

V. Advent in Biblical Perspective  
*From Christophanies to Epiphanies*  
“The Theophany of the Incarnation”

John 1:1–4, 14

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December 24, 2015 – 5:00 p.m. Christmas Eve sermon

What a glorious night, a night Divine that would lead to glorious things for this is the Son of God that has come to save us from our sins! I will be reading some verses from John 1 but I'd like to first read from Hebrews 1. I want to read something that I think properly sets up our brief study this Christmas Eve in John 1. Hebrews 1:1–3 says [1] *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I want to take a few minutes to tie into what we've been doing. We have been involved in a study of how one of the ways the Old Testament anticipates the birth of Christ or as the New Testament calls it, the epiphany and that is the out breaking, the outshining of the glory of God that comes into this world through the birth of Christ – the epiphany of God – which is achieved through the Incarnation itself. In the next study we will be looking at a fourth Christophany which is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in the Old Testament – a theophany. That will be the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham and what the Angel of the Lord communicates to him.

In this study I want to talk with you about the epiphany, the Incarnation, the birth of Christ which is the ultimate theophany. A theophany is a pre-incarnation, prior to the birth of Christ, where the Son of God takes upon Himself humanity and makes this appearance in the Old Testament and it is sometimes called a Christophany because it is the Second Person of the Trinity. There are at least fourteen of these and arguably even more. Sometimes He appears as the glory cloud, sometimes as the angel of the Lord, sometimes an angelic appearance, sometimes in human appearance but they are miraculous, pre-incarnation appearances of Christ that are temporary for a moment to deliver a message that points to the coming of Christ and His epiphany that He is coming to us to save us from our sins. That is what these Old Testament theophanies are.

The fulfillment is in the epiphany of Christ who comes as the Promised One to achieve the promises of God. One He will save His people from their sins. Two He will defeat and ultimately destroy all of His enemies and our enemies – Satan, the flesh, the world, death, the grave, hell. He wins the victory when He comes to go to the cross for His people. That's why we end our Christmas Eve celebrations with communion which reminds us of the death and resurrection of Christ, for that is why He came. He was born to go to that cross. This epiphany, this Incarnation is the ultimate theophany.

When I say the word 'ultimate' some of you may think of ultimate boxing, ultimate hamburgers and ultimate everything for there are all kinds of ultimate but ultimate means the final, the distinguishing, the farthest, the destination that now God has come in the flesh. This is not a temporary appearance but wrapped in humanity forever and ever and ever. The

Christophanies were all temporary, miraculous, had a significant purpose anticipating the Incarnation of Christ and now that Christ has come, what is this? This is the ultimate that is the last, the destination of all of the theophanies. This is the theophany, not for a moment but for eternity. It is not to deliver a prophecy but to fulfill all the prophecies. The birth of Christ is that ultimate theophany where Christ has now come in the flesh, not in the likeness simply but in the actuality forever, not for a temporary moment but forever. He comes to save His people from their sins and win the victory over His and our enemies.

That is why I read from Hebrews 1 for God spoke long ago through prophets in many ways, through types, prophecies, symbols, theophanies and visions. In these last days He has finally spoken in His Son Jesus Christ and the One who has come is the exact representation of Divine nature. That is why He says to Philip, 'when you have seen Me you have seen the Father.' Veiled in flesh the Godhead see for this is God having come in the flesh to achieve the promises of God. He is not a mediator that needs His own salvation like an Aaron, Moses or David but here is a Mediator who brings the final Word from God. He is The Priest who will be the final sacrifice. He is The King of Kings and Lord of Lords who has come to bring His people into His Kingdom from all the nations of this world. This is the final, decisive and ultimate theophany and it is forever.

This flesh, that almost 2,000 years ago we've been celebrating that birth in anticipation of Him coming again and that Incarnate body, the Second Person of the Trinity, not only has brought veiled in flesh the Godhead see to accomplish the purposes of God's grace to save His people from their sins but He will have that body with the very marks of the crucifixion upon it for all eternity and we shall behold Him forever and ever. The glorious truth is given to us in John 1 so I'd like to read this passage. Remember that God has not said anything for 400 years since Malachi and now God speaks in the gift of His Son.

John 1:1-5 and 14 says [1] *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [14] And the (that) Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

That Word, Christ, through whom all things were made, by whom all things are upheld by the Word of His power, has come and become flesh to dwell among us. We have seen His glories, glories of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. It is not a momentary theophany in the Old Testament but it is the ultimate and final coming of God Himself to be with us. This Incarnation, this work of God's grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins, and in that same body, now glorified in which He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father, will come again for us to be with us forever. All who know Him as Lord and Savior will be with Him and can and will behold Him. They will see His hands, feet and side for all eternity. God has found a way not only to save us but we can fellowship directly with Him for no man can look upon God and live unless God finds a way to save us from our sins and now veiled incarnate, in flesh we see Divine deity.

For you to celebrate Joy to the World the Lord is come I just want you to think with me a few minutes because every Christmas when I turn on the radio or television I hear three heresies about this Incarnation. I don't want you to be led aside by them so that you and I might see the

fullness of what this means that Jesus the Son of God has come in the flesh to save us from our sins.

