

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

A Christmas to Remember

Raj Nathaniel; 23 December 2018

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Before we get into our study of the Word, some background business first. The birth of Jesus is recorded diversely in the 4 Gospels. The birth of Christ is recorded in the first 2 chapters of Matthew and Luke. Mark doesn't even mention it and John alludes to it in the verse that we just read. And what is also interesting is that there is absolutely NO celebration of the Christ birth anywhere in the early church as recorded in the book of Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament. There is a good reason for this and we will get to it shortly.

John writes in the opening lines of his book...that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Then in verse 14 John mentions that the Word became flesh, dwells among mankind and that they have seen His glory. John is talking about Jesus being the Word of God. So for Jesus to become flesh, He has to have left His dwelling with the Heavenly Father in order to become flesh and bones.

Jesus came from the Father. Left the Father to be with us. If we want to be like Jesus, we also need to leave. But what do we leave? Who is our Father?

All of us when we are born, no matter the circumstances, are born under the power of Sin. In other words, sin is our default lineage because Adam sinned from the influence of Satan who is the original sinner.

What did Jesus say to the Pharisees?

Read John 8:44 Jesus said... "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning,

and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

And so we too start out as children of sin with the devil as our spiritual father. But when our eyes are opened, to the Gospel we have that choice to leave the devil father to be born again new, into the Family of God with a Heavenly Father.

1. Jesus was born so that I can be born again into His family.

Now let us look at the birth day.

Read Luke 1: 26-32

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David (this last prophecy has not yet been fulfilled).

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth. The Jewish calendar begins with the month Nisan, which coincides with our March-April and adding 6 months according to this verse, Mary's visitation then would have occurred around our September-October... And counting a 9 month gestation, Jesus then would have been born around June-July at best. So contrary to popular belief, the Bible is very clear about the birth day! How then did we end up with 25th December...that happened when the Roman empire under Emperor Constantine institutionalized the Christian faith as the Official Religion of the Empire. Everything went downhill from there. Pagan priests who until the day before sacrificed to Roman gods, now all of a sudden 'became' Christian priests. As it is said old habits die hard, and they brought with them all the Roman practices into Christianity with the inception of the Roman catholic church and every Roman festival now was changed to have

a Christian name and link including 25th December. And not even the Protestant Reformation movement in the 1500s and 1600s corrected the false Roman-Christian festivals. This is one reason why we do not see any reference to the celebration of Christmas day in the early church history anywhere in the New Testament.

The second and more important reason for the lack of any reference to Christmas day is because of the Words of Jesus Himself regarding the main purpose of why He was born in the first place...which is to die for the Sins of the whole world as planned by the Trinity even before the world was created. And furthermore, Jesus always reminded His disciples and those around Him the purpose of His life.

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

John 5:30 I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent me.

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

And what was the will of God the Father for His Son? That the Son should die for the sins of the whole world. John 3:16

Read John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Christ coming to the earth meant that death wasn't the end anymore! It was only the beginning of eternal life with the Heavenly Father. And thus the entire focus and spotlight of the early church was on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

That is why the early church gathered on the Resurrection day. That is Sunday...because on the 3rd day He rose from the dead, so the early church began to meet regularly on Sunday to commemorate the resurrection because of Jesus' own words that He is the resurrection and

the life of all humankind. So too, for us as believers, our own death and resurrection should be the main focus of our lives just as it was for Jesus and the early church.

Jesus The Word became Flesh.

What did Jesus do here? It's not as simple as being born as a baby. After He left the Heavenly Father, Jesus took on a carbon based life form. He had skin, muscle and bones, and all the other body systems we associate with the human body. But what does this mean?

Read Philippians 2:6-7 Jesus.... ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself (or denied divine privilege), by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

That's what Jesus gave up to become a full human being. At every point in His earthly life, He was fully God...but He did not grasp at that power, but instead gave it all up to be fully human. He deferred on everything to the Heavenly Father's will. Set for us an example to follow.

