

A photograph of a stone church building with a large Gothic-style window and a cross on the roof. In the foreground, there are white blossoms on a tree.

Weekly Newsletter: 12th December 2023

Reflection: How Should the Incarnation Affect Your Spirituality?

By Joe Barnard

We all know that we are supposed to be amazed by the incarnation. We reverently listen to Christmas messages and use pious language about the marvel and beauty of the child in the manger. However, if we are honest, a lot of us struggle get much spiritual benefit from thinking about the incarnation. We are more mystified by the story of Christmas than amazed by it. We readily understand the need for Jesus to live a perfect life, for him to die on the cross, and for him to resurrect; however, the relevance of the incarnation is more difficult for us to determine. The proof of this is seen in two ways: first, in just how little we talk about the incarnation at any time other than Christmas and, second, the slight influence that the incarnation has in shaping our everyday devotional lives.

Now, if you (like me) have often struggled to discern the spiritual relevance of the incarnation, here are some ideas to ponder over the advent season.

1 – The Incarnation Reveals the Dignity of Human Nature

God could not take the form of a tiger, a mole, or an eagle and reveal His glory. There is something incompatible about the nature of a mere animal and the nature of God. Animals lack the freedom, will, intellect, and ability to love which are necessary to reflect the personal nature of God.

The incarnation highlights for us that, when the Bible says we are made in the image of God, it really means what it says. Our nature, as shocking as it may sound, is able to bear something of the weight of God. God is able to take the form of a man because man is able, by design, to reflect the life of God. Marilynne Robinson, the great Christian novelist, captures this point when she says, “Jesus is the profoundest praise of humankind the cosmos could utter” – or, as one old Puritan put the matter, Jesus is the “flower” of our nature.

2 – The Incarnation Measures the Immeasurable Love of God

Pagan religion could not conceive of a true incarnation. The Greeks may have told stories of Zeus taking on an avatar in order to enjoy an evening of pleasure, but they never made the mistake of imagining that Zeus would inseparably unite his nature with the nature of a human being. No god, the Greeks would have thought, would love human beings enough to become one of them in suffering, in pain, and in death.

The marvel of the incarnation is that the eternal Son of God assumed the form of a man in order to rescue us from sin, suffering, and death. In order to do so, he became a sin offering, suffered in our stead, and –

did not just die – but experienced the worst of all possible deaths. Such heavenly love exceeds anything human beings could have imagined or hoped for. Thomas Watson was right when he said, ‘Christ incarnate is nothing other than love covered with flesh’.

3 – The Incarnation Illumines the Sacredness of the Cross

If Jesus is not God, the cross is unspectacular. Thousands of men and women have been executed throughout history. If Jesus is simply a martyr, he is forgettable.

But Jesus is God, a fact that changes everything. His blood is not just the blood of an innocent man, but the blood of God enfleshed as a man. Appreciating this ought to make us shudder as we reflect on the weightiness of the cross. John Donne says,

*Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;
What a death were it then to see God dye?*

Looking at the cross, we should be dumbstruck as we ask one question: *why? Why would God do this?*

The more we appreciate the incarnation, the more we will marvel at the cross. To see God in Christ is to see the glory of Calvary.

4 – The Incarnation Makes Sense of the Resurrection

Christians sometimes overestimate the intellectual scandal of the resurrection. If Jesus is simply a man, then the idea of him being resurrected is shocking. Human beings are mortal. We expect them to die and to stay dead.

Yet, Jesus is 100% God as well as 100% man, and God is not mortal, but immortal. Thus, whereas we might expect death to have power over a mere human being, we should not expect death to have power over Jesus. How could the Son of God die and not resurrect? This is the real question we should be asking. Death is not stronger than God; death has no claim over holiness.

That the Son of God could die is a paradox; that the Son of God would resurrect after death is no more surprising than the sun bursting through the curtain of night.

5 – The Incarnation Reveals the Essence of Spirituality

In the person of Christ we see humanity yielding itself completely to divinity. Jesus is perfectly righteous because his will is submitted completely to the love of the Father.

Herein lies the essence of all true spirituality. Our greatest fulfilment does not come by resisting God or trying to become God, but by yielding ourselves completely to God. Although we cannot replicate the unique person of Christ, we can learn from him what it means to be truly human. I am most myself when I am most yielded to God. This is the existential truth of the incarnation.

Funeral Arrangements – Sylvia Shippin

Sylvia's funeral will take place this Friday (15th) at 11am in the Lorimer Chapel at Warriston Crematorium. Refreshments will be served afterwards at Malmaison, 1 Tower Place, Leith and everyone is warmly welcome. The service will be livestreamed, please contact Liz (Liz@holyroodevangelical.org) if you would like the details. Please continue to pray for Ernie, Max and their families as they grieve.

