

Discussion Notes
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When God Was Little Part 1
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The nation of Israel had found itself in such a place. The darkness had nothing to do with a lack of daylight. The darkness was created by the absence of God's voice; it was a spiritual darkness, a void that left the people of God in a deep place of lack.

For many years they had heard God's selected spokesmen, the prophets warning them they had to change their ways to have a right relationship with Yahweh. But they failed at it. They found idols to worship; they set aside their ancient stories of grand deliverance from oppressors and God's rich faithfulness that followed and allowed their world view to be corrupted. Their nation paid the price. The northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria and the southern kingdom later went into captivity in Babylon. Even after their return to Judah from Babylonia for the most part the Israelites still struggled with their faithfulness to God.

In the final book of the Old Testament the prophet Malachi had some sobering words for them....

Malachi 4:1 The Lord of Heaven's Armies says, "The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. On that day the arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw. They will be consumed—roots, branches, and all.

A bleak outlook for sure but then, the God who never gives up on us also put these words of hope into the mouth of the prophet.

2 “But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture.

The prophet then drops his pen and the Lord speaks no more for 400 years. In a society that had counted on the Word of the Lord through the prophets, the silence would have been deafening.

The High God of Heaven – was no longer speaking to them. They had gone that far in disobedience, they had so messed up their relationship with the Almighty that it seemed as if He had turned away from them. Those who heard the silence the most lived without hearing but with hope. They held onto to what they knew, what had been spoken in the past (like the rising of the Sun of Righteousness); their religion was not lost but it was missing its life through the presence of a communicating God.

It's hard to fathom the growing sense of spiritual isolation, particularly an isolation that lasted four centuries. I remember as a child a form of punishment my mom would use was just stop talking to us. It was a cold silence that grew in its lack of comfort the longer it went on. My mom knew what she was doing. Her silence gave us time to reflect on what exactly we had done and ultimately it would lead to our making things right. By the time she was ready to break her – we were so ready to hear her voice again, it was the thing that helped us know it was going to be alright.

God would speak again. Malachi's final words underlined a hope to come that was spoken not only by him, but by his predecessor prophets like Isaiah and Zachariah who in essence all said as Isaiah did....

Isaiah 32:1 : “Look a righteous King is coming!”.

The Sun of Righteousness would not come however without a proper introduction. God would speak through another prophet, another Elijah who would usher in this new era and he happened to be a man called John.

An angel of the Lord had appeared before John's father, Zechariah, a Jewish priest and had told him that his wife – who had been barren all of these years, was now going to have a baby. Elizabeth along with Zechariah had called out to God for a child and now that it was going to happen Zechariah could hardly believe it and actually doubted the words of the angel. His doubt was met with the loss of his ability to speak again until the child's birth. Again “silence” was teaching a strong lesson.

Zechariah's trimester silence was finally broken when he insisted on following the angel's instructions by calling his newly arrived son – John. Scripture says instantly he could speak again and began praising God. And then – filled with the Holy Spirit – Zechariah says this about his son.

Luke 1:68-79

68 “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,

because he has visited and redeemed his people.

69 He has sent us a mighty Savior

from the royal line of his servant David,

70 just as he promised

through his holy prophets long ago.

76 “And you, my little son,

will be called the prophet of the Most High,

because you will prepare the way for the Lord.

77 You will tell his people how to find salvation

through forgiveness of their sins.

78 Because of God’s tender mercy,

the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,

79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

and to guide us to the path of peace.”

The morning light, the Sun of Righteousness, was about to break upon the people of the land and they desperately needed it. God’s silence had ended and soon the one who would give light would be among them. The end of the 400 year timeout found God’s people in a difficult place and ready for a supernatural remedy. The Jews were an unwilling subject of the Roman Empire. They could worship and have limited authority over themselves. They had a high priest but were faced with many of religious authorities, Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes (teachers of the religious law). And over them was a religious Supreme Court called the high council or Sanhedrin. There was religious politics, power broking and of course the ongoing oppression of Roman rule. The people’s hope was

found in the words spoken by God into their history centuries before, written by the prophets they anticipated the coming the Messiah – the one who was to change their world. A morning light from heaven to break upon them....

John's mother, Elizabeth was six months along, when her relative Mary – was met by the same angel who carried similar news for her – except Mary's child would incredibly be born not through a man, but through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:18-23 18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. 20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

23 “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

**She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means ‘God is with us.’”**

The story of the birth of Jesus has been, for most of us, a part of our lives since we were children. Even if we did not come from Christian homes – the account of Mary and Joseph searching for an inn and ending up in a stable is one we know well.

“When God was little” - the title of our Christmas series – is meant to bring us to one of the most astonishing facts in the history of our humanity. These few well know verses we have just looked at uncover for us the richest expression of love ever demonstrated. The incarnation – God putting on human flesh began a redemption story 2,000 years ago that tangibly reaches right into our here and now because God’s desire to break through our own spiritual darkness and illuminate our world continues today.

