



INCARNATION: GOD COMES

Part 7 of Doctrine

Pastor Mark Driscoll | May 11, 2008

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Well, howdy, Mars Hill. Good to see you all. We're continuing today in the Doctrine series. Today we're dealing with the incarnation, God coming into human history as the man Jesus Christ. If you're new, my name's Mark – one of the pastors here at the church. We've got a lot to cover and my sermon today is gonna be a little shorter than normal. So I'll go ahead and pray and we will get right to work.

Father God, we begin by acknowledging that you are the Maker of heaven and earth, that you have made us male and female for relationship, that in sin we have separated ourselves from you. But in Jesus you have come on a rescue mission to seek us, to find us, to save us. As we examine the incarnation, the birth and life of Jesus, it is our hope and prayer that the Holy Spirit would illuminate our understanding, enliven our hearts to live in light of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

I'll start by telling you a story. I met my wife Grace when I was 17. I was – since I was a little boy I looked forward to growing up one day and being a husband and a father. Just ever since I was a little guy, that's what I was thinking about. So I didn't date a lot of gals and was pretty focused, looking for a certain kind of gal. And at 17 in high school I met Grace. And we went out on our first date March 12th, 1988 – a little bit ago. And I remember that first date, game, set, match – done, it was over. I met my girl. And I told her that two weeks later. I said, "We're gonna get married. We're gonna have a great life. It's gonna be perfect." (Laughter) If you're 17, don't do that. You don't know what you're talking about. (Laughter) But anyways – you're a stalker. I, though, was led by God. (Laughter)

So anyways, I told her we'd get married and I loved her and I wanted to give my life to her and have kids with her and just be together for the rest of our days. So we dated for a few years. And I probably would've said that I was Christian, though I was not a Christian – didn't really know what that meant. And at age 19, then, I became a Christian. God saved me. And so I called Grace, told her, you know, "I've become a Christian." We were at separate colleges at that time. We'd graduated from high school by that point.

And I remember a little ways down the road from there time-wise I started to praying to God, "God, I love Grace and I want to marry her. Is she the girl that I should marry?" I never really considered God much in the equation prior to that. And God spoke to me audibly – doesn't do that all the time, but said to marry Grace, plant churches, train men, and preach the Bible. And so I called Grace, I said, "Well, God said we're supposed to get married." And, you know, most guys who do that, it's manipulation. I knew she wanted to marry me. She already knew that I wanted to marry her. This was just confirmation of our hearts' longings and desire, something we'd been talking about for some years.

So she transferred out to be with me in school. We were married at 21, graduated at 22, moved back to Seattle, started Mars Hill Church in our mid-twenties, around 25. And around that time, too, Gracie stopped working and really wanted to be a mom, and by God's grace she got pregnant. And I remember her carrying our first child, my oldest daughter Ashley. We now have five kids. And I remember she started showing, and I thought it was super cute. She thought she was "deformed." That was the word she used. (Laughter) She's very petite and she's like, "Oh, my gosh, look at me!" I said, "Well, it's not as bad as me, you know. You just have a little belly. You look great." (Laughter) And I thought she looked really cute.

And I was still totally attracted to her. And as she, you know, continued with the pregnancy she got more uncomfortable, and hard time sleeping and breathing and heartburn and she's short-waisted so there's no room for all this baby. But I thought she was so cute pregnant, and I was just totally attracted to her. And I was always rubbing her belly thinking she was so cute.

And then I'll never forget, she gave birth to Ashley, and Ashley's now ten years of age. And I'll never forget seeing Grace hold Ashley, and for me holiness finally made sense. I never to that point in my life had any real functional understanding of holiness. But at that moment holiness went from this sort of abstract theoretical idea to something that I got to witness, and it was sacred. And there was my wife holding our daughter, our child, our baby. And I just remember being overwhelmed with this sense of awe.

