



The Greatest Gift – God With Skin On

"Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name [was] Mary." –Lk. 1:26-27

Does your god love you enough to come via virgin birth and put skin on? Talk-show host, Larry King, was once asked who, of all the people that have ever lived, he'd want to interview most. King said that his choice would be Jesus of Nazareth, and that he would ask Him only one question: "Are You indeed virgin born?"

"The answer to that question," King said, "would explain history for me." Although Larry officially considers himself an agnostic, Mr. King really grasped things in this respect. He understands that if Jesus Christ's virgin birth was a reality – if Christ truly is the Son of the most high God – then a fresh way of seeing all of life 24/7 bursts out for us, free from all constrictions of naturalism.

I like what author Philip Yancey says about the virgin birth of Jesus. He calls it "the Great Invasion." He describes this Advent "a daring raid by the ruler of the forces of good into the universe's seat of evil."

The virgin birth speaks to me of purity, holiness and the loving, miracle working power of God! It says there's a proactive God out there who cares about all the details of our lives – One that wants to be with us, help us and show us that he understands what we're going through. He really loves you and wants you to put Him first for your own benefit. How you seek Him and live matters to him. He wants you to experience joy in a close relationship with Himself through Christ this Christmas. He wants you to be pure, to live what you believe, be on-fire-in-love and have increasing faith. You remember how The Lord commanded Timothy, "...be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Ti 4:12). Jesus came to this earth so we could have these things.

Now as your family celebrates this holy Advent, I pray you will revel in the realities that this invasion can bring to you personally. What realities? Well, in a single verse of Scripture Paul the Apostle sets forth four great truths surrounding Christ's birth that can affect you directly, if you will allow them to: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). Man, talk about Christmas Gifts! Go ahead – unwrap these four presents early. These gifts are for you, and they were bought for you at a great price.

1.) The Gift of the Incarnation

A frightened little girl came late one night into her parents' bedroom. "I can't sleep, Daddy" she cried. "I'm scared." Her father tried to calm her: "Sweetheart, you don't need to be afraid. God is with you." "I know," the little girl whimpered, "but sometimes I need a God with skin on!"

We all do. "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Phil 2:6-7). And this is exactly what we have in the Person of Jesus Christ. "God was in Christ." The prophet declared, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matt. 1:23). This means God is in your corner, strengthening and lifting you. And He's been there. He knows from personal experience what you're going through. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). God is with you. What a Gift! Choose to be with Him.

2.) The Gift of Reconciliation

Jesus came to earth with a clear objective. He came to make a way for rebellious humanity to be brought back to God. He was God's plan A and there is no plan B. Through Christ, God was "reconciling the world to Himself." Now we can be born again to live in unbroken, harmonious fellowship with God as our Father – all because merciful Jesus put skin on. The Amplified Bible begins John 3:16 in this way, "For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He even gave His only begotten Son" Coming to know Jesus is the one and only way back into God's favor and family. "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). God accepts you.

3.) The Gift of Salvation

Talk about a reason for sinners to rejoice –no longer is God "counting their trespasses against them!" Every time we have ever sinned and broken the laws of our Lord, the Bible says these transgressions were logged and put on record against us before a holy God. But this record of wrongs was nailed to the cross. What radically vivid imagery – as Christ was nailed to the cross, the record of our sins was nailed on that splintery wood with Him! He was paying for our sins as He shed His own blood. He has forgiven me. I'm free! This is the miracle of salvation. "And when you were dead in your transgressions . . . He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col. 2:13-14). You too can be saved in fullest sense of the term. Hallelujah, what a Savior! God will forgive you. Come to Him today!

4.) The Gift of Participation

Now, "He has committed to us the word of reconciliation." We start by praying and then participate with God in bringing the world to Himself. We speak the word as the Spirit directs us. That is why evangelism is so thrilling. We are privileged to participate with God in what is closest to His heart – to ensure that His Son receives worship from redeemed people from every tribe and nation. The Bible tells us how angels would love to get in on this action, but God has reserved redemption and its worldwide proclamation

for us. God fills you with His joy and entrusts you with this Good News. He says "Go" because there's huge need across the oceans and across your street.

Reflect on His promise, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). That's why we can participate. The virgin birth of Jesus gave new significance to the name Immanuel, which means "God with us" (1:23).

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel. —Wesley*

Did you know that nine out of ten Americans affiliate themselves with a church, a denomination, or some other religious group today? Less than 5 percent of Americans claim to have a faith outside of the Judeo-Christian mainstream. This came out in a study by Baylor University dealing with piety in America that was released in September '06. A quarter of those who were surveyed would describe God as: distant and not active in their lives – not active in the world. They think of God as some cosmic, impersonal force which set the laws of nature in motion, not as the engaging, loving Father we find depicted in the Bible. Americans think of Jesus as a fairly good man whose sexual partner was Mary Magdalene. Among those who label themselves as mainline Protestants, 22 percent believe the Bible is merely an ancient book of history and legends, another 22 percent never read the Bible, 12 percent never pray, and 14 percent never attend a weekly service to worship God. It's no wonder then that when George Barna completed a similar survey in 2003, he discovered that only 4 percent of American adults have a biblical worldview as the basis of their decision-making. How sad! There's need across the street!

Why is there, in our culture, such a tendency to compartmentalize faith? Many Christians today are like the designers of the ship, Titanic. We believe that if we can just compartmentalize the hull to contain the results of damage, the rest of the ship will never sink. That's why the people in these surveys could say they believed in God, but then go on to live lives their own way – lives of practical atheism. But understanding and applying biblical principles to all of life means carefully integrating your relationship with Christ into all the nitty-gritty details of life 24/7/365. You were made for an everyday Jesus! You were created to celebrate Christmas every day!

In the Fisher's mighty hand,
kurt