No other religion goes this far. No other expression of faith offers this most practical and yet highest interaction between Almighty God and His creation. The coming of Jesus, through the physical body of a Galilean woman called Mary changes everything. A huge part of our pattern of worship in this Christmas season is to take a good, strong look back to when “God was little” and consider what His living as one of us, has meant for us.

Consider the question – why come as a baby at all? A baby comes into this world with nothing and needing everything. He or she leaves the womb to be suddenly thrust into what can be a harsh world where lungs need to operate on their own, where the ambient air temperature is much less comfortable than the waters of the womb. The umbilical cord is cut and food finds its way to a new stomach which is subject to gas, burps, spit-ups and diapers. The notion of the Messiah

coming to be with His people boggled the minds of the day and even led to His rejection – because it was hard to answer the question – why would He come as a baby at all? Many had expected a mighty king to break into their world ready to do battle with the oppressors and set them free, certainly not a child born of common stock.

As we begin this Christmas season it is good for us to ponder the incarnation, that moment in our history “when God was little”. Perhaps even ask the same questions the Jews of 2,000 years ago would ask. Why? Why this way? The answers are meaningful because they help form our understanding of what it means to claim Jesus as Lord over our lives. Why the incarnation, what can we learn about God and how does it speak into our relationship with Jesus? Here are 8 simple thoughts...

First as to why; plain and simple the incarnation is **God’s answer**. God could do as He pleased and He did. The Father sent His Son. While a first response may be to dismiss the incarnation as just too much or over the top – we must consider the sovereign nature of its originator. Our pre-disposition for coming up with better answers, always fall short in light of God’s wisdom. There is great mystery in the incarnation and yet its simplicity and its finality as our only answer to life ahead is nothing less than God breathed. *To embrace the truth of the incarnation is wisdom; to dismiss it is to miss our own redemption story.*

Colossians 1:19-20 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, 20 and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace

with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

Through the coming of the incarnated Jesus we see God is **faithful** – He does what He says He will do – always. He is no way restricted by our timing or what we think is best. The coming of Jesus as a child was a long standing promise by God through His prophets. As much as He was prophesied to be a coming King, He was prophesied to begin His journey on this planet as a baby. God did exactly what He promised to do.

Isaiah 9:6 For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The Incarnation shows Jesus to be **submitted** to the will of the Father. Before He found Himself surrounded by the mess of the stable, the mess of a broken world, He came in obedience; sent by His Father. The mystery and wonder of the Trinity comes into play here; God, three persons in One – each member with their own role. In His coming Jesus teaches us of the importance of submission to the will of the Father.

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will.

The coming of the Christ Child teaches us about the very essence of **sacrifice**. It begins with the Father giving up His Son for us to walk among us and touch our brokenness. It is about Jesus Himself giving up His rights as God to walk with us.

It is about His death on the cross sacrificing His life for us so that we might live.
No greater love.

Philippians 3:5-8 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. 7 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, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

The incarnation is about **relationship**. Jesus comes as a fully relatable God. Over the millennia religions have come and gone and many remain today that have developed a god who is distant, immoveable and far from personal. Our God has always related to His people – in person or through another. The Old Testament is full of dialog between God and His own. The coming of Jesus brings the relatable side of God to a whole new level. Because he came in the flesh – we could literally touch Jesus, gaze into His eyes, and hear His voice. God as a child had 10 toes and 10 fingers. He ate, He burped, He grew to play, to learn, to pick up a hammer to develop deep friendships. Jesus coming to Bethlehem was all about relationship.

John 15:15 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. **ESV**

We know He's "been there" – Jesus **understands** the human experience because for 33 years He has lived in our skin. *While remaining sinless he gained the grime of the world.* He experienced life – our life. He wept, He laughed, He

partied and pitied, He was angry, He was compassionate, He listened and He taught. Today, when the word says Jesus sits at the right hand of His Father and He intercedes for us – it is because He knows us, He knows us very, very well.

Hebrews 4:15 15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.

We know He “**showed up**” and that calls us on to do the same. The breaking through of the morning light showed us that Jesus cared enough about His creation to show up and provide the mechanism for its redemption. His “showing up” begs the question – will we “show-up?” – will we meet Him face to face?

Proverbs 8:17 “I love all who love me. Those who search will surely find me.”

We know Jesus is ultimately about an **invitation** and it is for every single one of us. When Jesus arrived on that cool Bethlehem night He came for all. He levelled the playing the field, He created an open table of opportunity and said all are welcome here. The welcome mat was laid out the night He arrived.

John 3:16 16 For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

When God was little - The light broke through darkness sin; through oppression, through religion, through disobedience, through uncaring attitudes and intransigence, through the lie of the enemy. Jesus came as the hope for the lost, the broken, the hurting – He came to break through our darkness – When God was little - He came for us.

We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. (1 John 1:1, 2 NLT)

Discussion Questions

- How did this message on the incarnation affect you? Have you considered the depth of Christmas before?
- What parts about the incarnation that were highlighted spoke to you?
- What comfort, hope joy, or peace do you take from the Christmas season?