

The Incarnation Continues

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 December 2021

Preacher: Anthony Parrott

[0 : 0 0] Well, in the church calendar, this is known as the fourth week of Advent, the fourth Sunday of Advent. And then we have Christmas Eve this Friday, Christmas Day this Saturday.

And on this fourth Sunday of Advent, the church worldwide reads and proclaims something called the prophecy or the song of Mary, the Magnificat.

Magnificat comes from a Latin word to magnify the Lord. And so we're going to read this together. So if you're able, I invite you to stand. We're going to stand up. We're going to do this what's called antiphonally.

We're going to split you up into two sides of the room. So over here, you're the left. Over here, you're the right. And you're going to be declaring Mary's revolutionary prayer, prophecy, and song to each other.

All right? So let us begin. Left side, my soul magnifies the Lord. And to the right, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

[0 : 5 9] If you're online, you get to say whatever part you'd like. Keep going. Left. For God has looked with favor on the depressed state of their servant. Surely.

For the mighty one. For those who revere them from generation to generation.

God has shown strength in their heart. God has scattered the proud of his thoughts of their heart. God has brought down the power from their heart.

God has lifted up the depressed. God has filled the hungry with good things. God has sent the richer way. And then all together, God has helped their servant Israel in remembrance of their mercy.

According to the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. This is the word of the Lord.

[2 : 0 7] Thanks be to God. You can be seated. Now we're going to answer the question tonight. Why did Jesus come? Why did Jesus come?

And if you've been inside the church or outside the church, you may have heard a variety of stories about why Jesus came. Anything to do with, you know, getting God to forgive you of your sin. To deal with your guilt and your shame. As Jesus to stand in the way of the fiery wrath of the Father. You may have heard a variety of stories. And scripture has a few answers to this question of why Jesus came.

For instance, the book of Hebrews chapter 2 says, Jesus became flesh and blood so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

That is the devil. And free those who all their lives were held in slavery for the fear of death. 1 John chapter 3 says, The Son of God was revealed, showed up, appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

[3 : 1 5] In John 10, Jesus himself says, The thief, the enemy, the devil, comes only to steal and kill and destroy. And Jesus says, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

To have it to its full. Now, we hear stories about why Jesus came. And here's something about Jesus enabling God to be able to forgive sin.

But it's as if God had this lack of power that then Jesus showed up and gave God power. And that's really bad Trinitarian theology. And it makes nonsense of what God is truly like.

God has always been the kind of God who forgives sin. The cross was not about God giving God power to forgive. About Jesus giving God power to forgive.

Some power that God lacked until Jesus died. No, God came in the person of Jesus. Not to figure out a way to forgive you. But to show us what God has always been like.

[4 : 16] If you want to know the character of the Father, then look at Christ the Son. And Jesus came, according to these passages, to be swallowed up by death.

So that Jesus could render it powerless from the inside. Anybody know the movie Men in Black? Will Smith, Tommy Lee Jones. So there's this scene where Tommy Lee Jones is an agent fighting alien invaders from space.

And Tommy Lee Jones stands in front of the gigantic cockroach bug alien and allows himself to be swallowed up by it. And Will Smith is like, Tommy Lee Jones, what are you doing?

You have so much of a career ahead of you. And so Tommy Lee Jones gets swallowed up by the big bug. Will Smith thinks that all hope is lost, like the disciples thinking that the crucifixion was the end.

But what Will Smith doesn't know, and Tommy Lee Jones does, is that Tommy Lee Jones has a little friend in his pocket that explodes the bug from the inside. And that gets rid of the threat to Earth.

[5 : 22] And Tommy Lee Jones is safe. And Will Smith is happy as Will Smith deserves to be. And that is the resurrection story. About Jesus, didn't know that was coming, being swallowed up by death, being sunk into Hades and to the ground, preaching, proclaiming the gospel to the dead.

And death and the devil and Satan have thought that they have won, but little do they know that they have swallowed up the source of life itself. And Jesus burst out of death through the resurrection and now holds the keys to Hades and death.

And if Jesus is holding the keys, what do you think he's going to do with it? That's why Jesus came. Now, in Magnificat language, Mary's prophecy and song, this is what Mary says.

She declares, God shows mercy to everyone from one generation to the next. Jesus comes to show us what it is for God to give mercy.

