

CHRISTMAS DAY DEVOTIONAL

Read: Luke 2: 1-7, Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 53:3-11, Revelation 4:1-11

Have you ever stopped to consider what really happened when the Almighty entered the womb of a woman? When the Son of God became the Son of man -- flesh and blood, bones and joints, muscle, and sinew? I love the picture Daniel Fuller paints in his book *Unity of the Bible*, where he describes the incarnation as a winding staircase stretching from the glory of heaven to the world of wretched misery. While Jesus' descent to earth to redeem humankind began long before the foundation of the world, our first glimpse is in the stable that reeked of animal dung and moldy straw, where a newborn babe lay shivering in the chill of night, vulnerable to some of the worst conditions imaginable.

Perhaps the most stunning thing about Christ's descent from glory was His choice to let go of His role in sharing equality with God. Though in essence He retained His Deity, in experience He chose to give up His rights as God, requiring Him to depend upon His heavenly Father for whatever power or wisdom or guidance He might need.

What must it have been like for the all-sufficient Son of God to know that soon He would be at the mercy of weak and sinful human beings? Can you see Him there, standing on that staircase just before the Spirit placed Him in Mary's womb? What kinds of thoughts went through His mind? Surely it must have felt as if He were stepping into a swirling abyss of darkness.

From that manger in Bethlehem, Christ's descent from glory soon continued. His parents became vagabonds, settling as strangers in a foreign land where their livelihood depended upon Egyptians who probably detested them. Later Mary and Joseph would establish their family in Nazareth, a place of derision even among the Jews, for its lack of any distinguishing mark. As Jesus prepared for public ministry in the wilderness fast, the god of the world He'd come to save taunted Him for His fall from power, daring Him to reclaim His rights as the Almighty. He refused, and the descent went on.

For the next three years the Son of Man sought to do His Father's will while sleeping in fields and hills, looking to benevolent women for financial support, seeking solace through prayer in the wee hours of His dark and lonely nights. Scorned by heathens, rejected by the religious elite, living under constant threat of death, the drumbeat of descent pounded out its rhythm day after difficult day.

Down and down and down the winding staircase Jesus went as His closest followers denied and abandoned Him upon His arrest. Then, mocked, spat upon, slapped, and scourged till his body was a bloody pulp, Jesus was paraded through the streets like a criminal and hung to die while His earthly mother looked on in despair. And for six hours on Calvary, the Son of Man descended to the very depths of depravity as He took on the sins of the world, leading to the most painful predicament of all -- a severing of relationship with His Father.

The Apostles' Creed states that Jesus even descended into hell, alluding to a verse in 1 Peter that may indicate this took place between His death and resurrection. While theologians disagree on whether this happened or not, in truth, Jesus had experienced the very worst hell had to offer when He was plunged into the dark agony of separation from the One He'd loved and been loved by for all of eternity past.

This is just a smattering of the descent from glory that Jesus faced when He entered our world as a tiny baby. We will perhaps only grasp the scope of it when we see Him one day on His throne, radiant in splendor, attended by angels and worshipped by saints from every tribe and tongue. There can be no better time to ponder such a thing than on Christmas Day as we celebrate our Lord's birth.

So as we read the Christmas story and exchange our gifts and share our meals, let us take time to remember what it really cost to redeem fallen humankind. May we muse on that manger scene through the prism of the panorama in glory, where our King reigns, His beauty filling the temple of the heavens and splashing out across our world in whispers of wonder that we are privileged to behold.

And as we do, let us bow and worship in some way befitting the One who began that descent to secure your salvation and mine, long before this world was formed. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

Reflect

Today is one of celebration, family, sharing, and fellowship. Take a few minutes to give thanks for all of these things as you ponder that staircase. See Jesus going down it step by step. Read the following passage slowly and prayerfully, asking the Spirit to give you fresh revelation of what it meant for Jesus to humble Himself and become a man.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!
(Philippians 2:6-8)

Respond

Now read the rest of the passage, turning into a prayer of praise and worship for the King of kings and Lord of lords whose birth we celebrate today.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

A Christmas Activity

ENJOY THE DAY!