And then she handed to me Ashley, and I got to hold Ashley for the first time. And I remember in that moment thinking to myself, "God came like this. God came like this – frail, fragile, needy, helpless, vulnerable. God came like this." And I know every Christmas we sort of acknowledge that. We celebrate Jesus was God become a man. He came as a little baby. We acknowledge that, but to actually stop and consider that, to meditate on what that means for human history, sanctity of human life – incredibly, profoundly important.

The birth of Jesus is the most important birth in the history of the world. History is divided BC and AD – before Christ, Anno Domini, the year of our Lord. Everything revolves literally around the birth of this man Jesus Christ.

We have talked about Jesus since the inception of Mars Hill. My goal for you today is to summarize in a succinct way what we believe about Jesus regarding in particular the doctrine of the incarnation. Some of you are not Christians. This'll be the first time you've heard it. Some of you are Christians and I want you to hear it again in a fresh way and ponder the depth.

First question is, what does incarnation mean? Big Latin word, make you feel like you got your money's worth. What does incarnation mean? Well, carne means meat, right? All of you men, when you buy chili, or better yet, if you can make your own – and you should. (Laughter) There are two kinds of chili. There's regular chili and there's chili con carne. Good job, men. And carne means meat, so you're looking for that one if you go to Mars Hill. You're looking for the chili con carne. You're looking for the meat chili, okay? And you should. (Laughter)

And that's the same word: carne, meat. So incarnation means God came in meat. So chili reveals the glory of God, and you can think about the birth of Jesus every time you eat chili. (Laughter) Act of worship, that's what it is. So chili con carne, in meat – God came in flesh, in meat. That's what it means. Incarnation: that Jesus is God come into human history in flesh.

Now in this it is not saying that a human being became God. It's not teaching that. That is the first lie that Satan told our parents in the garden, and some religions like Mormonism still perpetuate. It's not that someone became God, it's that God became someone. God became a human being.

John Calvin uses this great language, saying that in so doing God accommodated us, and I like Calvin's use of that word, accommodating. And Jesus is God accommodating us in the same that a good mom accommodates her kids. We now have the five kids, two, four, six, eight, and ten. And my wife accommodates them, from how our home is organized, to our schedule, to our diet, to the kind of vehicle we drive, to the kind of bedtime routine we have. My whole life with my wife is about accommodation, and she's wonderful at accommodating our kids. She walks at the pace they walk in the store – it's much slower, right? Doing things with children forces you to accommodate them.

Likewise, God is Creator, we are created, and God needs to accommodate us. He needs to work within our limitations and our parameters. And he does that by coming as Jesus Christ. He comes kind of like a parent getting down on the floor to be at the level of their children, speak to their kids, relate to their kids in a way and language they can understand. God does that for us in Jesus Christ. And that's what incarnation means.

Well, do a little bit of historical excursus. How did people know God was coming? There was this longing, anticipation, expectation. I've got a whole chapter in Vintage Jesus on this, but I'll just summarize a few quick points. It all started in Genesis 3. Genesis 1 and 2, we looked at the fact that God created everyone and God created everything. And we sinned against God, separating ourselves from God, experiencing physical and spiritual death as a result. God comes in Genesis 3:15, something called the Protoevangelium, the first gospel, and God preaches 4,000 years before the birth of Christ of the incarnation. And here's what God says to our first parents. He is speaking here, rather, to Satan, who was the one who instigated the original sin. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel." So God says, "Someone is coming, a male son, that'll come through the line of the first woman, Eve. And he will do battle with Satan and Satan will physically hurt him, but he will ultimately destroy Satan."

Furthermore, in this we are getting the first inference of the virgin birth. In the rest of Genesis and the Old Testament the genealogies are given in a way that is patriarchal. "This man had these sons. This man had these sons." There is here no mention of a father, and it's an inference suddenly of the virgin birth. All it mentions is the mother. So now we're waiting for a particular son to be born of a woman, who will crush Satan, overcome sin and death, and right everything that went wrong with Adam.

