

The Staggering Dependence of the Incarnation

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Every year at Christmas I feel a strange sense of longing. I want everyone to feel special, everything to look picture perfect, my heart to be content and joyful, but throughout the season, I feel I'm missing something.

That's when I remember that Christmas, particularly Advent, is the season of waiting and longing. Recognizing that the world will never satisfy me, and nothing will be perfect until heaven. So it's understandable that Christmas will never feel perfect. For me, each year I can do less during the holidays, and this year friends are helping with everything from preparing holiday treats, to decorating my tree, to wrapping presents. While I'm so grateful for the help, it heightens my sense of helplessness and increasing dependence.

As I reread the accounts of Christ's birth, I was struck again by the sacrifice of the incarnation. It's unimaginable to me that the eternal Word, through whom all things were made, willingly limited himself to be born as a baby. The weight behind these simple words is staggering:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14).

God, who has no beginning and will have no end, who exists outside time and space, who created the heavens and the earth and set the moon and stars in their place, set aside his glory for us.

God whose glory is above the heavens and who created all things, who laid the foundations of the earth and told the ocean how far it could come, who commanded the morning and formed the dry land with his hands, became subject to his own creation.

God who needs nothing and gives life to everything, who upholds the universe by the word of his power, who is worshiped by the host of heaven, came to be a servant.

We really can't understand the magnitude of what Christ laid aside. Though he was God, he willingly emptied himself when he came to earth and then further humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8).

I've always focused on the ultimate sacrifice, the saving work of Christ on the cross, but often overlooked the enormous sacrifice inherent in the incarnation. **Just as the crucifixion involved sacrifice and separation from God, so did the incarnation.** Jesus enjoyed unending fellowship with the Trinity until he interrupted that union when he entered humanity. God came to earth as a helpless baby. The frailest of all creatures. Dependent on his earthly parents. Unable to take care of his own needs.

We don't know what Jesus was aware of as a baby, whether he grew in understanding of his deity (he knew by age 12), or if he was aware of it from the beginning. If it was the latter, that would even intensify his sacrifice to me - waiting for his parents to provide for the needs that he couldn't yet verbalize as a human baby. Knowing the universe was created at his word, but now patiently waiting for help, unable to speak a word.

Jesus lived on the earth with the same limitations that we do. And willingly submitted to them.

That God chose to be limited for us has special significance now as I'm living a life of dependence. I use a wheelchair most of the time and I can't go anywhere without my husband who patiently helps me with everything. It's humbling. I long for the independence I once had. I'm dealing with a persistent back problem, and I go to sleep propped up by pillows and can't turn without my husband's help. Bed isn't the place of comfort and rest it once was.

But Jesus uniquely understands what it means to give up independence and comfort. Even in the manger, his tender newborn skin was probably irritated by the hay poking through his swaddling clothes. He came into the world in a damp smelly drafty stable and later had nowhere to lay his head. But these places, these circumstances, this manger were no accidents — they were chosen by God and foretold by the angels as they proclaimed the birth of Christ.

Jesus's life began with dependence. And he learned obedience through what he suffered. I'm learning that hard lesson too, that **God works through my weakness rather than when I'm relying on my strength. The more dependent I am on him, the more his strength and his power are made evident in my life.**

Ted Wueste's devotional [Trusting God in the Wilderness](#) has highlighted God's grace in dependence. Wueste writes:

"On a foundational level, God always provides what is truly needed to live a life of dependence. Let that sink in for a moment. He gives us what we need to live a life of dependence. How often do our ideas of provisions have more to do with living in such a way that we are independent and self-sufficient as opposed to vulnerable or dependent upon God?"

Wueste asks, "As we move along this path from independence to dependence, are you willing to be uncomfortable? Are you willing to walk through the suffering rather than trying to fight it?"

These are important questions for me because I love comfort and often fight against suffering and dependence. Yet Christ found joy in his dependence on God. He did not count equality with God something to be grasped but voluntarily let it go. He willingly emptied himself. He chose dependence because he trusted God.

While all our journeys are unique, God is inviting each of us to increasing dependence on him. It is an invitation to life, life in him, though the process may feel like death.

As Wueste says:

"God is leading us somewhere. The journey is about deepening our dependence on Him. Why? Because dependence is the promised land. Hear that clearly. A life of dependence is the truest, most real hope in our lives. Our hope is Him, not some location outside of difficulty. It is experiencing Him and trusting Him in the wilderness that forges a dependence and reliance which is what we long for."

So this Christmas, if you feel weak or dependent or that somehow your life isn't where you'd like it to be, press into God with those longings. Know that he understands the pain and losses you're enduring but trust that through them, God is offering a richer life in him that you can possibly imagine.