

What Christmas Meant for Jesus

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

You know, there's no time of the year in which we're more religious than at Christmas. Now, I know we all tend to go to church a little bit more around this time of year, but that's not what I mean. What I mean is, unlike any other time of the year, we approach the days surrounding Christmas and the traditions we have with an almost religious-like purposefulness.

Now, you know what I mean. There are certain things that you must do before it begins to feel like Christmas, right? There's certain things you've got to check off your list before it feels like Christmas.

You know, maybe it's setting up the tree and the house. I don't think we got ours done until, like, December 2nd. And you would have thought it was December 23rd in my household because so many people were saying, we've got to get the tree up, Dad, you know?

[1 : 03] Or maybe it doesn't feel like Christmas until you watch Elf or Die Hard or It's a Wonderful Life. You know, these movies that you watch every year. Or maybe until you bake some sugar cookies.

Or maybe until you have Christmas dinner with all the fixings and all the family there gathered around. Or maybe it's before you go to a certain family member's house. I remember for about 15 years of my life or maybe even longer, we went and gathered with a certain family on Christmas Eve and saw them every year.

So it didn't feel like Christmas in many ways until then. Or maybe it's just reading those same old books. Books like the Polar Express or Charlie Brown or the Best Christmas Pageant Ever.

Any of these things. What are the must-dos on your lists? Because those are the things that make it feel like Christmas. I remember as a boy, it didn't feel quite like Christmas until the 9 p.m.

Candlelight Christmas Eve service.

Until we heard the same guy sing O Holy Night every year. And especially until we sang Silent Night without the sound of an organ and with only the light of a candle.

[2 : 12] You know, we love traditions. I think we as humans, we just love traditions in no time more than Christmas. And keeping these things with intentionality.

And we should. I think they're great things. You know, they're so predictable. We know it's going to happen. We've seen Charlie Brown 30 times. We know it's going to happen. And yet, so helpful. In fact, it's just because they're predictable that makes them so helpful.

Because they remind us of past Christmases and warm our hearts for this one. And yet, beneath all those other traditions, best of all, Christmas invites us to hear again and recapture the wonder of how Christ came.

Now, we know all the stories. We can read them this morning. We know about Mary and Joseph. We know how just he was. We know about the angel coming to Mary.

We know about the shepherds and the wise men. We know how it all happened. And yet, year after year, we need to hear it again to recapture the wonder. You know, as we look closely at the next few verses this morning, that's my hope.

[3 : 18] Is that if only for an hour, or hopefully not that long, you know, if only for 30 minutes, 40 minutes, the time would pause, so to speak, and our hearts would be warm to this wonder.

You know, as we continue in Philippians and dive into these verses, we're going to look at Christmas through Jesus' eyes. You know, we do know about the angels, and we know about the shepherds, and we know about the wise men, but do we know about what our Lord thought that first

Christmas night?

Do we know what motivated him? Do we know well what broke him? Do we know well how much he had to give? That's what these verses are after. They unveil the first Christmas to us.

They also unveil the heart of Christianity to us. It's exciting to be able to slow down and to consider these for a few minutes. Look at me in verse 5.

Philippians 2, verse 5. He says, He says, That is the Word of God.

[5 : 01] We're going to dive into it. Just the heading for where we're going today is, Behold, look how far Jesus the King has come to give grace. Look how far Jesus the King has come to give you, to give me, grace.

So we're going to break this out in three points. The first one is, See how low Jesus came. See how low he came. In order to see Christmas through Jesus' eyes, the Apostle Paul takes us back to eternity past.

He says in verse 6, If you look there with me, He says, He was in the form of God. He was in the form of God in eternity past.

You know, form is a funny word in our language. You know, it basically means the basic shape or mold of something. So if you were kind of working in a factory in plastics or something like that, if you're building a mold, Well, the form is what you would pour.

Right? And so the form of something wouldn't actually be the same thing. They would be very close, but they would only be similar. Does that make sense? Because the form is just the shape or the structure of something.

[6 : 10] But that's not what it means here. Here, form means the essence, the heart, the core of something. So what he's saying is that long for creation, Jesus was in the form of God.

Not in the sense that he was molded after Him and similar to Him, but in the sense that he fully reflected Him and revealed who God is. That makes sense. He was both fully God, but he also was in the form of God in the sense that he reflected who God is.

You know, Paul could have simply said, He is God. Just like John did in John 1. 1. But Paul is saying something very different here because it's richer. He's not just like God.

