

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *The Incarnation*

**SERIES:** *“Have a Mary Christmas”*

**SCRIPTURES:** *Luke 2:1-7*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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*\*Credit to BibleGateway; Ken Bailey; Scot McKnight;*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church.

This morning we come to the 4<sup>th</sup> and final message in our Christmas series **“Have a Mary Christmas”**.

We’ve been following the Christmas story through the experiences of Jesus’ mother, Mary. From the Angel’s announcement and the many **unexpected surprises**, to **Mary’s revolutionary song**. To last week, this important conversation about **the “reality” of the Christmas story**. There was a Census, there was a Caesar. There was a Mary and a Joseph. There is a Bethlehem and there is a Messiah. The story of Christmas is about a real world, our real world.

This morning, we arrive at the climax of the story...

## **I. The Birth of Jesus**

So, again, if you have a Bible we are headed to Luke 2...

**Luke 2 - In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place**

**while<sup>[a]</sup> Quirinius was governor of Syria.)<sup>3</sup> And everyone went to their own town to register.**

**<sup>4</sup> So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup> He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.**

This is in a sense the heart of the Christmas story. We said at the outset of this series that ultimately Mary leads us to Jesus. This morning, we have finally come full circle. The moment in history has arrived.

Ok, so first of all just a little bit of clarity about

### **A. The Manger and the grumpy inn-keeper.**

There may be some misunderstanding with our traditions related to this part of the Christmas story.

Typically, when we imagine this part of the story, we think of a little barn or stable outside the city and an “inn”, similar to a motel, with a grumpy old inn-keeper who leaves the pregnant lady hanging out in the cold with no place to stay. And while that makes for a great nativity scene, may not be the most accurate image to have in mind.

Haven't you wondered to yourself how an inn-keeper and a group of guests could be so heartless, as to leave a pregnant lady out in the cold night with no place to stay?

In fact, I heard a neat story one time about a little boy who had some mental disabilities. Sometimes had trouble formulating complete sentences and speaking clearly, he didn't do very well in classes at school. But when it came time for the school's annual Christmas pageant, he wanted to have a part in the Pageant. What's more, he wanted a speaking part. He wouldn't settle for anything less.

So they made him the innkeeper. They figured he could handle that because all he had to do was say, **"No room,"** twice: once before Mary spoke, once after she spoke. The night of the Pageant, Mary knocks on the door and, this little boy playing the grumpy inn-keeper, opens the door, and he says in a brusque fashion, "No room!" Mary then says her line, "But I'm sick, and I'm cold, and I'm going to have a baby, and if you don't give me a place to sleep, my baby will be born in the cold, cold night."

Well, little boy just stood there, frozen. His classmate, behind him on stage, figured he'd forgotten the line so he nudged him and said, "No room," say, "No room." And finally, the little boy playing the innkeeper turned around to his classmate and said, "I know what I'm supposed to say, but I was thinking she can have my room if she needs it."

How could an innkeeper not have room for a pregnant lady?!

I won't go into the entire discussion on this. But New Testament Scholar Ken Bailey has been very insightful in bringing some clarity on this. The word often translated as **"guest room or inn"** in this passage doesn't necessarily mean "inn" like we think of an inn or a motel. Instead, it's probably more accurate to think of a "traditional ancient middle-eastern peasant home"...something that looks like this (**PIC** – credit to Ken Bailey). This is a top-down view.

Most families would have had a one room living space where the entire family, lived, ate, slept etc. And then **a guest-room**, either on top of the house, or at the one end

of the house, like in this picture. It's likely that this is the "guest-room" that was already occupied when Mary and Joseph arrived.

**The stable** as it is often referred to, likely would have been a room attached to the other end of the home, where the families animals slept at night. But every morning the animals would have been taken outside and the stable room cleaned. Bailey even describes how some of these stable rooms had drainage holes so that as the room was washed each day the water had a place to run outside.

It seems possible, perhaps even likely, that since the guest room was occupied, the family would have allowed Mary and Joseph to stay in the family room with them or they could have potentially, left the animals outside, for a time and given Mary and Joseph the animals' room or "stable".

