

GOD INCARNATE

The Fullness of Christ's Deity

Incomprehensible - Isaiah 55:8-9, Romans 11:33 & Luke 1:26-35

So one of the things we all look forward to this time of year is the sentimental feeling of it all. We enjoy the look and the feel and even the sound of Christmas. We drive down the streets at night and admire all the lights. The Christmas cards we'll receive in the mail will have snow-covered homes and churches on the outside and on the inside will be words of love, goodwill, cheer, and peace.¹ Walk down the Christmas themed isles at the store and you'll find stuffed animals with scarfs and red felt hats on and chocolates in their paws. In the commercials on tv, men and a women are exchanging gifts with giant bows on them and it's snowing outside. Christmas movies always end with a smooch under the mistletoe.

Nativity scenes of the holy family show soft, tender faces with golden halos around their heads. We sing songs about the night Jesus was born as if "all was calm and all was bright" and "He slept in heavenly peace." The song Away in a Manger tells us, "The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes." It's all a very surreal and sublime picture we have of First Christmas. It's a picture we long for – to be comforted by – especially after the year we've had. I say that because I'm one of them.

It's safe to say that, aside from past personal tragedies, this year has been harder on everyone than any year in recent history. There's been a lot of change, a lot of chaos, a lot of confusion, a lot of uncertainty, and I think we're all a little weary from the mess, longing for that nostalgic, traditional Christmas sentimentality.

And I don't want to take away from that because I enjoy it myself, but what I want to submit this morning is that our greatest comfort this year is not going to be found by trying to escape from the mess of this year by the sentimentality of it all. Our greatest comfort is going to be found by pressing into the reality of the first Christmas and the first coming of Christ because when He came into this world, He played by the harsh and cold rules of this world. **He entered into it in a most humiliating way and that tells us a lot about our God. It reveals to us who He is and what He is like. That's in essence what we're going to look at this morning.**

The next month or so is going to be a bit unique and I think a lot of fun, as we study some of God's attributes and then see how that is revealed in God the Son and His coming. If as Colossians 2:10 pointed out last week, Jesus is "the fullness of Deity in bodily form", God with skin on, we should be able to discuss any attribute of God and then turn around and see that attribute in or through the life of Jesus Christ somehow. Hebrews 1 says of the Son that He is the exact imprint (or image) of God. Even Jesus said Himself, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). I guess you could say we're going to test that this Christmas.

Any orthodox Jew could teach on the basic attributes of God, but to study the attributes of God (part of what Bible Scholars call *Theology Proper*) and then find those same attributes in God the Son, that's Christian, and I think it's going to make the incarnation more striking. And besides that, my hope is to pass down the teaching of the incarnation because if Jesus is the greatest revelation of God, then Satan will be doing everything he can to try and blur that revelation. But before we start studying the attributes of God, we need to ask what an attribute of God is exactly?

I. **DEFINING WHAT AN ATTRIBUTE IS.**

Webster's defines an attribute as a characteristic or quality that belongs to something.

- ❖ Attribute = a characteristic or quality that belongs to something.

Dr. Chafer described an attribute (with God in mind) as, "a property which is intrinsic to its object. It is that by which it is distinguished or identified."ⁱⁱ To keep it simple, attribute is a part of who God is. Studying the attributes of God is one of the best ways to understand all that He is. And there was a time not long ago when it was just sort of expected for people to know God's attributes. Everyone was taught the attributes and everyone knew them.

And it's important to know that there are **two types of attributes**. You have what theologians call communicable and incommunicable – those which He communicates to us and those which He doesn't. I like to think of them as **shareable and non-shareable**.

- ❖ Communicable = shareable
- ❖ Incommunicable = non-shareable

Communicable attributes would be those which are shared by created beings like wisdom, mercy, love, justice, compassion, etc. **Incommunicable**, or non-shareable, attributes are those characteristics or qualities of God which do not belong to any other created being, but to God alone. These would be qualities like His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnipresence, eternity, sovereignty, etc. All the omni- attributes clearly belong to God alone. On God is all powerful, all-knowing, all-present, etc. The attribute that is our focus today is God's *incomprehensibility*.

II. THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD.

This attribute is referring to the fact that the infinite **God cannot be fully comprehended** by a finite being like man. Man is finite but God is infinite. We have limitations but He is unlimited. We are creatures, He is the never-created eternal Creator. And because He is so much greater than we are or anything we know, greater than the universe we know, He cannot be fully comprehended. We just can't get our minds around all that He is, even just one facet of His being. This does not mean that we cannot comprehend anything at all about God or know God at all. There are many deep things we know about God by the Spirit revealing them through His Word and creation. But it is to say that none of us can know God *exhaustively* (totally and completely). We are limited beings who work from limited perspectives of Him and His ways.

For example, this inability on our part to comprehend or even imagine what God looks like shows up in the descriptive heavenly depictions of God that Isaiah (Is. 6) or Ezekiel (Ezek. 1) or the apostle John (Rev. 1) had. 3 men who had great visions of God on His throne are left to describe God with words like "likeness," "appearance of," "as it were," "resembling" or "the likeness of the appearance."ⁱⁱⁱ They didn't have the thoughts or language to describe what they were seeing. We get a taste of this whenever we discuss the **Trinity**: 1 God in 3 Persons. The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is not the Father, and vice versa. It's hard for us to grasp, but we know it's true and worship God for that revelation.

Two verses seem to stand out regarding **God's incomprehensible ways**. One is **Isaiah 55:8-9** – "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts." What I love about that is that it's not just saying that God knows more than us and does more, but that who He is in the very nature of Himself, He is different. He doesn't think

the way we think or do things the way we would normally choose to do them. That's evident by the way man loves religion and God loves faith. Man wants to rule but God came to serve.

But us created beings at some point must reach this place where we trust or rely the Creator even when nothing makes sense because neither God nor His ways can be put in a nicely wrapped up box. Job learned that big time. Sometime this week just go read Job 38-42. You'll pry end up like Job, "I have declared that which I do not understand, things too wonderful for me... therefore I retract, and I repent in dust ashes." That's what happens when God confronts you with "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" That's enough to make us realize we have no right to tell God how He should do things. You can't put God in a Christmas package and tie a bow on it. It's an intellectual stumbling block for us because we want to connect every dot and explain everything going on in our world. But the reality is, it's not going to happen, and that's ok.

This attribute of God though, as insulting as it is to the intellect, is actually what made the apostle Paul break out in worship. It is this that led him to breakout in doxology. In **Romans 11:33**, after expounding God's incredible program for Israel and the Gentiles, he says this, "Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How *unsearchable* are His judgment and *unfathomable* His ways [no one can find it nor plumb its depths]! For *who has known the mind of the Lord*, or *who has become His counselor*? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." To Paul, the incomprehensible ways of God are medicine for his heart. As Frederick Faber wrote, "*Darkest to the intellect but sunshine to the heart.*" And I'll tell you why this is ultimately sunshine and medicine for our hearts.

In a year where we have had so many unknowns, what we need is not every detail explained (like Job's friends *attempted* to do when he was in misery). Every problem doesn't need to have a solution. We don't need to connect all the dots. What we need is a greater awareness of and trust in the One whom we cannot fully comprehend. It sounds like oxy-moron to say that we need more comprehension of the incomprehensible, but we do. **We need a God you cannot put in a box. A God that isn't controlled by time & space circumstances. Someone who works in ways that are unsearchable and unfathomable and in ways we wouldn't prefer or understand, for a greater purpose than our mere comfort.**

We need a God who works things for good even when that means going against our preferences. Someone whose ways are not our ways. Someone who can use a mess to do miracles. Someone whose foolishness is wiser than the greatest wisdom of man (1 Cor. 1:25). A God who could foreordain the year 2020 before time and say, "I'm going to use that mess of a year in a mighty way." Without that God, we would be without hope at this time when nothing makes sense. It makes sense to God though. There's no mystery from His perspective.

