

Why the Incarnation?

CHRISTMAS, AS ADVERTISED

Recovering the purpose and power of this holy season.



PART 2: WHY THE INCARNATION?

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Christmas, As Advertised, Part 2
Why the Incarnation?
A *ReVision* Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Why the Incarnation?

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Welcome to *ViewPoint*

Welcome to *Why God Became Man*, a brief study of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, following the argument of Anselm of Canterbury's classic work, *Cur Deus Homo*. *Why God Became Man* is one of our *ViewPoint* series of studies in Biblical worldview.

This study is part 2 of a 3-part series on *Christmas, As Advertised*. In these studies we're reviewing the purpose of Christmas and what we can learn about God – and ourselves – by a better understanding and use of this season.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We are happy to receive your suggestions for future topics and studies. Contact us at our webpage. And if you're not receiving *ViewPoint* first thing every day, then be sure to register on the website, www.ailbe.org.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Higher Reasoning

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55.8, 9*

An act of history

Christmas, the celebration of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, invites the consideration of many mysteries, chief among them, the question of why God became a Man. Was the Incarnation necessary? Does the world really need Christmas? Or is this just some quaint mythology to which millions cling for a false sense of comfort against a closed and unsympathetic cosmos?

To the Christian, the *fact* of the Incarnation is not disputed. Christians have professed from the earliest years to believe in “Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary...” But while we may *believe* the Incarnation to be an act of history, we may not be entirely clear on just *why* the Incarnation and Christmas are necessary. And in helping our skeptical age to consider the deep mysteries of the Gospel, a good understanding of this central doctrine of our faith would seem to be in order.

Anselm of Canterbury

Over a thousand years ago a young theology student named Boso thought the same thing. As he explained to his instructor, the great Anselm of Canterbury, “As the right order requires us to believe the deep things of the Christian faith before we undertake to discuss them by reason; so to my mind it appears a neglect if, after we are established in faith, we do not seek to understand what we believe.”

Boso went on to request of his mentor that he kindly explain to him “for what necessity and cause God, who is omnipotent, should have assumed the littleness and weakness of human nature for the sake of its renewal?”

In other words, Why did God become a man? Why the Incarnation? Boso’s question launched a conversation with Anselm which develops one of the great theological treatises in the history of the Church, *Cur Deus Homo*, or, *Why the God-Man*, that is, *Why God Became a Man*. Cast in the form of a dialog between the great Archbishop of Canterbury and his student, *Cur Deus Homo* remains a classic explanation of the reason for the Incarnation and, with that, of why we as Christians take the celebration of Christmas so seriously and with such joy.

Anselm (1033-1109) served as Archbishop of Canterbury for the final 16 years of his life. He left a number of important writings, but none so eloquent or timeless as *Cur Deus Homo*. Moreover, few tracts of profound theological reasoning are as readily accessible to most readers as this. In *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm elaborated a full Scriptural and rational explanation for the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he wanted his readers to understand that this great mystery cannot be known by reason alone. Rather, we must be willing to think like God about this question, and to submit our reasoning powers to the teaching of God’s Word. We must let God be God in explaining Himself. We must understand as far as we can, but we will need to be prepared to take God’s Word in faith. Only thus will we be able to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of why the Incarnation was necessary.

Look to Scripture!

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At the outset of his dialog, Anselm explained to Boso, “I wish all that I say to be received with this understanding, that, if I shall have said anything which higher authority does not corroborate, though I appear to demonstrate it by argument, yet it is not to be received with any further confidence, than as so appearing to me for the time, until God in some way make a clearer revelation to me.”

In other words, to understand the Incarnation we must look to Scripture and try to understand this great historical event from God’s point of view. His thoughts are higher than ours, and we shall need to engage them in the confidence that God understands our need better than we. If we do, we may discover, as Boso did so many years ago, just how rich, beautiful, gracious, powerful, amazing, and eminently reasonable the Incarnation of Jesus truly is.

