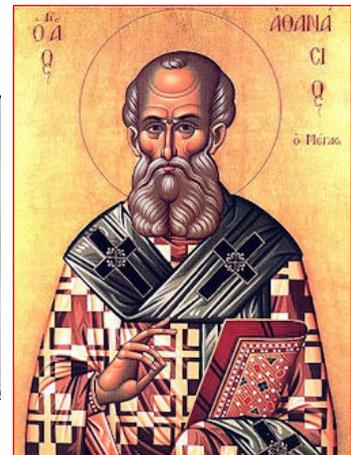
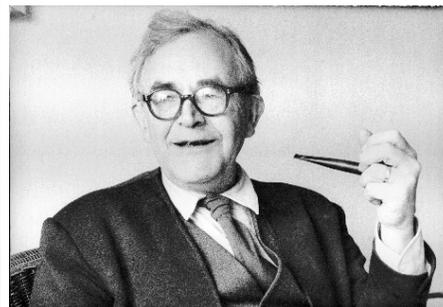
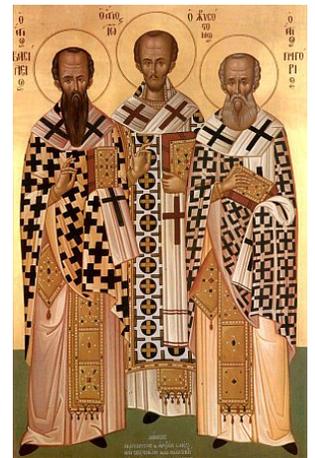
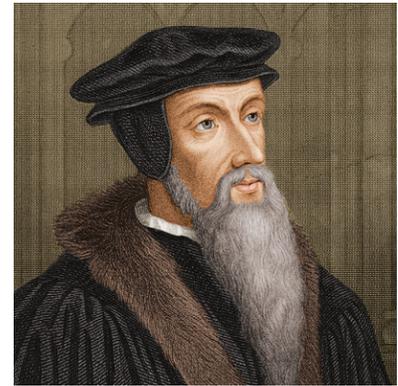


Christmas Reflections from Church History



Readings about Christmas and the Incarnation from the Creeds, Church Fathers, and Great Thinkers of Church History

Compiled by Jordan Rimmer

Introduction

The book you are holding is a devotional for Advent that has quotes from various creeds, church fathers, and Christian leaders. Some are short and easy. Others are more difficult and take greater effort to understand. I suggest you take your time and try to wrestle with each one. They are written for December 1-25 so that they read through Advent and Christmas.

God bless you as you wrestle with the great mystery of Christmas.

December 1

Charles H. Spurgeon from *Morning and Evening* for December 25

Let us today go down to Bethlehem, and in company with wondering shepherds and adoring Magi, let us see Him who was born King of the Jews, for we by faith can claim an interest in Him, and can sing, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." Jesus is Jehovah incarnate, our Lord and our God, and yet our brother and friend; let us adore and admire. Let us notice at the very first glance His miraculous conception. It was a thing unheard of before, and unparalleled since, that a virgin should conceive and bear a Son. The first promise ran thus, "The seed of the woman," not the offspring of the man. Since venturous woman led the way in the sin which brought forth Paradise lost, she, and she alone, ushers in the Regainer of Paradise. Our Saviour, although truly man, was as to His human nature the Holy One of God. Let us reverently bow before the holy Child whose innocence restores to manhood its ancient glory; and let us pray that He may be formed in us, the hope of glory. Fail not to note His humble parentage. His mother has been described simply as "a virgin," not a princess, or prophetess, nor a matron of large estate. True the blood of kings ran in her veins; nor was her mind a weak and untaught one, for she could sing most sweetly a song of praise; but yet how humble her position, how poor the man to whom she stood affianced, and how miserable the accommodation afforded to the new-born King!

Immanuel, God with us in our nature, in our sorrow, in our lifework, in our punishment, in our grave, and now with us, or rather we with Him, in resurrection, ascension, triumph, and Second Advent splendour.