In addition, many **mangers (PIC)** in these homes were often, large grooves cut in the stone. This is a pic that Pastor Brady took of an actual manger when he was visiting Bethlehem. Filled with straw and wrapped in cloths would have made a cozy bed for a baby.

All that to say, Jesus was certainly not born in a fancy, state-of-the-art hospital. But, it's probably also not completely accurate to think that a grumpy inn-keeper left this family out in the cold to sleep in a barn. It seems realistic that a gracious and extremely hospitable Bethlehem family gladly welcomed and accommodated Mary and Joseph in their home.

But ultimately the story does not revolve around the details related to the inn-keeper or the nature of the stable, but around...

## **B. Mary's Son**

**<sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, <sup>7</sup> and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger...**

Mary gives birth to a child. But this is not just any child. This child is the Savior of humanity. So, I just want to take a few minutes and talk about the significance of baby Jesus.

There is a term that tries to grasp the nature and significance of Jesus. The word is: **incarnation**. It is a word that literally means **to embody** or to take up residence in. Put simply, it means, **God took up residence in Jesus**.

And so, let's just talk for a moment about these two crucial aspects of Jesus nature. His humanness and his divine-ness (divinity). First,

### **C. God as a human.**

In just a few short verses, the Christmas story reminds us that God became a human being.

I love how author Max Lucado describes the "humanness" of Jesus...

*The Omnipotent, in one instant, made himself breakable. He who had been spirit became pierce-able. He who was larger than the universe became an embryo. And he who sustains the world, with a word, chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl.*

*God was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys, and a spleen.*

*Angels watched as Mary changed God's diaper. The universe watched with wonder as The Almighty learned to walk.*

*To think of Jesus in such a light is—well, it seems almost irreverent, doesn't it? It's not something we like to do; it's uncomfortable. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. Clean the manure from around the manger.*

*But don't do it. For heaven's sake, don't. **Let him be as human as he intended to be. Let him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let him in can he pull us out.***

When Mary wrapped her baby in cloths, she knew in that moment that this baby was human like any other baby.

When Mary placed that sleeping child in a manger. He was human like any other baby.

When He awoke crying in the middle of the night. When he needed someone to change his diaper, feed him, bathe him, carry him because he could not walk.

In all of those ways, Mary knew, better than the rest of us, that God had become a vulnerable little baby.

This is one of the unique aspects of Christian theology. God as a human. In Islam, for example, Muslims tend to emphasize, **“God above”** humanity...to the degree that God almost seems unreachable. We might say they overstate the transcendence of the divine. They would see flesh as weakness. God would never enter flesh.

And so Muslim's accept Jesus as a great teacher and a prophet. They even accept the virgin birth of Jesus. But they would not accept that God became human. One Muslim theologian says it like this...

*“The Christian view of incarnation seems to compromise God's transcendence and sovereignty...” (Kateregga 166)*

But in Christian theology we would say, God enters human flesh and we don't believe this compromises his divinity. This is significant for a number of reasons. I will suggest two.

First, Jesus' humanness, means that whatever it is you are experiencing in your frail, limited, human existence...

### **1. God can relate.**

God becoming human was God's way of experiencing what you experience.

The writer of Hebrews picked up on this concept...

**Hebrews 4:15 - <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.**

He empathizes with our weaknesses and he experiences temptation as we do.

*Max Lucado writes about an occasion where he was watching a family of black-tailed squirrels (**PIC OF SQUIRRELS**). He says, "I should be working on a Christmas message but can't focus. They seem set on entertaining me. They scamper amid the roots of the tree north of my office. We've been neighbors for three years now. They watch me peck at the keyboard. I watch them store their nuts and climb the trunk.*

*We're mutually amused. I could watch them all day. Sometimes I do. But I've never considered becoming one of them. The squirrel world holds no appeal to me. Who wants to sleep next to a hairy rodent with beady eyes? (No comments from my wife on that one!)*

*Give up the Rocky Mountains, bass fishing, weddings, and laughter for a hole in the ground and a diet of dirty nuts? Count me out. But count Jesus in. What a world he left. Our classiest mansion would be a tree trunk to him. Earth's finest cuisine would be walnuts on heaven's table. And the idea of becoming a squirrel with claws and tiny teeth and a furry tail? It's nothing compared to God's becoming an embryo and entering the womb of Mary. (Max Lucado)*

In Jesus, God shared in our human vulnerability and weakness so that he could relate to us. Thinks about this...