And understanding this can only enhance our wonder, joy, and witness during this glorious season of Advent.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why would you say the Incarnation was necessary?
2. Meditate on Philippians 2:5-11. What do you learn from this about the necessity of the Incarnation?
3. Do you think the question with which this section is concerned – the reason for the Incarnation – is one that many people ponder? Why not ask a few of your friends?
4. What are your goals for section of our study? What do you hope to learn?
5. How can you help your fellow students to gain a better understanding of the reason for the Incarnation?

Next steps: Why do your unsaved friends celebrate Christmas? Ask a few of them. Use their answers to share briefly why you think Christmas is important.

For prayer:

2 Since by Man Came Death

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15.21, 22

Never irrational

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ, which Christians celebrate at Christmas, is but the opening act of a story of devotion, heroism, betrayal, torture, murder, and redemption which, were it not for the triumph of the resurrection, would seem to make a mockery of the idea that God is good.

Was it really necessary, in order to bring salvation to the world, that the Son of God should be made to suffer the indignation of Incarnation and the horrors of suffering and death? Could not the almighty God of heaven and earth have devised some other means of accomplishing the same end?

This was the question Boso, the young theological student, pondered, and which he posed to his master, Anselm of Canterbury, for discussion in the latter's great theological treatise, *Cur Deus Homo*.

To some of his contemporaries, Boso explained, it was irrational for God to act in such a way. You have probably heard such comments from some of your own unbelieving friends. Yet, as Anselm insisted, "the will of God is never irrational." We cannot understand God's ways and works at the same *depth* He does, but we can understand them *as* He does, trusting that He knows all things, and does all things well. Thus we may find the reasonableness of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.

Not seemly?

Boso explained to Anselm that some unbelievers he knew were insisting that it was an "injustice and dishonor to God" to insist on the Incarnation – all that fleshly living and dying seemed to them somehow "incompatible with Deity."

In fact, as Anselm explained, the Incarnation was inescapable for the salvation of sinners, for the simple fact that men are sinners, and that by their own choice. Anselm asked, "Does not the reason why God ought to do the things we speak of seem absolute enough when we consider that the human race, that work of His so very precious, was wholly ruined, and that it was not seemly that the purpose which God had made concerning man should fall to the ground...?"

God has a great and glorious plan for humankind, which we have ruined by our pursuit of sin and selfishness rather than of the goodness and glory of God. God had to become a man to save us, Anselm explained, for if He had done so by any other means – say, by an angel – then we would by right have to be the servants of that being; and, if we were the servants of any other being than God, we would "in no wise be restored to that dignity" which would have been ours if we had not sinned, and which would have fulfilled God's original plan for us.

Further, because sin had entered the world through men, justice required that sin should be vanquished by a man. Those who are guilty must be made to pay. Yet no human being born of women would ever qualify for such a task, given the stain of original sin and our inherent inability to overcome it through our own efforts. Thus, all humankind would appear to be doomed, since none among their kind could be found to redeem them.

We need a new Man for our salvation, a Man sent from God Who is both Man *and* God, for only such a Man can wield the power for righteousness that we have forfeited, and only such a Man can break the power of

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death which we deserve. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, is thus the *only* way salvation can be brought to human beings, for He has fulfilled the righteousness we spurned by obeying and fulfilling all the Law of God. This is what theologians refer to as the *active obedience* of Christ. And He has borne the judgment we deserve, according to the justice of God's Law, thus in His *passive obedience* offering Himself as a substitute on our behalf. And each of these acts of obedience He accomplished in the human flesh with which He was born of the Virgin Mary.

As by a man death came to the world, so it was necessary that, by a Man – the God-Man – death should be defeated in death, and life should reign in righteousness through our Lord Jesus Christ.

For reflection or discussion

1. By what means and in what sense did death come to the world through Adam?
2. How would you explain what God's purpose was in creating human beings?
3. Why do we say that Jesus Christ was the "God-Man"? Why is that essential to His work of salvation?
4. How do Jesus' righteousness and suffering relate to our being saved?
5. Briefly outline what you would say to someone in explaining how Jesus overcame the curse of death by His Incarnation:

Try sharing that outline with a few people this week, to get their response. Do people seem interested in talking about this subject?

Next steps: Meet with a couple of Christian friends to discuss the active and passive obedience of Jesus Christ. How can a better understanding of this help us to make sense of the Incarnation? How can it enrich our celebration of Christmas?

