

What if God was One of Us?

BY GREG ALBRECHT



Yeah, yeah, God is great yeah, yeah, God is good...what if God was one of us?

(Joan Osborne/"One of Us"/Relish/ Polygram)

Several times during "One of Us," the listener hears the haunting refrain "What if God was one of us?" The good news is that God was one of us. He came to be one of us. In Jesus, he became flesh, becoming hu-

man while remaining God.

A God-man

Fully human, fully God. "Very God, very man," said the early Christians, long before gender-inclusive language.

In Jesus, God became a God-man. He had a body, a face and hands. That body was resurrected, and he still has those hands, hands that bear the marks of spikes that were driven through them, nailing him to the cross. God became one of us, to save and rescue us from a world that doesn't act like God the Son...or God the Father.

Another early Christian put it this way: "This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be de-

God came to be with us, and he started out where we all start. Birth. He came to a cradle. He started, voluntarily setting aside his glory, as a child born into humble circumstances. He was not born in a place where we would expect God to be born.

stroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.

God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again" (John 3:16, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary English*, by Eugene H. Peterson).

So God was one of us. What does that mean to you and me? Who was he? Why was he born? Who is he?

Stop Acting Like God. Start Acting Like Jesus." The message, on a poster being waved during a rally in support of a minority group, confronted and challenged me. It seemed to be directed at me and my fellow Christians.

If they really knew Jesus, I thought, they would know that he is God and he was God in the flesh!

I continued to ponder the poster until a free translation of its intended meaning occurred to me: "Jesus, save us from your followers who seem to be acting like our stereotype of the Old Testament God."

It was obvious they had a vague notion that Jesus didn't hurt people, that Jesus didn't abuse people, and that Jesus forgave people.

Maybe you have similar ideas about God the Father, and some stereotypes of Jesus. Maybe some of what you have been told is correct, and some undoubtedly isn't. You might even have been led to think there are two Gods, one harsh and judgmental, the other kind and forgiving.

Not long after I saw the poster, I heard a song asking a haunting question about God. It isn't an overtly Christian song, but one that topped the charts in the secular market. Its broad appeal makes the message even more interesting:

*If God had a face what would it look like
and would you want to see
if seeing meant
that you would have to believe
in things like heaven and in Jesus
and the saints and all the prophets.*

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE WINNER

Who Was He?

"This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit. Joseph was a good man and did not want to embarrass Mary in front of everyone. So he decided to quietly call off the wedding:

"While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, 'Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is from the Holy Spirit. Go ahead and marry her. Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

"So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, 'A virgin will have a baby boy, and he will be called Immanuel,' which means 'God is with us'" (Matthew 1:18-23, *The Promise, Contemporary English Version*).

God came to be with us, and he started out where we all start. Birth. He came to a cradle. He started, voluntarily setting aside his glory, as a child born into humble circumstances.

He was not born in a place where we would expect God to be born. Not in a castle or a mansion. No servants bustling around, busy serving Joseph and Mary. It was just a simple little family—Mom, Dad and Son.

Well, maybe not so simple. The Son was the Son of God. God, in the person of the infant Jesus, was adding time and space limitations to his divinity. Coming to our world. Coming to be one of us, to save us.

