

Christmas: God comes down to us!

Dear listeners,

Once again the Christmas season is upon us. At this time of the year the Christian church celebrates the birth of Jesus. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem God came down to save sinners. But there was nothing ordinary about the conception and birth of Christ! God opened heaven and came down to be present with us! The almighty and eternal Son of God came down to us to redeem us of our sin and guilt. He is Immanuel, God with us.

Ever since the fall into sin, history has been a narrative of God coming down to his people. He comes down, not in a condescending way but to seek and save the lost. Immediately after sin shattered the relationship between God and our first parents, Adam and Eve, what did God do? He came down to look for them. God's coming down to Adam and Eve already tells us the road of redemption runs from heaven to earth and not from earth to heaven. God keeps coming down toward us. He came down from heaven in the awesome display of his power when he led the people Israel through the Red Sea, delivering them from the hand of a cruel oppressor. The glory of the Lord was revealed to the people of Israel when he opened the skies and came down in holiness and might on Mount Sinai. Later, his glory came down and filled the tabernacle and temple. When that glory departs, as it did in the days of Ezekiel, the people had no assurance of the Lord's presence.

Knowing that the Lord had to come down to redeem his people, the faithful in the Old Testament prayed for the ultimate descending of the Lord. One such petition is found in Isaiah 64: "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence." In the same chapter the prophet expresses why the Lord needs to come down. The sins of the people need to be removed. Verse 5b: "Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?" Verse 6: "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment."

The miracle of the virgin birth is the climax of God's gracious coming down in order to seek and save a people lost in sin and guilt. The Lord came down to redeem in the person of his Son, Jesus. Quite remarkably, when the Lord comes to save he does not appear in a dazzling display of might but in the simplicity and humility of the incarnation. Jesus empties himself of all his heavenly glory and becomes one of us. He comes in the form of a servant in order that he might be your Saviour and Mediator. The glory of his godly nature was hidden behind his human nature. Who would have noticed that the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger was the Son of God? But that's who he was!

Something truly miraculous, momentous and marvellous took place when God opened the skies and came down to ransom his people. Christ knew what awaited him and yet he was willing to stoop below his godly dignity, to come down and save his people from their sins. His conception and his birth, his coming down, would culminate in him being lifted up on a cross, being despised, rejected, misunderstood, mistreated and hated.

When the angel announced to Mary the conception of the Messiah, Mary asked the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" The angel Gabriel uncovers the mystery for her when he says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." The Holy Spirit brings about the unity of the Son of God in heaven and the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary. He works something that never happened before and never will happen again.

As we celebrate Christmas let's praise God for the mystery of the incarnation! He made a new beginning right where we set off on the wrong foot. The Father tore open the heavens to bring us salvation, peace and hope. Christ's coming down allows us to set our hearts and minds on the things that are above. Comforted by knowing God came down in Jesus we are called to respond to God's coming down by lifting our hearts on high to the place where Christ has gone after accomplishing what he came down to this earth to do. Joel 2:13 calls us to come down off our high horses of human pride, to rend our hearts in true repentance and to bend down in worship – thanking God for his great love in sending his son to come down to us.

When Jesus came down to this earth God threw open the heavens. He did so in fulfilment of the promises he made to all the Old Testament believers who eagerly awaited the coming of the Lord. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He became one of us in order that we may become one with him. He covers in the sight of heaven the sins in which we were conceived and brought forth and sets us on the path of the new obedience. His coming down to earth allows believers to approach the heavenly throne of God Almighty in prayer and thanksgiving.

Our Saviour came down to this earth and clothed himself with our humanity. You wouldn't have said "This child is the Son of God" if you saw him in the manger at Bethlehem or if you had seen him playing with children out in the streets of Nazareth. You wouldn't have considered him to be sent down from heaven if you saw him busy helping his Dad in construction or as when he was on the cross. Yet this is how God came to save. He sent down his Son. This is how Jesus is able to sympathize with us in every need. As the One who came down he knows the struggles we face every day. You can go to him when you are lonely, despairing, or frustrated by what life throws at you. He was made like you in every respect, except for sin. He has the power to help.

Well, are you prepared to receive in faith the person who came down from heaven? Faith in God requires of you and me that we accept the story of the incarnation as gospel truth and then set out to apply this truth to our lives.

The Jews at that time had hoped the Messiah would give them political relief and when Jesus did not meet their expectations they crucified him. But Christ had not come down to meet human expectations; he came to satisfy the justice of our heavenly Father. He was sent down to this earth to secure deliverance for his people, a redemption that would last forever.

Today, Christ who came down returned to heaven having accomplished all he was called to do. He rules from heaven as head of his church and king of the world. In faith I am called to seek all things in him, that is, to find my hope and comfort in him! I am to look up to the one who came down. The coming down of the Son of God is a mystery but it is the best news that could ever be announced. Jesus brought God close to us to live and dwell among us. He fulfilled the promises of God through his perfect obedience. He has the power to grant us full salvation – he applies to us the great benefit of his first coming by once again rending the heavens and sending down the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is sent down to comfort, guide, encourage and teach us to set our hope on Christ for all things.

Dear listeners, praise God for the miracle of Christ's birth. Look up to the God who has come down to you in love. By doing so, you can enjoy a truly blessed and joyous Christmas.