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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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## **Opening Our Christmas Gifts: The Treasure Trove of the Incarnation**

**1 John**

Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is GREAT!!!

***1 Timothy 3:16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body***

Christmas is many things... a rich, frantically busy, lavishly apportioned feast for the senses; some simply love it and thank God for the traditions and family experiences, the happiness and generosity, the great flavors and spectacular sights of Christmas

Others genuinely struggle with Christmas... the secularization, the Santa Claus themes, the seasonal songs like “

The chestnuts roasting on an open fire, jack frost nipping at your nose; the “Have a Holly Jolly Christmas” ... Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer... some struggle with the gross materialism of the season, the gluttony of it all

Perhaps most clearly symbolized by Charles Dickens’s “A Christmas Carol” in which Ebenezer Scrooge learns the true meaning of Christmas from three ghosts—the ghost of Christmas past, present, and future. And the ghost of Christmas present seems to be little more than the Spirit of Bacchus, a huge giant sitting on a monstrous pile of luscious food:

turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch

After his night of terror and education, Scrooge learns that the essence of Christmas is goodwill toward men, generosity and charity—but without a single mention of Jesus Christ

Two words sum up the mystery of Christmas for me this morning: FLESH and FULLNESS... both found in John 1

***John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.***

This gets immediately to the heart of the mystery... Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became FLESH... He had muscles and a blood vessels, nerves and intestines, hair and sweat...

The mystery of that word is really INFINITE... because we are told in many other places that the flesh is the seat of LUSTS... inordinate desires that drive us to sin:

***1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.***

So, how could God become FLESH??? That goes immediately to the heart of the mystery... the flesh of John 1:14 must be similar to the flesh of 1 John 2:16, for the same author uses the exact same word; BUT the flesh that Jesus took on must somehow be radically different than what John warns us about. MYSTERY!!

The second word that shows me the mystery of Christmas is the word FULLNESS:

***<sup>ESV</sup> John 1:16 And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.***

Fullness is an amazing word!!! Jesus Christ is FULLNESS INCARNATE...

***Colossians 2:9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form***

***Colossians 1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him***

This is more than just saying that Christ is “fully God”... it is to help us realize how FULL God is in Himself... a full being, no emptiness, no deficiencies, no loneliness, no weaknesses... a FULL WELL of blessing, Full of Grace, rich in compassion and mercy, full of power, complete in wisdom and knowledge...

NOTHING CAN BE ADDED TO HIM, NOTHING CAN BE REMOVED... a perfectly FULL being

***Ephesians 3:19 that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

From His FULLNESS... Christ has blessed us with a river of Christmas gifts...

***Grace upon grace***

Literally, “grace in the place of grace”... the last grace gives way to the next one; the last gift yields to the next one

Christ took on FLESH to heal us of our FLESHLY LUSTS and to give us a RIVER OF GRACE, from the infinite fullness of His personhood

That is what we’re looking at this morning

All NT writers meditate on the incarnation of Christ at some level... but no one does it as richly and powerfully as the Apostle John...

## I. The Reality of the Incarnation (1:1-3)

### A. What is the Doctrine of the Incarnation?

1. The idea that Jesus of Nazareth is fully God AND fully human
2. The Jesus existed before the creation of the world as God the Son... in perfect fellowship with His Father
3. That at a specific moment in time, He took on a human body...

***John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.***

***John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.***

4. He was conceived in the virgin Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit

***Luke 1:30-35 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great***

***and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." <sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.***

5. CONCEIVED BY A MIRACLE, BUT born in the ordinary way, in Bethlehem, in a stable... because there was no room for them in the Inn
6. He was wrapped in strips of linen, swaddled as any baby would have been

B. 1 John Speaks Powerfully to this Doctrine

***1 John 4:2 Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God***

***1 John 4:9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.***

***1 John 5:6 This is the one who came by water and blood-- Jesus Christ.***

C. John, as an Apostle, Was Chosen to Be an Eyewitness to the Incarnation

***1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard***

1. Very practical, very physical, very real
2. Jesus, the Son of God, had a physical body that could be touched; a physical voice that could be heard with the ear; He lived a physical life that could be observed with the eye
3. John lived with Jesus, walked with Him... he was an eyewitness to the Incarnation... to the glory of a perfect life lived