The verse also says that not only did He become a human, but He dwelt among us. What does this mean? It means that Jesus experienced human life as we do. The writer to the Hebrews justifies why God chose to do that...it is so that He would be a just sacrifice, a perfect sacrifice, tempted in every way as a human yet without sin. And as a human being Jesus even tasted death. The Full spectrum, birth through death...is all there is for the human being.

Read Hebrews 9:27 It is appointed for a human to die once... then comes judgment.

Jesus even subjected Himself to that rule.

The rule of death. That's what it means to be fully human. Because of all the Spiritual beings of creation only humans get to die. God doesn't die. Neither do good Angels or bad Angels. Angels never die, they are eternal creations. Humans on the other hand get to taste life for short time in the flesh and then our Spirits get to live for eternity with or without fellowship with God. Where and how our Spirit spends eternity is entirely dependent on only one

thing that we can chose to do in our flesh life. That is to accept what Jesus has done for us, that is He paid the death penalty price for your sin and mine.

2. Jesus' offered a perfect sacrifice on my behalf so that I can have eternal life.

Jesus the Word becomes flesh and dwelt among humans and John goes on to say we have seen His glory. What does this mean? We are not going to define the Glory of God today, but we will attempt to recognize it.

I'm going to share 2 examples of the Glory of God and its association with man, from the bible. First is from the Old Testament, remember when Moses came down the mountain after spending 40 days in the presence of God receiving the Old Covenant? His face glowed so much that all the Israelites and even Aaron were frightened. And so, Moses wears a veil. This is mentioned only once in Exodus 34...and never again in the rest of Moses' life. Whatever rubbed off on Moses' face dimmed over time and disappeared. Moses was in the presence of God and that rubbed off on him.

The second example I want to share is of Stephen in Acts 6 and 7. Stephen was a disciple of Jesus and was preaching boldly in the power of the Spirit and doing miraculous signs. People were wonderstruck at Stephen. The elders and priests put Stephen on trial for blasphemy. And right before Stephen gives his defense mentioned in chapter 7 for which they stoned him to death...see what the Word of God records about Stephen.

Acts 6:15 ¹⁵ And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Or 'Bright as an angel's face'.

The Glory of God was shining through Stephen's preaching, through his works and now physically it was resting on his very face. But unlike in the case of Moses, this time it led to physical death on whom the glory shone!

What do people see in you and me? Do they see the Work of salvation in our life? Do they recognize the glory of God in our words, our actions and

our lifestyle? More practically how does the glory of God come to rest on an individual?

In my line of work, I sometimes work with dead animals. We dissect them in the laboratory. These animals are soaked in chemical preservatives that smell bad....the more time I spend in the lab, the more I smell like the lab!! Those who work in a chocolate factory will smell like chocolate. Those who work in a perfume factory will smell fragrant. And those who work with God in His Kingdom building project will begin to smell like God!! God's glory will start to rub off on them. You don't have to go looking for God's glory, just seek Him and His Kingdom and all these things will be added!

Moses' and Stephen's lives were marked as lives spent in close commune with God, there was no doubt that these individuals were followers of God. Hence the glory of God rubbed off on them. The glory of God is seen in our lives when we spend time with Him doing His will for our lives.

What did Jesus say about following Him and spending time with Him?

Read Luke 9:23

²³ And Jesus said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

So as followers of Jesus, what are we supposed to do? There are 2 parts here. The first is to Deny oneself and then to Take up our cross DAILY. What does deny himself or herself mean?