He's not just merely God. He fully expresses who God is. Later, it says that Jesus is in the image of God. Or it says He's the exact imprint of God's nature.

He's also called the Word, if you remember that in John 1, because He is everything God wants to say to the world about Himself. So He's in the form of God because He's reflecting God, because He's revealing God, because He's showing the world who God is.

[7 : 22] Look, and He continues there. In verse 6, Who, though He is in the form of God, did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself.

And so the idea is that although He had equal status with God, He did not act selfishly for Himself, but emptied Himself. He acted in selflessness toward us and in following God.

And you know, that word, though, and sorry, this would be the headiest part of this sermon, but the word could be translated, though, you know, in the sense that although He was in the form of God, although He had always been God, He didn't use it to His advantage, He didn't flaunt it, He didn't hold on to it.

That's one way it could be translated, but it could also be translated because. Now that changes the meaning here. Because He was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God of things to be grasped.

So obviously, He still doesn't use His status to His own advantage, but even more, because He was in the form of God, because He saw how desperate the situation for sinners was, He was willing to do whatever it took to show the world how great in love God is.

[8 : 38] That makes sense. If anyone could set the record straight, it would be this one. It would be Jesus, because He was in the form of God, He reflected and revealed God, and He was therefore on a mission to show the world how gracious, forgiving, generous, and deeply loving God is.

It just reminds us that God doesn't love us because of Jesus. One writer says it like this, God doesn't love us because Christ died for us. Christ died for us because God loves us.

And that's what that because means. That eternity passed. After we had fallen, after all this plan was about to unroll, God loved us so much, He sent Jesus. Jesus didn't come to pacify God's heart such that He began to love us.

Now that's deep stuff. We've got to keep moving, but it's helpful. So His mission, though, began by becoming a man. Look at verse 7. It says, He emptied Himself.

Continues, by being born in the likeness of men. He emptied Himself by being born in the likeness of men. He didn't lose anything. The emphasis here is that He gained something.

[9 : 50] By His own decision, He decided to have no regard for His own reputation and what He could get. He became something that He wasn't. One theologian says it this way, The Son of God became in time what He eternally was not.

He did not cease to be what He eternally was, but He began to be what He was not. That's incredible. So He was the Son of God. He was God.

He was in the form of God from all eternity, and yet He stepped into time such a way to become what He was not, to become a man, to become a baby.

Now, prior to having a baby, women go through this thing called pregnancy. It can be very difficult, uncomfortable, extraordinarily trying time for husbands.

It's probably true for wives, too, but it's hard for us as well. I mean, if your wife is pregnant, just hold on. I mean, literally. Usually you just sleep in the bed with your wife, but during pregnancy, along comes about 15 different pillows that arrange around her body, hot flashes, cold flashes, sleeplessness, roly-poly, lazy bones, whatever you name it, is going on that whole time.

[11 : 16] And then there's labor. I've heard that some husbands have actually died watching their wives give labor. It's tough. It's hard to walk through. And so, eight years ago, after we experienced all that in the delivery room, all we wanted to do was just leave all that behind and take our newborn son home.

It would have been nice to say, great, glad we got that behind us. Let's just go home. But we didn't do that because we realized that day that we didn't just have a new toy around.

We had a baby. Yeah, I remember driving home from the hospital and never drove so slow in my life. You know, I'm worried this guy does one little rock the wrong direction and we're in big trouble.

You know, we brought him in the house and we sat him down on this couch and we just kind of stared at him. Like, what are we going to do with this thing here?

You know, I mean, where's the manual? You know, they don't give you a manual when you leave the hospital. Is this even legal? You know, I don't know anything. I mean, surely there's a law being broken here.

[12 : 22] Where's that nurse? I need that nice nurse or that night nurse. You know, our baby son was so small and helpless and dependent upon us and we were clueless.

I'm not even kidding. I changed my first diaper on Rev. You know, and Paul says that's exactly how Jesus became. He became just like a little baby. It's unreal.

It says that he who receives the rightful praise of angels is born off in a far off town off the grid in a little unimportant town of Bethlehem.

It says that he who upholds the matter and molecules of the universe became a true real deal baby boy. He who flung the stars into place came to rest under them.

He who needs no food or drink or sustenance of any kind He who gives to all humankind life and breath and everything is weak helpless and made to nurse as a child.

[13 : 28] It's incredible. He who knows the name of every star and every person made in His image had to learn how to spell and how to write His name. He had to learn it just like us.

