

The Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord
St. Matthew 1:18-25

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

There was a television show that ran my last year in high school and into my first two years in college—seaQuest DSV; think Star Trek, but under water. As the second season began, a riot breaks out in a prison camp for people who were genetically engineered to be warriors. These people, grown entirely in a laboratory, were called GELFs, Genetically Engineered Life Forms. They were seen as less-than-human because they weren't born in the usual way, they lacked many of the traits that make the rest of humanity human (since they were bred as fighting machines), and they were unable to have children of their own. They seek recognition as people and their freedom, though it's safe to say, given the derogatory attitude people have toward them, that could likely never happen.

As these genetically engineered warriors riot and take over their camp, one of them gives birth; the first GELF conceived and born in the natural way—a miracle! As the powers that be seek to quell the riot and retake the camp, the rioters jettison the baby in a life pod, hoping to save it. It was picked up by the submarine seaQuest. As they discover the baby and it's GELF traits, the boat's doctor exclaims, "If this is their baby, that means they're becoming human."

What a terrific statement in light of what is celebrated tonight. You heard it from the pen of the Evangelist St. Matthew, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit." Joseph was concerned about this, so God appeared to him in a dream to tell him, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." And all of this was done to fulfill what was written in the prophet, "'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'"

Since this baby is God, that means He's become human.

It's a bit crude to put it that way, but it still works. The Divine has assumed human flesh after being conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary. "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit," God told Joseph. This Jesus, as He will be called in about eight days, is then true God and true man, as you confess using the words of the Athanasian Creed, "Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person." So, this God and man, Jesus, is God with us, God-in-the-flesh.

At a time like this, the predilection is to ooh and ahh over a baby. But you can't just do that because He's a baby. There's more to this child than meets the eye. Yes, He's God, but what does that mean? This little child, mere hours old, is the eternal Creator of the universe. This little child who will grow up into a man who can (and will) give His life as a ransom for all, is the changeless and immortal YHWH, the existing One. So, ooh and ahh over Him all you like, but bear in mind who He is.

Perhaps that should be cause for great fear. The shepherds who were in the fields at the moment Jesus was born feared for their lives when the angels appeared to tell them the good news. (cf. Luke 2:9) It is certainly awe-inspiring. God chose to dwell among you, to become one with you. Why? Since this baby is God, that means He's become human. Why?

Jesus is a man in every way you are, except without sin. He was conceived in a mother's womb, just as you were conceived in the wombs of your mothers. He was born—He has a birthday, just like you do. He lived and grew, ate and drank, learned and played. He took up a trade. He lived a life just as a man of His day and age would. But, unlike every man of His time, every man before, and every man

since, Jesus was without sin. And therein lies the answer.

Being the sinless man, Jesus is the new Man in whom all can find life. He is the replacement for Adam, you could say, who was created sinless, but chose the path to death and destruction that every man has been on since, and the same path to death and destruction that every man has chosen and chooses to be on still, you included. Jesus is the antidote; He is everything that Adam was supposed to be—everything you were supposed to be, you could say—and more. Jesus, being in very nature God, is able to live a life of perfect obedience to God, and then being in very nature man, and still God, He was able to live that life of perfect obedience in your stead—and He did. And because He is man, He gave that perfect life over to your death, the death you deserve for being on that path to death and destruction and participating in it.

The incarnation is the answer to all of your problems. God is man like you! Ooh, ahh. He knows you better than you know yourself, and now He knows what it's like to be you too, more intimately than you can understand on this side of eternity. And He knows just how far you fail to meet His expectations, how you fail to live up to His law and Commandments. And in His own flesh, He is able to sympathize with you.

But the answer is more than that: in order that His expectations could be met, that His law and Commandments could be kept—and more than that, fulfilled—He took on flesh and blood like yours, and became one with you in every respect. It bears repeating, but Jesus is fully man, a man like you in every respect, except without sin.

The law and Commandments of God were given to man in order to be kept and fulfilled. If you want to know God's will for your life, you'll find it in the statutes and commandments of God. It tells you what He wants you to do and not do. However, since the fall of man into sin, mankind has not kept to the will of God; the law is not kept but broken. As Martin Luther once penned, "The Law says, 'Do this,' and it is never done." Apart from God, there is no hope, but there's nothing doing for God Himself to keep His law.

Except one thing: God must become human! So, in the womb of a virgin from Nazareth, a conception took place as the Holy Spirit came upon her and the Highest overshadowed her, and the Son of God took on flesh of His mother. There is no other way to be fully man, and so God becomes fully man. St. Bernard of Clairveux wrote,

Brothers, who will declare this generation? An angel announces, power overshadows, the Spirit startles; the Virgin believes, by faith the Virgin conceives, the Virgin gives birth, the Virgin remains a virgin; who would not marvel? Then is the Son of the Most High born, God, begotten of God before all ages. The Word is born as a baby: who can marvel enough?

Ooh, ahh! From the moment of His conception, Jesus was at work fulfilling the Law for you because, as the Psalmist writes, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me." (Psalm 51:5) Here is the answer that is the incarnation: Jesus is God-in-the-flesh, come with salvation, and He was working it out throughout the entirety of His life. So, as you gaze at the Baby in the manger, see also the Man on the cross—they are one and the same: your Lord, your Savior!

So, He is fully man, in order that He would keep and fulfill the Law, and fully God in order that He would be able to do it. And He does it all for you, dear hearers—for every son of Adam and daughter of Eve, because He is a son of Adam, the Son of God (cf. Luke 3:38). He does it so that, since He has become one with you, you can become one with Him. The Apostle St. John wrote,

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that

when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.
(1 John 3:1-2)

Therefore, as St. Bernard once again wrote,

You who are in dust, awake and sing praise! See the Lord with salvation: he comes with salvation, he comes with ointments, he comes with glory. Jesus does not come without salvation, nor Christ without anointing, nor the Son of God without glory.

Take breath, you who are lost; Jesus comes to seek and to save what was lost. Return to health, you who are sick: Christ comes, who heals the broken-hearted with the anointing of mercy. Exult, whoever you are who yearn for great things: the Son of God comes down to you to make you joint heirs of his kingdom. Therefore I pray: Heal me, Lord, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved; glorify me and I shall be glorious.

The Son of God comes with healing in His wings (cf. Malachi 4:2), and He comes for you. He is your God, your Man, very God of very God, very Man of very Man, come as infant, come as Savior. He was born, lived, and died for you, and by faith you are in Him so that when He comes again in glory to raise the dead, you will be like Him. This is His promise to you, because out of great love and compassion for you, God became Man—one with you—in order to bring you to where He is. (cf. John 14:2-4) He will keep this promise to you, because He has already come—infant lowly, ooh, ahh—and forgives you for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.