I think a lot of us would love to become His counselor and tell Him what He should do this year – how He should intervene and stop the virus mess and get our lives back to normal. But that would be like the kid telling his parents how to do things. When you're a kid and your parents tell you to do something, it often generates frustration because you don't know *the why* of what they're telling you to do. They just tell you to do it, for your health and protection or some greater reason than your childish. Parents have wisdom and knowledge and experience their youngsters don't. So it is with us and God.

We need to remember that God's doing unsearchable and unfathomable things this year. One of them is making us realize that "The joy of the Lord [*and not our circumstances*] is our strength" (Neh. 8:10). This is why a study of God is important. I think it's the greatest counseling program there is. As one gal said, "*Those who know God have great contentment in God. It is no wonder so many are discontented! They don't know God.*"

Part of knowing Him is knowing that He does not do things the way we would not. And **that's exactly what we see in Jesus Christ with the incarnation.** Everything about it is just incredulous. It all happened in such a way that we would never have concocted such a plan ourselves if we were in control of it all.

III. **THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE INCARNATION OF GOD.**

Let's turn to **Luke 1:26-35**. And as I read this, somehow I want you to pretend like you've never heard this before in your life because if you don't, you'll ignore what is said you're so used to it (especially if you grew up in church & read it every Christmas).

❖ **The church suffers from occasional home-blindness when it comes to Jesus.**

Home blindness occurs when you become so used to something being there that you just forget it's there or it loses its ability to catch your eye.^{iv} One can live near a garden and never see a flower in it. Or witness a thousand rainbows and never really see the grandeur of one.^v

I noticed this happened to me the other day when missionary Will Fellows visited. We had gone downstairs for some reason, maybe to print something, when he stopped and said something like, "Well, that's neat!" as he stopped to take a picture of the scrabble board letters we have on the wall that say, "Love, learn, serve." When it was new to me, it caught my eye every time I walked by it, like it did for him, but now it's escapes my notice.

This is what happens to us when we are around Bible stories about Jesus too long. We can become so used to them that they've lost their ability to strike us and amaze us. They become predictable. The incarnation, God becoming flesh, even loses its ability to surprise.

"Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."

If we're honest about it, this passage should shake us from our Christmas sentimentality like this angel shakes up Mary! Look at Mary's response... she's **perplexed**. The angel has to tell her not to be **afraid**. Her initial response is something like, "But I'm a virgin!" Why? Because she knows people aren't going to believe that God would have told her this. Even Joseph had to be talked into it by an angel himself because he was planning on giving her a certificate of divorce (Mt. 1:19-21). It's unimaginable. Strange. Messy.

A. **The unimaginable way He came.**

Philip Yancey recalled in one of his books, watching an episode of *Thirtysomething* in which a Christian girl named Hope, argued with her Jewish husband Michael about the holidays they celebrate. “Why do even bother with Hanukah?” she asked. “Do you really believe a handful of Jews held off a huge army by using a bunch of lamps that miraculously wouldn’t run out of oil?” Michael exploded, “Oh, and Christmas makes more sense? Do you really believe an angel appeared to some teenage girl who then got pregnant without ever having sex and traveled on horseback to Bethlehem where she spent the night in a barn and had a baby who turned out to be the Savior of the world?” Michael’s got a point, doesn’t he? You see, God put Mary and Joseph in a position where they must face the shame and derision of people who react much like Michael. But this was God’s way...

Coming into this world through an engaged, pregnant, teenage girl who has to claim that an angel spoke to her and her baby is from the Holy Spirit that she has God in her uterus. If someone said that today we’d say she’s in need of psychiatric care or counseling or something! But for the faithful Jew in her day, she was an adulteress who was to be stoned to death! She had to hide the shame of her own miracle! He rests the fate of the world on the responses of two rural teenagers whom those around them would have met with derision.^{vi}

People weren’t expecting this. Yes, it was prophesied, but everyone was expecting a Messiah who came in a whirlwind of flaming fire to extinguish the enemy of Rome in a flash. But unimaginably, the Maker of all He came into this world as a microscopic seed, a fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye. An egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell in the womb of a nervous teenager.^{vii} The immense God of the universe now in the womb of teenager. As Charles Wesley wrote, “*Our God contracted to a span; Incomprehensibly made man.*” Or John Donne, who said, “*Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb.*” Restricted, but not reduced, and no less God. The physiology of the incarnation is incomprehensible. The mystery of it is unfathomable.^{viii} It puts the greatest fictions to shame. But we need not wrack our minds over it, as we wouldn’t with the Trinity. We worship Him for it because He knew we need a God-man Savior before we did and we learn of His humble nature through it.