December 2

John Calvin on the Incarnation from *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.12.1

The case was certainly desperate, if the Godhead itself did not descend to us, it being impossible for us to ascend. Thus the Son of God behoved to become our Emmanuel, the God with us; and in such a way, that by mutual union his divinity and our nature might be combined; otherwise, neither was the proximity near enough, nor the affinity strong enough, to give us hope that God would dwell with us; so great was the repugnance between our pollution and the spotless purity of God. Had man remained free from all taint, he was of too humble a condition to penetrate to God without a Mediator. What, then, must it have been, when by fatal ruin he was plunged into death and hell, defiled by so many stains, made loathsome by corruption; in fine, overwhelmed with every curse? It is not without cause, therefore, that Paul, when he would set forth Christ as the Mediator, distinctly declares him to be man. There is, says he, "one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus," (1 Tim. 2: 5). He might have called him God, or at least, omitting to call him God he might also have omitted to call him man; but because the Spirit, speaking by his mouth, knew our infirmity, he opportunely provides for it by the most appropriate remedy, setting the Son of God familiarly before us as one of ourselves. That no one, therefore, may feel perplexed where to seek the Mediator, or by what means to reach him, the Spirit, by calling him man, reminds us that he is near, nay, contiguous to us, inasmuch as he is our

flesh. And, indeed, he intimates the same thing in another place, where he explains at greater length that he is not a high priest who "cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," (Heb. 4: 15).

December 3

"The Word of God Will Come Within Us" from a sermon by Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th century

We have come to know a threefold coming of the Lord. The third coming takes place between the other two. They are clearly manifest but the third is not. In the first coming the Lord was seen on earth and lived among men in the days when, as he himself bears witness, they saw him and hated him. In his last coming 'all flesh shall see the salvation of our God', and 'they shall look on him whom they have pierced'. The other coming is hidden. In it, only the chosen see him within themselves and their souls are saved. In brief, his first coming was in the flesh and in weakness, the intermediary coming is in the spirit and in power, the last coming will be in glory and majesty.

This intermediary coming is like a road leading from the first to the last coming. In the first coming Christ was our redemption, in the last he will appear as our life, in this intermediary coming he is our rest and consolation.

Do not imagine that what we are saying about the intermediary coming is simply our own fabrication. Listen to Christ himself, 'If a man loves me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him'. I have read elsewhere, 'The man who fears the Lord will do good', but it is my opinion that more was said of the one who loves, namely that he will keep the words. Where, then, are they to be kept? Without any doubt they are to be kept in the heart, as the prophet says, 'I have kept your words, in my heart, lest I sin against you'.

Keep the word of God in that way for 'blessed are they who keep it'. Let it pierce deep into your inmost soul and penetrate your feelings and actions. Eat well and your soul will delight and grow. Do not forget to eat your bread or your heart will wither, but let your soul feast richly.

If you keep the word of God in this way without a doubt you will be kept by it. The Son with the Father will come to you. The great prophet who will renew Jerusalem will come and he will make everything new. The effect of this coming will be that just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. Just as the old Adam was poured out throughout the whole man and filled him completely, so now let Christ take possession of the whole man, for he created the whole man, he redeemed the whole man and he will glorify the whole man.

December 4

Scots Confession Chapter 6 and 7

Chapter 6 - The Incarnation of Jesus Christ

When the fullness of time came God sent his Son, his eternal wisdom, the substance of his own glory, into this world, who took the nature of humanity from the substance of a woman, a virgin, by means of the Holy Ghost. And so was born the "just seed of David," the "Angel of the great counsel of God," the very Messiah promised, whom we confess and acknowledge to be Emmanuel, true God and true man, two perfect natures united and joined in one person. So by our Confession, we condemn the damnable and pestilent heresies of Arius, Marcion, Eutyches, Nestorius, and such others as did either deny the eternity of his Godhead, or the truth of his humanity, or confounded them, or else divided them.

Chapter 7 - Why the Mediator Had to Be True God and True Man

We acknowledge and confess that this wonderful union between the Godhead and the humanity in Christ Jesus did arise from the eternal and immutable decree of God from which all our salvation springs and depends.