The first heresy is the heresy of divesture. That is the notion that Jesus Christ comes into this world but to take upon Himself humanity He laid aside His deity. He divested Himself of divine attributes and divine prerogatives. That's heresy. That's wrong. God cannot quit being God even for 33 years. We don't have 33 years without a Trinity. He did not lay aside deity. He laid aside privileges but no attributes or prerogatives of deity. You see them coming to worship Him. Divine worship is taking place. You don't worship mere men. This is God that has come in the flesh. God does not and cannot quit being God. That Babe, that zygote in Mary's womb is the Son of God by whom all things were made and who upholds all things by the Word of His power. He has humbled Himself not by divesting Himself of deity for this is humiliation by addition. He humbles Himself by taking upon Himself humanity. God with us, who is one of us, and yet He is fully God and fully man.

The second heresy is what has been called Docetism which is a Greek word that means ghostlike. These are the people that say God came in the flesh but it just looked like flesh for in other words, this is another theophany from the Old Testament. No, that is not what this is for this is the ultimate theophany. He doesn't come in a momentary appearance as an angel or human form. He comes in full humanity forever. This isn't a deceptive appearance of God as man. No, this is God having come in the flesh. That is why this same John will say later that 'we touched Him, handled Him, saw Him and looked with Him and if any man say that Christ the Son of Man did not come in the flesh let him be an anathema for he is the anti-Christ.' He came in real humanity because by a Man came death and by a Man must come the resurrection of the dead but He can't be just any man because if He is any man that means He comes from Adam. This is a virgin birth of God having come in the flesh because this is a New Adam – fully God and fully Man.

That brings me to the third heresy that we must always avoid. That is those who say He is one person that is 50 percent God and 50 percent man which is kind of a heresy of diminishment. He lays aside 50 percent of humanity so you have one person with two half natures and comes together as one nature. No, you have one Person with two full natures who is 100 percent God and 100 percent Man with no conflict, competition or contradiction but God has come in the flesh. He is a real soul, veiled in flesh. He has a real human body with a real human nature, untouched by sin yet has a real body that can catch a cold, a fever and will suffer pains of indigestion. He is tempted at every point likened to us in that real body yet without sin. It is in that body that He comes. When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father. He is the Divine perfect imprint of the nature of His Father. He is Jesus our Immanuel.

So what does that mean? He is not a God that laid aside deity but a God that came in humanity. He is not God that deceptively looked like a man but He really came in full humanity. He was not 50 percent and 50 percent but 100 percent God and 100 percent Man in one Person. It is this One who would take our place under the Law and obey it. It is this One who would go to the cross and pay the penalty for the disobedience we have under the Law for us. He will take our place and by that man Adam came our sin and by this New Adam, Christ, comes our redemption. This means that God Himself has come to us, to be among us, to be one of us, to take our place in life and at the cross, to pay for our sins and is coming again for us.

So as you think about that stable in Bethlehem, that location was the location of divine humiliation, not that He laid aside His deity but that He took upon Himself humanity. Philippians 2:5–8 says [5] *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,*

*[6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

That same stable that was the location of the gracious act of divine humiliation was command central of all the heavens and the earth. That One in that manger is upholding the whole world by the Word of His power. This is God having come in the flesh. This is the One who made the heavens and the earth. This is the One who has come into the heavens and the earth and who comes to us who were made in His image, to take our place so that we might be saved. This One has come and there is command central of the entire universe and divine humiliation but He came for one purpose and that was to save His people from their sins and to defeat His and our enemies.

I love the way the text ends in John 1:14. We beheld His glory. We beheld His glory in the stable. See the angels worshipping. See the shepherds worshipping. See the wise men worshipping. We behold His glory at the Temple and when He cleanses the Temple. We see His glory at the tomb of Lazarus when He says "Lazarus come forth!" We see His glory on the Mount when the glory cloud comes again and upon Him, Peter, James and John in their midst. We see His glory in an empty tomb. We see His glory ascending from the Mount of Olives but there is no place that we see His glory more than at the cross where the love of God meets the justice of God to save sinners by the grace of God to the glory of God. God has come to save us and be one of us for where there was no way He made a way. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

God gave you a gift. I know you probably have spent a lot of time thinking about what you'll wrap this Christmas. God from His wisdom wrapped His gift, as one of my favorite singers Michael Card says, in a Person. God Himself wrapped Himself in humanity to come be with us. That's the ultimate theophany, when you've seen Me you've seen the Father but my dear friends, it is the ultimate theophany but it is not the final for in that same Incarnate body He is coming again. Joy to the World the Lord is come. Joy to the World the Lord is coming again! Come quickly Lord Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the glory of Christ beheld in a stable, at a temple, on a mountain, at a grave site but thank You so much for the glory that we behold at Golgotha, at Calvary, where our God came and saved us and declared 'it is finished.' Dear friend, this is a glorious Christmas – God wrapped in a Person, Jesus the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity – came to save you. He has won the victory. He has risen and He is coming again. I want you to be there to be received by Him, not to the place where the enemies are destroyed – hell – but to a new heavens and a new earth to be with Him and with His blood and righteousness He has wrapped another gift. It is salvation. If you will turn from your sins and put your trust in Him then today is a forever day in which the Lord of glory will dwell with you now all the way to glory. Simply say 'Jesus I turn from my sin and put my trust in You.' To the world, for those of you who know Him, declare the glorious truth that the Lord has come so come to Him for He is coming again for all who know Him. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.