

“God With Us” (part 1)

Galatians 4:4-5

In social psychology, there is a phenomena that is known as the mere-exposure effect, or the familiarity principle. Essentially, the familiarity principle says that people tend to become relaxed toward things because they are familiar with them. The mere-exposure effect says that all things of value will, with the passage of enough time, be taken for granted. In other words, the more I spend time with and get to know anything, and the more something becomes just a normal part of life – the less I am excited about it or the less I am to give it the attention it deserves. It is very difficult to sustain passion and intensity for a long period of time.

Think about how this works when you were learning to drive a car. When we first drive, we are so very cautious. Our driver’s education instructor taught us to keep our hands at 10 & 2. But it’s not long before we are turning on the radio, reading the newspaper, eating a Chickfilet sandwich, or talking on the phone. Such over familiarity can lead to a total lack of caution and increase the likelihood of a car accident. Perhaps you’ve heard, “Familiarity breeds contempt.”

I’m afraid that if we are not ever so careful, Christmas can become too familiar to us. That’s not to say that we ignore it when Christmas time rolls around each year. When it becomes too familiar, we trivialize it and its true significance gets lost among the wrapping paper. It is amazing to me at how the humility and poverty of the Bethlehem stable can be confused with the extravagance and self-indulgence on display at the local shopping mall.

I know that its the most wonderful time of the year, but as followers of Jesus Christ, we better not forget why that is the case.

You can’t have Christmas without Christ. And for the most part, we have become a society that has so marketed Christmas and made it all about material things and social relationships that so much of it is Christ-less. Think of the irony of it all—a Christ-less Christmas.

We’ve heard the Christmas story so many times that we assume we know what it all means. But do we?

An authentic celebration of Christmas honors the most wonderful of divine accomplishments. It recognizes that the eternal, sovereign God came to earth as a human being to live a righteous

life among His people and then to die as a perfect sacrifice to deliver from the wrath of God all who repent and believe in Him.

Christmas is all about God with us.

Isaiah 7:14 - “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

The birth of Jesus Christ is fulfillment of Isaiah’s Immanuel prophecy. God became a Man in the unique person of Jesus Christ in an event known in theology as “the incarnation,” which simply means in the flesh, or in human form.

John 1:1, 14 - “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Or as one writer has said:

*The Word became flesh!
God became human!
the invisible became visible!
the untouchable became touchable!
eternal life experienced temporal death!
the transcendent One descended and drew near!
the unlimited became limited!
the infinite became finite!
the immutable became mutable!
the unbreakable became fragile!
spirit became matter!
eternity entered time!
the independent became dependent!
the Almighty became weak!
the loved became the hated!
the exalted was humbled!
glory was subjected to shame!
fame turned into obscurity!
from inexpressible joy to tears of unimaginable grief!*

from a throne to a cross!

The greatest of all miracles is the incarnation, God becoming Man and living among us. The Son of God became the son of man so that the sons of men could become sons of God.

It is important that believers understand the theology behind the Christmas narrative. The doctrine of the incarnation, the virgin birth of Christ, these are vital to our faith. Without an understanding of Christmas, we have no real understanding of Easter. The death of Christ would not have been effective to secure our redemption had the birth of Christ been average and ordinary.

Christmas is all about God with us, Easter is all about God for us, and Pentecost is all about God in us.

These two verses in Galatians 4 are found in a section of the letter where the Apostle Paul is making the argument that salvation is not gained by works but as a gift of God's grace through faith in Christ.

The Galatian church was facing a threat from false teachers known as the Judiazers who claimed that salvation was achieved through adherence to the Law and by becoming a Jew.

To clarify the truth from error, Paul explains in the third chapter how the Law was merely our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The promise of God was made to Abraham and his seed some 430 years before the Law was even given. The purpose of the Law was to show us our sin and drive us to faith in Christ and the grace of God.

Paul uses the analogy of a child becoming an adult. He compares the position and privileges of a child to those of a servant, with the figures of a child and servant representing life under the Law and the figures of adult and son representing life in Jesus Christ.

This text is rich with truth and reveals in a succinct way how and why Christ came into the world. Jesus Christ is "God With Us," and there are some very important truths about His unique person found here.