When faced with options, as humans we always choose self preservation above all else..in this we are just like animals! Because, animals also will always instinctively do things to preserve their life. They don't simply jump of a cliff or run down a steep bank for no reason and drown themselves unless of course they are demon possessed (Matthew 8:28-34)! In this aspect we are no different. However, Jesus is appealing to something different in each of us. Unlike animals, we are created in God's own image. And therefore, we have the capacity to go against natural biological instincts of self preservation....we have a spirit or conscience. And our spirit can override the desires of our flesh and body. So that means when I have a desire to overeat, the Spirit of Self Control kicks in to prevent my body from being

gluttonous. Or when I get a bodily urge to indulge myself in behavior that is perfectly legal but morally questionable, my spirit or conscience cautions me to abandon such lines of thinking.

So when Jesus says if anyone is to follow after me, let them deny themselves, Jesus is appealing to the image of God in us. He is in effect saying 'don't behave like an animal that is easily manipulated and predictable based on its instincts, rather be led by the image of God that is in you'.

We have the capacity to deny ourselves...once we have been born again. However, some people claim to follow Jesus but you will find no denying of themselves....they live like animals...going about life from one circumstance to another being guided by the pleasures of the flesh. It's important to distinguish who is in charge...is it our flesh or our spirit.

And more importantly how does one get to have the Holy Spirit in charge of day to day operations?

Read Hebrews 10:22 (NLT)

²² **let us go right into the presence of God** with sincere hearts fully trusting Him. For our guilty consciences (evil consciences) have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

We need to get to the presence of God, through the blood of Jesus. So denying one's self first involves being washed by the blood that Jesus shed for the remission of my sin and yours. Only then is our guilt removed and we are made clean.....And as a result of this God inputs into us His Holy Spirit that resides in us and communes or communicates with our spirit telling us what to do...only now are we ready to follow Jesus.

This is important to understand, because there are plenty of people that live their entire lives denying themselves...they lead simple lives, unplugged from technology, with very little material stuff...we have a lot of such people in India...they consider themselves to be wise sages...so wise that even the Beatles decided to follow them... We have the hermits of our day here in the western world as well... Whether it's a desire to love the earth and its people, whether it's a desire to redistribute wealth to the poorest of the poor, whether it's a desire to set right all the injustices in the world...it is still the

desires of the flesh that still rules....these are not followers of Christ by any means.

So denying one's self simply points to who is actually in charge of our life. Is it our natural bodily flesh and its desires or is it the Holy Spirit that communes with our spirit to lead us.

Giving over control of our lives to the Holy Spirit is by far the hardest thing to do in the Christian walk. Everything else is relatively easy...We might say "yes, Lord...I am a sinner, yes, Lord you died for me, thank you, yes Lord you will return to take me to be with you...say what?...you want me to do this now? Or You want me to give up this great opportunity? Or You would like me to get out of my neat little circle of friends?"

Who is in charge of your body?

Dearly beloved, who is leading us and who are we claiming to follow?

Jesus said If anyone should follow me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me daily.

We saw what it means to deny one's self and yield control of our life into the hands of the Master creator...what about this Cross business?

The part about the cross was not lost on the early disciples. Because unlike for us the cross was not jewelry, but rather represented the most horrific death they could ever imagine. It wasn't a simple 'time out' punishment, or even life in solitary confinement type of punishment...this was serious stuff....death on the cross was a public spectacle. Similarly, when we die daily to our right of self determination and completely rely on the grace of God for our lives, it begins to show...publically. People begin notice the words the proceed from our mouth (or that now cease to proceed from our mouth)...people begin to notice the things that once held our attention and interest no longer do so, the movies we watch have changed, the music we now listen to has changed, the stuff that makes us laugh on TV has changed, the things that makes us sad have changed. That is the evidence of a life changed by the Holy Spirit and yielded to His direction.

Read Romans 8:13-14

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

3. The glory of God is evident in individuals who spend time in His presence and are led by the Holy Spirit.

Review:

- 1. Jesus was born so that I can be born again into His family.**
- 2. Jesus' offered a perfect sacrifice on my behalf so that I can have eternal life.**
- 3. The glory of God is evident in individuals who spend time in His presence and are led by the Holy Spirit.**