The Old Testament moves forward. Isaiah 7:14 sheds additional light on the coming of Jesus, the incarnation, saying, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign." So this was something people were to be looking for. "Behold, the virgin shall conceive" – and you go, "That's unusual." Yes, we call that a miracle when a virgin conceives – "and bears a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" – which means God with us. So the first clue is we're looking for a male son born of a woman. Second clue we're looking for is the mother would be a young virgin woman.

Third clue comes for us in Micah 5:2, written again about 700 years before the birth of Christ, before the incarnation. This prophecy is given showing that God is sovereign over history. "But you, O Bethlehem" – which is a small rural town, not a big deal, right? Not a big deal – think Kent, okay? (Laughter) Think Kent, but not too long, 'cause you'll be sad. Okay, moving right along. (Laughter) "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah" – little, tiny, dumpy, rural, hick town, doesn't even have a fair. Not even that big. "From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler" – or king – "over Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days." In the Hebrew it literally means "from eternity past." So we're looking for a son born of a woman, mother to be a virgin, and he to be born in the town of Bethlehem.

And then fourthly Malachi 3:1, the final book of the Old Testament. 400 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, the incarnation, this prophecy is given. "Behold, I sent my messenger" – that'll be John the Baptizer, Jesus' odd, peculiar cousin – "and he will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord" – that's the Lord Jesus Christ – "whom you seek will come to his temple." You may have heard me state this previously, but this is an important historical fact. When was the temple destroyed? 70 AD. There has been no temple for almost 2,000 years since 70 AD. That means we are waiting for this man to come to the temple. That means he had to have come before 70 AD. "And the messenger of the covenant" – that's the new covenant, which we dealt with last week or two weeks ago – "in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of Hosts," the God who rules over the angels and the demons.

Again, so four facts: born of a woman, virgin woman, in the town of Bethlehem before 70 AD.

Now, let me say this before moving on to the next question. Many of my Jewish friends that I speak with say, “Yeah, but you take those prophecies and in light of Jesus you change their understanding. The Jewish people never understood that to mean that God was coming in human flesh.” My answer is twofold. First of all, who else was a man born of a virgin in Bethlehem before 70 AD? Who are we looking for? If it’s not Jesus, who else is there?

Secondly, I like to remind my Jewish friends that Jacob Neusner – it’s an interesting sort of side note for you who love footnotes – he is the leading scholar in Judaism today, widely regarded and respected. And he wrote a book called *The Incarnation of God*. And what he says, is that the Old Testament does speak of God coming in flesh as a human being in human history. Mind you, this is a man who does not worship Jesus as God. He’s an orthodox Jew. When asked about the implications, he will basically admit in the book that this does crack the door – more than crack the door, I would say kick it wide open – for belief in Jesus as the one everyone was waiting for, and God was promising God coming in human flesh.

What’s curious about this is he also says that many rabbis who initially studied the Bible agreed that it did teach that God was coming into human history as a man. So there have been Jewish people throughout the course of history who are awaiting the coming of God in human flesh as a man. That’s why, when Jesus came, many did worship him as God and accept that he is the one they have been waiting for, God come into human history, born of a woman who was a virgin in the town of Bethlehem before the destruction of the temple.

Next question is, how did God come into human history? How did Jesus incarnate? Matthew 1: We’re going to deal today with some very familiar texts of Scripture. For those of you who are Christian or are familiar with these, I want you to revisit them and I want you to reconsider them. And I want you to remember the extraordinary nature of what the Bible says about Jesus. Sometimes we can become so familiar with it that we cease to be amazed by what God has done. For those of you who are Christians, this is the birth of Jesus, Matthew 1:18. For non-Christians, we love you, glad to have you, really excited to tell you about this man Jesus.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ” – Matthew 1:18 – “took place in this way. When his mother Mary” – and now emotionally, ladies, I need you to go there with me. Mary is a teenage girl, maybe 14, 15, 16 years of age. She loves God. She’s a virgin. She’s saved herself for marriage. She’s engaged, betrothed to a man named Joseph. What is she thinking about? Her wedding day. She’s making the list of guests, organizing the event, undergoing the fittings for her dress – that’s where she’s at emotionally. This is going to be a wonderful day for her. She’s met a man named Joseph and he loves God and he loves her.