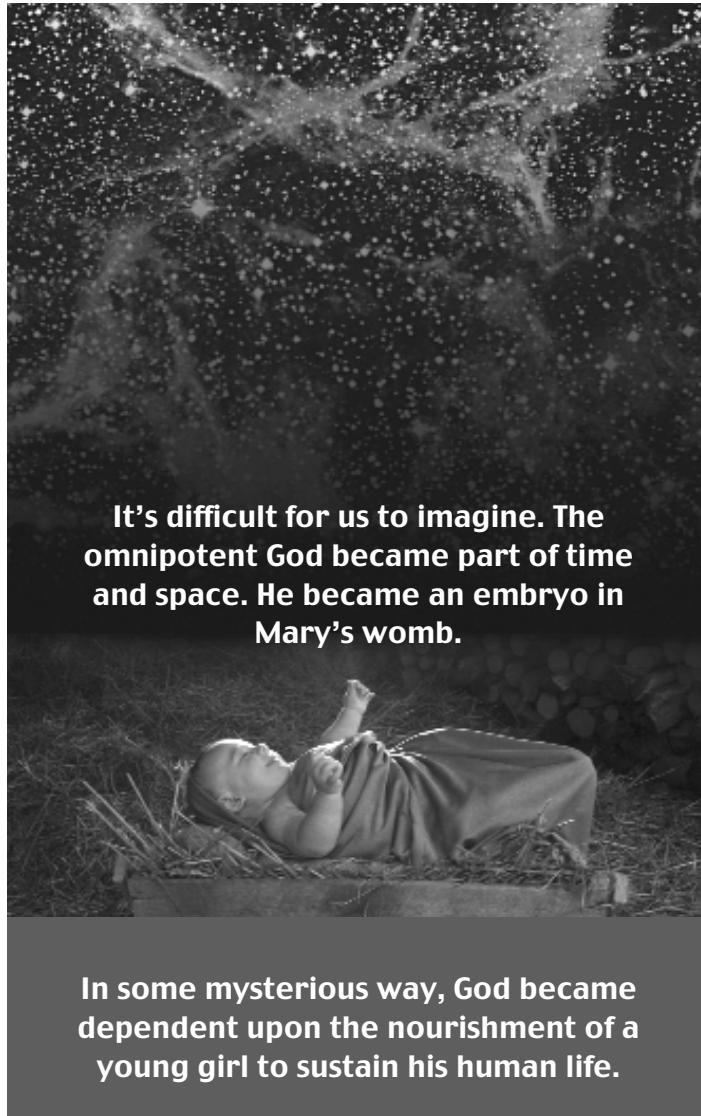
In spite of the unique and historic nature of Jesus' birth, no hoopla, no earthly gala celebrations, no pomp or ceremony accompanied Mary as she gave birth in humble surroundings.

Entering Time and Space

It's difficult for us to imagine. The omnipotent God became part of time and

space. He became an embryo in Mary's womb. In some mysterious way, God became dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl to sustain his human life.

Several decades after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul wrote in a passage that may well have been a



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hymn early Christians sang: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:6-8).

Humility is the path that God chose. Not only was Jesus, God the Son, born into humble circumstances, he was conceived in a woman who was not yet married. Not that there was any wrongdoing by Mary and Joseph. But

we can all easily imagine the stigma that Mary, Joseph and Jesus carried. Early in his life, our Savior, the God-man, began to suffer taunts and derision from others who felt superior by reason of their own birth.

What an irony! Born free from human sinfulness, perfect and unblemished, the Lamb of God was viewed by sinful and corrupt humans as illegitimate and inferior.

The irony of his humble beginnings is only surpassed by the humility and vulnerability expressed at the cross. For humans, the cross was a sign of weakness. For God, the cross was the sign of ultimate and complete victory.

In *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey says: "How many times did Mary review the angel's words as she felt the Son of God kicking against the walls of her uterus? How many times did Joseph second-guess his own encounter with an angel—just a dream?—as he endured the hot shame of living among villagers who could plainly see the changing shape of his fiancée?..."

"Nine months of awkward explanations, the lingering scent of scandal—it seems that God arranged the most humiliating circumstances possible for his entrance, as if to avoid any charge of favoritism. I am impressed that when the Son of God became a human being he played by the rules, harsh

rules—small towns do not treat kindly young boys who grow up with questionable paternity."

Why Was He Born?

Jesus came to allow us to have an intimate, personal relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because of our sinful nature and our personal sin, we are alienated from God. Nothing we can do can forgive our sin and heal the breach between us and God. Only God can fix our sinful condition. The holy and sinless God had to be one of us in order to save us.

We cannot save ourselves. A life-

time of doing good will not save us. Good works, actions and deeds do not save. We can never qualify, "make it," or be good enough.

It had to be God in the flesh who was in that cradle because no one else was good enough to pay the price of our sin. If he had been merely a man with sinful human nature, and still somehow had been able to live a perfect life, then his death would have atoned only for one human's life, but no more. The fact he was God in the flesh made his life and death so precious, so expensive, so worthy.

And as the popular saying goes, we are not worthy. We can become worthy to know God only through the blood of the

Lamb of God.
The book
of Reve-

cause of the life and work of Jesus. You can become a new man or woman. You can be regenerated. You can be converted, saved, born again and given a new start because of the life and death of our Lord and Savior.

