



## Advent and Daily Work: Incarnation and Labor

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Behold the mystery fantastic and wild  
A Mother made by Her own Child. (Michael Card)

As we celebrate Advent, there will be much romanticizing and politicizing of the Incarnation. Traditional nativity scenes will conflate two years of history as animals and shepherds, family and Magi gather around Mother and Child. Believers suspicious of power and wealth will focus in the humble circumstances of the birth and upbringing of the King of Kings in contrast to Herod's totalitarian paranoia. While these narratives are helpful and portray the humility and importance of our Lord, they can miss important details about a life well-lived as a model for our own. As we rightly reflect on the theology of divine self-disclosure and saving grace, we must also celebrate the anthropology and mission of this event.

**Theology:** As we celebrate Advent, we are celebrating God's forever Incarnate presence in Jesus our Lord. The humility of the Holy One is celebrated in early Christian hymns (John 1:1-18; Colossians 1:15-20; Philippians 2:5-11 and I Timothy 3:16). The nexus of our faith is the Passion: our Lord's death, burial and resurrection where our salvation is secured (Mark 10:45; John 3:16-17; Romans 1:2-4; 3:21-5:21; 10:9-10; I Corinthians 15:1-6; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Galatians 2:16-21; I John 4:9-10). This saving work is only possible because our Lord is fully God and fully human. St. Athanasius argued for the deity of our Lord as he queried, "How can we be divinized (sanctified/transformed by the Spirit) except the divinizer be divine?"

**Anthropology:** The Incarnation is God forever becoming one of us so that in him we might forever enjoy God. Eternity steps into time (John 1:14-18). The Infinite is subject to finitude (Hebrews 2, 5). The Second Adam is now leading a new humanity being liberated from the consequences of our parents' rebellion (Romans 5:12-21; I Corinthians 15). Our Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily laid down his life and for the eternal joy awaiting him, endured unspeakable agony for us (John 10:1-18). Jesus' resurrection is a preview of our future (I Corinthians 15; Colossians 1:18-20) and the gift of the Spirit is God's own presence in and with us, guaranteeing his eternal promises (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14).

**Human Vocation:** Our identity, purpose and destiny are all woven into this marvelous narrative of God's intervention. What is sometimes missing, however, are the daily, practical implications of Jesus' life of humility, love and work. Jesus spent most of his adult life working in the family business. He was aware of his Father in mature ways as he conversed with spiritual leaders as a young man (just after his Bar Mitzvah and welcome in to the community as an adult – Luke 2).



We discover that Jesus experienced human development, personal suffering and temptations (Hebrews 2, 5).

Daily Occupations: Our Lord honors our humanity in every way – including the goodness of work, even in a fallen world. From his earliest years until his early 30s, Jesus the Rabbi worked as a carpenter. He made items for home and field, including yokes for plowing (Matthew 11). Jesus joined 99% of contemporary Rabbis and religious leaders in such work, for there were few “full time” ministry or teaching posts in Second Temple Judaism, with its focus on the local synagogue.

Jesus woke up each day, said his prayers and then offered his daily work as worship before God, asking the Lord to bless the works of his hands (Psalm 90:17 and later affirmed by St. Paul in Romans 12:1-2 and Colossians 3:17-24). As the oldest son, he was the leader of the family household after his father’s death and he stewarded the activities of his other brothers (Mark 3). His obedience to leave this labor and enter into his public Messianic mission is the focus of our Gospels. He steps into public view at the age that men were just old enough to lead and have their insights received.

Jesus’ teaching mission is filled with vivid illustrations of the daily rhythms of economics and work. Jesus’ insights do not fit into 21<sup>st</sup> century ideological boxes. Notice that Jesus

- Excoriates the arrogance, insensitivity and self-satisfaction of many of the wealthy (Luke 4, 6, 12)
- Offers an urgent call to unconditional obedience (Luke 9:56-63)
- Affirms the goodness of marriage and family bonds (Matthew 19)
- Commends good master planning and leadership (Luke 14)
- Calls for both compassion for the poor and celebration of divine generosity (John 12:1-8)
- Commends diligent work and receiving a return for this work (Matthew 25; Luke 6)
- Warns about the difficulties of wealth and the wise use of resources (Luke 7, 18-19)
- Illustrates the nature of the kingdom life as he calls for disciples to become apprentices and walk with him in both work and rest (Matthew 11:27-30).

The above list reinforces the insights of Pastor Tom Nelson who argues that effective compassion requires ethical economic capacity (See his new book, the *Economics of Neighborly Love*). Jesus called for faith in a world with many fewer choices than we enjoy today. The people he touched and helped turn toward trust were locked in a system with few choices concerning family and work. The dignity of being a disciple and joining the new community was transformative as all are welcome on the freedom bus! Along with middle-class fishermen, Jesus welcome wealthy women, tax-collectors, lepers, persons of formerly dubious character and even elite religious leaders like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea.

Will we commend the risks and rewards of entrepreneurs that add value, wealth and sustainable jobs to our communities? Will we honor the unseen labor of parents and caregivers,



service and trade workers doing the difficult tasks that sustain our world? Will we warn the complacent, encourage the afflicted and confront both “personal iniquity and institutional injustice”? (Pastor Christ Brooks) And, personally, will we offer our daily tasks as kingdom worship before the Lord?

On Mission: Enjoying Advent and welcoming Christ afresh into our hearts and daily lives includes all the details of our work, whether paid or unpaid, labor or leadership, factory or field. We are all part of global and local economies, exchanging resources with others and hopefully adding value to our world. To believe in the Incarnation is to celebrate good work well done as inherently valuable in God’s mission and as platforms for witness that will fill heaven with new believers seeing exemplary living in the people of God.