December 5

"The Wonder of Christ" by Origen (185-254 AD)

Of all the marvelous and splendid things about the Son of God there is one that utterly transcends the limits of human wonder and is beyond the capacity of our weak mortal intelligence to think of or understand, namely, how this mighty power of the divine majesty, the very Word of the Father, and the very Wisdom of God, in which were created "all things visible and invisible," can be believed to have existed within the compass of that man who appeared in Judaea; yes, and how the wisdom of God can have entered into a woman's womb and been born as a child and uttered noises like those of crying children; and further, how it was that he was troubled, as we are told, in the hour of death, as he himself confesses when he says, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death"; and how at the last he was led to that death which is considered by men to be the most shameful of all—even though on the third day he rose again.

When, therefore, we see in him some things so human that they appear in no way to differ from the common frailty of mortals, and some things so divine that they are appropriate to nothing else but the ...nature of deity, the human understanding with its narrow limits is baffled, and struck with amazement at so mighty a wonder knows not which way to turn, what to hold to, or whither to betake itself. If it thinks of God, it sees a man; if it thinks of a man, it beholds one returning from the dead with spoils after vanquishing the kingdom of death.

For this reason we must pursue our contemplation with all fear and reverence, as we seek to prove how the reality of each nature exists in one and the same person, in such a way that nothing unworthy or unfitting may be thought to reside in that divine and ineffable existence, nor on the other hand may the events of his life be supposed to be the illusions caused by deceptive fantasies.

But to utter these things in human ears and to explain them by words far exceeds the powers we possess either in our mortal worth or in mind and speech. I think indeed that it transcends the capacity even of the holy apostles; nay more, perhaps the explanation of this mystery lies beyond the reach of the whole creation of heavenly things.

December 6

Selections from Dietrich Bonhoeffer From *God is in the Manger*

For the great and powerful of this world, there are only two places in which their courage fails them, of which they are afraid deep down in their souls, from which they shy away. These are the manger and the cross of Jesus Christ. No powerful person dares to approach the manger, and this even includes King Herod. For this is where thrones shake, the mighty fall, the prominent perish, because God is with the lowly. Here the rich come to nothing, because God is with the poor and hungry, but the rich and satisfied he sends away empty. Before Mary, the maid, before the manger of Christ, before God in lowliness, the powerful come to naught; they have no right, no hope; they are judged.

No priest, no theologian stood at the manger of Bethlehem. And yet all Christian theology has its origin in the wonder of all wonders: that God became human. Holy theology arises from knees bent before the mystery of the divine child in the stable.

Without the holy night, there is no theology. "God is revealed in flesh," the God-human Jesus Christ—that is the holy mystery that theology came into being to protect and preserve. How we fail to understand when we think that the task of theology is to solve the mystery of God, to drag it down to the flat, ordinary wisdom of human experience and reason! Its sole office is to preserve the miracle as miracle, to comprehend, defend, and glorify God's mystery precisely as mystery. This and nothing else, therefore, is what the early church meant when, with never flagging zeal, it dealt with the mystery of the Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ If Christmas time cannot ignite within us again something like a love for holy theology, so that we—captured and compelled by the wonder of the manger of the Son of God—must reverently reflect on the mysteries of God, then it must be that the glow of the divine mysteries has also been extinguished in our heart and has died out.

December 7

CS Lewis from *Miracles* Chapter 14

The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this. Just as every natural event is the manifestation at a particular place and moment of Nature's total character, so every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the Incarnation. There is no question in Christianity of arbitrary interferences just scattered about. It relates not a series of disconnected raids on Nature but the various steps of a strategically coherent invasion—an invasion which intends complete conquest and "occupation." The fitness, and therefore credibility, of the particular miracles depends on their relation to the Grand Miracle; all discussion of them in isolation from it is futile.

December 8

"When Christ comes, God will be Seen by Men" From a treatise Against Heresies by Irenaeus, 130-200 A.D.

There is one God, who by his word and wisdom created all things and set them in order. His word is our Lord Jesus Christ, who in this last age became man among men to unite end and beginning, that is, man and God.

The prophets, receiving the gift of prophecy from this same Word, foretold his coming in the flesh, which brought about the union and communion between God and man ordained by the Father. From the beginning the word of God prophesied that God would be seen by men and would live among them on earth; he would speak with his own creation and be present to it, bringing it salvation and being visible to it. He would free us from the hands of all who hate us, that is, from the universal spirit of sin, and enable us to serve him in holiness and justice all our days. Man was to receive the Spirit of God and so to attain to the glory of the Father.