And now she goes on to show us what this mercy is like. This is how we know that God is merciful. Four ways. Number one, to pull down the powerful from their thrones, to send the rich away without their riches, to fill up the hungry, and to lift up the low or the depressed.

[6 : 44] It is God's mercy to remove the powerful and the wealthy from their power and their wealth, because scripture makes clear that those two things are corrupting diseases.

In fact, power and riches are such a corrupting disease that, I don't know if any of you know this, but if you own a cat, some cats have this parasite that gets released into their fecal matter.

And so if you scoop up the fecal matter and you don't wash your hands and you take in this parasite, it will get into your brain and make you love your cat more. True story.

You can Google this. Power and wealth have a similar parasite which get into your soul and convince you that even though they're corrupting you from the inside out, this is actually good for you.

It's like a lung disease patient taking one more puff from that cigarette, thinking that will finally cure their coughing. Therefore, it would be merciful for God to remove that corruption from within us, remove that parasite from within us, even corruption that we misperceive as good so that we might have clear minds once again.

[8 : 06] Now, I know that pastors are not supposed to geek out on Greek in front of their congregations, but too bad. Here we go. I'm going to teach you a Greek word tonight. The Greek word is kathario.

Let me hear you say kathario. Kathario. Very good. Now, it's used throughout ancient Greek literature. It's used in the New Testament about nine times.

And the majority of the time that it is used, it's used as a technical term for how you remove a body from a cross. Now, crucifixion was this grisly, cruel way that Rome reminded everyone that they're in charge and you are not.

And so estimates say that upward of 600,000 people were crucified by the Roman Empire over their time as rulers and reigners. And so it was outlawed in the 300s.

They crucified hundreds of thousands of people in this public display of their dominance and your submission. And it happened so often that language, the Greek language, had to develop a word for what's that thing called when you have to take the body down.

[9 : 18] And it was to kathario a body, to remove it from the crucifix. Now, this is what Mary says happens to the rulers.

God has kathario'd taken them down, the rulers from their thrones. So why does Jesus show up? Jesus has come to destroy the works of Satan and the devil, to destroy death from the inside, like Tommy Lee Jones.

Jesus has come to show us what it is for God to show mercy. And what is God's mercy? God's mercy is to remove the powerful, to decrucify the powerful from their thrones.

It's an act of God's mercy to take rulers from their thrones for two reasons. Number one, it's mercy for those oppressed by the powerful, those oppressed by those in their thrones.

It's merciful to those who have been hurt and wounded by those who monopolize power and money. It's an act of mercy to those who have been set aside or marginalized by systems of slavery and supremacy and homophobia.

[10:31] It is a mercy to those who have been profited from during a pandemic, from those who have been refused to fair pay or health care.

It is an act of God's mercy to remove the powerful from their thrones, to kathario, to decrucify them from their power so that those who have been hurt by their power may be hurt no longer.

And it's also an act of mercy to the powerful. It is God's kindness to those on the thrones because being in power over others is kind of like being crucified.

If you find yourself on a throne of privilege, power, wealth, responsibility over others, in a position of authority and wealth, then I should warn you that that sort of monopolizing, individualistic power over others will slowly leach life out of you.

And the only merciful thing left for God to do is to take you down from that cross, that cross of corrosive power that you have found yourself up on, to take you down and to decrucify you and begin the restoration and healing process that those of us who find ourselves in positions of privilege and power are going to need.

[12:03] So it's an act of mercy to those of us who have been oppressed, hurt, wounded, marginalized by those in power. It's an act of mercy to those of us who are the hurters and the wounding and the ones in power.

Now, Anthony, you may be thinking, that's pretty darn political. And I say, you might be thinking, but I know at least some of you are thinking this because I've had this conversation just this week. Well, you know, I couldn't go to the table anymore because it got too political.

So I've got good news for you. There is a new Bible translation out called the Anti-Critical Theory Translation, the Anti-Critical Theory Bible. The ACT Bible is a new translation that seeks to demonstrate God's desire that Christians be colorblind, classblind, and blind to many, many things. It's satire. Okay? The solution, this translator and editor says, is that in order to avoid reading scripture with any hint of a critical lens, which might lead to embrace an entire worldview, the ACT, the Anti-Critical Theory Bible, gently alters all references to race and ethnicity, allowing a truly colorblind approach to the Bible.

This radical new translation allows readers to see people as people devoid of characteristics that might lead one to have Marxist thoughts. By the way, our lawyers have asked me to tell you that if you have sustained Marxist thoughts for more than four hours, please see a medical professional.