His ways are different. He came in the most humiliating circumstances. As a helpless baby, to a poor family, in an insignificant town, to die the worst death imaginable – He was born, crying like any other baby, and in manger of all places, just to die on a cross. That’s the kind of incomprehensible God we’re dealing with. By **His coming He removed all charges of favoritism. He played by the harsh and cold rules of this world.**

To add to the incredulity of it, let’s reflect on when He was born. Remember, as God, He could’ve chose to come into this world however and whenever He wanted but He came in difficult times.

B. The tumultuous times in which He came.

On a pragmatic level, He didn’t come in a time when they had running water and water heaters and thermostats on the wall. Central air wasn’t invented yet. Or when there were automobiles and airplanes that made for easy travel. Or when internet could broadcast a message around the world in the click of a button. He came in a day and age when life was much more harsh, much less comfortable to say the least.

More so, He came at a time when Israel was anything but prosperous. Maybe an ideal time to come to Israel would have been in Solomon's day, when they were so rich in gold that silver was like stones. But Jerusalem in His day was poverty-stricken and the streets lined with beggars.

Israel was not living securely in peace either. It had been in a constant state of unrest and upheaval for some time now. The crushing beast of Rome was dominating Israel on a local level and insurrectionist militiamen were being strung up on regular basis for their defiance against the Empire. To protect their Jewish culture from being absorbed into the Greek and Roman cultures, there was a resurgence of Jewish pride and fighting back and naming kids after the patriarchs and matriarchs. William Barclay said that just before Jesus came 150,000 revolutionaries had perished in uprisings. He said, "*There was no more explosive and inflammable country in the world.*"

Because of the resistance, there were Roman spies everywhere. You had to watch what you said in public meetings and worship gathering, if you were brave enough to hold one. To say something against Rome or Caesar was to put your life at risk. It wasn't much different from living under a communist regime. There were curfews, crackdowns and discriminations. Into this world, Jesus was born.^{ix} It makes the United States of 2020 sound like a cake walk.

To top it off, even the politics were more corrupt. Herod the Great was ruling in Israel – just a despot of a ruler who had no respect for the gift of life. Scarcely a day past, it's been said, when someone wasn't executed by him. And just the word of another king being born was enough for Herod to massacre every child under the age of 2 without a blink. Even Jesus was influenced greatly by the politics He chose to be born into. It was because of a political census that Jesus was born where He was, not in a hotel when traveling but with the barn animals and placed in a feed trough. Then, because He was born a king, His family was forced to flee to Egypt. And it wasn't until Herod the Great died, a political ruler, that an angel came to Joseph and said it was okay for them to return to Israel – and where did they return? To a no-name, bad-reputation town like Nazareth. A town that later became an insult to His Messianic identity.

Why do we need to know all of this? Well, because all throughout human history and especially 2020, men and women have been fault finders, blaming God, asking questions like, "*Why doesn't He do something? Does He even know?*" And If He does, He just doesn't care or know what it's like!"

But 2020 years ago, in Israel, in a mess of situation, in a mess of times, our God placed Himself in this world under such circumstances that tell us He is can relate to *anyone*. He can make a miracle out of the mess. It's where He does His greatest works because His ways are not our way and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

ⁱ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan Audiobook), chapter 1.

ⁱⁱ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1* (Kregel), 190.

ⁱⁱⁱ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1961), 7.

^{iv} Don Everts, *God in the Flesh*.

^v Max Lucado, *God Came Near*.

^{vi} *Ibid*, 34.

^{vii} Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Zondervan Audiobook), chapter 2.

^{viii} J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 58.

^{ix} *Ibid*, 58.