The prophets foretold that God would be seen by men. As the Lord himself says: Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God. In his greatness and inexpressible glory no one can see God and live, for the Father is beyond our comprehension. But in his love and generosity and omnipotence he allows even this to those who love him, that is, even to see God, as the prophets foretold. For what is impossible to men is possible to God.

By his own powers man cannot see God; yet God will be seen by men because he wills it. He will be seen by those he chooses, at the time he chooses, and in the way he chooses, for God can do all things. He was seen of

old through the Spirit in prophecy; he is seen through the Son by our adoption as his children, and he will be seen in the kingdom of heaven in his own being as the Father. The Spirit prepares man to receive the Son of God, the Son leads him to the Father, and the Father, freeing him from change and decay, bestows the eternal life that comes to everyone from seeing God.

As those who see light are in the light sharing its brilliance, so those who see God are in God sharing his glory, and that glory gives them life. To see God is to share in life.

December 9

Westminster Confession 6.043-44

I. It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and men, the prophet, priest, and king; the head and Savior of the Church, the heir or all things, and judge of the world; unto whom he did, from all eternity, give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

II. The Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof; yet without sin: being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

III. The Lord Jesus in his human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure; having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell: to the end that being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety. Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father; who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same.

December 10

Quote by Athanasius from *On the Incarnation*

(7) Yet, true though this is, it is not the whole matter. As we have already noted, it was unthinkable that God, the Father of Truth, should go back upon His word regarding death in order to ensure our continued existence. He could not falsify Himself; what, then, was God to do? Was He to demand repentance from men for their transgression? You might say that that was worthy of God, and argue further that, as through the Transgression they became subject to corruption, so through repentance they might return to incorruption again. But repentance would not guard the Divine consistency, for, if death did not hold dominion over men, God would still remain untrue. Nor does repentance recall men from what is according to their nature; all that it does is to make them cease from sinning. Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. No, repentance could not meet the case. What—or rather *Who* was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing? His part it was, and His alone, both to bring again the corruptible to incorruption and to maintain for the Father His consistency of character with all. For He alone, being Word of the Father and above all, was in consequence both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father.

(8) For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us. He saw the reasonable race, the race of men that, like Himself, expressed the Father's Mind, wasting out of existence, and death reigning over all in corruption. He saw that corruption held us all the closer, because it was the penalty for the Transgression; He saw, too, how unthinkable it would be for the law to be repealed before it was fulfilled. He saw how unseemly it was that the very things of which He Himself was the Artificer should be disappearing. He saw how the surpassing wickedness of men was mounting up against them; He saw also their universal liability to death. All this He saw and, pitying our race, moved with compassion for our limitation, unable to endure that death should have the mastery, rather than that His creatures should perish and the work of His Father for us men come to nought, He took to Himself a body, a human body even as our own. Nor did He will merely to become embodied or merely to appear; had that been so, He could have revealed His divine majesty in some other and better way. No, He took *our* body, and not only so, but He took it directly from a spotless, stainless virgin, without the agency of human father—a pure body, untainted by intercourse with man. He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was known and in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because, having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men. This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.

December 11

"The Word, the Wisdom of God, was Made Flesh from a Sermon of Peter Chrysologus

The blessed apostle has recalled that two men gave a beginning to the human race, namely Adam and Christ; two men equal in physical nature but unequal in merit; truly alike in their bodily structure, but totally dissimilar in their own origin. 'The first Adam', he says, 'became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

That first Adam was made by this last, from whom he obtained the soul to give him life; the last was author of his own making: he did not look for life from another, but himself alone bestowed life on all. The first Adam is moulded from the vile dust of the earth, the second comes forth from the precious womb of the Virgin. In the first Adam earth is changed into flesh, in the last, flesh is raised up to God.

And what more? This last is the Adam, who when forming the first set his own image in him. Hence he assumed his role, and received his name to prevent the loss of what he had made to his own image. There is a first Adam, then, and a last Adam: the first has a beginning, the last has no end. Because this last is in truth himself the first, as he says, 'I am the first and the last...!'