Suffering for Us

The last moments of Jesus' human life enable us to see God's unmistakable and matchless love. For humans, the voluntary humility and suffering of our Lord seems on the surface to be weakness. But our Savior's suffering is the highest self-disclosure of God's love.

The enormous distance between God and humans is bridged by the cross. By coming to the cross of

Jesus was born so you could be born again. He was born so you could become a child of God. And he was born so you can be resurrected.

Jesus was born to die and to be raised from the dead. From the cradle to the cross to the grave to the empty tomb. His resurrection gives us life and hope. It imparts to us the new life we can have in him. Because he is risen, the risen Lord of our lives can live his life in us. That's good news!

Who Is He?

There was a day and time when God came into the world. We don't know with certainty the day or even time of the year God came into space and time in the person of Jesus. But we do know he came. If he did not, nothing else matters. Nothing.

Some people get so preoccupied try-

Father... and/or Son?

One God, or two? Justice, punishment and condemnation...or forgiveness, love and grace?

A common misconception is that God the Father is harsh and cruel, and that Jesus, God the Son, is loving and tender. A strict either/or answer to this misconception can lead to heretical beliefs about God and guilt-ridden slavery about the human condition.

The early Christians decided, among much turmoil and controversy, that God is not two or three. They understood that God is one, existing eternally as three co-essential but distinct Persons. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, it was impossible to separate two Gods, one as harsh and one as loving. But how do humans reconcile the good news that Jesus saves with the biblical teaching that God is just and demands perfection?

God's inspiration of the apostle Paul reveals that the holiness, perfection and righteousness of Christians is not their own, but God's. God's righteousness is given to those who live by faith. It is given, not because of anything anyone ever does, but simply because of the lavish goodness and grace of God.

God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) sent us God the Son for our salvation. The Son did not come to condemn but to rescue and to save.

lation reminds us, "Worthy is the Lamb..." (Revelation 5:12).

If you believe in Jesus and what he did for you on the cross, and if you accept him as Lord and put your trust in him, that he is capable of saving you, you can be reconciled to God. God will make you worthy because of the perfect work of Christ on your behalf. As Paul says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

You can know the love of God, be-

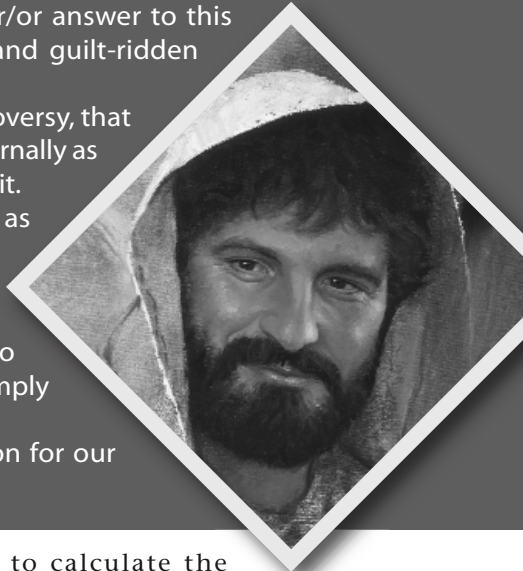
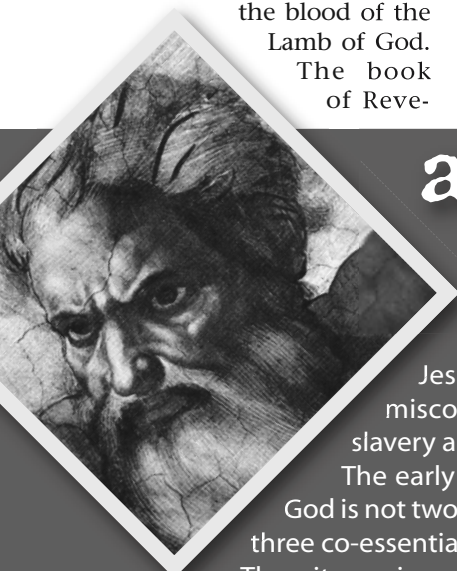
Christ, you can pass from the life you may lead now—trying to carry the burdens of your own life, trying to atone for your own sin, trying to be good enough to qualify for salvation—to new life in Christ. The cross of Christ enables you to bridge the chasm between the death of sin and eternal life.