For prayer:

3 Obedience Restored

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.
Romans 5.19

Obedient unto death

The disobedience of Adam plunged the entire human race into sin and death. All people are born in sin and are thus naturally inclined to disobey God, preferring instead the sinful desires of our own hearts. This is what is referred to as the doctrine of original sin. Nothing in us is either willing or able to overcome this preference for disobeying God.

How, then, can we ever be made acceptable to Him, and how can we live in His favor, since we *will* not and *cannot* obey His Word? How will we ever be restored to a path of obedience, so that we might know the blessings of God in every area of our lives, and thus realize the fullness of His good and perfect plan?

Anselm explained that it was to restore obedience to the human race that the Son of God became a man and willingly submitted to the righteous Law of God and the punishment of our sin. God the Father did not compel His Son to die, Anselm explained to Boso, “but he suffered death of his own will, not yielding up his life as an act of obedience, but on account of his obedience in maintaining holiness; for he held out so firmly in this obedience that he met death on account of it.”

Two aspects

There are two aspects to the obedience which Jesus accomplished on behalf of sinful men. I mentioned these briefly in our previous installment, but I want to visit them again here.

The first is what theologians refer to as His *active* obedience. By His active obedience Jesus perfectly fulfilled all the righteous requirements of God's Law. He never failed in a single jot or tittle of the Law, but kept and fulfilled all it requires, perfectly, and at all times. Thus He presented to God a righteousness full and complete, without stain or fault. His righteousness is the ground on which God is willing to accept us.

The second aspect of Christ's obedience is what is known as His *passive* obedience. By this Jesus allowed Himself to be taken and crucified in order to suffer the punishment of a holy and just God against the sins of the human race. God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us, as Paul said, so that, through His active and passive obedience – not ours – we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5.21).

By actively submitting to the *requirements* of the Law of God, Jesus accomplished the righteousness we require in order to know, enjoy, and serve God. By submitting to the *punishment* of the Law at the hands of wicked men, He became our Substitute, and, taking our sins upon Himself, took our sin away, so that all who believe in Him have no reason to fear the wrath of God. Now all men possess the means, through Jesus Christ, for enjoying fellowship with God forever.

Obedient and exalted

Anselm summarized this reason for the Incarnation of Christ: “So the Father desired the death of the Son, because he was not willing that the world should be saved in any other way, except by man's doing so great a thing as that which I have mentioned [he means, restoring obedience]. And this, since none could accomplish it, availed as much with the Son, who so earnestly desired the salvation of man, as if the Father had commanded him to die; and, therefore, as the Father gave him commandment, so he did, and the cup which the Father gave to him he drank, being obedient unto death.”

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Because of His obedience, and as the culmination of it, Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God and received a Kingdom and glory and honor (cf. Dan. 7.9-14). Now He is advancing His rule on earth as it is in heaven (Phil. 2.5-11), giving His Kingdom to His saints, who inherit and rule in it forever. (Dan. 7.18-27). The obedience of Jesus Christ our King cancels our sins and provides a power for righteousness by which we are increasingly transformed into His image as His Word and Spirit work in us (Phil. 2.13; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

As Jesus obeyed the Father, fulfilling all righteousness, so all who believe in Him are called to obey His Word as well, not that they might earn salvation, but that, being saved, they might participate in the life of Christ by the power of His Spirit, and thus know full and abundant life in Him. Through the obedience of Christ we are saved, and through the obedience of Christ we obey, unto righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, precisely according to God's eternal plan.

For reflection or discussion

1. What "obedience" does Paul have in mind in Romans 5.19? How does Jesus' obedience relate to us?
2. Anselm seems to be saying that Jesus did not die because it was somehow inevitable; He died because He chose to be obedient. What is the relationship between obedience and holiness for the Christian?
3. Explain "active obedience" in your own words. Why should you give thanks to God for this? Explain "passive obedience" in your own words. Why should you give thanks to God for this?
4. Our obedience does not earn salvation; rather, our obedience expresses salvation: Explain:
5. Meditate on Philippians 2.12, 13. Explain the relationship between our work of obedience and God's work in us, which is based on Christ's obedience:

Whenever we find that we have been obedient to God in some manner, should we congratulate ourselves? What should we do? Why?