For you ladies who are married, remember what it was like leading up to your wedding. I noticed this with my two daughters. They’ve started practicing, since they were about 18 months old. They put on white dresses. They get dressed up. “What are you doing?” “I’m getting married.” “Not yet, you’re not. I didn’t say yes.” (Laughter) “I’m practicing.” Okay, totally fine. They’ve been practicing for a long time. Both of my daughters at various points have asked me to marry them, which I really appreciate. But I said no. (Laughter) Explained to them that someday God would bring along a man who would love them, and who would love God, and that they would be married.

And Mary’s at that day where her wedding day is imminent and approaching, and she’s excited. “When Mary his mother had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together” – she was still a virgin, in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 – “she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” Imagine how shocking that was. See, in that day a woman would be disgraced, maybe even put to death for committing adultery. Betrothal, their version of engagement, was so legally binding that to extricate yourself required a legal divorce. Over in Luke 2 it gives more detail, but we see clearly that she loves God, she worships God, and she trusts God.

“And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.” He assumed – now, you men need to go there with me with Joseph. He loves God. He loves her. He believes she is a chaste virgin. He probably has not laid a hand on her, not even kissed her at this point. And she’s pregnant. He feels utter betrayal. The girl of his dreams has now become the bride of his nightmare. And rather than putting her to shame or potentially putting her to death, he resolves to divorce her quietly, to leave her dignity intact and find a way just to get out of this very painful situation.

Verse 20: “But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord” – an angel shows up – “appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’” It’s a miracle. Your part of God’s plan. The Old Testament is being fulfilled in the womb of your teenage fiancé. Lot of pressure on this guy. He’s going to need to adopt God. Lot of pressure. He’ll be the adoptive father. If you’re here and you’re adopted, you’re in good company. You’re in the company of Jesus.

He goes on. “‘She will bear a son’” – verse 21 – “‘and you shall call his name Jesus’” – that means God saves his people from their sins – “‘for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoke by the prophet.” Which prophet? Isaiah 7:14. “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means God” – the Lord Jesus Christ – “is with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but he knew her not” – no intimacy, no physical relations – “until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus.”

Joseph stood up, was a godly, dignified man. He was a bit of an earthly savior to Mary and Jesus. He married this woman. He was scorned throughout the course of his life, as was she. “Oh, you married her? You think she’s a good gal? You’re a fool.” He endured that scorn. He served God faithfully. He married the single mother. He adopted Jesus, raised him. Ultimately we see in Luke 2 as well that Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem because his adoptive father Joseph was from the family line of David. A census was called for tax purposes. All the families had to go to their hometown to register. David took Mary to Bethlehem, which was the hometown of his descendant David. The result is that, in God’s providential timing, Mary gave birth to Jesus in the town of Bethlehem at just the right time, fulfilling all of the Old Testament prophecies, so that the woman who was a virgin gave birth to God, Immanuel with us, Jesus, in Bethlehem before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Perfect.

Next question: Is Jesus fully God and fully man? This is the confusion – errors come when you say that Jesus is only God or only man. The church wrestled with this and issued something called the Chalcedonian Creed in 451 AD. They came up with a concept called the Hypostatic Union, hypostasis meaning person, that Jesus is one person with two natures. The humanity, the divinity – fully man, fully God joined together in the person of Jesus Christ, in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now the reason this is important is because no other religious leader in the history of the world that heads any major world religion has ever said they were God. In fact, every other major religion is founded by someone who said they're not God. In the history of the world only a short list of people have ever said they were God, and they were all cult leaders and very dangerous. Jesus is God, and the reason that a few billion Christians on the earth today worship him as God is because he said he was God. It's not something that we made up. It's something that he stated.

