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A Christmas Prayer

John 17:1-5

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

One of our best-known Christmas carols, was written by Charles Wesley in 1739 and published in a collection *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. It originally began with the line, “*Hark, how all the welkin rings, Glory to the King of Kings*” and was paired with a quite solemn tune. The opening line was changed by the evangelist George Whitefield and it was put to the music by Felix Mendelssohn in 1840 to give us the song we know and love today. As with many Wesley hymns, this song presents grand gospel truth. The second verse gives us a great statement of what took place when our Savior was born in Bethlehem:

*Christ by highest heav'n adored,
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of a Virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

The Christmas season and this carol in particular remind us of another great word of our Christian faith – ***Incarnation***. Incarnation, literally “in flesh”, is the truth that the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, came to earth and took on human nature so that He might live a perfect life, suffer and die on the cross, and rise again dead so that our sins might be forgiven and His righteousness credited to us. This is the truth Wesley describes. This is the teaching we find throughout the Bible. In John 1 we read that “***the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from***

the Father, full of grace and truth”. In Philippians 2 we see how Jesus, “***...Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***”

We find no greater description of this truth than Jesus’ prayer in John 17. This is sometimes called the “High Priestly Prayer” as Jesus prays for His disciples (and for us). In this prayer we find displayed the astounding relationship between Jesus, God the Son, and His Heavenly Father and the expression that Jesus was both God and man. This is why we are calling it a “Christmas Prayer” as it describes for us the greatest truth of Christmas – God’s plan of salvation and the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

¹Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, ² even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. ³ This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴ I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Jesus' disciples were blest to hear Jesus praying to His Heavenly Father. In His praying, Jesus is demonstrating that even though He was God, as a man He was dependent upon the Father. We are reminded of how often the disciples saw Jesus praying constantly throughout His life and ministry. At His baptism, while He was praying, heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3:21). When He began His public ministry, Jesus got up early in the morning, went to a secluded place, and prayed (Mark 1:35). As He prepared to select His disciples, Jesus went off to a mountain to pray, and spent the whole night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12). It was as Jesus was praying that He was transfigured before Peter, John, and James, giving them a glimpse of His future glorified body (Luke 9:29). And, of course, we are aware of His prayers in the garden (Luke 22:39-46) and on the cross (Luke 23).

In this prayer we also see the wonderful plan of salvation from the Father and the Son's perspective. Jesus prays, "**Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...**". As we are reading the Gospel of John, we know that Jesus is praying immediately before He is to be arrested, tried, and crucified. The Father sent His Son that we might know God and have eternal life. The Father gave the Son the work of living a perfect life and suffering a brutal death in order to provide our salvation, and this is the work He accomplished. Those who repent and put their faith in Christ are the Father's gift to the Son. Five times in this prayer Jesus refers to those believers who the "**Father has given Him**".

The greatest and most glorious truth of Christmas is described for us in verse 5 as Jesus prays, "**Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was**". We do not begin the story with the baby in the manger. We look to eternity past and consider the glory of the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can only try to consider and contemplate this glorious Person before He came to earth.

Jesus had glory with the Father and came from glory into this world. So, what happened to His glory while He was here? He did not stop being God. He voluntarily laid aside His glory, the visible expression of being God. This is what Wesley meant when he wrote, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see..." Jesus' glory was still there, but it was veiled or covered by His flesh.

Most would look at Jesus and just see a common man. Of this coming Savior Isaiah wrote, "**He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.**" (Isaiah 53:2-3).

As Jesus taught in His hometown of Nazareth some would reject Him saying, "**Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?**" **And they took offense at Him.**" (Mark 6:3). But to those who believed in Him Jesus would say, "**He who has seen Me has seen the Father**" (John 14:9; 12:45). Of these believers John wrote, "**We beheld His glory**" (John 1:14).

Our Response

What is our response as we read Jesus' prayer to His Father? We should ever have a sense of wonder, adoration, and worship for the truth that God the Son veiled or covered His glory as man.

We should revel and rejoice in God's glorious plan of salvation.

We should look to Jesus as our greatest example of glorifying God in all He said and did.

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 18

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