

HOW THE SON OF GOD BECAME ONE OF US

God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them. John 3:16 & 17.

Salvation is a single, unified Event and Process begun in eternity, continued in time at a particular period in human history, and completed in eternity. Christmas celebrates the beginning of the earthly phase of this process, when God the Father sent his Son to become one of us and to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth. It continues through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, his sending of the Spirit upon the Church, the Body of Christ united with him as the Head, the work of the Church in union with Christ, and completed on earth with his coming again in glory to turn over his kingdom to the Father. At that time, all those who have accepted this plan of salvation through Jesus Christ will live with him and the Father in union with the Spirit as his family throughout all eternity.

This, then, is the story of how Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, came to be born.

A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But, before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God's Spirit. This is how. God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for an unwed girl named Mary. The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you."

Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Then, the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end."

Mary asked the angel, "How can this happen? I am not married." The angel answered, "The holy Spirit will come down to you, and God's power will come over you, so your child will be called the holy Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is also going to have a son, even though she is old. No one thought she could ever have a baby, but, in three months, she will have a son. Nothing is impossible for God!" Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said." And, the angel left her.

Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone, so he decided to quietly call off the wedding. While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Then, after her baby is born, name him Jesus (which in Hebrew means 'the Lord saves') because he will save his people from their sins."

So, the Lord's promise came true as the prophet Isaiah had said, "A virgin will have a baby boy, and he will be called 'Emmanuel', which means 'God is with us.'" After Joseph woke up, he and Mary were soon married, just as the Lord's angel had told him to do.

But, they did not sleep together before her baby was born.

The Emperor Augustus gave orders for the names of all the people to be listed in record books. This was done so that everyone could be made to pay taxes to the Emperor.

Everyone had to go to his or her own hometown to be listed. Joseph had to leave Nazareth in Galilee and go to Bethlehem in Judea. Long ago, Bethlehem had been King David's hometown, and Joseph went there because he was from David's family. Mary traveled with him to Bethlehem. While they were there, she gave birth to her firstborn son. The Jewish people said that the first-born son in each of their families belonged to the Lord. She dressed him in wide strips of cloth, which is how young babies were dressed, and laid him on a bed of hay because there was no room for them in the inn. Joseph named him Jesus.

That night, in the fields near Bethlehem, some shepherds were guarding their sheep. All at once, an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But, the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day, in King David's hometown, a Savior was born to you. He is Christ the Lord. You will know who he is because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay. Suddenly, many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said, "Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone whom God favors."

After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about." They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and, they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay. When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him. Everyone listened and was surprised. Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant. As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

Some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw the star in the east and have come to worship him." The star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They were thrilled and excited to see the star.

When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him. Frankincense was a valuable powder that was burned to make a sweet smell. Myrrh was a valuable sweet-smelling powder often used in perfume.

The time came for Mary and Joseph to do what the Law of Moses says a mother is supposed to do after her baby is born. After a Jewish mother gave birth to a son, she was considered "unclean" and had to stay home until he was circumcised. This is the cutting off of skin from the private part of a Jewish boy eight days after birth to show that he belonged to the Lord.

They took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem and presented him to the Lord, just as the Law of the Lord says, "Each first-born baby boy belongs to the Lord." The Law of the Lord also says that parents have to offer a sacrifice, giving at least a pair of doves or two young pigeons. That is what Mary and Joseph did because they were poor.

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to do what the Law of Moses says should be done for a new baby, the Spirit told Simeon to go into the temple. Simeon was a good man. He loved God and was waiting for God to save the people of Israel. God's Spirit came to him and told him that he would not die until he had seen Christ the Lord. Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God, "Lord, I am your servant, and now I can die in peace because you have kept your promise to me. With my own eyes, I have seen what you have done to save your people, and foreign nations will also see this. Your mighty power is a light for all nations, and it will bring honor to your people Israel."

Jesus' parents were surprised at what Simeon had said. Then, he blessed them and told Mary, "This child of yours will cause many people in Israel to fall and others to stand. The child will be like a warning sign. Many people will reject him, and you, Mary, will suffer as though you had been stabbed by a dagger. But, all this will show what people are really thinking."

The prophet Anna was also there in the temple. Now, she was eighty-four years old. Night and day, she served God in the temple by praying and often going without eating. The Jewish people sometimes went without eating (also called "fasting") to show their love for God or to show sorrow for their sins. Anna came in and praised God. She spoke about the child Jesus to everyone who hoped for Jerusalem to be set free.

After Joseph and Mary had done everything that the Law of the Lord commanded, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. The child Jesus grew. He became strong and wise, and God blessed him.

Yes, when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish Law to redeem those who were under the Law so that every person might become God's child. As to his humanity, he was born a descendant of David; as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. There is only one Lord, then, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are created and through whom you live.

From the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and the Epistles of Paul.
Edited by Patrick J. Hession

CHRISTMAS HOPE

Upon a lambing season night,
While all mankind in sin lay hopeless,
The Word eternal, Lamb of God,
Whispered in the dark.
Then broke the dawn;
Redemption came as man.

-Patrick J. Hession-

Jesus, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are. Being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. For this, God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all human beings in the heavens, on earth, and in the underworld should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father

An ancient Christian hymn quoted by St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians, Chapter 2