***John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

D. The Incarnation Must be Proclaimed

1. It is possible to learn much about God from creation... a full education in what is called “Natural Theology” comes from looking at the earth and its fullness, at the sun, the moon, the stars... the astonishing variety of living things

***Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.***

***Psalm 19:1-2 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. <sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.***

2. But you cannot learn about Jesus Christ any other way than by the proclamation of the truth by witnesses... and the Apostles were the first of those
3. John says that the centerpiece of their proclamation was the INCARNATION... their physical experience with the word become flesh... what they saw with their eyes, what they heard with their ears, what they handled with their hands... THIS IS WHAT THEY PROCLAIMED concerning Jesus, the Word of Life
4. The physicality of the Incarnation and the practicality of life
  - a. They sat at table with Jesus and saw Him eat... they saw Him chew and swallow
  - b. They walked with Jesus along the dusty roads of Judea and Galilee, and they heard His sandals crunching the pebbles as He strode
  - c. They touched His hands, perhaps patted Him on the back... saw the wind blowing His hair and the rain pelting His face during the storm on the Sea of Galilee

- d. They saw His glory in all these practical ways... a normal human life, YET WITHOUT SIN...
- e. They saw the way He interacted with His mother, with His neighbors in Nazareth, with sick people and grieving people, with happy people and despondent people, with men and women, boys and girls
- f. They saw Him dealing with enraged enemies and tearfully grateful worshipers
- g. They saw in space and time the PERFECT HUMAN LIFE, lived in the crucible of constant opposition and hatred
- h. Unforgettably, they saw Him arrested and beaten; John saw the blood on His face, the blood running down His back, the agony of death on the cross

#### E. Ultimately, Witnesses of His Resurrection

- 1. BOTH Christmas AND Easter are essential to the Christian message of eternal life
- 2. BOTH are in view in 1 John 1:1-3... the Apostles were eyewitnesses not only that Jesus was fully human, but also that He had RISEN FROM THE DEAD... He was physically alive after death
- 3. This was precisely what He wanted Thomas and the other Apostles to confirm

***Luke 24:36-43 Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." <sup>37</sup> They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. <sup>38</sup> He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup> Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." <sup>40</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. <sup>41</sup> And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" <sup>42</sup> They gave him a piece of broiled fish, <sup>43</sup> and he took it and ate it in their presence.***

***John 20:19-20*** *On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"<sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

***John 20:27-28*** *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."<sup>28</sup> Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"*

## II. The Ultimate Purpose of the Incarnation (1:3-4)

There was a clear reason WHY the Word became flesh, and WHY eyewitnesses like John testified to Jesus' life, death and resurrection

Lots of reasons... but I like what John says is his reason for writing...

### A. Eternal Life

***1 John 1:2*** *The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.*

Jesus Came to Give Us ETERNAL LIFE... and this LIFE is described most plainly in John's Gospel

1. John 2: Eternal life is like a wedding banquet in which there is an abundance of the highest quality wine made directly by the hand of Almighty God
2. John 3: Eternal life is a form of existence so radically different that it's like being born a second time
3. John 4: Eternal life is like a spring of water inside us welling up and satisfying us deeply
4. John 5 and John 11: It's like being dead in a tomb, hearing the voice of the Son of God and coming out to live forever
5. John 6: It's like eating bread from heaven
6. John 7: It's like having a stream of living water flowing from within us to others around us

7. John 8-9: It's like being born blind, and then being able to see for the first time... and the light we see is JESUS
8. John 10: It's like having a Good Shepherd who provides for all your needs
9. John writes to give us eternal life

***1 John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. <sup>12</sup> He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> ¶ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.***

Ultimate purpose of Incarnation is LIFE which is FELLOWSHIP

#### B. Joyful Fellowship

***1 John 1:3-4 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.* <sup>4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.**

1. John writes this little letter so that his readers can have FELLOWSHIP with them...
2. The word "fellowship" is a powerful one
3. It means a close community of friendship in which the most vital things are SHARED AS ONE
4. The ultimate example of fellowship is the Trinity in which the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are perfectly ONE without losing their personal identity