Do you get to the end of a day and just feel worn out and tired, exhausted by life, children, responsibilities, the daily grind? God in Jesus experienced human tiredness.

Have you ever been lonely, felt out of place, excluded...God in Jesus experienced loneliness...as he prayed in the Garden before his crucifixion, he cried out about feeling God-forsaken.

God, in Jesus, experienced...fear...temptation....

God experienced...the joys of having a body...pain at having that body hurt...comfort in others embracing him...the physical limitations we all face, when our body lets you down. To the point of death...as on the cross he breathed his last breath.

Whatever it is you experience, God, in Jesus says, "I can relate. I understand."

And this leads to another important aspect of God becoming human...the importance of

## **2. Incarnational ministry**

In order to minister to us, to serve us, Jesus didn't just whisk us out of the pain and brokenness of this world, but rather he decided to enter into it with us. And this is what incarnational ministry is about.



As we go out into the world, to help others and to minister to others and to serve others...we must enter into their world. Sometimes, we church people, have a tendency to think, we need to get people to come to us. When in reality we need to go be with them.

There's an inspiring story, John Ortberg tells about *Father Damien (PIC)*, who was a priest, who became famous for his willingness to serve lepers. And so in order to serve lepers best he decided he needed to enter their world. He actually moved to Kalawao, a village in Hawaii that had been quarantined to serve as a leper colony. Quarantined, because leprosy is extremely contagious and was also fatal. Kalawao you might say was a place you went to die.

For sixteen years Father Damien lived in this colony. He learned to speak their language. He bandaged their wounds, embraced the bodies no one else would touch. He organized schools, bands, and choirs. He built homes so that the lepers could have shelter. He built two thousand coffins by hand so that when they died, they could be buried with dignity. Slowly, it was said, Kalawao became a place to live rather than a place to die, for Father Damien offered hope through his "incarnational ministry".

More striking though, was that Father Damien was not careful about keeping his distance. He did nothing to separate himself from his people. He dipped his fingers in the poi bowl along with the patients. He did not always wash his hands after bandaging open sores. He got close. For this, the people loved him.

Then one day he stood up and began his sermon with two words: **"We lepers. ..."** Now he wasn't just helping them. Now he was one of them. From this day forward he wasn't just on their island; he was in their skin. First, he had chosen to live as they lived; now he would die as they died. Now they were in it together.

*And you see at Christmas we are reminded that one day God came to this earth so that he might begin his message: "We lepers..." Now he wasn't just helping us from afar. Now he was one of us. Now he was in our skin. Now we were in it together.* (Ortberg "God is Closer than you think.")

And look, maybe we aren't all called to go and live with lepers, that's not what I'm saying, but in your world, can you do your best to enter the life, the experiences of someone around you? Ministering to people often isn't about getting them to come to church, at least initially, its about serving where you already are.

I think about this, sometimes in really simple ways in my life. When I'm coaching my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade soccer team. None of them have leprosy, contagious bad habits, maybe, but not leprosy. But for me it's not just about passing along soccer knowledge and skills. It's about loving and serving a group of young people. Creating a team and community of players who know and love each other. And so I have to create practices on their level. We play games, we laugh, we run, we work hard together. I ask them about school and their homes and life outside of soccer practice. I ask them about video games, Christmas lists...

Why, because to serve as a follower of Jesus means...incarnation...you enter someone else's world, meeting them where they are.

I was thinking that this is just a great opportunity to give a shout out to our **children's ministry volunteers** and **student ministry volunteers**.

Many of them are serving at 9:45am every morning, while many of us are able to sit in here without child interruption and listen to messages, because there is a group of volunteers who are entering the world of our children. Coloring, crafting and reading.

We have student ministry volunteers who have done all-nighters, color wars, Christmas caroling and who sit in small groups on Sunday evenings with teenagers?

Now why would they do that, when they could be home watching Sunday Night Football or Hallmark Christmas movies? Because if you are going to reach students today, minister to students, serve students you have to leave your world and enter their world. That's what incarnational ministry looks like? That's what God did for us when he became a human.

