

## GOD CAME TO US IN HUMAN FORM

Philippians 2:1-11

Key Verses: 2:7-8

*Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (NLT)*

In this passage, St. Paul encourages us to have the attitude of Christ in our personal life as well as in the Christian community. It's not exactly a Christmas message, in the sense that there is no nativity scene. No Mary and Joseph. No manger. No wise men from the east. Still, it is a Christmas message, because Jesus appears here. Paul tells us why and how Jesus was born as a human being, some 2,000 years ago. He teaches us why the birth of Jesus is such joyful news for all of us. I earnestly pray that God may fill our hearts with the joy of knowing Jesus personally and serving him wholeheartedly.

### I. HAVE THE ATTITUDE OF CHRIST (1-5)

When he wrote this letter, Paul was a prisoner in Rome. He was a suffering servant. But he was mindful of the believers in Philippi. He loved them. He knew that they had a difficulty in forming a unity. Philippi was a cosmopolitan city. The believers in the church had come from many different backgrounds, probably even more diverse than our Shippensburg UBF. How could they work together with one mind? Paul knew that only one person could unite them—Jesus Christ. In particular, they had to learn the humility of Jesus Christ. There were people with selfish ambition that ruined the unity of the church. So Paul appealed to them to have the attitude of Christ, especially his humble servanthip. Let us read verses 1-2. *Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. (NLT)*

Again how can we work together with one mind and purpose when we are all so different? We can be united in Christ when we love Jesus and obey his commands. We can overcome our differences and become one in spirit and purpose to serve the mission that God has given us. However, in reality this is easier said than done. So Paul says in verses 3-5. *Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. (NLT)* Selfish ambition and vain conceit hinder our spiritual unity. We should consider others better than ourselves. This doesn't mean we should compare ourselves to others. Instead, we must look at each other through Jesus' eyes and recognize that each person is created in the image of God and has unique qualities given him or her by God.

## II. JESUS WAS BORN AS A HUMAN BEING (6-11)

St. Paul says that in Jesus, our life can be transformed from a selfish one into a blessing to others. Then who is Jesus that he can do this wonderful thing to us? Who is Jesus to you personally? This is a very important question we should all ask, especially this Christmastime. I am afraid that some children in our society may associate Jesus with Santa Clause. Christians know better, but still Jesus is often set aside behind many holiday activities such as shopping, shopping, and more shopping. But we should bring Jesus to the front as we celebrate Christmas. In particular, we must ask some important questions such as: Who is Jesus? Why did he come? What did he do for us? What does it mean to be saved by the grace of God?

**First, God came to us.** Look at verses 6-7. *Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ...* (NLT) Jesus is God. He is the Son of God. He is the second person of the Trinity. He was with the Father God and the Holy Spirit when God created the universe. This God came to us. He gave up his divine privileges. He took the humble position of a servant and was born as a human being. He appeared on earth in human form. What comparison can we make to explain God becoming a human being? President of the U.S. becoming a homeless person? Queen Elizabeth becoming a housemaid? No, I don't think such comparisons really capture the meaning of God becoming one of us.

So the question is why did God have to become one of us? Hebrews 4:15 says of Jesus, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." God came to be our brother in flesh and blood. He walked in our shoes. He understands what we go through in our life. His coming showed that God is interested in us personally. C. S. Lewis said: "The Son of God became a man that men might become sons of God." God became a human being so that we might become God's children.

I want to tell you a story that helps us to understand why God came to us in human form. You may have heard this before, but I think it's worthwhile to hear it again. There was once a man who didn't believe in God, and who was skeptical of God coming to the world. His wife was a woman of faith and tried to help him to accept the love of God. He would often give her a hard time about her belief and mock her joy of Christmas. "It's all nonsense. Why would God lower himself and become a human like us? It's such a silly story," he would say.

On one snowy winter day, his wife and children left for church while he stayed home. Soon the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax before the fire when he heard a very loud thump. Something had hit the window. He looked out but couldn't see more than a few feet. When the snow let up a little, he ventured outside to see what could have been beating on his window.

In the field near his house he saw a flock of wild geese. Apparently they had been flying south for the winter when they got caught in the snowstorm. They were stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter. They just flapped their wings around the field blindly and aimlessly. And a couple of them had flown into his window, it seemed.

The man felt sorry for the geese and wanted to help them. His barn would be a great place for them to stay, he thought. It's warm and safe; surely they could spend the night and wait out the storm. So he walked over to the barn and opened the doors wide, then watched and waited hoping they would go inside. But the geese just fluttered around aimlessly and didn't seem to notice the shelter for them. The man tried to get their attention by waving a lantern, but that just seemed to scare them. He went into the house and came with some bread to make a bread crumb trail leading to the barn, but they still didn't catch on.

Now he was getting frustrated. He got behind them and tried to shoo them toward the barn, but they only got more scared and scattered in every direction except toward the barn doors. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where they would be safe.