Jesus Christ frees us from the slavery and tyranny of sin and its consequences, and he will give us new life. Through his sufferings we can cross from death to life!

ing to calculate the time of Jesus' birth that they miss the meaning of why he came.

But after all the calculations and rhetoric, the fact remains, he came. The exact time is not important. (There may be a lesson here for those who insist on setting an exact date for his second coming!)

Some people are concerned that too much commercialism takes place at Christmas. And they are correct. But gifts, lights and commerce can never



obliterate the fact he came and the salvation he brought.

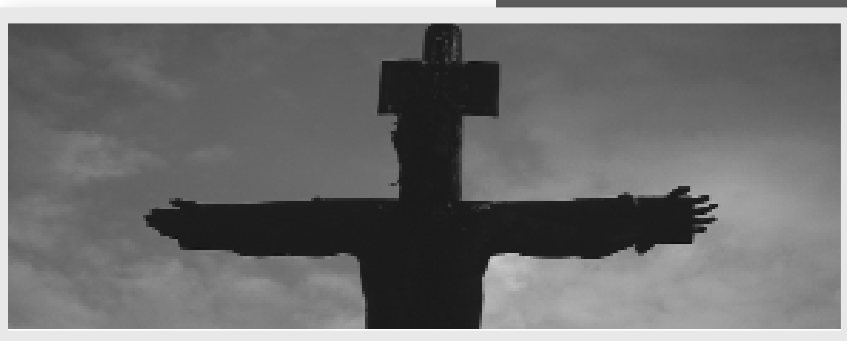
Jesus came to make all things new. He changed everything. The river of time turned at his birth and began to flow in the opposite direction. His birth was a Continental Divide for Christians. On one side, history flows in one direction; on the other, the opposite direction.

Nearly the whole world, believers and nonbelievers alike, counts time as being either before Christ (B.C.) or after Christ (A.D.—in Latin, “*anno Domini*,” or “in the year of our Lord”). Those who do not wish to acknowledge him or who believe they must ignore his birth should never write another check, never consult another calendar. Every time we write the date, we give witness to the fact that God was one of us.

The Real Question

Many people ask the question “Who was Jesus?” But the real question is “Who is Jesus?” Jesus was, but more importantly, he is.

He never stopped being God, not in the cradle, not on the cross, not in



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the grave, and not in the resurrection. He came to transform all who would believe in his name. He was God with us, and he is God with us.

He isn't with us as a human anymore. He lives within Christians, and

Why Was Jesus Born?

1) The birth of Jesus separates Christianity from all other religions. God came from outside of time and space into our world to be one of us, to save us from our sin.

In one form or another, other world religions present the main goal in life as being the search for God. They teach that the goal for humans is to find God. Christianity teaches the opposite. We cannot find God by our own effort. He came to us, to our world, to find us and to save us.

Buddhists do not believe that Buddha was a god. Muslims do not believe Mohammed was a god. Only Christians believe that Jesus was and is God.

2) The birth of Jesus forces us to remember that Jesus was and is God. He was not simply a prophet, rabbi, teacher, philosopher, reformer, wise man, miracle worker or a moral teacher setting a good example. He was all of these and much more. He was God with us.

3) The birth of Jesus teaches us that Jesus can transform our lives. Only God can give us new life, only God can heal, only God can forgive. Jesus owns us, and he is the Lord of our lives. We are obligated to him. He is our Lord and our Savior.

4) Jesus' birth was the most important event in history. He is the hinge of history. He changes everything. Because Jesus was and is God, his death on the cross is enough to pay for my sins and for yours. His birth reminds us that the question is not “Why were we born?” The ultimate question is “Why was Jesus born?”

he is in heaven, awaiting and anticipating his second coming. As the Christian music

group, Glad, sings in “In the First Light”:

Hear the angels as they're singing on the morning of his birth

But how much greater will that song be When he comes again, when he comes

again! (Glad/The Acapella Project/Benson Music Group)

Jesus came to the cradle that he might go to the cross. He was one of us. He came to make all things new. He changed the world forever, and he can change you and me. Jesus is not a baby anymore.

But wise men and women still seek him. □

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