

Title: All for Love
Date: December 13, 2020
Subject: What it meant for the Son of God to become human
Scripture: Philippians 2:6 - 11

It was billed as one of the greatest love stories ever. People swooned at the news. One of the key moments was marked by these words: "I, Edward the Eighth, of Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Emperor of India, do hereby declare My irrevocable determination to renounce the Throne for Myself and for My descendants, and My desire that effect should be given to this Instrument of Abdication immediately."

With that, Great Britain's King Edward VIII stepped down as king December 10, 1936. He proclaimed it was because of his deep and profound love for Mrs. Wallis Simpson whom he wanted to marry.

Not so fast. The truth is she was his mistress. She'd been divorced, remarried and was currently married while seeking another divorce. The whole truth is the king was a womanizer and had to inform two other mistresses that their relationships were ending.

Additionally, Edward was facing pressure from the British Prime Minister, Parliament and the public over the scandal. It got so bad that the entire government threatened to resign over the matter.

In the end, his love wasn't all that virtuous or selfless. I still have a question – how much wealth and potential wealth did he give up? His brother became king and then his brother's daughter Elizabeth became queen and remains to this day. She's worth about 500 million and the whole monarchy is valued at 88 billion. He potentially would have had access to that fortune as it began to accumulate or at least his heirs would have.

People like stories of people who go from rags to riches. Edward's isn't quite going the opposite way – the story of riches to rags. There is one who went from riches to rags and back to riches, who did it out of selfless love.

2020 is a rather untraditional year. And this is quickly becoming an untraditional Christmas season. So why not look at another untraditional scripture passage about Christmas?

Read Philippians 2:6 - 11.

One of the key words in the passage comes in v. 7. It's *kenosis*. The NIV translates it as "made himself nothing." It can also be rendered "emptied himself." According to gotquestions.org, it "comes from the Greek word for the doctrine of Christ's self-emptying in His incarnation. The kenosis was a self-renunciation, not an emptying Himself of deity nor an exchange of deity for humanity... Jesus did not cease to be God during His earthly ministry. But He did set aside His heavenly glory of a face-to-face relationship with God. He also set aside His independent authority" [gotquestions.org]

The passage affirms that Jesus was, is and always will be fully God and possesses all the qualities that make God God. He had the same status and privileges as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. As someone

has said, "He is undiminished deity and perfect humanity united without confusion in one person forever." Every fiber of his being remained God.

Jesus, the son of God, second person of the Trinity, equal with God the Father in all aspects and form, who had no needs, no wants, no longings left unfulfilled, no gaps in his wisdom, no holes in his person, no defects in his character, who was whole and completely fulfilled, lived in a perfectly aligned relationship with the Father. Jesus didn't give up his deity. He temporarily set aside clinging to his Godness and became human.

What Jesus did is he didn't insist on clinging to the privileges and status of Almighty God. He didn't forcibly try to retain the glory he had in heaven. He was willing to give it up, temporarily lay it aside. He didn't operate according to all the prerogatives of being God. Jesus wasn't forced to do it. He self-limited his attributes. He chose not to exercise them.

The one who possessed all knowledge -- of all civilizations; of the combined heavenly powers; of the past, present and future including what would eventually transpire on a cruel cross -- subjected himself to those who couldn't understand even the basics about God and life. He who was everywhere present allowed himself to be confined to a single cell. He who was all encompassing, infinite, existed outside of space and time, was confined by space and by time, became temporal. He who had all power and was the creator of all that exists outside of God by simply speaking it into existence, chose not to use his power and ability.

From the pristine regal halls of heaven to a dingy, stinky cattle feed trough. He who lived in a state of perfection, of unmarred beauty, entered a world of imperfection and even gross ugliness. From constant comfort and companionship of being with the Father in heaven where he was totally loved, adored and worshipped to a place where few even cared about him. Some would overtly hate him and ridicule him while others would misunderstand and ignore him or simply give him their spare moments.

At his crucifixion, he bowed his will to that of others. He bent the knee to those who would scourge him. He allowed them to torment, mock and abuse him. He allowed them plant a crown of thorns on his head. He allowed them to nail him on the cross. Ultimately, he was separated from God the Father at the cross.

The Son of God went from breathing life into man to create a living being to breathing in the polluted air caused by death's disgusting odor. From being in command of angel armies to being unable to make a demand for anything except for an infant's cries for food or to be changed. He went from total independence to complete dependence for every need. He who was all sufficient and possessed no needs became the neediest of the needy, a tiny newborn who depended upon others for food, protection and cleanliness.

What was it like to think and act like a baby, for the totality of God to be inside that baby? We ooh and aah and think how adorable and cute. He didn't override the natural functions of an infant. He didn't wiggle his nose and make birds magically appear when he was three weeks old. He was unable to form words and coherent thoughts for years. God was confined in the growing form of a toddler, a teen and then a young man.

Nazareth became the hometown for Jesus. It was such a small and obscure village that it didn't make the names of Galilean towns mentioned in the main source for Jewish theology and religious law. The region

got little respect. Its people became the subject of jokes and were regarded as a bunch of rural hicks and rubes who lived on the backside of nowhere. They possessed an accent and an inadequate understanding of Hebrew so they often mispronounced words. This resulted in them not being allowed to read the sacred scriptures in the synagogues. Since Jesus grew up in the area, he no doubt spoke in a similar manner which would result in people looking down on him. People expressed doubt that any good thing could come from Nazareth and Galilee. Joseph and Mary were poor as they weren't able to afford the prescribed sacrifices at the temple but only the one for those who were poor.

