

The Humility of The Incarnation 2 Corinthians 8:9, Luke 2:1-7

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Well, after thirty-three days, the country is still wondering about the President-elect. During these past few weeks, we've been hearing that this is a great lesson in democracy.

But from my point of view, this has been an object lesson in the contrast between the values of this world and the values of the world to come.

It's a lesson that's especially appropriate during the Advent season.

In the political arena, the highest value is power – how to get it, how to keep it, how to use it to maximum effect. So, it's no wonder that so much time, money and effort goes into a Presidential race.

But at the same time as this battle is going on, we've also been preparing to celebrate the anniversary of quite a different event. An event which concerns, not power, but humility.

This event was hardly noticed at the time. Aside from a few shepherds and a handful of wise men, no one paid any attention to the birth of Christ over 2,000 years ago.

“Powerful” wasn't an adjective that would've been used to describe either the baby or His parents.

They had so little influence they couldn't even get a hotel room, not even with Mary being nine months pregnant. They had to sleep in the barn with the livestock.

Not only that, but they couldn't even afford the usual sacrifice of a lamb at the temple for her newborn son.

They had so little money that, when the time came, all Mary could afford was just a couple of pigeons.

So, this morning, I'd like to look at the radical humility of Christ. How His humility should be an example for us, His followers, today.

This is especially important because we live in an age where humility isn't respected. Instead, it's held in contempt. Anyone who tries to exercise humility is scorned as a weakling or a fool.

The role models of our society are not humble, but selfish, ambitious, proud, and arrogant.

Many people in our society idolize sports heroes, actors and actresses, singers, or entertainers who tend to have a high regard for themselves.

Sometimes it seems that every time you turn on the television or open a newspaper, all you see and hear is "Look at me! Look at me!"

The one exception is politicians. Not that they're especially humble, but at least they know it doesn't look good for them to be constantly talking about themselves, so they hire press secretaries.

Another example: football. It used to be that when a pro football player made a touchdown, he would just run off the field, or maybe spike the ball.

Now, we have ten minutes of high fives, moonwalks, break dancing, chest bumps and taunting the other team; a one person party of self-congratulation.

I can't really blame them, though. They're just doing what their culture has taught them to do. But Christ points us in a different direction.

So today, let's look at a couple of things that sets Jesus apart.

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First, consider the humility of the incarnation itself. The second person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, taking on humanity with all of its limitations, pain, sorrow and suffering.

Listen to how Paul describes it. 2 Corinthians 8:9, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”*

What does that mean, *“He became poor”*? It means that He gave up His honor and glory. He let go of His position.

He relinquished all the riches of heaven in order to become one of us, in order to save us from our sins. He gave up that glory to become a human baby.

To give up the glory of heaven to become a man would've been humility enough, but He became a helpless little infant.

Think about it: the baby Jesus, completely at the mercy of Mary and Joseph. Unable to feed Himself, move about, or communicate. Unable to do anything except eat and sleep.

And here's the irony of it all. He was dependent upon the man and woman, whom He made, to take care of Him.

If they had known who He really was, Mary and Joseph would've bowed down and worshipped Him, just like the shepherds and the wise men.

But instead, Jesus had to rely on them. Those hands which had formed galaxies and set the stars in place, those hands that had spun the earth on its axis, now just waved around in the air.

The mouth that had spoken the universe into existence, now just babbled and cooed. The sovereign Lord of creation had become the very picture of weakness and inability – a little baby.

Not even a royal baby, not the son of a king; not a wealthy baby, the son of money and privilege. But a peasant child born to poverty and raised in humble circumstances.

Surrounded not by God's holy angels and the glory of heaven, but by sinful, fallen human beings and a dirty barn.

Think about it: when people are struck with a serious illness, something progressively debilitating, that they know over time they're going to become less and less able to care for themselves, one of the things they fear most is losing control.

Becoming dependent on someone else, at first just needing someone to drive them places or prepare meals for them, and then eventually having to rely on other people for the basic necessities of life – to dress them, and feed them, and bathe them.

Yet Jesus voluntarily took on this kind of complete helplessness, the kind that we fear so much.

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Also, as a human being, Christ became subject to Old Testament Law. He had to obey the ten commandments, including number five, *"honor your father and mother."*

Mary and Joseph probably weren't perfect parents. They weren't all-knowing or all-wise. They weren't sinless.

There must have been times when Joseph had a bad day at work and yelled at Jesus for no good reason.

There must have been times when His parents disciplined Him unfairly out of anger or frustration. But Jesus was sinless, which means perfectly obedient, not only to God but also to His earthly parents.