And this is important as well, because the first of the Ten Commandments is that there is only one God and you should worship no one but the God of the Bible alone. And by saying he was God, Jesus was either telling the truth, or he was a blasphemous liar who should be put to death. On this point, New York Judge Gaynor said, "It is plain from each of the gospel narratives that the alleged crime for which Jesus was tried and convicted was blasphemy." He kept saying he was God.

Give you one example for sake of brevity. John 10:30-33: Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." He's saying he's God. "Again, they picked up stones to stone him" – for saying he was God. "But Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy'" – listen to this. These are his critics – "because you, a mere man, claim to be God." Jesus kept saying he was God. Jesus was arrested and put to death for declaring himself to be God. He never recanted. He is fully God. God became a man.

John 1 is another very important section of Scripture. I'll take you through it briefly. It illuminates the incarnation of Jesus as fully God, fully man. It is written by Jesus' dearest friend, a man named John who was one of his disciples – saw the miracles, saw the death, saw the burial, saw the resurrection. He was an eyewitness to it all. He was the last living among the disciples. The others died bloody, murderous deaths. They tried to murder John and he was boiled alive and exiled to Patmos, which is modern day Turkey. He lived to a ripe old age and he wrote 1, 2, 3 John, the book of Revelation, and the gospel of John. He, too, never recanted that his friend Jesus was God. In fact, he writes John to tell us that Jesus is God.

And in so doing he is bringing together two cultures that were predominant in that day. One was the Jewish culture that had a concept of the word of God being preeminent and powerful. They understood that in Genesis 1 alone God spoke ten times. God's word is powerful. Isaiah 55:11 they meditated on, that God's word accomplishes what he sends it out to do. It does not in any way return to him void, but God's word is powerful. It accomplishes what he desires and decrees.

Likewise, the other culture that was predominant in that day was the Greek culture that was very philosophical in its orientation, with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great. They traced the history of their philosophy back to a man named Heraclitus, and he predated those other philosophers. He was so powerful that his face was on the coin in the Greek day, not unlike George Washington for us. He was a preeminent figure, a powerful figure, and the figurehead in many ways of those people. And he said that the most important, essential, powerful thing in the world was the word or the logos – that was the Greek term. And the logos created, and the logos held the world together, and the logos reconciled the realm of the spirit and the realm of the physical.

Well, what John's going to do is he's going to take this concept of the logos, the word, and in so doing he's going to take the essence of Jewish thinking and the essence of Greek philosophy, and he's going to bring it all together into Jesus Christ. He does so beginning in John 1. "In the beginning" – which is an echo of Genesis 1:1. "In the beginning" – we're talking eternity past here – "was the Word." So before creation in eternity past was the Word, was the logos. "And the Word was with God." So the Word is eternal and with God. Literally it means face to face with God. "And the Word was God." So this eternal Word that's face to face with God is God. We're getting a picture here of the Trinity.

"He" – now it's personal. Not a force, but a person is face to face with God, eternal and is God. It's talking about Jesus. "He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." He's the Creator. We're his creation. This logos, this Word, Jesus, was face to face with God, is eternal, is Creator, and is God. "In him was life" – he is the source of all life, and apart from him there is no life, including our own – "and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." He echoes, harkens back to Genesis 1 where God separates light and darkness. Here he's talking in a moral, spiritual sense, darkness being the world filled with sin, light being the coming of Jesus to illuminate God, truth, and holiness in the darkness of the world. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Goes on to speak of the forerunner, the forerunner to Jesus, John the Baptizer here in fulfillment of Malachi 3:1. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to bear witness about the light." John the Baptizer came preaching repentance and pointing to Jesus.

