

PROBING DEEPER INTO THE INCARNATION

Philippians 2:6–11



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Thinking deeply at Christmas can be difficult. Shopping for presents, family get-togethers, and holiday parties sometimes crowd out the time we need to reflect on the meaning behind the trees and tinsel. In addition to the holiday hustle and bustle, Christmas traditions sometimes take the edge off the truth, fantasy eclipses the original manger scene, and sentimentality tends to replace reality. We give and receive Christmas cards with a gold-leaf, haloed baby sleeping in a clean manger with smiling oxen, donkeys, and kittens crowded around.

Though the decorated trees, tame nativities, and piles of presents aren't inherently bad, they can distract us from the original scene depicted in God's Word. And more important, these holiday traditions can keep us from reflecting on what Christmas represents—the unfathomable truth of the incarnation.

Let's remember that before Mary placed Jesus in the manger, He existed in heaven with God the Father and God the Spirit. And before baby Jesus cried His first cry, He was the Creator of all things.

When we think deeply about the incarnation, it will make all the difference when we sing the carols, admire the nativities, and talk about Mary, Joseph, and their precious baby.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. The Eternal Son (John 1:1–4)

In John 1:1, the apostle didn't use a definite article to refer to "the beginning." That's because eternity has no beginning. And just as eternity has no beginning, neither does the Word. Before Jesus was born in a dirty stable, He eternally existed as the Word, the second Person of the Trinity, with all the rights, responsibilities, and attributes of deity. The Son is also the Creator of everything. Empowered by the Spirit, the Son carried out the Father's plan to create the universe and give life to all living things (John 1:3–4).



Quotable

*Do you realize
how much
God loves you?
Maybe today is
the day you
believe it. He
gave His Son to
die for you.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. The God-Man (John 1:14; Philippians 2:6–11)

Since eternity past, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit have existed in a perfectly free, mutually loving relationship. They operate from a united will, and they work together to carry it out on earth. The Son shares with the Father and the Spirit all the characteristics of deity, including omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and so on. So when we get to John 1:14, we must stop to ponder what the Son did—He became a tiny baby. The One who holds all the matter in the universe together (Colossians 1:16–17) squeezed into the virgin’s womb and waited for nine months to endure the pain of birth. Deity became humanity. The second member of the Trinity became an embryo, a fetus, a newborn. The invisible became visible. The infinite became finite. The Son voluntarily limited the use of His divine powers and His right to receive worship from every living thing in order to be born as a servant and die in the place of sinners (Philippians 2:6–11). This truth should revolutionize Christmas for all Christians.



GETTING TO THE ROOT

When God Emptied Himself

Greek is a far richer language than English. So when we want to plumb the depths of the incarnation, we have to get to the root of the original Greek. When Paul wrote Philippians 2:7 and spoke about the time when the Son became a human being, he used a very specific word to communicate a very complicated doctrine.

In Philippians 2:7, Paul said that in His incarnation, Jesus “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant” (NASB). The New Living Translation says He “gave up His divine privileges.” Paul used the Greek word *kenoo* to describe Jesus’ voluntary resignation of His divine rights and abilities for a period of time.

When the second Person of the Trinity became a man in the person of Jesus Christ, He did not cease to be God, nor did He lose any of His divine attributes, such as omnipresence and omnipotence. He merely laid them aside for a time.

The birth of Jesus was the most extraordinary event in human history. While Israel’s high-born, well-educated elite advanced their status and pretended to seek God’s favor, their Messiah quietly slipped into the world in the unassuming hamlet of Bethlehem, into the arms of a humble nobody named Mary. God not only became a baby, but He did it knowing that He would one day face death on the cross. And for every nanosecond of His earthly life, from conception to resurrection, He remained God. As a man, Jesus bowed to His Father’s will and emptied Himself of His own life so that those who believe won’t have to face eternal death. And He asks us to follow in His self-emptying footsteps each and every day of our lives.



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LET'S LIVE IT

Many people live their entire lives in fear, not knowing that God loves them with an eternal, sacrificial love. God placed you in your mother's womb because He wanted to have a relationship with you. The Son of God became a man and gave up His own life to prove His love for you—and to make it possible for you to love Him in return. Do you believe that?

Do you realize how much God genuinely loves you? If not, ask Him to help you believe in His love. If so, share His love with others this Christmas.



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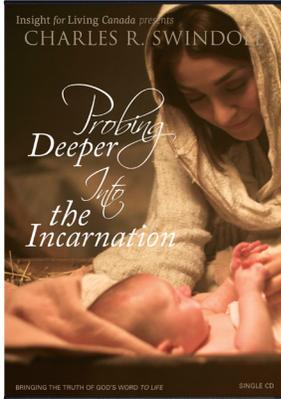
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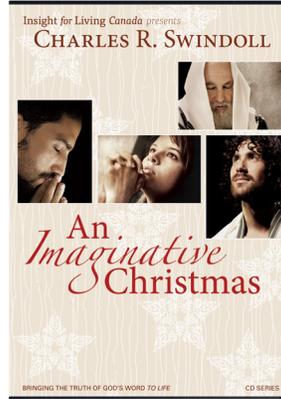
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Tools for Digging Deeper



Probing Deeper Into the Incarnation
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An Imaginative Christmas
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The Gift That Still Saves Lives
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