"Why don't they follow me?!" he exclaimed. "Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm?" He thought for a moment and realized that they just wouldn't follow a human. "If only I were a goose, then I could save them," he said out loud. Then he had an idea! He went into the barn, got one of his own geese and carried it in his arms as he circled around the wild geese. He then released his goose. It flew through the flock and straight into the barn. And one-by-one the wild geese followed it to safety. The man stood silently for a moment as the words he had spoken a few minutes earlier replayed in his mind: "If only I were a goose, then I could save them!" Then he thought about what he had said to his wife earlier: "Why would God want to be like us? That's ridiculous!"

Suddenly it all made perfect sense to him. That is what God had done! We were like the geese--blind, lost, and perishing. God had his Son become like us so he could show us the way, and save us! Suddenly he understood why Jesus Christ had come. Years of doubt and disbelief vanished with the passing storm. He fell to his knees in the snow, and prayed his first prayer: "Thank you, God, for coming in human form to get me out of the storm!"

This story helps us to understand why God came to us in human form. The next question some of us may ask is: How did God come to be with us? We know that Jesus didn't descend from heaven on a spaceship. No, he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born to a virgin named Mary. Some people have a hard time believing in the virgin birth of Jesus. They would point out that artificial insemination wasn't available then, and it's biologically impossible for a virgin to have a baby. They would say this because they don't know God. When Mary asked the same question, the angel Gabriel told her, "For nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:37 NIV84). God can make anything happen! Then

why is it important for us to believe in the virgin birth of Jesus? Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, meaning he was fully divine, that is, he was born without any trace of sin. At the same time, he was born of a woman and was fully human. This is important to our faith because only Jesus, who was fully human yet without sin, could be our Savior. If he was a sinner, he would have needed a savior for himself so he couldn't be our Savior. That's one of the reasons why no human being, no matter how noble he may be, can be our savior because everyone sinned. Only the innocent blood of Jesus can wash away our dirty sins. Only Jesus could be a perfect substitute for the atonement for our sins. That is what St. Paul says next.

**Second, Jesus came to save us by dying on a cross.** Look at verse 8. ... *he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.* (NLT) The Son of God humbled himself to obey the will of God to save the sinful humanity. He came to live on earth as a shepherd for people who were lost in sin. He taught them the word of God. He healed them of their physical and spiritual sicknesses. He prayed for them. Then at the age of 33, Jesus died on a cross, between two criminals. He paid the price of our sins with his own life. That's what he did to save us from our sins.

Sometimes, the meaning of the word "save" does not fully register in our minds. When you go to a soccer game, you may ask your friend, "Hey, can you save my seat?" It sounds trivial. But saving a person is different. If a person needs to be saved, it means his or her life is at stake. He might be drowning in water. She might be in a burning building. Or they might be lost in a terrible blizzard like the geese. And that is exactly what happened to us. All of us sinned before God. We were separated from the Creator God. We were condemned to hell. That is why Jesus had to save us by dying on a cross.

So how can we be saved from eternal condemnation? From our Romans study this semester, we learned that we are justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Ro 3:24). You cannot earn your salvation by your works no matter how hard you try. It is only by the grace of God. Then what does it mean to be saved by God? What difference does salvation make in our lives? Basically, it means two things. First, we receive the gift of eternal life. This happens instantly at the very moment we repent our sins and accept Jesus as our personal Savior. We are no longer condemned to hell. We become children of God with all the privileges that come with the new identity. Second, to be saved by the grace of God means that sin no longer has its powerful dominance over us. We are no longer slaves to sin. This does not happen instantaneously, however. We don't become saints overnight. It happens gradually as we live a life of faith in God with the help of the Holy Spirit. This is called the sanctification process which we are learning from our Romans study. We are pilgrims on a journey toward heaven. Our final victory guaranteed but we still have to run toward the finish line. And our journey is not on a four-lane highway. It is on a narrow and winding road, which many people want to avoid. But we are not alone. We travel together with other believers by remembering the grace of God. We have each other to pray for us and to laugh and cry together as a Christian family. Above all, our Lord Jesus is with us.

**Third, Jesus Christ is our Lord.** Look at verses 9-11. *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* So Jesus died on a cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But God raised him from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures. And then after 40 days, he ascended to heaven. So where is Jesus now? He is sitting at the right hand of God, cheering us on to live by faith. And some day, he will come back to take us back to heaven. When Jesus comes to us the second time, he will not come as a helpless baby in a manger. He will come in his great power and glory. God elevated Jesus to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names. Every knee should bow before him and every tongue will declare that he is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Meanwhile, what should we do while we wait for his return? Paul says we should have the attitude of Christ. We should obey his words as he is our Lord. We must repent our selfish, prideful attitude so that we can work together with one mind and purpose to serve the Lord.

In conclusion, let us think about Jesus personally as we celebrate Christmas. Jesus came to us in human form to be with us and to show us the way to the kingdom of God. May God help us to have the joy of knowing Jesus and serving him! May God help all of us to be one in spirit and purpose as we serve the Lord while we wait for the second coming of Jesus!