

ATHANASIUS

The Incarnation.

Piece of paper. Jot down as fast as you can what the first Christmas was all about. What comes to your mind?

Perhaps we have ideas from early childhood that we've never reexamined.

The Annunciation. Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. Lk 1:26-38.

Athanasius (born c. 293, Alexandria—died May 2, 373)

The things that struck me most:

*Taking it back to creation, and deliberation "What then was God to do?"
Understanding Genesis 1-3. Not about how God created (creation/evolution a giant red herring). The earth is the Lord's. It was created good.*

*Sin and corruption. Repentance is not enough
How do we think of sin? "Forgive us and restore us." "the guilt and power of sin"*

*How thoroughly contemporary is his statement on the substitutionary atonement.
His earthly life meets us half-way.*

*The paradox that even while he was a man he did not cease to uphold the universe
He sees Jesus' whole life completely under his control. Nothing happened to him
that he did not design.*

The great debate in the church at the time was Just who is Jesus Christ? Why did he come?

He became bishop of Alexandria. Gregory of Nazianzus once said, “the bishop of Alexandria was the bishop of the whole world.”

He was exiled five times for a total of 17 years for various political or theological reasons. It was during these years, often spent in the desert, that Athanasius did much of his writing.

Attended Council of Nicaea 325, called by the Emperor Constantine to establish unity in the church. 300 church leaders attended.

The council affirmed the eternal divinity of Jesus—as summarized in the Nicene Creed, which says Jesus is “true God of true God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father.

Yet this consensus unraveled soon after, and Christ’s deity became a contested doctrine for the next 50 years.

Athanasius rose to the occasion, devoting his life to seeing that the truth that had been established at Nicaea was worked into the life of the church. He was exiled 5 times. He spent his time in the desert writing books that defended his beliefs, including *De Incarnatione* (about the Incarnation).

For Athanasius, the logic of salvation begins with God creating humanity to share in his incorruptible life and to cultivate his beautiful creation. But human beings sinned and abandoned their calling. What was God to do? The only way for God to rescue humanity and uphold his character was to send his Son in the flesh to take on the sins of the world. God must become man. So, in solidarity with humanity, the divine Son assumed a human nature.

As the God-man, when Jesus encountered death, his humanity gave him the ability to die but his divinity gave him the power to overcome death. In this way, his crucifixion paid the debt of death so that we could have eternal life. Jesus had to take on flesh in order to save us.

During Christmas, we celebrate the silent night when “Christ the Savior is born.” For many North American Christians, though, salvation has become an abstract and spiritual idea, as if Jesus came only to save our souls, forgive our sins, and promise us an eternity in heaven. Athanasius would see that idea is correct but not complete. Jesus came to ransom our souls but also to renew the world.

Like him, we can celebrate the many facets of salvation—such as victory, forgiveness, and reconciliation—within the broader framework of God re-creating the world through Christ.

1. One of the ideas floating around at the time was that Jesus was not fully God, but a lesser God who worked under the father.

2. Another was that Jesus had not always existed.

3. Just as God is renewing creation through his Son, the Christian life is one of renewal into the image of Christ, by the Spirit, and to the glory of the Father: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”(2 Cor. 5:17).

We are given a new heart, a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26), a new mind (Rom. 12:2), a new identity, a new family (Mark 3:31–35), and the hope of living in a new world (Matt. 19:28).

Athanasius challenges us to break through the surface of simplistic spirituality of Christmas and experience the multilayered depth of its meaning. The Alexandrian bishop pleads with us to embrace the whole Christ who came to bring salvation to the whole creation and renewal to our whole lives. This Christmas, when we cry out, “Let heaven and nature sing!” may we remember that both of these are being renewed and brought together by our Savior King.

How might we do that? What is the “multilayered depth of its meaning”?

what else ???