"The true light" – that is Jesus, the logos, the Word – "which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him." God the Creator came into creation as the man Jesus Christ, and many did not know that he was God. They didn't see it. Goes on to say, verse 11: "He came to his own" – the Jewish people – "and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him" – some Jews did – "who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" – to be adopted into the family of God" – who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This is spiritual birth, being born again. We're born physically. We need to be born again spiritually. We're born physically alive, spiritually dead. Being born again here is having a new heart, new

life, new nature to image, reflect God on the earth as we were intended.

Verse 14 – very important. “The Word became” – what? Flesh, or meat – incarnation. This God, person, Creator, eternal, in face to face relationship with the Father became a human being. He took upon himself flesh “and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The glory of God is manifested in the person of Jesus. There is no knowledge, no understanding of God apart from Jesus. If you’re here, here’s the big idea. There is no right knowledge of God apart from the person of Jesus Christ.

Go on to say, “John bore witness about him and cried out, ‘This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”” John says essentially, “Though we are about the same age, he is much older than I. He’s eternal. He’s God. He preexists me.”

It goes on to say, “And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.” God came as the man Jesus Christ to give grace up grace – unmerited favor, unmerited love. “For the law was given through Moses” – as we read the law we’re fully convicted of our sin. The law tells us what to do. And in reading God’s law, the Bible, we acknowledge, we understand we have failed, and we have sinned, and we have fallen short. And what we need to make up the absolute distance between us and God is grace. Grace comes through Jesus.

“No one has ever seen God” – that’s the point. Apart from Jesus, all we have is speculation of philosophy and religion. With Jesus we have the revelation of God in Christ. “No one has ever seen God; the only God” – there’s only one God – “who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” And he did that, John’s telling us, in the incarnation, in the birth of Jesus.

Jesus is fully God, fully man, come into human history in human flesh to live a human life without sin. Jesus was fully human. Isaiah says, “He had no beauty or majesty in him, that we would be attracted to him.” If you saw Jesus, he looked very normal – very normal. Most of the first ten films that were made all had the word passion in the title, and they were all about the life of Jesus. And they absolutely gave an inaccurate portrait of Jesus because he always had a glow about him. You’re watching the movie. Which one’s Jesus? Well, he’s apparently the nuclear one. You could tell. He’s sort of glowing. He didn’t glow. He didn’t look like that. There wasn’t a halo over his head.

He looked very normal. He looked like a regular guy. He had a mother. He was born. He grew up. He had to learn to walk and read and write. Luke 2:42 says he grew in favor and stature and wisdom with men and God. He had friends. He was betrayed. He was happy. He was sad. Not to be disrespectful, but he had to go to the bathroom. He was fully human and fully God. And this is the great mystery of our faith, but again, it occurs only in Jesus.

Last question, then, following up. How could God become a man? How could this work? How could this happen? What I need you to see is that Jesus came as a missionary. This is very central to our theology at Mars Hill Church, and this is actually very central to all of my teaching and writing, and that is that God is a missionary and sends us to be missionaries in culture, okay? Now, the culture Jesus lived in before he was born on the earth was very different. We get a glimpse of it in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah has heaven open and he says, “Behold, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. The train of his robe filled the temple, and around him were angels crying out, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty! Heaven and earth are full of his glory!’”

Fast forward. John 12:41, he says, “Isaiah saw Jesus and spoke of his glory.” So the picture that Isaiah experienced of heaven being open was a glimpse into the majesty and the glory of the presence of Jesus, seated on a throne, ruling over all peoples, times, and places, and being worshiped as God.

Now, Jesus came off his throne, humbled himself, and physically entered into the human history through the womb of Mary, the young virgin, and he came as a man. In so doing he went from one culture to another. He went from glory to humility. He went from a throne to a manger. He went from honor to dishonor. He went from extravagance to poverty. He entered into human history as a missionary. He entered into a culture. He abided by their language and food and customs and style. He incarnated, he contextualized, he came into history into a culture with a people, speaking a language, eating certain food, wearing certain clothes, enjoying certain holidays, reading certain books. That’s God. And he’s giving us an example of how we are to live our lives in culture, incarnating, contextualizing, getting to know the world that we are in to bring the truth of God to the world.

