

# Before the Manger

## Jesus' Character as God

### Philippians 2:5-11

- **V5** – Have this mind (attitude) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. “Have this attitude...” sometimes interpreted as “have this mind...”, but it is not intellectual power or even wisdom. But, rather it is *attitude* or *mindset* (NASB and NIV). What was Christ’s mindset?
  - **The God Who Serves**
    - “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)
    - “For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. (John 13:15)
    - “No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.” (John 10:18)
- **V6a** – who, although He existed in the form of God...
  - **The God Who Departed – And Arrived**
    - Existed – *huparcho* – not only did He exist prior to His birth, but He existed eternally.
      - “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.” (Micah 5:2)
      - “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8)
    - Form – *morphe* – when we think of the word form, we usually think of an objects shape or appearance -- think of concrete forms or dress forms. But *morphe* is deeper. It speaks to the essence of a person or thing. It is more related to something or someone’s *being*. So, Paul is saying Jesus is not like God, He **IS** God!
      - And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Hebrews 1:3)
      - He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Col. 1:15)
      - For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. (John 5:18)
      - And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)
    - All of this is not just a reminder of orthodox theology, however. This is the truth of the incarnation of Jesus in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. Matthew affirms it like this:
      - Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 “BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.” (Matt 1:22–23)

- **V6b – did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped...**

- **The God Who Sacrifices**

- Jesus was entirely God. He fully embodied the divine nature and dwelled perfectly in the presence of the Father in eternity past. However, in His incarnation He took on the role of a servant, and His attitude about His status was one of giving away, not *grasping* it firmly.
- “grasped” (NASB and NIV) – harpagmos – “booty, treasure, something to clutch or cling to”.
  - Author, Bill Crowder, said it like this, *“The context lets us see this refusal to use His status for his own benefit as part of Christ’s perfect humility. It speaks of the attitude of Christ before He came into the world – that He would not selfishly cling to the privileges or prerogatives of His divine position. So, as the ultimate Servant He was willing to be utterly selfless – not clinging to what was rightfully His – so He could come into the world for you and for me.”*
    - He gave up a throne for a manger and a cross
    - He gave up majestic splendor for suffering and shame
    - He laid aside His rights as the Son and took the role of a servant
    - He put aside the garments of glory and took up the flesh of humanity

- **V7 – but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of men.**

- **The God Who Empties Himself**

- Emptied – *kenosis* – not so much “pouring out”, but “setting aside”. This is seen not only in the manger, but in the life He entered into.
  - “Emptied Himself” – He set aside His equality with the Father and all divine privilege in order to redeem us
  - “Form of a slave” – As noted earlier, His form, His being, was the full essence of God. But, now He adds to the divine essence, the essence of a slave.. He eternally possessed the essence of God and now, in total humility, He becomes a slave.
  - “Likeness of men”(appearance in NASB and NIV) – This is different from “form”. This is the ideal term to describe the God-man. “It carries the idea of strong similarity while leaving room for recognizable differences.” (Bill Crowder).

With this idea in mind we could paraphrase or describe the term “God-man” this way: In His incarnation, Jesus Christ eternally possessed the very essence of God but temporarily added to it the likeness of man” -- *But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, (Galatians 4:4)*

- **The Mind of Christ**

- *“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29)*
- Since we have been rescued from the domain of darkness by the work of Jesus, which began with His incarnation, we are now called to be like Him. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...
  - *“When we understand who Christ is, what He left, and how He came, Christ’s mind-set is clearly one of servanthood and self-sacrifice – long before He took a basin and towel to wash the disciples’ feet, and long before He went to the cross, allowing himself to be sacrificed as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). Christ’s sacrifice and servant’s heart are first seen in eternity past as He chose to set aside His rights and privileges as God to come in the essence of a slave.” (Crowder)*