***John 10:30 I and the Father are one.***

5. So Jesus came to bring together rivals, and enemies, and hate-filled selfish people and make them as ONE as they are

***John 17:21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us***



6. Acts 2-4: This fellowship was revealed in the early church in incredible ways... SHARING food, drink, possessions as needed, ministry, suffering
7. John wanted to expand this fellowship to include new people
8. JOY was at the center of it...
  - a. The more people join, genuinely join, through faith in Christ, the more joyful the fellowship would be
  - b. Worldly societies can be EXCLUSIVE... the idea is that if more people join, they'll likely RUIN IT... it'll be diminished by the additions
  - c. But the Body of Christ, the church, is always ENHANCED by the additions the Holy Spirit makes to our number
  - d. So it's almost like our joy is INCOMPLETE as long as any of the elect remains outside... we will have the FULLEST JOY when someone comes to faith and joins
  - e. That's why each of the "Lost and Found" parables in Luke 15 center around JOY

I) The shepherd, after he has found the lost sheep:

***Luke 15:5-6 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders<sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'***

***Luke 15:7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.***

II) The woman, after she has found her lost coin:

***Luke 15:9-10 she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'<sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."***

III) The father of the prodigal son, after the son has returned:

***Luke 15:23-24 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.***

When the older son is angry at the celebration and refuses to come in, the father explains the celebration:

***Luke 15:32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.***

John says

***1 John 1:4 We write this to make our joy complete.***

Our joy is ENHANCED by others coming to faith in Christ... just as the Father in heaven celebrates over one sinner who repents.

The point of the incarnation, then, is eternal life resulting in joyful fellowship with God and with each other

### III. The Achievements of the Incarnation (2:1-2, 3:1)

Part of the treasure box of the incarnation is to look at what Jesus achieved with the physical body He took on. I want to zero in on three things... ATONEMENT, ADOPTION, and TRANSFORMATION

#### A. Atonement

***1 John 2:1-2 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.***

#### B. Adoption

***1 John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.***

#### C. Transformation

1. At one time we were in the darkness...

2. Christ has brought us out of the darkness into the light of His presence

***1 John 2:9-11 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. <sup>10</sup> Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. <sup>11</sup> But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.***

3. We are made essentially NEW CREATIONS by the work of Christ's physical body on the cross

This transformation, then, enables us to imitate the Incarnate One

#### IV. The Imitation of the Incarnate One (2:6)

##### A. One of the Powerful Lessons of Christmas: Physical Life on this Planet MATTERS

1. Other religions (like Buddhism) tend to be dualistic... trying to escape the physical side of life... physical desires, physical pleasures, physical pains
2. The incarnation of Christ elevates the physical world to where God intended it to be... a magnificent creation, radiating with God's glory

##### B. Jesus's Physical Life on Earth Makes Everything Powerfully Spiritual

1. Eating, drinking, conversing, working, relating... all of it is embraced in the incarnation
2. Therefore, not only is Jesus our propitiation, our blood atoning sacrifice... He is also our EXAMPLE... our ROLE MODEL

##### C. John EXPLICIT about this...

***1 John 2:6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.***

1. To John, this is in clear reference to moral purity... perfect holiness... freedom from sin

2. He makes this clear in 1 John 1

***1 John 1:5-7 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.***

3. Jesus comes not merely to ATONE for our sin, but also to TRANSFORM OUR LIVES FROM SIN

4. Our “walk” is our daily life in this physical world... and John says it must be a life of moral purity, freedom from the DARKNESS OF SIN

5. This moral purity is defined most explicitly in the Law of God:

***1 John 2:3-6 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. <sup>4</sup> The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: <sup>6</sup> Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.***

D. Ultimately, It Comes Out in a Pattern of Sacrificial Love for Others

***1 John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. <sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? <sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.***

V. The Denial of the Incarnation (4:1-3)

***1 John 4:1-3 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the***

***antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.***

A. Satan is Dominant in this World

***1 John 5:19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.***

B. This Message of the Incarnation is HATED by Satan and the World

C. Satan Has Filled the World with Lying Spirits, False Teachers

D. Satan HATES the Message of the Incarnation... But True Christians Know for Certain what Christmas is really about!!

VI. The Celebration of the Incarnation

A. Understand and Delight in the True Meaning of Christmas

B. Come to Christ!!

C. Open Your True Christmas Presents One by One

D. Enrich Your Assurance of Salvation

E. Walk as Jesus Did

F. Make Your Joy Complete: Embrace the Sweet Fellowship John Intended