So the first thing I need you to understand is that Jesus is a missionary. And when he became a missionary he did not cease to be God. Augustine says it this way, the great church father: “Christ added to himself which he was not, he did not lose what he was.” He was fully God. He didn’t lose his divinity as God. He added to that, Augustine rightly says, humanity and became a human being.

This means that Jesus retained all of his rights and his divine attributes, but he did not continually avail himself to them. He came very humbly. In fact, Philippians 2 uses that specific word to talk about the incarnation of Jesus. He came in humility, not glory – not glory, but humility. Philippians 2, beginning in verse 5: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” – so we’re to think like Jesus, approach life like Jesus, see the purpose as our life as similar, akin to Jesus – “who, though he was in the form of God” – that’s a way of saying he was God. He was the same as God. He was the stuff of God. He was God. Him and God the Father, they were the same. They’re fully God, speaking of divinity here – “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” – he didn’t hold on to his rights and his privilege. He emptied himself of them. He should’ve been worshiped, not cursed at and spat upon. But he let that go. He should’ve been paraded around as a king, not disrespected as he was. And he let that go. Jesus should’ve been obeyed, not disobeyed. But he let that go. Jesus let go of his rights and he humbled himself – “but made himself nothing” – again, Jesus was poor. Jesus was homeless. Jesus was single. Jesus did not experience many of the pleasures and possessions that you and I enjoy. He made himself nothing. He set aside his rights – “taking the very form of a servant” – or literally a slave. God became a humble slave willingly – willingly enslaved himself to service.

See, deep down, don't you want a God who's humble? A God who is gracious? A God who will suffer? A God who can relate? A God who has been there? A God who, when you're struggling and hurting the most, he's not far away, just giving you answers, but he's drawn near to identify? That's Jesus. There's no one like Jesus. There is no religion that gives you any concept of God anything like Jesus.

"Being born in the likeness of men." Verse 8: "And being found in human form" – he was in the form of God. He came in human form. Fully divine, fully man – "he humbled himself" – that's the only way to be humble. You have to humble yourself. Jesus humbled himself. No one could take his rights, take his glory. He gave it in love. He gave it in worship. "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of the death, even death on a cross." He came to live without sin. He came to die for sinners. And he speaks here of the cross, that Jesus went there, not just to be an example for us, but to be a substitute for us. We'll deal with this more thoroughly in the coming weeks.

But here's what happened. Our God became a man. Our God lived without sin, though he was tempted in every way that you and I are, Hebrews 4 says. He then went to the cross and willingly took upon himself all of our sins and endured the punishment and penalty that we rightly deserve for all of our sins. You and I, we deserve to die, be sentenced, judged, and tormented forever in hell. And through Jesus, we get what John 1 calls grace upon grace.

Christianity is not a religion. Religion is about what you do for God. Christianity is about Jesus and what he does for us. It's totally different, and it's better because religion always leads to pride or despair. You try hard. And if you do good, you're arrogant; you're not humble like Jesus. And if you fail to live up to the expectations, you're grieved and sad because you're not good enough for God. Jesus alone gives us joy and humility, humility knowing that we cannot save ourselves, joy knowing that when he said, "It is finished," it was. That's why we love Jesus so much. There's no one like Jesus.

If you're here today, let me emphasize this point: It's always solely, only, totally, completely, thoroughly about Jesus. Your sin is real. God's judgment is real. And the cross of Jesus is real. And he takes away sin, and he forgives sinners, and he reconciles us to God.

~~At the end of Jesus' life – "And he has highly exalted him" – after he died, Jesus rose three days later, and then he ascended into heaven.~~
great news! Jesus is alive and he's highly exalted. Revelation says repeatedly that he's seated on a throne, ruling and reigning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords over all peoples, times, and places, over all nations, all genders, all races, all socioeconomic backgrounds, all political parties, all sexual preferences, all employment vocations. He rules and reigns over everyone and everything. He's high. He's exalted. He's back to the position that he was prior to his incarnation. He was in glory, came in humility, now he's back in glory.

