen. 3:15 where the prediction that the offspring of the woman will be victorious over sin and Satan is first declared. This promise finds fulfillment when Christ takes on flesh and blood in order to destroy the Evil One’s power of death, according to Heb. 2:14-15. Think of it. The body of that baby Jesus became the battlefield between the hosts of Heaven and the hosts of Hell!

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus for His willingness to suffer in our flesh the ravages of all-out war against Satan. Perhaps it was the realization that His flesh was to be “handed over” to Satan’s fell clutches that made Jesus so unafraid of being touched by lesser forms of merely human misery. *If* Jesus was able to wrestle with the defiled malignity of Satan, and come out as the Holy Victor in such polluted, hand-to-hand combat, then how could He fear touching leprosy or any other form of human sin? Ah, wonderful “hands-on” Savior! Willing to “lay your hands upon all” those who came to you tormented by the Devil, sin and sickness (Matthew 8:16-17) in order to “carry our infirmities”!

Thursday: Read Isaiah 59:16-20 and Hebrews 10:7. We often speak of the “ministry of presence,” that is, when one Christian simply visits another for the purpose of “just being there” by their side in their troubles. Their bodily presence makes all the difference. Now, add to that picture the presence of one with us *when there is no one else able or willing to stand by our side!*? How we value such a solitary visitor to our bedside or in our time of need! But what if there is no one? What if, in the hospital room; the battlefield; the law-court, at the family fireside: are all empty!? No one there to help us as orphans and take us in! That was the horror recorded by the prophets, in places such as Isaiah 59:16, where even God Himself is described as amazed by the complete absence of any “body” to stand and intercede for man in his plight. That is why the “body of Jesus” being born at Bethlehem is such good news! No other arm to lean upon until Christ came for us. Now there is One, with a real nature like ours, who will never leave!

Meditate and Pray: Ask God to enable you, by faith, to enter into the joy of hearing the real, physical, human voice of God’s Son, when He came into the world, saying (Heb. 10:7) “**Behold**, I have come...”! There is nothing so comforting as the real, bodily intercession of this One Jesus, who truly stands in our place, and walks with us through all the dark trials of this world! Hymn # 402 helps express this comfort so well:

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

*I need thy presence every passing hour.
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me*

Friday: Read Hebrews 2:10, 16 and 7:25-28. In preparing a body for His Son; a body which is now risen and ascended victorious to Heaven, God the Father has ensured that our Savior, will “always live to intercede for us” in that human body before His Father’s throne in Heaven! But even more, as we begin 2023: no matter what events or trials face us in the coming year, we have a Savior whose real body means that we always have an arm to lean upon, and a hand which can touch our fevered brows *down here on earth*! He will never leave or forsake us down here! His body in Heaven is the pledge that He will never abandon His body on earth even for one moment! Christ’s Spirit sent down ensures Christ’s presence on earth!

“But wait,” some may object, “are you forgetting that Christ’s humanity is in Heaven now, and not on earth? How can you speak of Christ being with us on earth, comforting and leading us with His hands through our sufferings, and difficult days?” Well, that is what a “captain of salvation” (Heb. 2:10) does! He stays with His flock; personally leading them by the hand out of trouble. In terms of Heb. 2:16, the Son of God “helped” our nature not just for a time, in order to suffer and die with it, but with a view to constant mediatorial work on our behalf *in* and *through* that human nature! Interestingly, that word translated to “help” or “take hold of” or “give aid,” literally means, “to lead by the hand”, just as God, through Moses, led His people out of Egypt. This same verb is used in Hebrews 8:9, which reads: “... when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt”!

Meditate and Pray: Thank Jesus that He continues to “lead His church by the hand.” He continues to “walk among the golden candlesticks” of His church on earth, taking account of our every daily need as surely as if we could see Him walking with us! And just as Jesus could bring that old, exiled apostle John comfort by laying His real hand upon him in Revelation 1:17, so “He knows our sorrows,” and lays His priestly hand upon us, to bring us the real, human, sympathetic comfort of His presence while we suffer here in this vale of tears. Surely we could not begin 2023 with a better picture of our security in Christ’s ongoing ministry on our behalf!