He grew up. He grew older. He grew stronger. J.F. Packer says it like this. The more you think about it the more staggering it becomes. nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth.

What He's saying is nothing is so amazing so wonder producing as is this truth that God became a man. It's the greatest mystery in the Christian faith.

I was telling my kids that Jesus is 100% man and 100% God. So you do the math. He's not like a Reesey Peecy where the outside's man and the inside's God or something like that.

You know the outside's chocolate the inside's peanut butter. It's not like that. That's where all these analogies start to break down. He's not like an egg or anything like that. He is 100% God. 100% man thoroughly mixed together.

[14 : 30] This is getting caught in my beard. Okay. And yet He became a man and driving all of that was His willingness to do whatever it takes to show the world how great God is.

That's what it is. And He became a servant. He continues look in verse 7 He says He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant.

Now there's that word again right? Form word He didn't just appear as a servant but He undertook all the lowliness all the demands all the obedience in living to serve another.

Now we know this Mark 10 44 and 45 says I've not come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many and He did come to serve men.

I mean He came to do good on this earth but in a much more important way He ultimately came to serve God. Bored into His consciousness was this commitment to serve the Father.

[15 : 28] If you remember that from John He says I've come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me. If you go through John you know so many times the Father is just referred to as Him who sent Him and He's just referred to as the sent one and so He had this wonderful obedience but mysteriously He remained God.

As a man He became a servant and became subject to God but as God He was subject to no one. How do you figure this stuff out?

But all this so that He might give us grace and raise up those to whom the Father has committed to Him. Behold look how far Jesus the King has come to show you who God is and to give you grace. Point two see how far or see how low Jesus stayed. See how low He stayed. You know we must see not only how low Jesus came but how low He stayed.

He humbled Himself. Verse 8 being found in human form He humbled Himself. Paul begins discussing humility so it's no surprise to see it again but here but what does it mean in this verse right?

[16 : 47] He continues He humbled Himself by becoming obedient. Now if we just take off our Sunday school glasses obedient this is Jesus.

Who needs to be He doesn't need to be obedient. He's God. He's perfectly He perfectly expresses God. He's in the form of God. Remember what does He need to do in order to be obedient?

Well in order to accomplish His mission He had to humble Himself in obedience for others. That's what good leaders do and that's what good kings do. For the past several months or actually the past year or so I've been reading the Chronicles of Narnia to my kids C.S. Lewis is fantastic books and one of them really struck me The Horse and His Boy it tells the story of a young boy making his way back to his family into his home where he's been estranged since birth he's kind of raised by another man in another country and he when he finds his home that's the whole track of the book when he finds his home he discovers that his father is the king and that he is in line to be the next king because he's just a wee bit older than his twin brother Corrin and his brother I love this part his brother rejoices at that news you know I mean most people want to be the king right you know if you're playing checkers you want to be the king you know you don't want to be on the other side where someone has lots of king but Corrin is rejoicing because he understands what the king what being the king means and he says to his father and to his brother he says hooray hooray

I shan't have to be king I shan't have to be king I'll always be a prince and it's the princes that have all the fun and his father responds he says that's truer than your brother knows for this is what it means to be king to be first in every desperate attack and last in every desperate retreat and man that maps so on to what Christ is doing why does he come in this way because a good king doesn't think about himself a good king thinks about his people and when the true king the lord our lord and savior Jesus Christ saw the desperate condition that we were in because of our sin he made himself first in the desperate attack for us he humbled himself and became obedient for us you know humility does not end at his birth it only began there he's the prime example of humility that's what Paul's talking about he was the one who counts others more significant than himself he's the one who looks not only after his own interest but also the interests of others and so the bible says that he went on from the cradle and what one writer called a pattern of non self-centered self-giving obedience the humility that he needed was just this pattern of life in which he humbles himself again and again and again so obviously this humility meant he obeyed God perfectly in word thought and deed which is incredible he never lashed out he never grew bitter he never lusted he never preferred his own comfort to the needs of others we can think yeah but that's easy that's Jesus right I mean if anybody should be able to do this it's him but that's not true at all because Jesus was made like us in every respect his temptations were real and because he resisted to the full his temptations were more difficult than any of ours the pressures and temptations were constant on his life have you ever walked in a room where you knew you weren't welcome I'm sure you've had this experience where you walk in a room and you just feel as if everybody's staring at you like who is this guy you know I don't know like he doesn't fit in here as if you walk in a room and everybody