A key word in describing this emptying is *humility*. Jesus, the Son of God, yielded his will and ability to control himself. Jesus came to serve not to be served. He was submissive to the will of others, of humans who needed salvation. He came to earth to his life as a ransom, a payment for the debt we owed. Sacrifice speaks not only to the end of Christ's physical life but to the totality of it and what he sacrificed to become human.

Christ didn't hang on to all that he possessed as being God. He released some of those things because of his immense love for us. Chip Ingram has this definition of love, "Love is giving another person what they need the most, when they deserve it the least, at great personal cost." He went on to describe love by using words like giving, caring, sacrificial, and unselfish toward others, a commitment, loyalty, paying a price.

Author Phillip Yancey dug into the New Testament and historical background information to compose the book *The Jesus I Never Knew*. The second chapter is titled *Birth: The Visited Planet*. In it, Yancey discusses some of what it meant for Jesus to become human.

"Nine months of awkward explanations, the lingering scent of scandal - it seems that God arranged the most humiliating circumstances possible for his entrance, as if to avoid any charge of favoritism. I am impressed that when the Son of God became a human being he played by the rules, harsh rules: small towns do not treat kindly boys who grew up with questionable paternity...

"Before Jesus, almost no pagan author had used *humble* as a compliment. The events of Christmas point inescapably to what seems like an oxymoron: a humble God. The God who came to earth came not in a raging whirlwind nor in a devouring fire. Unimaginably, the Maker of all things shrank down, down, down, so small as to become an ovum, a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager...

"God's visit to earth took place in an animal shelter with no attendance present and nowhere to lay the newborn King but a feed trough. Indeed, the event that divided history, and even our calendars, into two parts may have had more animal than human witnesses. A mule could have stepped on him. *How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given.*

"For just an instant the sky grew luminous with angels, yet who saw that spectacle? Illiterate hirelings who watched the flocks of others, *nobodies* who failed to leave their names. Shepherds had such a randy reputation that proper Jews lumped them together with the *godless*, restricting them to the outer courtyards of

the temple. Fittingly, it was they whom God selected to help celebrate the birth of the one who would be known as the friend of sinners...

“Among people who walled off a separate sanctum for God in the temple and shrank from pronouncing or spelling out the name, God made a surprise appearance as a baby in a manger. What can be less scary than a newborn with his limbs wrapped tight against his body? In Jesus, God found a way of relating to human beings that did not involve fear...

“God arranged the circumstances in which to be born on planet earth - without power or wealth, without rights, without justice...

“As a Christian I believe that we live in parallel worlds. One world consists of hills and lakes and barns and politicians and shepherds watching their flocks by night. The other consists of angels and sinister forces and somewhere out there places called heaven and hell. One night in the cold, in the dark, among the wrinkled hills of Bethlehem, those two worlds came together at a dramatic point of intersection. God, who knows no before or after, entered time and space. God, who knows no boundaries took on the shocking confines of baby skin, the most ominous restraints of mortality.”

“He is the image of the invisible God, first born over all creation an Apostle would later write; He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. But the few eyewitnesses on Christmas night saw none of that. They saw an infant struggling to work never-before-used lungs.

“Could it be true, this Bethlehem story of the creator descending to be born on one small planet? If so, it is a story like no other. Never again need we wonder whether what happens on this dirty little tennis ball of a planet matters to the rest of the universe. Little wonder a choir of angels broke out in spontaneous song, disturbing not only a few shepherds but the entire universe” (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, pp. 32, 36, 37, 38, 41, 45, 46).

Another author and pastor F. B. Meyer, “When our Lord stooped to live visibly amongst men, He refused to avail Himself of the homage due to His original nature. He had been in the form of God, but was content to veil His glory, to assume the form of a servant, to be made in the likeness of men. In the cradle of Bethlehem, in the home of Nazareth, in the voluntary limitations of His earthly ministry, in His obedience to the death of the cross, there was the hiding of His power. He refused to use the attributes of His intrinsic Deity, that He might manifest the Love of God, that He might bear away the guilt of the world, and work out and bring in an eternal righteousness. Therefore, He is exalted and bears evermore the name of Jesus---the Saviour of the world.”

Paul Harvey told a story (*The Man and the Birds*) about God’s intended impact: The man to whom I’m going to introduce you was not a scrooge, he was a kind decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn’t believe all that incarnation stuff which the churches proclaim at Christmas Time. It just didn’t make sense, and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn’t swallow the Jesus Story, about God coming to Earth as a man.

“I’m truly sorry to distress you,” he told his wife, “but I’m not going with you to church this Christmas Eve.” He said he’d feel like a hypocrite. That he’d much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed and they went to the midnight service.

Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound...Then another, and then another. Sort of a thump or a thud...At first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They’d been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window. Well, he couldn’t let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter, if he could direct the birds to it.

Quickly he put on a coat, galoshes, tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So he hurried back to the house, fetched bread crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the bread crumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them...He tried shooping them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms...Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn. And then, he realized that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me...That I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Because any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.

“If only I could be a bird,” he thought to himself, “and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to safety,...to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see, and hear and understand.”

At that moment the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells – *Adeste Fidelis* (O Come All Ye Faithful)– listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow...

Jesus had to leave heaven and become human so we’d understand. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Riches to rags to riches.

Song *Here With Us* by Joy Williams, “It’s still a mystery to me, That the hands of God could be so small, How tiny fingers reaching in the night, Were the very hands that measured the sky...How His infant eyes have seen the dawn of time. How His ears have heard an angel’s symphony, But still Mary had to rock her Savior to sleep. Hallelujah, hallelujah. Heaven’s love reaching down to save the world...Son of God, servant King, Here with us,...Jesus, the Christ, born in Bethlehem, A baby born to save, to save the souls of man.”