[13:33] All right. So let me give you some examples. Numbers chapter 12 says this. It says, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because, and the original says, of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married.

But we're going to cross that out and we're going to put instead they didn't get a good feeling about his wife. So God's cloud departed over the tent and behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. No, no, no. That refers to whiteness and we don't do that in the Bible so we're just going to say it hurt a lot. Now this is what the editor of the ACT Bible says. They say, this passage seems to say that Miriam didn't approve of Moses' wife because she was black or Ethiopian.

So God mocked her, and this is just a hilarious part of the Bible, by making her very, very white. Like, oh yeah, you don't like Moses' wife? How about you're whiter than ever? So this sounds far too much, the editor says, like a critique of whiteness, hierarchy based off of skin color, which, you know, it's not in the Bible so we're going to take it out.

James chapter 2, the ACT Bible. says this, for if, the original says, a man with a gold ring and fine clothing, no, we're not going to refer to like wealthy or poor people, that's too political, so we're just going to say, if one guy comes into your synagogue and then another guy also comes in and you pay special attention to, not the rich guy, but that first guy, and say, sit here in a good place, and you tell the poor man, no, the second guy, stand there or sit by my footstool, haven't you just made

a random choice among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

[15 : 14] James 2 goes on, listen, didn't God choose those who are poor? No, no, no, no, don't talk about the poor or the rich, it's too political. No, didn't God just choose one random group in this world to have faith and be heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him?

But you've dishonored the second guy. James, the original, says, don't the rich oppress you and drag you before the courts? But no, we're not going to say that, we're just going to say, aren't people like the first guy with no particularly important characteristics, aren't they mean to you sometimes?

So what if we depoliticize, we decritical theory marries magnifica? So this is what it would say. It says, God has shown strength with God's arm, God has scattered some random people and the thoughts of their hearts.

He's brought down some people from some places and he's lifted up some other people. He has told some people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and he sent other people to offshore accounts to avoid paying their taxes.

Not nearly as a revolutionary text, is it? God has sent Jesus to show us what mercy looks like.

[16 : 31] And mercy has particular claims and implications in this world that some people just might call political. To decrucify the powerful from the crosses of their power so that the oppressed might be lifted up, so that the hungry might be filled and so that the rich might not be hoarding anymore.

Now how is God going to accomplish this? We know why Jesus came but how is God going to do this? So to answer that we've got to talk about a specific word but I've got to give you some background.

So there's this thing that happens in language where a word or a phrase can be used the exact same words but in two different ways and it means different things.

So take a look at this picture of a math teacher saying look for the radical. So you're looking for the answer of a square root. The radical of nine, the square root of nine is three.

Hey, good job. Okay. I had to look this up earlier. Thank you for embarrassing me. So that's one use of the phrase look for the radical but it can be used very differently if you just change the background.

[17 : 45] Look for the radical. Well, now you have soldiers with guns and they're being given instructions to take somebody out who might be a threat to others. Look for the radical.

Same word, same phrase means something completely different. Now this happens in ancient languages as well. It happens in the Bible as well. So you read 1 John chapter 2. John writes, Don't love the world or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. So world, bad, don't love it. But then you get to John chapter 3 and John says, God so loved the, that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him won't perish but have the life of the age, have eternal life.

Wait a second, God, didn't you say in 1 John to not love the world but you get to love the world? How's that fair? No, it's one word being used in two different ways. The world can mean the demonic systems of hierarchy and oppression and violence that are used to bring suffering and death.

Yeah, don't love that. But the world is also God's good creation, the cosmos, the created order that God dwells within working to redeem.

[18 : 59] The Psalms say, the world is filled with God's glory. Of course, we ought to follow God's example and love the world but don't love the systems within it that are used to bring harm.

Now, that's just an example so I can get to this how. How is Jesus going to pull rulers down from their throne, send the rich away, empty, fill the hungry, and lift up the lowly?

How is God going to show mercy? So, there's this other word in scripture that has two different definitions. But for the past 500 years or so, we have been so focused on the one definition that it's created a destructive theology.

So, Romans chapter 8, Paul uses this word flesh. To set the mind on the flesh is death. But to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace.

For this reason, the mind that's set on the flesh is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law. Indeed, it can't. And those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

[20 : 01] Now, this kind of misunderstood language got us to a philosophical point where flesh equals bad. Your body, bad.