Next steps: How many different ways can you see the obedience of Christ at work in your life? Talk with a Christian friend about this question, and give thanks and praise to Jesus for restoring us to obedience.

For prayer:

4 For the Honor of God

“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” John 17.4

The honor of God

In his great dialog on the reason for the Incarnation of the Son of God, *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury at the turn of the 12th century, explained to his student, Boso, that God had to become a man because He desired the salvation of men so much. And, since there was nothing men could do to save themselves, God would have to restore them to His original purposes in the same way they had initially fallen from them. As a man had been the occasion of humankind’s fall from grace, so only a Man, and only One capable of perfect obedience, and thus also God, would be able to accomplish the salvation God desires for us.

Jesus Christ became the God-Man to take away the pains of death and restore men to a path of obedience before God, by bringing them salvation through His own active and passive obedience. Thus He set God’s eternal plan on a fast-track toward glorious fulfillment.

A third reason for the Incarnation, Anselm explained, was to restore to God the honor that sin had taken from Him. Anselm explained, “to sin is nothing else than not to render to God his due.” To which Boso asked, “What is the debt which we owe to God?” And the Archbishop replied, “Every wish of a rational creature should be subject to the will of God...For it is such a will only, when it can be exercised, that does works pleasing to God...He who does not render this honor which is due to God, robs God of his own and dishonors him; this is sin. Moreover, so long as he does not restore what he has taken away, he remains in fault; and it will not suffice merely to restore what has been taken away, but, considering the contempt offered, he ought restore more than he took away.”

The demand of justice

Now God cannot restore His own honor merely by compassion, Anselm explained. He cannot simply wave off our sins and forget them. This would be to dishonor Himself by ignoring His justice. As Anselm explained, “It is not fitting for God to pass over anything in His Kingdom undischarged.”

Further, to simply forgive sins without appropriate payment for them would be to remove any difference between those who are guilty and those who are not, “and this is unbecoming to God,” Anselm insisted. Moreover, to do this would be to equate injustice with justice, and even to equate injustice with God Himself, because He forgives injustice without proper judgment.

“God maintains nothing with more justice than his own dignity,” Anselm wrote. “Therefore the honor taken away must be repaid, or punishment must follow; otherwise, God will not be just to Himself, or He will be weak with respect to [the just and the unjust alike].” God’s justice must be satisfied if His honor is to be vindicated and restored, and for God to allow His honor to be neither vindicated nor restored would be to make injustice equal to God.

When Jesus prayed that He had accomplished the work for which God had sent Him, and had glorified Him on earth (Jn. 17.4), this is what He had in mind. Jesus restored the honor of God by His work of obedience, and, by so doing, He has made it possible for us – on whose behalf God’s honor was restored – to honor Him henceforth in every aspect of our lives. But the greater glory of God, which Jesus had already fulfilled in His heart and mind, would be accomplished on the cross of Calvary, and then, out of the tomb on the first Easter morning.

To glorify God in all things

“Man’s chief end,” the catechism declares, “is to glorify God.” We could not glorify God, but would instead only continue to dishonor Him, apart from the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Dead in our trespasses and sins and inclined in our hearts only to disobedience, we need a power beyond this world to rescue us from our transgressions and to set us on a path of knowing and glorifying God.

This is why we were created, and this is the life in which we know the greatest satisfaction and fulfillment. But more important than this, the life of redemption is that life which alone can give to God the honor and glory and praise which are His due, and which we are enabled to supply by the grace of Jesus Christ our Savior and King.

For reflection or discussion

1. How did Jesus glorify God on earth?
2. How does sin rob God of His honor? Why is God due honor from us? How do we show that we honor Him?
3. What is “God’s justice”? How does His justice relate to our sin?
4. What does it mean to glorify God in all things (1 Cor. 10.31)? What keeps us from doing this?
5. How does the Incarnation of Christ make it possible for us truly to live for God’s glory?

Why is the glory of God the highest motive for the life of faith?

Next steps: Jesus glorified God, thus making it possible for us, through His obedience, to glorify God as well. But what does it mean to glorify God? Talk with a pastor or church leader about this question.