thinks they're better than you or maybe they just don't like you it's so different right than being at home you know a phrase we use around the house is like you get home you kind of let your hair down you know i don't have much hair to let down but in college i did have a mane and uh you know you you get home you kind of let your hair down you can relax right because you know you're in a place where you're completely loved and accepted well that sense of not belonging and being hated even never left the savior i mean think about this why did he pull away like that and pray through the night if only because he was trying so hard to not give in and give up because these temptations were so great so he had to obey god word thought and deed this humility also many had to obey god by suffering on the cross look in verse seven eight again he says by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross obedient to the point of death even death on a cross now this is a sudden transition you think wait what this is the one who we just talked about was in the form of god and had equality with god you know this is the one who was perfect in every way and yet had to be obedient to the point of death on a cross j.i.

packer says it like this he says the crucial significance of the cradle at bethlehem lies in its place in the sequence of steps down that led the son of god to the cross at calvary and we don't understand the cradle till we see it in this context the crucial significance of the cradle at bethlehem is the sequence of steps it led to the cross at calvary that's incredible the sequence of sequence of steps down as he went further and further down as he approached calvary you know this just as well as i do the temptations kept coming he was ridiculed mocked spat upon he was slapped punched and whipped scripture says he never opened his mouth he never fought back his humility took him lower and lower one writer said he took him on an un-roman resume of shame you know we build our resume with things that will move us up jesus built his because he was coming for us he built his with things that took him down and he went down from a glorious throne of heaven not just to a cradle at bethlehem but to a cross a roman cross at calvary several years ago an ad ran in the new york times that said the meaning of christmas is that love will triumph and that we will be able to put together a world of unity and peace i think that's what most people believe right if we just work together we can overcome how bad this world is and if we're honest it is pretty bad you know there's lots of poverty lots of injustice lots of evil and so we have this power within us if we just work together and work harder we can get it but that's not the meaning of christmas at all right that's why years ago the baptists popularized this phrase that jesus is the reason for the season i'm sure you've heard that phrase right jesus is the reason for the season that's a wonderful phrase he is wonderfully he is but i like the way another pastor came after that and said what's the reason for the reason jesus is the reason for the season but what's the reason for the reason and if we look at the cross of calvary the reason for the reason is sin humanity can't put the world back together even with the best and brightest and all the world's wealth humanity is desperately sick because of sin humanity is on a crash course because of sin and the essence of sin is putting myself in place of god saying i reject your rule i act as if you don't exist i live life as i want and i'm my own boss and therefore the only answer the only acceptable answer before the heavens is that jesus would come and put himself in place of sinners that he would receive the wrath that we deserve so if you know your bible if you've gone to the old testament all throughout the way there are these sacrifices where where they put these worshipers they offer a sacrifice they put the sacrifice in the place of them but the sacrifice does not do it it does not hold it can only absolve sin for a little bit of time you know and so other places in the bible talk about how these sacrifices did not help and were not effectual and so there's only one answer that he who is in the form of god must stand between god and man and enter that place and he must sacrifice be sacrificed in our place and so that's the meaning that's the reason the reason the reason the reason is that we put ourselves in place of god and we need someone to put himself in our place that's what jesus came to do so when jesus came that first christmas i don't know how he thought it but he knew he was headed to that cross at calvary remember it says later on that he set his face

[26 : 15] like flint for jerusalem most people turned from trouble he walked right into it our text says he was obedient to the point of death you know sometimes i think we think about the cross like the cross just overtook him i mean as you would expect i mean it is the most gruesome form of execution known to man or devised by man and so we think that the cross just overtook him it just stole its life death is a thief!

and the cross stole his life but that's not what this text says it says he was obedient to the point of death you remember what he said he said i lay down my life no one takes it from me i take it up and