'As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven'. How shall those not born in such a condition be found so, remaining not as they were born, but as they were reborn?

This is the reason, brothers, why the heavenly Spirit makes fertile the womb of the virginal font, by the secret admixture of his light, that it may bring forth as heavenly creatures, and bring back to the likeness of the

Creator, those whom their origin in earth's dust had produced as men of dust in miserable state. So now reborn and refashioned to the likeness of our Creator, let us fulfil the apostle's command: 'Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven'.

Now reborn after the pattern of our Lord, as I have said, let us bear the full and complete image of our maker; not in majesty, in which he is alone, but in innocence, simplicity, meekness, patience, humility, mercy and concord - in which he deigned to become and to be one with us.

December 12

Quote my Martin Luther from Sermon "The Story of Jesus' Birth"

How could God have shown his goodness in a more sublime manner than by humbling himself to partake of flesh and blood, that he did not even disdain the natural privacy but honors nature most highly in that part where in Adam and Eve it was most miserably brought to shame? so that henceforth even that can be regarded godly, honest and pure, which in all men is the most ungodly, shameful and impure. These are real miracles of God, for in no way could he have given us stronger, more forcible and purer pictures of chastity than in this birth. When we look at this birth, and reflect upon how the sublime Majesty moves with great earnestness and inexpressible love and goodness upon the flesh and blood of this virgin, we see how here all evil lust and every evil thought is banished.

No woman can inspire such pure thoughts in a man as this virgin; nor can any man inspire such pure thought in a woman as this child. If in reflecting on this birth we recognize the work of God that is embodied in it, only chastity and purity spring from it.

But what happens in heaven concerning this birth? As much as it is despised on earth, so much and a thousand times more is it honored in heaven. If an angel from heaven came and praised you and your work, would you not regard it of greater value than all the praise and honor the world could give you, and for which you would be willing to bear the greatest humility and reproach? What exalted honor is that when all the angels in heaven can not restrain themselves from breaking out in rejoicing, so that even poor shepherds in the fields hear them preach, praise God, sing and pour out their joy without measure? Were not all joy and honor realized at Bethlehem, yes, all joy and honor experienced by all the kings and nobles on earth, to be regarded as only dross and abomination, of which no one likes to think, when compared with the joy and glory here displayed?

December 13

2nd Helvetic Confession 5.062

Christ Is True God. We further believe and teach that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was predestinated or foreordained from eternity by the Father to be the Savior of the world. And we believe that he was born, not only when he assumed flesh of the Virgin Mary, and not only before the foundation of the world was laid, but by the Father before all eternity in an inexpressible manner. For Isaiah said: "Who can tell his generation? (Ch. 53:8). And Micah says: "His origin is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 4:2). And John said in the Gospel "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," etc. (Ch. 1:1). Therefore, with respect to his divinity the Son is coequal and consubstantial with the Father; true God (Phil 2:11), not only in name or by adoption or by any merit, but in substance and nature, as the apostle John has often said: "This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). Paul also says: "He appointed the Son the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding

all things by his word of power" (Heb. 1:2 f.). For in the Gospel the Lord himself said: "Father, glorify Thou me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made" (John 17:5). And in another place in the Gospel it is written: "The Jews sought all the more to kill him because he . . . called God his Father making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

December 14

2nd Helvetic Confession 5.064-67

Christ Is True Man, Having Real Flesh. We also believe and teach that the eternal Son of the eternal God was made the Son of man, from the seed of Abraham and David, not from the coitus of a man, as the Ebionites said, but was most chastely conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the ever virgin Mary, as the evangelical history carefully explains to us (Matt., ch. 1). And Paul says: "He took not on him the nature of angels, but of the seed of Abraham." Also the apostle John says that whoever does not believe that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is not of God. Therefore, the flesh of Christ was neither imaginary nor brought from heaven, As Valentinus and Marcion wrongly imagined.

A Rational Soul in Christ. Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ did not have a soul bereft of sense and reason, as Apollinaris thought, nor flesh without a soul, as Eunomius taught, but a soul with its reason, and flesh with its senses, by which in the time of his passion he sustained real bodily pain, as he himself testified when he said: "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26:38). And, "Now is my soul troubled" (John 12:27).