For prayer:

5 For the Happiness of Men

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10.10

Not what God intended

The Scriptures expose to the light what every unbeliever knows to be true about his life: that happiness and fulfillment are elusive, and disappointment and disillusionment are pretty much the norm in life.

Paul tells us that apart from God people have no hope in this life (Eph. 2.12). Everything on which they depend for happiness is either fleeting or inadequate, leaving them wondering aloud, “Is that all there is?”

What’s more, all people live in the fear of death (Heb. 2.15) and are stalked by the specter of judgment for their wrongdoings. Guilt and shame are the daily experience of all but the most hardened of heart. Many perhaps resonate with the bumper sticker that reads, “Life’s a bitch, and then you die.”

This is not what God intended when He created men and women. He made us to be upright, happy, full of joy, abounding in pleasure, and flourishing in good works. His purpose for us is to know and enjoy Him, and to serve Him in full and bounteous flourishing with all the gifts of personality, creation, and culture.

But sin has ruined the promise of our creation. Sin not only robs God of His honor, it robs human beings of their longed-for happiness. Unless something is done to take away our sin, we will never know the kind of happiness which God intends for us.

The way to happiness

Here, Anselm explained to Boso, is yet another reason why God had to become a Man. By satisfying the debt of our sins, Jesus has opened the way to happiness for all who believe in Him. Indeed, our happiness could not be achieved, Anselm explained, apart from the work of Christ in the Incarnation: “Therefore, consider it settled that, without satisfaction, that is, without voluntary payment of the debt, God can neither pass by sin unpunished nor can the sinner attain that happiness, or happiness like that, which he had before he sinned; for man cannot in this way be restored, or become such as he was before he sinned.”

The Incarnation is the reason for the joy and happiness of men, which we celebrate each year at Christmas. Most people have completely lost sight of the “reason for the season.” However, so powerful was the work of Christ’s Incarnation that untold millions of those who do not believe in Him share – if only for a season – in the happiness He has opened to us.

The penalty, power, and presence of sin

God became a Man, Anselm explained in *Cur Deus Homo*, so that human beings, trapped in a misery of our own creating, might be set free to know the happiness of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. That happiness, moreover, consists of two dimensions.

First is the happiness we may know here and now.

In this life those who come to salvation through faith in Christ are not immediately translated out of the world of sin; nor are they even completely freed from their own sinful tendencies. In this life we continue to know the blows and bruises of sinful behavior, both ours and that of others. The *penalty* of sin has been removed from us, but the *power* of sin continues to affect us, though we daily strive to make progress against it. However, in spite of this, believers who know their sins to be forgiven and who are pursuing a life of

obedience to God through Jesus Christ can know true happiness, a deep-seated joy that not even the direst of circumstances can take away (cf. Hab. 3.17-19).

Our happiness now, while real, is but a foretaste of the eternal happiness which is yet to be, when we are finally translated from *power* and the very *presence* of sin to live in glory with God forever.

And the greatest happiness we have, now and forever, is that of knowing God and living in His presence increasingly day by day.

As Anselm explained, “rational nature was made holy by God, in order to be happy in enjoying Him...It is, therefore, established that rational nature was created for this end, viz., to love and choose the highest good supremely, for its own sake and nothing else...Wherefore rational nature was made holy, in order to be happy in enjoying the supreme good, which is God.”

Human beings could not be happy as God intended, unless God became a Man in the Incarnation of the Son of God to take away our sins and restore us in His righteousness to the Father Who made us. His having done this in Jesus is the reason for “joy to the world.”

For reflection or discussion

1. How is the Christian life an abundantly satisfying way to live? To what extent do you experience it this way?
2. Mediate on Ecclesiastes 7.29, Genesis 1.26-28, and Psalm 8. Why did God make human beings? What did He have in mind? How has sin affected this original plan?
3. Meditate on John 14.6. How would you explain each of those terms to an unbelieving friend, and how would you demonstrate the truth of them from your own life?
4. Meditate on John 17.3 and Psalm 16.11. In what sense can we say that eternal life means knowing God? How should knowing God like this affect our daily lives?
5. How does the Incarnation of Jesus make it possible for human beings to be restored to God’s original plan for them?