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" – the name of Jesus is the most important name in all the world. Your name, my name, the name of Mars Hill Church, the name of Seattle, the name of Washington, the name of the United States of America is nothing in comparison to the name of Jesus. The name of Jesus is absolutely what we live for. It is our hope, our goal, and our joy to live in such a way that the name of Jesus is made much of. If you're new you may notice this. At Mars Hill we don't say God a lot. We say Jesus. We believe in God, but we believe he's Jesus, and we want you to know that just talking about God is sometimes insufficient because people will mis-define who God is. God is Jesus, and Jesus is God. So we say Jesus a lot. We sing to Jesus, pray to Jesus, love Jesus, serve Jesus, honor Jesus, follow Jesus, want to be like Jesus, one day look forward to seeing Jesus, and read the Bible to know more about Jesus. If you miss everything, what's the big point? Jesus. Thank you.

Okay, now, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" – ruler over all – "to the glory of God the Father." Christians are people who willingly bend their knee: surrender, submission, humility. Jesus is God, I'm not. Jesus' name is preeminent, not mine. Jesus' will is best, not mine. His glory supercedes my own. A Christian is one who willingly bends their knee to Jesus and willingly proclaims him, Paul says, with their mouth. Christians are one who say, "I love Jesus. I pray to Jesus. I sing to Jesus. I follow Jesus. I want to be like Jesus. It's all about Jesus. I thank God that he came into human history to live the life I cannot live, to die the death I should've died, and to give the gift I cannot otherwise obtain. I am totally enthralled with this man Jesus."

The other kind of person is one who unwillingly bends their knee, and here is the hard, cold truth: everyone will bend their knee. Some of you will do it in this life for salvation. Some of you will do it after this life for damnation. Some of you will do it today as a friend of Jesus. Some of you will do it eventually as a foe of Jesus. Everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, as he is high and exalted. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess, "Jesus is Lord God." Our hope, our prayer for you is that you would come to your senses in this life, that you acknowledge that your sin is real, that God's just wrath and judgment is real, and that the love and the grace and the mercy of Jesus is equally real. And that God has gone to such great lengths to come into human history, to save us from our sins and from death and from judgment and from hell.

Since we're all going to bend our knee to Jesus, wouldn't it be most prudent and wise to do it today? To confess your sins, to repent of them, to give them to Jesus, to have his finished work on the cross be applied to your life so that you can begin your reconciled relationship with God today. Some of you may say, "God has no right to judge me, and hell seems cruel." Let me remind you of the depth of God that God has demonstrated. God promised that he was coming. God came as a man. God was humble. God became a slave. God endured temptation. God suffered. God died. And God is willing to forgive anyone of anything. God is good. And only a fool would reject his hand of friendship.

Our hope and our prayer today would be for all of us to meditate on the person and the work of Jesus, and to perhaps even literally bend our knee and to raise our voice, to demonstrate with our posture and to declare with great passion, "Jesus Christ, he's the Lord incarnated, God in human flesh, come to rescue me. And his name is all that matters." I'll pray.

Father God, I pray for my friends. I pray that we all would have a great clarity and passion about the passion and the work of Jesus, God become a man. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your unprecedented humility, that you would become a slave to serve your enemies. Lord Jesus, your name is truly about every name. Your throne is above every throne. And you give from that place grace upon grace. I pray for my friends, to turn from sin, to trust in you. For those who do not know you, Lord Jesus, I pray they would become Christians today, that they would bend their knee and confess with their mouth that Jesus Christ is their Lord. And God, as well, I pray for those of us who have been Christians for a while. Maybe we've heard this so many times that it's become familiar. It's ceased to capture our affections and to inspire our devotion. May you reignite some passion in us, some understanding, some clarity about Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.