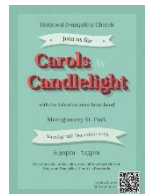
Jasmine Erica Moore



We were delighted to hear of the safe arrival of Andrew and Shelby's daughter and she now has a name – Jasmine Erica Moore. She was born on Saturday 2nd December at 6.55am and weighed 7lbs 7oz. We are rejoicing with Andrew and Shelby and praying for them as they settle into life together.

Carols by Candlelight – tonight!

We're looking forward to gathering tonight (Tuesday 12th) from 6.30pm to 7.15pm to sing carols with the Salvation Army Band and enjoy hot chocolate together! It looks like it will be raining this evening (and all day today!) so we'll be meeting in the church instead of the park.



Christmas Plans

Here are the plans for over the Christmas season:

- **Tuesday 12th December** - Carols by Candlelight from 6.30pm to 7.15pm.
- **Sunday 17th December**
 - Worship Service at 10.30am with a Christmas message from the Sunday Club
 - Baby and Toddler Nativity at 3pm. Everyone welcome, please come along and support the Baby and Toddler Group.
 - Carol Service at 6pm – a great opportunity to invite family and friends along!
- **Sunday 24th December** – Worship service at 10.30am (no Home Groups)
- **Wednesday 27th December** – Prayer meeting (on Zoom) at 7pm
- **Sunday 31st December** – Worship service at 10.30am (no evening service)

Cornhill Book in a Day – 17th and 18th January

Come and spend two days at Cornhill in Glasgow digging deep into the book of Psalms with **James Hely Hutchinson**. James is the Director of Institut Biblique de Bruxelles (IBB), in Belgium. IBB is a wonderful college teaching the Francophone world how to preach and teach the Bible faithfully. James has studied, taught and written extensively on the book of Psalms and this book in two days event is not to be missed.

The day will be a great opportunity to learn key Bible handling skills and to grow in your understanding of the book of Psalms whilst enjoying warm fellowship with like-minded brothers and sisters. Please contact Liz (Liz@holyroodevangelical.org) if you would like to attend so that we can book together as group.

Christmas Appeal 2023

The Christmas Appeal will run for the month of December and the four projects that we are supporting this year are –

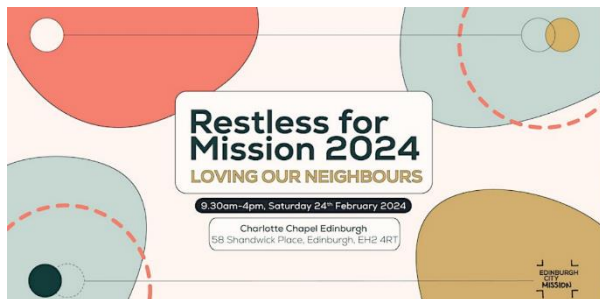
- Tim Rawlinson and the Tranent Church Plant
- Kilmallie Free Church (where Euan Dodds is the Minister) to support their Minister in Training
- Scripture Union Scotland
- Tearfund for their Middle East Emergency Appeal



We'll hear more about each of these projects during our morning services. The elders decided that the funds would be allocated with the Tranent Church Plant and the Kilmallie Minister in Training receiving 30% each. Scripture Union and Tearfund will receive 20% each.

Giving towards the appeal can be made by bank transfer to the church account <https://holyroodevangelical.org/giving/> (using the reference 'Christmas Appeal') or can be placed in an envelope marked 'Christmas Appeal' in the offering box. Thank you!

Edinburgh City Mission – Restless for Mission 2024



Restless for Mission is the Edinburgh City Mission annual conference where they encourage and empower the church in Edinburgh to do mission! This year the theme is 'Loving Our Neighbours' and Alan and Diane McWilliam are the keynote speakers. The conference will take place in Charlotte Chapel on **Saturday 24th February** from 9.30am to 4pm and for tickets go [here](#).

Church Calendar

For your prayers and info:

- Monday:
 - Baby & Toddler Group from 10am – 11.30am (last one for this term)
 - Warm Space 12noon – 3pm (last one for this term)
- Tuesday: Carols by Candlelight at 6.30pm – 7.15pm
- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting at 7pm on Zoom
- Friday: Funeral Service for Sylvia Shippin at 11am in Mortonhall Crematorium (Lorimer Chapel)
- Sunday:
 - Worship Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Joe Barnard preaching.
 - Baby and Toddler Nativity at 3pm
 - Carol Service at 6pm



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