**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**The Incarnation – Part II**

***God’s Spirit at Work During the Incarnation***

 **December 10th, In the Year of Our Lord 2023**

 **Pastor Matthew Diehl**

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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 Another week has gone by, and we are closer to December 25th. Obviously, the Jewish community does not celebrate the Christian Christmas, but do they have a holiday this time of year? The Jewish community observes the rededication of the Second Temple starting December 7th-15th, 2023. This holiday is called the Feast of Dedication.

 But make no mistake, the December 25th date we have today started in 336 A.D under Emperor Constantine as he sought to Christianize the Empire and move the religion of the people away from paganism. I concede that in his mind he had good intentions as political as they were. After all, . . . it is well-recorded in history by Eusebius of Caesarea and Lactantius that the pagan Constantine experienced seeing a large cross of fire in the sky and on one side of the cross were the words in the Greek language: “*By this, conquer”.* Therefore, he attributed his military victory at the battle of Milvian Bridge over the Tiber River in 312 A.D. to the Christian God. This was the decisive battle he won that made him Emperor of Rome.

So, why December 25th? The Romans were already celebrating the rebirth of the Unconquered Sun (Sol Invictus) on December 25th and during that week a long-standing festival for Saturnalia, which dated the return of longer days after the winter solstice. These celebrations included people feasting and exchanging gifts. Constantine had made Christianity a legal religion 313 A.D. through the Edict of Milan. It was emperor Theodosius who issued the Edict of Thessalonica (380 A.D) making Christianity the exclusive and official religion of Rome, using the Nicene Creed of 325 A.D. as a constitution. To a large degree, other Christian sects lost their legal State standing and considered heretics. The Roman State confiscated their properties.

 Regarding the Believer’s Church observing the birth of Jesus on a particular day. . . there is not any record. Contrasting the Resurrection observance which is a known date, history does not record the day of the birth of Jesus. Due to an error in the Gregorian Calendar, it is recognized that Jesus was born between the years 4-6 B.C. However, every Sunday is the Lord’s Day, and every day we Believers worship the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, in Spirit. . . living by His teachings. Jesus often said *“if you love me then you keep my commands.”* (John 14:15, 21, 15:10, 1 Cor. 7:19,1 John 2:3,4, 3:23,24, 5:2,3 Rev. 12:17, 14:12)

Now, back to the Feast of Dedication which is called Hanukkah. Hanukkah observes the Maccabees' victory over Greek oppression and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem on the 25th day of the Hebrew month called Kislev. In correlation to the Christian Calendar, the Jewish month of Kislev falls between late November and early December. This historical event is recorded in the Book of First Maccabees which is a deuterocanonical book written after 165 B.C. Of the deuterocanonical books, 1st Maccabees is considered to be an accurate historical source. However, the Jews never included 1st Maccabees in their sacred cannon of Scripture because it was not written by a called prophet of God. As the rededication of the temple was taking place, a miracle of God also happened.

In the Temple, the eternal flame of God was to stay lit at all times as a symbol of God's presence. But according to tradition, when the Temple was rededicated in 165 B.C., there was only enough oil left to burn the flame for one day. The rest of the oil had been defiled by the Greeks during their invasion, and it would take a week for new oil to be processed and purified. However, at the rededication, the Maccabees went ahead and lit the eternal flame with the remaining supply of oil. Miraculously, God's Holy presence caused the flame to burn for eight days until the new sacred oil was ready for use.

This miracle of the long-lasting oil explains why the Hanukkah Menorah is lit for eight consecutive nights of celebration. The candelabra has eight candleholders in a row, and a ninth candleholder positioned in the middle and slightly higher than the rest. The burning candles represent the eternal flame that burned for eight days on one day's worth of oil. Therefore, another name for the Feast of Dedication is Festival of Lights.

https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/11105/jesus-before-christmas

**The Story Behind the Feast of Dedication**

Remember that Alexander the Great had conquered most of the lands and people in the Middle East by 325 B.C. After his death in 323 B.C. his generals divided up their conquered lands. Therefore, the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt, the Seleucid Empire in the east, the Kingdom of Pergamon in Asia Minor, and Macedon. Israel came under the Seleucid Empire and by the middle of the 2nd Century B.C. was ruled by Antiochus IV.

Daniel’s prophecies about the abomination of desolation seemed to have at least a partial fulfillment in 167 BC when a Greek ruler by the name of Antiochus IV desecrated the temple in Jerusalem. Antiochus called himself “Epiphanies” (“illustrious one” or “god manifest”). He set up an altar to Zeus over the altar of burnt offering, and he sacrificed a pig on the altar. Antiochus went even further in his atrocities, slaughtering a great number of the Jews and selling others into slavery. And he issued decrees forbidding circumcision and requiring Jews to sacrifice to pagan gods and eat pig meat.

As a result, a group of four Jewish brothers led by Judah Maccabee decided to raise up an army. These men of fierce faith and loyalty to God became known as the Maccabees. The small band of warriors fought for three years with "strength from heaven" until achieving a miraculous victory and deliverance from Greco-Syrian control.

https://www.learnreligions.com/feast-of-dedication-700182

**Why Jesus is connected to the Feast of Dedication/Festival of Lights**

The New Testament witnesses the Jewish Feast of Dedication in John 10:22-23.

22 At that time the **Feast of the Dedication** took place at Jerusalem; 23 it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.