He had to subject Himself to them, had to obey them and respect them, even when He knew they were wrong, even when they acted foolishly or sinfully.

Here's a question for you: Have you ever had to submit to someone in authority whom you were convinced was your inferior?

Parents who didn't understand. A supervisor at work who had been promoted beyond his ability; a police officer or judge who seemed extremely incompetent; a husband whose ignorance was matched only by his stubbornness?

Then take heart from Jesus' example. Everyone with whom He came into contact was His inferior, including His own parents. Yet He never grumbled or complained, He never rebelled.

Instead, He humbled Himself and yielded to their authority over Him. He respected their authority, not because they deserved His respect but because it was the right thing to do.

God the Father had placed Him in a position of subjection. And, if Jesus could do it, then so can we.

By His power, we can show respect and honor to those in authority over us, even when they don't deserve it, even when we're convinced they're wrong.

But Christ's humility didn't end with His birth or His childhood. It continued throughout His life.

We see this in Mark 10:43-45 when His disciples were discussing their place with Him, *"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Jesus humbled Himself by becoming a helpless human infant, by honoring and obeying His parents, and ultimately, as He died on the cross for our sins.

Likewise, we're to humble ourselves in our relationships with one another.

Philippians 2:2-8, *"Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 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!"*

Jesus was willing to give up the privileges of deity to become one of us, in order to give His life for our sins.

In the same way, we're to follow Christ's example and respond to one another in humility. That's from where unity comes. Each person seeking to serve rather than to be served.

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So, if we're supposed to be humble, what does it look like? First, humility isn't pretending. It's not acting as if you're something less than you really are.

If you're a first-rate pianist, and someone compliments you, humility isn't saying, "*Oh, well, I don't really play so well.*" That's not humility; that's not even being polite. That's just lying. Humility means seeing things as they really are.

Romans 12:3-5, "*For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*"

What does all this mean? It means that we should each think of ourselves as the Bible does.

The Bible says that we're all sinners who deserve God's judgment, but who've been forgiven in Christ and blessed with gifts and abilities.

So, humility doesn't mean prancing around, saying "*I'm number One*" on one hand, or moping around, saying "*I'm worthless*" on the other.

It means not only evaluating ourselves with sober judgement, acknowledging our gifts and abilities, but recognizing that they come from God and are given to us by God to serve one another.

Therefore, our abilities or achievements are no reason to puff ourselves up or act as if you somehow we deserve to be honored and praised.

1 Corinthians 4:7, *“For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”*

Whatever your ability is, rejoice in it! It’s a gift from God! Give Him the praise and glory!

But, you say, *“I worked hard to develop these skills. I worked my way through college. I practiced the piano for hours a day”*

True enough. But who decided that you would be born in a country where you’d have those opportunities?

Who gave you your brain? Who decided that you’d have the good health and financial resources to develop those skills? The answer’s obvious. God did.

Even if you worked hard to get where you are, you were only taking the raw materials that God gave you, and applying the strength and intelligence He gave you, to get there.

Third, humility means putting the needs of others ahead of your own. Philippians 2:3, *“consider others better than yourselves.”*

This means willingly giving up your ‘rights’ in order to serve others; not grudgingly, but thankfully.

It means that you consider it a privilege to give up your time, and resources, and energy for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

It means that, instead of walking around expecting everyone else to serve you as if you deserved to be catered to, we treat others as if they deserved to have us serve them.

It means that we consider their needs and interests to be just as important and urgent as ours, maybe more so.

Humility is not condescension, reaching down to serve someone inferior to me. Humility is recognizing that, before God, we are all of equal worth.

Therefore, serving one another isn't just a duty or an obligation. It's a privilege. It's a privilege to serve God's people with the resources and abilities He gave us.

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Conclusion

There's a difference between serving out of duty and obligation and serving out of love and humility.

If you're just serving out of duty, you're serving at your convenience. You're making yourself available according to your schedule.

But if you're serving out of humility, you serve at the other person's convenience, according to their need.

And finally, humility means accepting God's love and forgiveness as a gift of grace. It means recognizing that there's nothing we can do to earn or deserve God's love.

All we can do is receive it as a free gift. We can never repay Him, in fact He doesn't want us to try.

Once we truly understand God's grace, once we've humbled ourselves to accept His gift of salvation through Jesus Christ, then we're better able to freely give to one another and receive from one another.

Knowing that everything we have is a gift from God, that's the ultimate lesson of Christ's birth.