Your skin, bad. Even got to a point where Christian missionaries and preachers cared more about your souls than your bodies, as if the two could be separated.

And so, we would send missionaries out to other places, other lands, and it didn't matter if they were being colonized. It didn't matter if they were starving. As long as we could get them to say a prayer, well, then that's all that mattered.

Because flesh was bad and soul was good. But this bad theology forgot the words can be used in more than one way. Because remember, we're asking, how is Jesus going to remove rulers, lift up the lowly?

It's through this. The word, Jesus became, say it with me, flesh, and made his home, built his tent, tabernacled with us.

[21 : 00] We have seen with our eyes Jesus' glory, glory, like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. And so, this thing that's been called bad for centuries, your flesh, anybody who's in the flesh where they can't possibly love God, is actually the answer to how God shows God's mercy, how God will redeem the world.

It's one word used in two different ways. Yes, there is flesh, which some modern translations now translate selfishness, that instinct within us that leads me to do the things I don't even want to do that hurt and harm myself and others.

Yeah, don't listen to that. But there's also my flesh, my skin, and my bone, and my blood, and that physical part of me that God created and calls good.

Hebrews chapter 2 puts it this way, since God's children have flesh and blood, Jesus also shared flesh and blood in the same way.

Why did Jesus do this? We read this earlier, to destroy the one who holds power over death, the devil, by dying. And he set free those who are held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death.

[22 : 16] There's a there, there type of there, I'm so sorry. By God taking on flesh, we see the divine, we see God reaffirm what was said in the very first page of scripture.

It is good. God made a physical world, and the point of Christian faith is not to evacuate it, it's not to condemn it.

Jesus says this himself in John chapter 3, verse 17, the Son did not come into the world to condemn the world, but to redeem it, to save it. God reaffirms what has always been true, that our flesh and our blood and our skin and our bones is good.

It's not about us waiting for our souls to leave our bodies, to shuffle off these mortal coils and end up in clouds in heaven. No, it's about heaven being reunited with the stuff of earth, about the whole of ourselves, bodies too, being the way through which God makes God's presence known.

This leads me to my last point. This whole incarnation business about Jesus taking on flesh. You know the, you know, chili con carne, chili with meat.

[23 : 39] Jesus incarnate, God with meat on him. It continues through us. 1 Corinthians 3 and 6, Paul writes, Do you not know that you are God's temple, sanctuary, dwelling place, that God's spirit dwells in you?

Do you not know that your body is the very dwelling place of God's spirit within you? It's not your souls, it's not your spirits, it's your body in which God makes God's home and residence.

And this was a major theme in the early church, the theme of theosis, of us humans becoming more and more like the divine. 2 Peter chapter 1, the word became flesh to make us participants in the divine nature.

Saint Athanasius in the 300s writes on the incarnation, for the Son of God became human so that humans might become God. Now don't twist this until like, you know, we're going to become equal to the creator of the universe.

Don't think so highly of yourselves, but also don't think so lowly of yourselves that the attributes of God's holiness, goodness, love, sanctification can't be applied to you as well.

[24 : 55] Saint Aquinas in the 1200s, the only begotten Son of God, Jesus, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our human nature, the flesh and blood, so that he made into a human might make humans into God's.

This incarnation business about God taking on flesh continues as we take on God's nature. God is redeeming the world by using our bodies and our lives to do the things that God promised to do.

incarnation isn't only a claim about what happened in the past in Jesus. Incarnation is also about what is still happening in us.

And so this has grave implications because Mary's song about God showing mercy to everyone from generation to generation about God showing mercy by decrucifying the powerful from their power and the wealthy from their riches about lifting up the lowly about filling the hungry.

If that's going to be happening through Jesus then that means it has to continue happening through you and through me because God's presence made here on earth is through us.

[26 : 17] So when we pray the best way to have our prayers be answered is to take action as we've said before at the table. when we pray we move our feet.

And we don't do this through some guilt-induced way of impressing God. God is already deeply impressed by you, beloved. Rather, we do this because we are filled with God's presence and power and spirit and as we pay attention to the ways and the words and the life of Jesus then we are inspired to do likewise.

so this Advent and Christmas and New Year season may you know that God became human so that you may become like God.

Become like God in the way that you take down rulers and lift up the lowly. God you need you to Link meets your fire has today.

On the way we just can move in wherever you can use one