Remember, it had only been a one-hundred and sixty-five years since the cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem from the oppression of Greek overlords. During the 1st century, Israel was occupied by just as an oppressive invader, being the Romans. It is of great significance that John records Jesus’ words as He spoke while walking in Solomon’s Colonnade area on the Temple Mount. Jesus came to set the captives free (Luke 4:14-21) which is exactly what the Maccabees did. However, in Jesus’ day, the Jewish leadership in the Temple and in all Israel failed to see that they too were part of the oppressive overlords. This is why the proclamation Jesus made in the synagogue at Nazareth was so revelatory. God came in the flesh to make such declarations.

 **Luke 4:14-21** (God’s Spirit Power at work as Jesus during the Incarnation)

14 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

15 And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.

16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

18 "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, 19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." (Isaiah 61:1)

20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

 Jesus’ declarations (Luke 4) were a witness to the community then, and to us now, that the power and application of the Incarnation was happening in front of them and continuing for us today.

In this very public address, being in a synagogue, God, declares as Jesus, who He is and for what purpose He came. We can see now why the word “Incarnation” is important to understand. To say that Christmas was just the observance of the day of Jesus’ birth is extremely short-sighted. Remember the witness of God’s Word’s in Scripture in 1 John. All that Jesus accomplished during His thirty-three and one-half year ministry was to destroy the works of the devil. My observation has been that the vast majority of people buying Christmas gifts are not thinking. . *. I am doing this to destroy the works of the devil.* I know I did not as a child or young adult. I personally believe that every culture needs traditions, and Christmas traditions and decorations in the West are very beautiful and bring families together. With this said, all things need to be kept in perspective of God’s intent.

7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous;

8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

 (1 John 3:7-8)

**Significance of God’s Spirit**

God became one of us but maintained His full humanity in Jesus to demonstrate that when the Spirit of the Lord is upon us humans, we too can live the life He has called us to live. Obviously, Jesus maintaining His full humanity was for our benefit. It would be easy to live the life Jesus lived maintaining only His full divinity. However, Jesus demonstrated it is possible to achieve the moral life and goals He set for us but only if God’s Spirit is operating in our hearts and minds. This is why He calls all people to surrender to Him. This is an Incarnational goal.

In Luke 4, we see that Jesus returned to Galilee under the power of the Spirit (v.14) and reiterates that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him in v.18. It is God’s spirit-power that impowered Jesus to fulfill His mission to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed. And at the same time. . . proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. In other words, Jesus would have not been successful unless God’s Spirit was in Him/with Him. This is why Jesus stated that He could do nothing without the Father (John 5:30, 8:28). We also see this in Jesus’ response to Nicodemus in John 3 that a person has to be born again to see or enter the kingdom of God.

 We have cited **John 10:22-23**, which is a witness that the Jew, Jesus, most certainly participated in the Feast of Dedication. Let us start reading **John 10** in verse **14** to benefit from a fuller context. Here, Jesus recalls back to David’s shepherding life as a young boy. We see this is Psalm 23 (“*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*.”). These Scriptures bear witness to a number of key accomplishments for the Incarnation.

14 "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,

15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

16 "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.

17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life **so that I may take it again.**

18 "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."

19 A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words.

20 Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?"

21 Others were saying, "These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?"

**What do we learn from Jesus’ Incarnation-Words?**

1. God knows each of us personally. (v.14)
2. God knows who the pretenders are. (v.14)
3. Sacrificial atonement. (v.15)
4. All people of the world are included in Jesus’ outreach. (v.16)
5. God still demonstrates, in Jesus, that we have free will. (v.18)
6. The Incarnation exposes unbelief. (verses 19-21)

**Teachings from John 10:22-30**

22 **At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem;**

23 **it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon.**

24 The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him,

 "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

25 Jesus answered them,

"I told you, and you do not believe;

the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me.

26 "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.

27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish;

and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all;

and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

30 "I and the Father are one."

**What do we learn from Jesus’ Incarnation Words in John 10:22-30?**

1. Jesus was a faithful Jew. (v.22)
2. Jesus taught in the Jerusalem Temple, the headquarters of the High Priest.

(v. 22-23)

1. Jewish opposition followed Jesus seeking to trap Him in a contradiction. (v. 24)
2. Jesus knew who the unbelievers were/are. (v.25, 26)
3. People are blind to see God at work. (v. 25)
4. Believers listen, hear (receive) Jesus’ message and He identifies with them. (v. 27)
5. Believers are eternally saved. There are two parts to this verse. First, Believers will never perish. Second, no one will take them away from God. (v. 27)

God, as the Father, qualifies true faith. We know that there are pretenders that walked away from Jesus when they did not receive/understand His teaching that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood (John 6:59-71). In addition, during His incarnation, Jesus said. . .

 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

 15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?

 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.

 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.

 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you;

DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS (Matthew 7:14-23)

1. Verse 30 declares the one nature of God seen in Jesus the Christ.

**Teachings from John10:31-33**

31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

32 Jesus answered them,

 "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?"

33 The Jews answered Him,

"For a good work we do not stone You,

 but for blasphemy; and **because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."**

**What do we learn from Jesus’ Incarnation Words in John 10:31-33?**

When we Christians, the Believer’s Church, speak the truth and demonstrate good works that are a product from having faith in God because His Spirit is at work in our hearts and minds. . .we can expect the fallen world to strongly reject the Message. And because we are instruments of the living God, the fallen world takes offense, not at the good that we do, but because it represents God’s Work.

**1 Samuel 8:4-7** 4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; 5 and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." 6 But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

Be encouraged. . . all people have Good News from God, through the Apostle Paul proclaiming to the gentiles in Thessalonica, that the Lord chose us (Gentiles, all the world, not exclusively the Jews) from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:13) **AMEN**