



Home for Christmas

an Advent Series

Home for Christmas
Humble
Philippians 2:5-11

During the Christmas season, a common church tradition is the lighting of the Advent candles each week during a church's corporate worship time. Each individual candle symbolizes a unique aspect or theme of the collective Christmas story. While some variety does exist between different church traditions, the common themes represented by the Advent candles are love, joy, peace, faith, purity, and hope.

But these themes are not all-encompassing. The Christmas story is also about humility. For the early church fathers, like the apostle Paul, Christ's humility served as an important starting point to both explain and expound on the scandalous claim of the gospel. This gospel that begins with the Incarnation—God taking on humanity in the person of Jesus.

- What themes, emotions, or symbols do you most commonly associate with the Christmas season?
- How do we commonly define “humility” or “being humble?”

- Is this a virtue that is exalted in American society?
- Is this a virtue that we often seek out in a political leader or ruler?

Pastor Dustin's main point on Sunday was that Christ's humility demonstrated through the Incarnation is both our way to life (salvation) as well as our example to follow for life (our mindset). To help explore these points about the humility of Jesus, Pastor Dustin led us through a very old Christian hymn (or poem) found nestled in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi.

In this letter, Paul addresses unity in the Philippian church. He knows that, just like him, they are enduring persecution. He doesn't want the church to fracture under the weight of this trial. Paul longs for them to stay united in order to continue to contend for the gospel of Jesus. But this unity will only happen if their lives and mindsets are rooted in humble service to one another, as modeled by Jesus himself.

Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

"5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

*6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;*

*7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

*8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

*9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,*

*10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father."*

Verse 5

In the New Testament, the word "*Christ*" often appears written directly before or immediately following the name of Jesus. Christ is neither a surname nor the last name of Jesus but rather a royal title! By attributing this title to Jesus, the apostle Paul is making a grand and scandalous claim about Jesus' true identity and status.

- What does the word '*Christ*' mean? What is its Hebrew equivalent?

- The Hebrew title “*Messiah*” comes from the verb that means “to anoint or to smear with oil.” In ancient Israelite culture, generally only two types of people were ceremonially anointed with oil. Can you guess who they were? (*hint: one of them wears a crown*).
- For Jews like Paul, the title Christ came to be specifically associated with the arrival of a future king. Why was the potential of this future king’s arrival so greatly anticipated?
- How do the kings and rulers of this world, both past and present, typically assert their dominions, establish their legacies, Deal with rebels and insurrections?
 - How does King Jesus differ on all these accounts and why is this ‘good news’?

Verse 6

The ESV translates verse 6 “who (Jesus), though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped . . .” The English word *form* does not carry the same depth as the Greek word for form. Pastor Dustin mentioned a more helpful English word here may be *essence* or *nature*.

- How do these two words give added depth to the English word *form*?

In both Roman and Jewish circles, it was (and still is) scandalous to claim that Jesus was a king. But even more scandalous is Paul’s claim in verse 6 that Jesus is also God, equal to God the Father. Furthermore, Jesus did not earn his status or somehow attain this privilege; rather, he has always been God from eternity past.

- How does Paul say that Jesus viewed his status and privilege as both God and King? How could Jesus have used these things to his own advantage?
- Why are status and privilege often so important to us as humans? How do we let them define our self-worth? In what ways can clinging to our positions of status and privilege be both detrimental to ourselves and our church community?

Verse 7 - 8

Verses 7 and 8 follow Jesus’ voluntary descent down from his royal throne. They begin by saying that Jesus “emptied himself . . .” (or as the NIV translation reads “made himself nothing . . .”).

- Flowing out of the context of verses 5–6, of what did Jesus’ voluntarily empty himself?

At first glance, the logical ordering of verse 7 seems a bit backwards. Indeed, in descending order one might think that being *human* would come before the position of *servant*. But, when we read this text, we often skip a key player in God’s created order of the cosmos.

- In the biblical narrative, what type of beings that appear throughout the storyline are described consistently as more glorious than humans but not more glorious than God himself? (*Hint: one of their name's is Gabriel*). What are their roles in relation to God?
- Psalm 8 is a beautiful reflection on the humanity's status in God's created order. Read this short Psalm. How does the psalmist contrast humans with angels (aka, heavenly beings) in God's created order?
- Pastor Dustin mentioned that verse 7 is about addition not subtraction. What does it mean that Jesus *added* humanity to his nature without subtracting from his deity?
- Considering who and what Jesus is, how does his birth story reflect his humility? How is the humility of his incarnation then reflected in his earthly ministry?
- What made a Roman crucifixion the epitome of human degradation? How does Jesus' willingness to suffer such a death show the extent of his humility and obedience?

Verse 9 - 11

There is a common motif that flows through the whole of the Biblical narrative. That motif is expressed in the words of Jesus' own mother, Mary, in Luke 1:51-52: "He (God) has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble." God exalts the humble. If the previous verses were all about Jesus' humility, then these verses are about his exaltation.

- In the previous verses, who "humbled" Jesus? In contrast, in these verses, who elevates Jesus? What is the significance of this change?
- What is the significance of the phrases "every knee should bow" and "every tongue confess?" Again think about this in the context of kings and kingdoms.
- Paul's words here do not imply universal salvation for all but rather the extent of Jesus' rule. How do these verses convey the eventual totality of Jesus' rule as both God and King over his creation?

At Christmas, we celebrate the first coming of Jesus as both God and King. His position and title afforded him all the status and privileges that being God could offer. However, he willingly forsook his status and took on humanity, first being born into relative poverty and obscurity. In life, he humbly served his own subjects. And in the end, he willingly suffered death, enduring the humiliation of a Roman crucifixion. Through his humble obedience, he offers us both salvation unto resurrected life as well

as the pattern for living a gospel-centered life. For this, we have cause to rejoice this Christmas season!