

Series: Why Christmas?
Title: Why did God become a man?
Text: Luke 1:23
Key Word: Reasons
Proposition: In difficult times, God comforts and strengthens us with the reasons why he chose to become one of us. Everyone will find strength and comfort because of the reasons why God became one of us.

Good Morning. My name is Chris Farmer and I serve as one of the pastors of this church. We are thrilled that you have chosen to worship God with us today. God is in this place. He offers His love, presence, and guidance so that you and I can know the depth of His love.

One day a toddler asked his mom, "Why do we have Christmas?" His mom patiently explained that Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birthday. In a burst of preschooler inspiration, the boy concluded with a child's logic, "Well then, we should have a birthday party! We can have cake and Kool-Aid and sing happy birthday to Jesus!" His mom said, "Okay, we will!" Thus began a five-decade family tradition, a Birthday Party for Jesus every Christmas Eve, complete with angel food cake and candles that the youngest child gets to blow out.

Besides singing carols and reading the Christmas story from the Bible, each family member takes a turn sharing his or her answers to two personal questions: "What, from the past year, are you thankful to God for?" and, "Since it's Jesus' birthday, what gift will you give him this next year?" Many profound family moments shape this family.

With the hectic rush of Christmas parties, shopping, food preparations, and traveling, we often yearn to stop and ponder the question: “Why Christmas?” We will revisit the Christmas story recorded in the first three books of the New Testament and ask such questions as Why Bethlehem? Why was there no room in the inn? Why music at Christmas? Why call Him Savior? Why did God become one of us? I hope that as we unwrap these questions, we will rediscover the purpose behind all the activity and recapture the joy of this glorious time of the year.

More than any other follower of Jesus, Matthew knew the cost of following the Master, yet he never hesitated. He left his tax-collecting booth, guaranteeing unemployment. Many of the other disciples could return to his job, but not Matthew. Following Jesus changed his life. He not only belonged to a new group, he belonged to the Son of God. He not only accepted a new way of life, he became an accepted person. At one point, he was an unacceptable tax collector, now he had a new purpose and new identity. Before he kept financial records, now he recorded the history of the Son of God on earth.

He recorded the events of Jesus’ life in the first book of the New Testament. I suspect that Mary and Joseph told him about the time when the angel visited them. His memory of ancient preachers also informed his writings. In the first chapter of his account, he wrote, “*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophets: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ – which means, ‘God with us.’*” (Matthew 1:22, 23)

Several years ago, Eric Brazilan raised the question: “What if God is one of us?” in his song by the same title. Many remember the song sung by Joan Osborne especially as the introduction to the TV show, Joan of Arcadia. While Joan is singing images of Rev. Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and others flash across the screen. When I occasionally watched the show between 2003 and 2005, I often felt this pause as I pondered this thought. “Why did God become one of us?”

The Bible answers this question by saying that God did become one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the God-Man. Shepherds and wise men from the East and the disciples worship him. (Matt. 2:2,11; 14:33) Stephen prays to Him while being stoned to death. (Acts 7:59) The Bible teaches us that He was without sin. (1 Pet. 2:22) Peter said he knows all things. Paul wrote that all of God’s fullness dwells in Him. (John 21:17) Jesus himself said that He alone gives eternal life. (John 10:28) He forgives sin, when many believed that only God could forgive sin.

Why did God become one of us? Here are some reasons that God became one of us. **First, God became one of us to show us that God keeps His promises.** The Risen Jesus told his followers, *"This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."* (Lk. 24:44) Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Isaiah foretold that a virgin would be with child and name him, Immanuel. The prophet Micah foretold that the ruler of Israel would be born in Bethlehem. At the time of Jesus birth, shepherds left their fields and entered Bethlehem to worship Jesus. The

prophet Hosea foretold that God's chosen one would come out of Egypt. Mary and Joseph took the infant Jesus and traveled to Egypt to flee from King Herod. Later, they came back and settled in Nazareth. God had promised his people that He would come and save his people. Even though it may take a long time, God always keeps his promises. He does what he says He is going to do. It may not be in the time when we want it. It may not be done, as we would expect it.

Second, God became one of us to show us what God is like. Jesus answered, "*Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*" (John 14:9) Madeline L'Engle put it like this: "The virgin birth is far less mind-boggling than the power of all Creation stooping so low as to become one of us."

One day Jesus walked into the temple and sat down. All the people gathered around him to listen to him teach about God's kingdom. Some religious leaders and teachers brought to him a woman. They made her stand before the crowd and Jesus while they asked him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses teaches us that she must be stoned. What do you think? Jesus knew that they were up to no good, so he walked over to the woman, stooped down in front of her and wrote something in the ground with his finger. When they kept asking him, he quit writing, stood up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again, God stooped down and wrote on the ground.

One by one those who heard Jesus' words dropped their stone and walked away, first the older ones, then younger, until only Jesus was left with the woman, still standing before him. Jesus stood up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you." Go, now and leave your life of sin."

Fred Winters, a Baptist pastor, lost his life to a gunshot wound during a Sunday service by a troubled young man. A week after the tragic event, Julie Chen of CBS's *Early Show* interviewed his wife, Cindy Winters. When asked about her husband's alleged killer, Cindy spoke only a message of forgiveness.