You can do this with your co-workers, neighbors, family members...with your children.

In Jesus God became human. But not just human. And this is so important for us to understand as well. Jesus was not just human...

#### **D. Jesus was still God**

When Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son and wrapped in cloths and placed him in a manger, this was not just a human child. This was God's own son. This was God himself.

To be a Christian is to accept Jesus, not just as human but as Lord your life. Remember, we said Mary was the first person to accept Jesus as Lord.

**Luke 1 - the angel said to her...<sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High...**

Mary's response was, "May it be..."

There's kind of this central passage of Scripture in the New Testament about the divinity of Jesus. One of those epic Bible passages...the Apostle Paul writing to the church in Colossae writes...

**Colossians 1 - <sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together...<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.**

And so as we come to Jesus, as we celebrate his birth, as we relate to and appreciate his humanness...may we also hang onto his divinity. And as we remember Jesus divinity, this leads to two primary responses: The first response we should have before Jesus as God is to...

### **1. Worship Him**

We do this in many areas of our lives. Penn State fans out there. If I say, **“We Are”**...you say, **“Penn State”**. It’s not exactly worship, but it’s similar. It’s giving praise, adoration.

This was the response time and again throughout the Christmas story to Mary’s son.

**Luke 2:17-21 - <sup>17</sup> When they (Shepherds) had seen him (Jesus)...they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen...**

**Matthew 2:11 - <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they (Wismen) saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.**

Worship was the response of Mary and Elizabeth and Simeon and Anna.

The Apostle the Apostle Paul goes on to write that...

**Philippians 2:9-11 - <sup>9</sup>...God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Our first response to Jesus, this Christmas should be one of worship.

This worship for Jesus can come in various forms.

**Singing songs** together. Think about the words you're singing. And how those words are lived in your everyday life. (Today we sang???) If you sang thoughtfully and followed along you worshipped!

**Offer gifts** like the wise men. These probably aren't literal gifts to give to Jesus. But using your resources, your time, your skills for benefit of others. Jesus said "whatever you do for the least of these...you do for me!"

Worshipping Jesus often has to do with **priorities**. Making sure you've arranged the priorities in your life to put "*Jesus as Lord*" at the very center. What would your life look like if it was arranged around Jesus as Lord?

**Read the Christmas story.** Think about the significance of the story. Talk about the story with your family, loved ones, close friends.

Spend time in **worshipful prayer**, thanking God for entering our world as a baby.

Corporately, come to our **Christmas Eve services** on Saturday and share in communion, lighting candles and reflect on the Christmas story with us.

Whatever you do this Christmas, you must make sure that worshipping Jesus is a top priority.

And then, the other response we should have to the divinity of Jesus is to...

## **2. Follow Him.**

In our world, you can follow or give your life to so many different things. You can follow an athletic team or a political party, or a celebrity, you can follow a TV evangelist...And you can get advice about the meaning of life and how to live your life anywhere...family members, pastors, social media, Oprah, Judge Judy, Youtube, Google...

In our world there are so many options for following.

But, what we're saying with Jesus is that Jesus is not just another great human who can give you advice about life. But rather, Jesus is the ultimate expert on life. He gets the final say. We follow Jesus as Lord, in a way we don't follow anything else.

**Colossians 1:16 – “For in him all things were created...”**

**John 1:3 – Through him all things were made...**

**Romans 11:36 – For from him and through him and for him are all things...**

This makes Jesus...

**The ultimate expert on relationships and forgiveness and healing and restoration.**

**The ultimate expert on money and material possessions.**

**The expert on the meaning of life and finding true joy, contentment, hope, peace.**

**The expert on life and death and even life after death.**

And so if you're looking at this list or around your world and your life and you're kind of thinking “Man, I could use some help. I could use some good advice. But more than good advice...I could use a savior...the savior.” Then I'd invite to start following Mary's son, Jesus.

Jesus invitation time and again was, “come follow me...I can offer you abundant life. The life you were created for. The life you’ve always wanted. Just come follow me.”

Make this Christmas season and then your motivation for the new year...following this Jesus.

At Christmas we have someone who understands what it’s like to be human, in all of it’s fullness. But we also have someone who can offer us abundant life and save us for eternity.