Two Natures in Christ. We therefore acknowledge two natures or substances, the divine and the human, in one and the same Jesus Christ our Lord (Heb., ch. 2). And we say that these are bound and united with one another in such a way that they are not absorbed, or confused, or mixed, but are united or joined together in one person--the properties of the natures being unimpaired and permanent.

Not Two but One Christ. Thus we worship not two but one Christ the Lord. We repeat: one true God and man. With respect to his divine nature he is consubstantial with the Father, and with respect to the human nature he is consubstantial with us men, and like us in all things, sin excepted (Heb. 4:15).

December 15

"O Christian, be Aware of your Nobility" from a Sermon by Leo the Great, 5th century

This is the day our Savior was born: what a joy for us, my beloved! This is no season for sadness, this, the birthday of Life - the Life which annihilates the fear of death, and engenders joy, promising, as it does, immortality.

Nobody is an outsider to this happiness. The same cause for joy is common to all, for as our Lord found nobody free from guilt when he came to bring an end to death and to sin, so he came with redemption for all. Let the saint rejoice, for he hastens to his crown; let the sinner be filled with joy, for pardon is offered him; let the Gentile be emboldened, for he is called to life.

When the designated time had come, which God in his deep and impenetrable plan had fixed upon, God's Son took the nature of man upon himself in order to reconcile man to his Creator. Thus would the devil, the father of death, be himself overcome by that self-same human nature which he had overcome.

The angels therefore exult at the birth of the Lord: they sing 'Glory to God in high heaven'; they announce 'Peace on earth for men on whom his favor rests'. For they behold the heavenly Jerusalem being constructed from out of all the peoples on earth. How greatly ought mere men rejoice at this mysterious undertaking of divine love, when the angels on high thrill so much at it!

My beloved, let us offer thanksgiving to God the Father, through his Son, in the Holy Spirit. In the great mercy with which he loved us, he had pity on us, and 'in giving life to Christ, gave life to us too, when we were dead through sin', so that in him we might be a new creation, a new work of his hands.

Let us then be quit of the old self and the habits that went with it. Sharers now in the birth of Christ, let us break with the deeds of the flesh.

O Christian, be aware of your nobility - it is God's own nature that you share: do not then, by an ignoble life, fall back into your former baseness. Think of the Head, think of the Body of which you are a member. Recall that you have been rescued from the power of darkness, and have been transferred to the light of God, the kingdom of God.

Through the sacrament of baptism you have been made a temple of the Holy Spirit; do not, by evil deeds, drive so great an indweller away from you, submitting yourself once more to the slavery of the devil. For you were bought at the price of Christ's blood.

December 16

"The Revealing of the Hidden Mystery" from the Treatise of Hippolytus against the heresy of Noetus, 3rd century

There is one God, and we can come to know him through sacred scripture. So then, let us look at what scripture proclaims, let us discover what its teaching is. As the Father wants to be believed, so let us discover what its teaching is. As the Father wants to be believed so let us believe; as he wants the Son to be glorified, so let us glorify him; as he wants the Holy Spirit to be given, so let us receive him. We must not act in accordance with our own mind or our own will; we must not do violence to what God has given. We must look at things rather as God has chosen to make them known through scripture.

God, existing alone, without contemporary of any sort, decided to make the world. He conceived it in his mind, willed it, spoke the word, and so made it, and immediately it came into being, formed as he had willed it. It is enough for us simply to know that God had no contemporary; apart from him there was nothing. But though alone, God was manifold. He was not without reason or wisdom or power or counsel. All things were in him and he was all. When he willed, and as he willed, he revealed his Word, at times which he himself had determined. Through his Word he made all things.

The Word was in God and was invisible to the created world, but God made him visible. He spoke, as he had done before, and, begetting light from light, he sent forth his own mind to the world as its Lord. He who formerly had been visible only to God and invisible to the world was now made visible, so that through this manifestation the world could see him, and be saved.

The Word is the mind of God; he came into the world and was shown forth as Son of God. All things, then, come into being through him, and he alone is from the Father.

