

Christmas: God's Black Ops
Christmas Eve, December 24, 2010
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I feel rather lonely up here this Christmas Eve.
For the past 20 years I have been accompanied by my three children. But last year they announced that now they are all in college, I am on my own from now on.

This has made me wonder how God the Father felt on the first Christmas Eve.
For all eternity he had enjoyed the company of his beloved Son. But at Christmas Jesus left heaven and came to earth.

The Father surely must have missed his boy.
So perhaps my experience as a father this Christmas Eve helps me appreciate the emotions of the Father of all humanity.

That is a good thing because for centuries theologians have tried to grasp something of this amazing event we call the incarnation.
That word means "to put on flesh."
It describes the extraordinary truth that Jesus, who was Spirit until the first Christmas, put on human flesh and became a physical being when he was born of the Virgin Mary.

The incarnation is described in John's famous statement that, **"The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14)**
Another way of looking at this truth was expressed by the little girl who was terrified one night by the sound of a storm outside.
She kept calling for her mother to come to her bedroom and comfort her.

After several visits the mother told her daughter, "You don't need to be afraid, God will take care of you."
The little girl replied, "I know God will take care of me but I need someone with skin on."

That is what the incarnation is all about. God's putting on skin.
It is the reason for this season.
It is the cause behind the cards and the carols and the candles, behind the presents, the pies and the people who gather in our homes.

So what exactly happened at the incarnation?
The church has debated this down through the years.
The Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century declared that at the incarnation Jesus lost nothing of his divinity by leaving heaven and he lost nothing of his humanity by being conceived by the Holy Spirit.
They said that Jesus now has two natures.
He is fully God and also fully man.

In the middle ages theologians fought over whether the incarnation would have happened if Adam hadn't sinned.

One group said the incarnation wouldn't have been necessary.
The other group said the incarnation was always part of God's plan for the world.

In the 16th century Martin Luther said that at the incarnation a wonderful exchange took place in which humanity received the blessedness of Christ's divine being while Christ took upon himself the sinfulness and weakness of human nature.

Not to be left out John Calvin then said that in the incarnation God was manifested in human flesh.
However, because nothing finite can completely contain the infinite, Christ is also active outside of the flesh of Jesus.

At this point the discussion becomes very metaphysical and philosophical and frankly it loses me.

What I need is a simple picture of the incarnation.
Something that explains what is happening.

This month I came up with an idea.
It does not have the gravitas of Augustine or Athanasius but it does have the advantage of simplicity and you are the first to hear it. So here is my attempt to explain the inexplicable and unscrew the inscrutable.

Christmas is God's Black Ops.

I was so excited about this idea that it became the basis of our family Christmas card this year. The concept came to me when I was reading a report of the latest video game that was released in time for the holidays called "Black Ops."

Now Black Ops are all about covert operations.
And that is exactly what Christmas is.
The Lord of heaven's armies sent his son secretly behind enemy lines.

In Black Ops the special forces personnel are disguised.
They blend in with the scenery by camouflaging themselves.

What better disguise for God to have than to come in the form of a baby, born to a peasant girl in a crowded inn on the busiest night of the year caused by a Roman census.
No one would look at that little boy and think "This is God Almighty." But that is exactly who he was.

It is very hard to keep any military operations a complete secret. Somebody usually gets wind of it.

There had been some God watchers who had predicted the mission centuries earlier but they had no clue as to the time or the form it would take.



Of course, God's own forces knew about it and there were a band of angels who couldn't keep quiet.

They were like a first century WikiLeaks giving the game away by announcing, "**Glory to the God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.**"

There were some local partisans who happened to be watching their flocks in a nearby field and they went to investigate.

There were also some intelligence analysts in the east who worked out that something was up from their astronomical calculations. But even they had to flee Bethlehem undercover.

Apart from this the whole thing was top secret and Jesus tried to maintain this secrecy throughout his life.

When he healed people or delivered them from a demon he often would warn them, "Don't tell anybody about it."

He was waiting for his own moment to reveal his identity.

At the first Christmas nobody apart from the Father comprehended the whole mission.

Mary knew a bit and so did Joseph.

The angels grasped part of the story.

But now with the benefit of having all the secret documents revealed in four tell-all books we call the gospels we know what was taking place.

First Jesus was dropped behind enemy lines to **rescue captives**.

That is why the angel told Joseph to call the baby Jesus "**because he will save his people.**"

In his song Zachariah said that God had come "**to rescue us from the hand of our enemies.**"

Jesus came to save his own people from the very worst form of spiritual bondage. He came to release us from our sins.

Sins are those actions that spoil our life, hurt others and separate us from God.

Jesus came to earth to lead us from captivity into liberty.

The Son of God breaks into our prison, finding us near death, and like a commando or Navy Seal he slings us over his shoulder, carries us away to safety and provides us not only with life but eternal life.

He takes us into the free land of righteousness where he is king.

If the first goal of God's Black Ops is rescue, the second is **destruction**. Jesus came to destroy the enemies of God.

The Apostle John who writes so brilliantly about the incarnation in his gospel adds to his insights in his first letter when he tells us, "**The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.**" (John 1:8)

We don't often think of this note of destruction at Christmas but it is there. We hear it in Mary's Magnificat when she sings that God, "Has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones." We see it in Herod's murder of the baby boys in Bethlehem.

It is the reason our family decorated our Christmas card this year with automatic weapons.
Jesus came to destroy the devil's work.
His weapons were truth and righteousness.

He came to defeat death and every manifestation of injustice.
For the perfect world the prophets foretold is not possible until all evil is swept away.
Jesus came to bring peace but lasting peace follows successful warfare and the battle was long
and hard until Jesus finally rose from the grave on Easter Day.

If a Black Operation is discovered it is often denied or disowned by those in power.
That is why King Herod tried to kill Jesus and why the Roman authorities crucified him.
They stood to lose most if the Black Op was successful.
And still today people deny that it ever happened.

So that is my theory of the incarnation.
Christmas is God's Black Ops.
It leaves us asking, "Are we among those that Jesus came to rescue or are we those who resist
him?"
Those are the only two choices.

To resist Jesus is to invite defeat and disaster because while he might look like a baby, he is
Almighty God.
He is the one that the book of Revelation describes as riding to victory on a white horse. His
name is Faithful and True.
With justice he judges and makes war.
His eyes are like blazing fire.
He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the Word of God.

Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. John tells us he
will rule with an iron scepter.
He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.
On his thigh he has this name written: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

But to be rescued by Jesus, what a different story.
It means to be protected, to be surrounded by his grace, to be forgiven, to be adopted into his
family.
And all that is possible because of the miracle of the incarnation.