

Introduction: We just celebrated the day of Christ's birth with great joy! But even while we do so, we ought to realize that Christ's taking on our flesh is Good News that we need daily. It is His humanity that Christ wears as the Eternal Son of God in heaven for us. He continues to sympathize with us in our every trial and temptation – just as Hebrews 2:14-17 say:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Monday: Read Philippians 2:1-8. To emphasize the daily reality of Christ's incarnate ministry for us, we begin with Paul's description of Christ's, "taking on Himself the form of a servant." (Philippians 2:1-8) Here we have one of the earliest accounts of the birth of Christ. As Marianne Radius puts it, in the December 2016 issue of *New Horizons*, which quotes an article by her entitled "The Heart of Christmas":

The first written account of what Christmas means is found not in the Gospels, but, surprisingly in Paul's letter to the Philippians. This letter was written about twenty years after the death of Jesus, and at least fifteen years before the first of our Gospels was written down.

Meditate and Pray: We see what was on the hearts of the early church as we read these words that summarize the birth of Christ in our place. These words of the Apostle Paul would have been passed from mouth to mouth, as believers sought to remind each other of the extent of Christ's love for them in dying on the cross. Philippians 2:1-11 are well-worn words of comfort shared in the worship and fellowship of believers in the first century church.

In other words, how wonderful it is to read this creedal statement about Christ's Divine Personhood ("Being in the form of God") about the lowliness of Christ's Incarnation to become Man ("He took on Himself the form of a servant.") and the extent of His love for us and obedience to His Father ("Becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross") and to realize that here we can hear the voice of believers in the early church, "encouraging each other all the more as they saw the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25)

Tues/Weds: Read Philippians 2:1-8; Colossians 1:14-15; John 1:1-3 & John 1:14. Philippians 2 is full of deep doctrine, describing Christ as the same exact essence as the Father (which is what the word "form" means: possessing the essential attributes of God). Philippians 2:6

Where was Christ as the "form of God" first revealed in Scripture? Well, was it not in the Bible's description of eternity that we see the unchanging relationship between the Son in the "form" of God and His Father as the One who eternally begets the Son? Before any creatures or creation were fashioned (John 1:3), the Son as the Image or Form of God lived in His Father's love as pre-eminent over all the angels and creatures God would make! Before Creation, the Son as God dwelt in Triune glory with the Father and the Spirit. Therefore, when the Son became Man as well as remaining eternal God, the eternal glory of God dwelt in our nature, as John 1:14 says! In short, Christ did not become "less God" in order to take the form of a servant in our nature. As fully equal with the Father forever, He chose to humbly take on Himself the nature of man. What a Divine condescension, when God took on our flesh to be born of the virgin Mary!

Meditate and Pray: Sing about these wonderful doctrines, using hymn # 193 in our hymns books, which so clearly expresses the Son of God's equality with His Father, even after He took on our flesh:

1 Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly-minded,
for with blessing in his hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.

2 King of kings, yet born of Mary,
as of old on earth he stood;
Lord of lords, in human vesture,
in the body and the blood,
he will give to all the faithful
his own self for heav'nly food.

3 Rank on rank the host of heaven
spreads its vanguard on the way,
as the Light of light descendeth
from the realms of endless day,
that the pow'rs of hell may vanish
as the darkness clears away.

4 At his feet the six-winged seraph;
cherubim, with sleepless eye,
veil their faces to the presence,
as with ceaseless voice they cry,
"Alleluia, alleluia,
alleluia, Lord Most High!"

Thurs/Fri: Read Philippians 2:1-8: We are in awe of the rich doctrinal truth contained in Philippians 2. But what is so striking is how practically beneficial Christ's ministry in our flesh is for the life of the church in Philippi. We see this when we remember that in Philippians 2 Paul writes to address the Philippians about conflicts in their church. In doing so, he uses as his example of how the church should live, Christ's willingness *to humble Himself by taking the form of a servant*, and from this example argues that they should in like manner adopt a servant attitude towards each other in the church at Philippi. See how Paul makes this all-important point about humble regard for others before ourselves in Philippians 2:1-4:

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal *interests*, but also for the *interests* of others.

Meditate and Pray: What a sermon illustration! We are to humble ourselves in our relationships in church because of Christ's example of humbling Himself even to the point of death! But alas, how hard this is for us! Let us flee to God in prayer right now, since we in our own strength cannot take one step in imitating Christ as we ought. Let us pray:

Great God in Heaven, we thank you that you humbled yourself in order to give up your Son for our salvation! What a lowering of yourself as our Father: You came down from your Throne, rolled up your sleeves and created by your Spirit a body for your Son in the womb of the Virgin!

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that, in learning from your Father how to exercise your high station as God's Son, you became obedient to death to show us both your submission to your Father's will and your great love for sinners!

Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you can bring into our lives as born-again Christians, that very same humble servanthood which the Son crafted in His life! Please cause Christ's graces, especially His humble obedience, to grow within us as a church family, that we truly might learn how to put the interests of others in the body of Christ before our own! Amen.

Sat/Sun: Further reflection on the essential role of humility in the life of faith:

Faith empties the soul of its own wisdom, understanding, and fullness, that it may act in the wisdom and fullness of Christ. The only advice for preservation in trials and temptations lies in that of the wise man, Prov. 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding." This is the great work of faith; it is faith; it is to live by faith. The great cause of men falling in trials is their leaning to, or leaning upon, their own understanding and counsel. (John Owen – Vol. 6, pg. 146)