1. Jesus is the PREEXISTENT Son from the Father

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son."

The most important thing about a person is what they say and do with the person of Jesus Christ! Nothing is more critical than what I believe about Him.

Matthew 16:13 - “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

There are differing opinions in the world as to who Jesus really is:

- Jehovah’s Witnesses say He is not God, but the archangel Michael
- Christian Scientists say He is not God, but an idea
- Mormons say He is not God, but the spirit brother of Lucifer
- Muslims say He is not God, but merely a prophet
- Eastern religions say He is not God, but merely one teacher among many
- Secular humanists say He is not God, but a religious figure who lived and died

Scripture is clear in its assertion that Jesus Christ is Immanuel, God With Us. He is divinity wrapped in humanity. He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, Son of the living God.

There is much modern and liberal scholarship that wants to reinvent the person and work of Jesus by claiming that He was nothing more than a mere man whom the early church began to worship because of their own superstitious misunderstanding. When you consider the claims of Jesus, as well as what the Bible says about Him, there are really only three conclusions a person can come to, what C.S. Lewis called a trilemma:

- Liar
- Lunatic
- Lord

Philippians 2:9-11 - “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.”

Here in Galatians 4, Paul plainly tells the church that God sent forth His Son into the world, which tells us that He is the preexistent Son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with God the

Father. This is where cults and liberal scholars leave the path of orthodox Christianity, for they deny the deity of Jesus Christ.

First, He existed before the world began

“In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son.”

“Fullness” - word meaning completeness or fulfillment

“Time” - word is ‘chronos’ and refers to chronological or sequential time; other Greek word used for time is the word ‘kairos’ which refers to an opportune time

The meaning of the word is significant, for it means that God’s Son was not sent at merely an opportune time, but that it was a fixed time on God’s calendar. He came at the precise chronological point in history that God Himself had foreordained.

This means that Christmas was not an accident! Not only was the time right, but the time was planned.

From a religious standpoint, it was the right time. For centuries, the Law had been in place and had well conveyed the truth that men and women need a Savior. The Old Testament canon had been well established, and a system of synagogues was in place. The people of Israel had been in 400 long years of silence and there had been no prophetic voice. It was as if a divine intermission were taking place in the drama of redemption.

From a political standpoint, it was the right time. Rome was the world superpower of the day and had instituted what history refers to as the pax romana, or Roman peace. Rome provided the world with political strength and stability, as well as an infrastructure and system of roads that made travel as convenient and accessible as it ever had been.

From a linguistic standpoint, it was the right time. If Rome had provided a political stability, Greece had provided a cultural stability. The Greek language was the dominant language of the day and spoken throughout the known world.

When we look at the religious, political, and social landscape, we can see how it was the right time for Christ to come into the world. The world was ripe for the coming of its Savior.

“Sent Forth” - word is a form of the word ‘apostle’ and carries the idea of being sent with a mission agenda

It means that God the Father sent God the Son into the world with a special assignment. God sent Him, He didn’t make Him, which shows that He has no beginning. The Son of God had a birth, but He has no beginning. He was with God in eternity past, and was God.

John 17:3-5 - “And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in your own presence with the glory I had with You before the world existed.”

He never became God, for He was always God. Yet when the fullness of time had come, God became Man. Jesus Christ is the God-Man, 100% perfect deity and 100% perfect humanity.

Hypostatic Union—teaches that these two natures are united in one person; the joining of the divine and the human in one person

Isaiah 9:6 - “For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Micah 5:2 - “But you, Bethlehem Ephratha, though you be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.”

Before you and I ever drew our first breath, He existed. Long before creation witnessed its first sunrise, before the first star ever streaked across the night sky, before the wind roared across the mountain peaks, He existed. There never was a moment in time when He was not. He is not the God who was, or even the God who will be—He is.

It was the name, “I AM,” that He gave to Moses as He called out to him from the burning bush. Not I was, or I will be, but I AM.

John 8:58 - “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

Question: Who is the only one younger than His mother, the same age as His Father, and yet without beginning or end?

Answer: The God-Man, Christ Jesus

There are several key passages in the New Testament that testify to the preexistence of Christ, and these passages are crucial for a robust understanding of who Jesus is.