Summarize all that you’ve learned thus far about the reasons for the Incarnation. Do you find that you think about this very much during the week?

Next steps: Spend a day – on and off – meditating on the words to the Christmas carol, “Joy to the World!” Pay particular attention to the verbs that relate to Jesus. How does each of these verbs work to bring us happiness? Share the results of your meditation with your spouse or a family member.

For prayer:

6 To Defeat the Devil

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3.8

Beginning and ending

Christmas, every believer knows, is the celebration of a new beginning, the beginning of our redemption. In Jesus Christ God became a Man in order that He might destroy death, take away our sins, open to us the path of righteousness, and bring us into the happiness which knowing God affords for all who believe in Jesus Christ.

Christmas marks the beginning of a Kingdom without end and everlasting life with God (Is. 9. 6, 7).

But Christmas also marks an ending – the end of the reign of Satan. When the devil tempted Adam and Eve, and humankind fell into sin, a great insult was done by man against the honor of God. Human beings handed the devil a victory which he indulged for thousands of years – but which could not last forever.

Anselm explained to Boso, “Man being made holy was placed in paradise, as it were in the place of God, between God and the devil, to conquer the devil by not yielding to his temptation, and so to vindicate the honor of God and put the devil to shame, because that man, though weaker and dwelling upon earth, should not sin though tempted by the devil, while the devil, though stronger and in heaven, sinned without any to tempt him. And when man could easily have effected this, he, without compulsion and of his own accord, allowed himself to be brought over to the will of the devil, contrary to the will and honor of God.”

A Man’s victory

This treachery could not be allowed to stand, Anselm insisted: “Decide for yourself if it be not contrary to the honor of God for man to be reconciled to Him, with this calumnious reproach still heaped upon God; unless man first shall have honored God by overcoming the devil, as he dishonored him in yielding to the devil.”

How could the redemptive work of Christ ever be secure and certain apart from the utter defeat of the one who had made that work necessary by his rebellion against God and treachery against the human race?

Further, this had to be a victory achieved by a man, since defeat had come at the hands of men in the first place. Anselm: “Now the victory ought to be of this kind, that, as in strength and immortal vigor, he freely yielded to the devil to sin, and on this account justly incurred the penalty of death; so, in his weakness and mortality, which he had brought upon himself, he should conquer the devil by the pain of death, while wholly avoiding sin.”

God Himself was in no need of coming down from heaven to conquer the devil. He had already done that, expelling the devil from heaven and consigning him to eternal separation from divine happiness and bliss. Rather, Anselm explained, “God demanded that man should conquer the devil, so that he who had offended by sin should atone by holiness. As God owed nothing to the devil but punishment, so man must only make amends by conquering the devil as man had already been conquered by him.”

Such a victory could not be achieved by just any man, Anselm explained; it had to be achieved by a God-Man, the Son of God come to earth in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Total victory!

This is what John meant when he wrote that Jesus Christ appeared at Christmas to destroy the works of the devil. Those works had been introduced by men; they could only be erased by a Man – but not just any man,

only the God-Man. At His temptation in the wilderness Jesus bound the devil (Matt. 4.1-11; 12.22-29). On the cross He put the devil to public shame and sent him scurrying (Col. 2.15). Out of the tomb Jesus overcame the devil's greatest weapon, the fear of death. Now He reigns in glory, and is putting the devil and all His enemies under His feet, until the time when He, the God-Man, shall return in power finally and completely to destroy the devil and His works.

Jesus' victory over the devil means that we, in His power, may continue in that victory, resisting the devil, growing through temptation, and bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1). The devil still stalks about, and he can be dangerous for those who trust in their own power to defeat him. But as we rest in Jesus, and draw on His Word and Spirit, the victory He gained over the devil during His earthly sojourn can be ours, every day of our lives.

This Christmas rejoice in the new beginning we have in Jesus, but rejoice as well in the victory over the devil which Jesus in His Incarnation achieved for us.

