



THEOLOGY CORNER

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“The Mission of Christ from Crib to Cross”

As we celebrate the Nativity of the Lord and the coming weeks of the Christmas season, it is helpful to consider two aspects of this magnificent event, namely, the *what* and the *why*. In short, we can say the crib is the “what” and the cross is the “why.” Let us look first to what God did, which is what we call the Incarnation—a wondrous moment in time in which God sent His only begotten Son into the world. The Second Person of the Trinity, God himself, took on a human nature. Many other world religions believe that their spiritual perfection comes by way of ascending to the heavens, but this is not so with Christianity. For the Christian, the situation is quite unique in that God himself instead comes down to *us*, perfecting our souls and making us holy by his very presence sharing in our humanity. The uniqueness of the Incarnation cannot be stressed enough. God literally dwelt among us by humbling himself to share in our humanity. As St. Paul explains it, “...though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant...” (Phil 2:6-7). Why would God do such a thing so as to give up his divine right and live among us as a man? Could he not have simply chosen to save humanity by just willing it to be? Of course he could...he’s God! But he willed nothing more than to come to us in such poverty and taking it upon himself to experience human suffering. Why? Because God is love. The very nature of love is to offer itself, and God who is love itself offers himself in the form of Jesus Christ who is born into the world in the humblest of circumstances—in a trough that farm animals eat from and in a family that is far from being wealthy.

We have discussed a lot about the “what” but let’s delve a little deeper in the “why.” We know that God is love and that is the most fundamental “why” behind the Incarnation, but why did he specifically choose for those specific state of affairs to take place exactly as they did? I think we should look at this from two perspectives: 1) God chose to take on our humanity for the purpose of reconciling us to God. 2) To become a perfect human being so as to serve as an example—to teach us the way to salvation. Let us consider both of these in turn. As to the first, the great Archbishop Fulton Sheen often said, “You and I come into this world to live, but Christ, the Son of God, did not come into this world to live. He came into it to die.” As striking as this sounds, it couldn’t be more true. There would be no need for God to become man if we had not sinned. The Father sent his Son as a Savior to the world. We know that this act of salvation was accomplished on the cross, when Christ offered himself up in obedience to the Father.

Not only does self-giving flow from his nature, it is also pedagogical.

In other words, by His entrance into the world, the Word became flesh in order to restore our relationship with God. As we may know, this was the most fitting way to perfectly restore humanity back into right relationship with Him. Through all the broken covenants and all the imperfect sacrifices to the Lord, we receive the God child who would later go on to make the most perfect sacrifice for our sins. For this reason, Christ says before his earthly death on the cross, “It is finished.” But what exactly does this mean? What was finished was His work of atonement for our sins, and the establishment of the New Covenant in Christ. The gates of heaven were opened, and we can now obtain salvation as a free gift by and through God’s grace. Alleluia!

He came to us in such poverty. Why? Because God is love and he dives into our misery. Love has to offer itself, so too must love offer himself. God’s happiness is to give himself up. To share his goodness with the world. To understand the mystery of Christmas, we have to place it side by side with the cross. Only then can we understand the true mission of Christ from crib to cross. Though he was equal to God, he did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather he emptied himself. Failure has always been a pathway to triumph.