i lay it down and so what this verse would tell us to me is that he hung there obediently willingly until all the wrath of god for sinners was exhausted i mean do we think jesus was quiet on the cross i don't think so at all i don't think death was overtaking him such that he was he was quieted by it but he hung there screaming out until all that wrath was gone and all the physical pain and the spiritual separation from god that ripped apart his heart he hung there until it was all gone and in obedience when it was all done and everything everyone else had fled he said it's finished remember those words he yielded up his spirit death did not take jesus life his obedience rendered it to god that's incredible that means everything we need to approach god without fear is found in that cross and nowhere else look how far or look how low he came look how low he stayed he who is rightfully deserving of the praise of angels endlessly is the one who spat upon and mocked on that cross a poet says it this way herbert says it this way oh all ye who pass by behold and see man stole the fruit but i must climb the tree the tree of life to all but only me was ever there a grief like mine now heal thyself physician now come down that's what they all said just come down from that cross you're big and great he says alas i did so when i left my crown and father's smile for you to feel his frown was ever there a grief like mine behold below look how far jesus the king has come to give you grace lastly see how high jesus is exalted to see christmas through jesus eyes we must see the goal for which all of this was pointed verse 9 is a radical transition you know it jumps from the cross at calvary to the exaltation in heaven look there it says therefore verse 9 god is highly exalted and bestowed on him the name that is above every name therefore we're kind of taken in this moment where jesus is honored and exalted by god god exalts him and bestows on him the name that is above every name i love this part of the text because all of this text has been dominated by jesus willing action all that he did all that he chose to do but now god takes over he says you go to that cross and i'm taking over now i love that and god exalts him and gives him the name that is above every name and if you read your bible you've thought what is that name well that's just the lord that's the lord so he's given the name of the lord now i read this and i think hasn't he always been the lord well yes he has as god the son but now he comes in as god the uh as jesus christ the one fully god and fully man and he's declared and exalted publicly as the lord for all time jesus took up his body when he entered earth and he he holds

his body in heaven as the son as the god man jesus christ and so he's exalted there and i just love to think about what that would be like you know if the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents how much more for the king who's come to rescue many sinners if the father runs to the younger son in the parable who wants to be clean of his filth and sin and he calls for the feast and kills the fattened cat how much more for the the son who died to bring many sons and daughters to glory and there's no way to capture this completely but there's one song that helps me each year as i think about this scene from handel's messiah probably a song you've heard the words say the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our lord and his christ who knew and He shall reign forever and ever, King of Kings, forever and ever, Lord of Lords, forever and ever, it just keeps building and building, King of Kings, forever and ever, Lord of Lords, forever and ever, we can't just say it once, King of Kings, forever and ever, Lord of Lords, forever and ever, it just keeps going on, and on, and on, and sopranos keep climbing higher, and higher, and higher, to announce, and He is the King, and we worship Him, We adore him. He's the one that went on the long lost mission to capture his bride.

He's the one that went the furthest distant imaginable to rescue his people. He's the king and he should be worshipped and adored. In England, when it was first performed, King George II was there.

[32 : 23] The stories say that as the refrains kept saying, Christ is a king of kings. And Christ is a Lord of lords. And they kept saying he will reign forever and ever.

King George II stood. Because it was as if he was in the presence of the true king. The true Lord. The king of kings. And the Lord of lords.

That's what it would be like. Or that's what it was like when the king returned to heaven. God exalted him. God rejoiced over him.

All who had waited for him rejoiced over him. The father honored him above everyone else. He completed his mission. He came so low. And it was finished.

His sacrifice was accepted. He cleared the way to God so that only grace is left for anyone that would come to him. And the father crowned him King of kings. Lord of lords.

[33 : 22] That's what he has tattooed on his leg in Revelation 19. You'll find that out at Belanche. But our text concludes by fast forwarding to the end of time.

It's such a sweeping passage. Look down in verse 10. He says, He was crowned King of kings and Lord of lords.

So that 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 to the glory of God the Father.

It says, The honor and exaltation of God is not enough.

For all that he's done, he must be crowned by all. Now, I've intentionally left very little application in this message. But I just want you to look.

[34 : 21] I just want us to see. I just want us to behold again. To see how far he humbled himself. To see how low he stayed in obedience.

I mean, have any of us resisted in temptation to the point of shedding our blood? It's what Hebrews 12 says. No one has. But he shed enough blood for you and me.

And behold how high he's exalted. He's the King of all. And reigns on the throne of grace. And my prayer is just that these next couple days, that time would slow down.

And that we would look and see and wonder. That he would do all this for sinners like you and me. We desperately need him. And he's given all that he has for us.

Let us pray. Father in heaven. Father in heaven, thank you for your mercy towards us and Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray God that you would help us these few days.

[35 : 27] I do pray for time to slow down. Lord, our hearts can be so fickle. And they can wander so far. And so I just pray, God, for just a few short moments here, a few short moments there, a few moments of prayer there, a few moments of reading there.

That you would cause our hearts to soar in wonder. That you would love us so much that you would come for us. That you would love us so much that you would die for us.

Love us so much. That you would welcome us into your presence without fear and with great joy.

We thank you. That you embraced the cross and despised its shame for the joy set before you.

Sinners like us who would trust in you with all our hearts. We thank you and we praise you. In Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, Lead Pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.