For reflection or discussion

1. What are the "works of the devil"? Are they still present in the world? In what sense has Jesus "conquered" the devil by having become incarnate?
2. Complete the following: "It was necessary for the God-Man to defeat the devil because..."
3. Read Matthew 12.22-29. What did Jesus mean by saying He had "bound" the devil? How should that affect us?
4. Read 1 Peter 5.8, 9. Given that Jesus has "bound" the devil, why are Peter's words important? Read James 4.7, 8. How should a Christian "resist" the devil?
5. What do we mean by saying that Jesus has destroyed the works of the devil?

Next steps: How would you counsel a new believer to beware of the devil's attacks and to resist him when necessary? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.

For prayer:

7 Only God Could Redeem Us

*None of them can by any means redeem his brother,
Nor give to God a ransom for him—
For the redemption of their souls is costly,
And it shall cease forever—
That he should continue to live eternally,
And not see the Pit. Psalm 49.7-9*

A dialog

The essential argument of Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo* is that only God could redeem men from their sins. Men, by our disobedience, have incurred a debt which we cannot repay. In the Incarnation of the Son of God, God came to earth to pay a debt which He did not owe.

Here is an exchange between Anselm and his student, Boso, which summarizes this point as well as any section of this wonderful book: Anselm: "Yet we may say, although the whole work which God does for man is of grace, that it is necessary for God, on account of his unchangeable goodness, to complete the work which he has begun."

Boso: "I grant it."

Anselm: "But this cannot be effected, except the price paid to God for the sin of man be something greater than all the universe besides God."

Boso: "So it appears."

Anselm: "Moreover, it is necessary that he who can give God anything more valuable than all things in the possession of God, must be greater than all else but God himself."

Boso: "I cannot deny it."

Anselm: "Therefore none but God can make this satisfaction."

Boso: "So it appears."

Anselm: "But none but a man ought to do this, other wise man does not make the satisfaction."

Boso: "Nothings seems more just."

Anselm: "If it be necessary, therefore, as it appears, that the heavenly kingdom be made up of men, and this cannot be effected unless the aforesaid satisfaction be made, which none but God can make and none but man ought to make, it is necessary for the God-Man to make it."

All of grace

But we must never lose sight of the fact that all this great and glorious work of God was not done out of necessity. God was not required to create men and the world, nor to redeem fallen men, and the Son of God was not commanded or forced to take on human form for their redemption. Nothing outside of God compelled Him to undertake this glorious and amazing work of redemption at such cost to Himself and His own dear Son. He simply chose to do so, motivated by nothing more than infinite and unfathomable love.

Why the Incarnation?

Here's how Anselm summarized this: "For this He became man; for this He did and suffered all things undertaken by him; for this He chose as He did. For therefore were they necessary [the things He suffered], because they were to be, and they were to be because they were, and they were because they were; and if you wish to know the real necessity of all things which He did and suffered, know that they were of necessity, because He wished them to be. But no necessity preceded his will."

The meaning of Christmas

The Incarnation of the Son of God – the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – is supremely and solely an act of divine grace, a measure taken out of love for poor, miserable, rebellious creatures such as you and I.

Only God could redeem us, and only by coming among us as one of us – a God-Man. In the Incarnation, Jesus of Nazareth destroyed death, restored obedience to men, returned honor to God, achieved our everlasting happiness and bliss, and destroyed the works of the devil. This is why Christians celebrate Christmas, and why we are determined to preserve its meaning against every secularist and materialist assault on its real significance.

Read Anselm on the Incarnation. If you will, you will discover new depths of meaning, gratitude, and joy to the timeless words of our most glorious Christmas carol, "Joy to the world! The Lord is come!"

For reflection or discussion

1. Meditate on Psalm 49.7-9. Based on what we've seen thus far in this series, why is this teaching necessarily true? How would you answer the question posed by Anselm's title: "Why the God-Man"?
2. Meditate on Ephesians 2.1-10. How does the grace of God work in and for us unto salvation?
3. How has this study of the reasons for the Incarnation affected your understanding of the depth of your own sin?
4. How has this study helped you to appreciate more fully the magnitude of Christ's work? The enormity of God's grace?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study?

Next steps: Summarize Anselm's argument in answering the question, "Why the Incarnation?" Then, go back to one or two of those friends you talked with earlier, and share your understanding of Christmas.

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.