John 1:1 - “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

He is the God of incarnation. In the first 18 verses or so of that chapter, the apostle John tells us how Jesus Christ is:

- Logos of God
- Life of God
- Light of God

Philippians 2:8 - “And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

He is the God of humiliation. He humbled Himself by becoming Man, in order to get those who could never get to Him. God sent forth His Son, born of a woman. In order to save us, He had to be God, for only God can defeat the power of sin and death and destroy the work of Satan. And yet, in order to save us, He had to be man because only man can substitute for man and die man’s death. He had to be God and Man—He had to be God to give His sacrifice infinite value, and He had to be Man in order to bear our sins in His own body.

Radical islamic belief says those who kill inherit life. Jesus says those who trust in Him inherit life. He gave His life for mine! Radical islamic belief worships a god that commands us to kill to live. Jesus shows us a picture of God who submits to death at the very hands of those He created. Rather than killing those He creates, He Himself dies for those He creates.

Colossians 1:15-23 - “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or authorities.”

He is the God of creation. He is the agent behind all of creation, the One through Him creation came into existence, and the One for whom creation exists. Jesus Christ is the preexistent God of incarnation, humiliation, creation, and revelation.

Second, He emerges throughout the Old Testament

“In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law...”

Paul is showing a connection here with the Old Testament. Jesus said that the scriptures spoke of Him, testified of Him, and were all about Him. He is the focal point of the Old Testament as well as its main Character.

John 5:39 - “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”

The Hebrew Bible is made up of three parts known as the “Tanakh” or TNK:

- The Law (Torah)
- The Prophets (Nevi'im)
- The Writings (Ketuvim)

The Law reveals man's need for a Priest to represent him before God. The Prophets reveal man's need for a prophet to reveal God to him. The Writings reveal man's need to be ruled by a godly King. Thus, the three offices in the Old Testament are the offices of prophet, priest, and king.

Jesus Christ alone fulfills all three of these offices, and He is there throughout the Old Testament on every page.

He is there in the opening verses of the first chapter of Genesis as God creates through His spoken Word. He is also promised to Eve, her Seed who would one day save the human race by crushing the head of the serpent, though it would mean His own bruising.

Genesis 3:15 - “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

Adam's sin plunged the entire human race into sin and alienation from God. Those whom God had created had sinned against Him and violated the terms of their relationship with Him, and in so doing, they became enslaved to Satan and in bondage to sin and death.

- Would God do anything to redeem them back?
- Would there ever be any hope for them to be sons of God again?

The salvation of the human race would depend upon the Seed of the woman. The Seed of the woman will be in conflict with Satan, and when the conflict reaches its climax, the Seed of the woman will only have His heel bruised, but the serpent will have his head crushed!

The promise throughout the Old Testament is that a unique Man will be born, One who will take back the domain of Satan and redeem those who are captive to his power by giving to Satan a fatal blow.

Who is the promised Seed? In the Old Testament, the promise is narrowed down:

- through Noah
- through Shem
- through Abraham
- through Isaac
- through Jacob or Israel
- through Judah
- through David

Once we cross the threshold into the New Testament, the fulfillment to the promise is realized:

Matthew 1:1 - "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Third, He entered the world through a virgin womb

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman."

Matthew 1:20-23 - “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. She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: Behold, the virgin will conceive and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel (which means, God with us).”

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son who entered the world through the womb of a virgin.

John Frame has pointed out why the virgin birth of Christ is so very important to our theology as believers. The following things are all contingent upon His virgin birth:

- the doctrine of Scripture
- the deity of Christ
- the humanity of Christ
- the sinlessness of Christ

The fact that God became a Man and stepped into your world is significant for you. How so?

- It means that Jesus Christ delivers from sin
- It means that Jesus Christ deserves your worship
- It means that Jesus Christ demands your obedience
- It means that Jesus Christ determines your purpose
- It means that Jesus Christ directs your steps

How will the truth of Immanuel, God with us, change the way that you celebrate Christmas this year? The theology of the incarnation is intended to provoke wonder in our hearts, worship in our spirits, and witness to the world.