"I do not have any hatred, or even hard feelings towards him. We have been praying for him. One of the first things that my daughter said to me after this happened was, "You know, I hope that he comes to learn to love Jesus through all of this." We are not angry at all, and we really firmly believe that he can find hope, forgiveness, and peace through this, by coming to know Jesus. And we hope that that happens for him." Jesus and Cindy Winters show us what God is like, a forgiving God.

Third, God became one of us to help us in our time of need. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "*But we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*" (Hebrews 4:15, 16) God loves us so much that He became one of us in the person of Jesus. He has

experienced a full range of temptations and trials as a human being throughout his life. We can take comfort knowing that He faced the same things we face. We are also inspired knowing that Jesus faced these temptations and tests without giving into sinful thoughts, habits, and attitudes. He shows us that we do not have to sin, when facing the seductive lures of temptation.

While working as a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, Lee Strobel reported on the struggles of an impoverished, inner-city family during the weeks leading up to Christmas. A devout atheist at the time, Strobel was mildly surprised by the family's attitude in spite of their circumstances:

The Delgados—60-year-old Perfecta and her granddaughters, Lydia and Jenny—had been burned out of their roach-infested tenement and were now living in a tiny, two-room apartment on the West Side. Lee walked into their apartment. He could not believe how empty it was. There was no furniture, no rugs, nothing on the walls—only a small kitchen table and one handful of rice. That is it. They had only a few possessions.

Eleven year-old Lydia and thirteen year-old Jenny owned only one short-sleeved dress each, plus one thin, gray sweater between them. When they walked the half-mile to school through the biting cold, Lydia would wear the sweater for part of the distance and then hand it to her shivering sister, who would wear it the rest of the way.

Despite their poverty and the painful arthritis that kept Perfecta from working, she still talked confidently about her faith in Jesus. She was convinced he had not abandoned them. Lee never sensed despair or self-pity in her home; instead, there was a gentle feeling of hope and peace.

Strobel completed his article, and then moved on to more high-profile assignments. When Christmas Eve arrived, he found his thoughts drifting back to the Delgados and their unflinching belief in God's provision. He wrote, "I continued to wrestle with the irony of the situation. Here was a family that had nothing but faith, and yet seemed happy, while I had everything I needed materially, but lacked faith—and inside I felt as empty and barren as their apartment."

In the middle of a slow news day, Strobel decided to pay a visit to the Delgados. When he arrived, he was amazed at what he saw. Readers of his article had responded to the family's need in overwhelming fashion, filling the small apartment with donations. Once inside, Strobel encountered new furniture, appliances, and rugs; a large Christmas tree and stacks of wrapped presents; bags of food; and a large selection of warm winter clothing. Readers had even donated a generous amount of cash.

However, it was not the gifts that shocked Strobel in the middle of Christmas generosity. It was the family's response to those gifts. In his words:

“As surprised as I was by this outpouring, I was even more astonished by what my visit was interrupting: Perfecta and her granddaughters were getting ready to give

away much of their newfound wealth. When I asked Perfecta why, she replied in halting English: "Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do."

That blew Lee away! If he had been in their position at that time in his life, he would have been hoarding everything. He asked Perfecta what she thought about the generosity of the people who had sent all of these goodies, and again her response amazed him. "This is wonderful; this is very good," she said, gesturing toward the new things. "We did nothing to deserve this—it's a gift from God. But," she added, "It is not his greatest gift. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. That is Jesus."

To her, this child in the manger was the undeserved gift that meant everything—more than material possessions, more than comfort, more than security. "At that moment," Lee thought, "something inside of me wanted desperately to know this Jesus—because, in a sense, I saw him in Perfecta and her granddaughters."

They had peace despite poverty, while Lee had anxiety despite plenty; they knew the joy of generosity, while he knew the loneliness of ambition; they looked heavenward for hope, he looked out for himself; they experienced the wonder of the spiritual, while he knew the shallowness of the material—and something made him long for what they had. Or, more accurately, for the One they knew. (*Lee Strobel, The Case for Christmas*) Followers of Christ love as He loves. Followers of Christ know his peace and security. God uses them to help in a time of need, even those who once thought they do not need any help at all. God became one of us to help us in our time of need.

Finally, God became one of us to strengthen us with His presence. Paul wrote, *“To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* (Colossians 1:27)

A man who had no interest in spiritual matters related casually to the Christian who lived next door—they talked over the back fence, borrowed lawn mowers, stuff like that. Then the non-Christian's wife was stricken with cancer, and she died three months later. Here is part of a letter he wrote afterward:

I was in total despair. I went through the funeral preparations and the service as if I was in a trance. After the service, I went to the path along the river and walked all night. However, I did not walk alone. My neighbor—afraid for me, I guess—stayed with me all night. He did not speak; he did not even walk beside me. He just followed me. When the sun finally came up over the river, he came over and said, "Let's go get some breakfast."

I go to church now. My neighbor's church. A religion that can produce the kind of caring and love my neighbor showed me is something I want to find out more about. I want to love and be loved like that for the rest of my life. God became one of us to strengthen us with His presence.

God became one of us in the person of Jesus so that we would trust in the faithfulness of his promises, know what God is like, help us in our time of need, and strengthen us with his presence. We can show others what God is like by our faithfulness, forgiveness, strength, and our compassionate presence. 2486