It was this one God who gave the law and the prophets. In giving them, he made them speak by the Holy Spirit: the Father's power inspires them, and they proclaim the Father's purpose and will.

And so the Word was manifested. Saint John sums up what the prophets said and shows that this is the Word through whom all things came to be: 'In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him'. Later he goes on: 'The world had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him'.

December 17

Heidelberg Catechism 4.035-36

Q. 33. Why is he called GOD'S ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, since we also are God's children?

A. Because Christ alone is God's own eternal Son, whereas we are accepted for his sake as children of God by grace.

Q. 34. Why do you call him OUR LORD?

A. Because, not with gold or silver but at the cost of his blood, he has redeemed us body and soul from sin and all the dominion of the devil, and has bought us for his very own.

Q. 35. What is the meaning of: "Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary"?

A. That the eternal Son of God, who is and remains true and eternal God, took upon himself our true manhood from the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit, so that he might also be the true seed of David, like his fellow men in all things, except for sin.

Q. 36. What benefit do you receive from the holy conception and birth of Christ?

A. That he is our Mediator, and that, in God's sight, he covers over with his innocence and perfect holiness the sinfulness in which I have been conceived.

December 18

"The Wonderful Exchange" By Gregory Nazianzen

The Son of God himself, who is before all ages,
the invisible, the incomprehensible, the bodiless,
the beginning from the beginning,
the light from the light,
source of life and immortality,
image of the archetype,
immovable seal,
unchangeable image,
the Father's definition and Word,
he it is who came to his own image and took to himself flesh for the sake of our flesh.

Then he united himself with an intelligent soul for my soul's sake, purifying like by like. He took to himself all that is human, except sin. He was conceived by the Virgin who was first purified in body and soul by the Spirit. It was necessary both that childbearing be honored and that virginity be honored still more highly.

He came forth as God with what he had taken to himself. Out of two contraries, flesh and spirit, he made one. The Spirit conferred the godhead on the flesh that received it.

He who enriches others becomes poor. He took to himself the poverty of my flesh so that I might obtain the riches of his godhead. He who is full empties himself. He emptied himself of his godhead for a brief time so that I might share in his fulness.

What is this wealth of goodness? What is this mystery that touches me? I received the divine image and I did not keep it. He receives my flesh to save the image and grant immortality to the flesh. This, his second communion with us, is far more marvelous than the first.

It was necessary that holiness be conferred on man through the humanity God took to himself. In this way, conquering the tyrant by force, he freed us and led us back to himself through his Son, the mediator. The Son brought this about to the honor of the Father to whom, in all things, he is seen to defer.

The good shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep, set out after the strayed sheep, on the mountains and hills on which you used to sacrifice. When he found the stray sheep he carried it on those same shoulders that bore the wood of the cross, and brought it back with him to the life above. The brightest of all lights follows the lamp that goes before him. The Word follows the voice in the wilderness. The bridegroom follows the friend of the bridegroom who is making ready for God a special people, cleansing them with water in anticipation of the Spirit.

We needed an incarnate God who would die that we might live. We died with him that we might be cleansed. We rose again with him because we died with him. We were glorified with him because we rose again with him.

December 19

"Our desires will be Completely Fulfilled in the Vision of the Word" from a Sermon by St Augustine, 5th century

What man knows all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ and concealed in the poverty of his flesh?

Though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich. When he made mortality his own and made away with death, he appeared in poverty; but he promised riches, riches that were only deferred - he did not lose riches that were taken away from him.

How great is the abundance of his goodness which he hides for those who fear him, which he perfects for those who hope in him! Our knowledge is partial until what is perfect comes. To make us fit to receive this perfection, he who is equal to the Father in the form of God and made like to us in the form of a slave, transforms us to the likeness of God. The only Son of God, made son of man, makes many sons of men sons of God. The slaves, sustained by the visible form of the slave, he frees and makes children so that they may see the form of God.

We are God's children; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. What are those treasures of wisdom and knowledge, what are those divine riches, except what is sufficient for us? What is that abundance of goodness, except what fills us? Show us the Father, then, and it is sufficient for us.

In one of the psalms someone says to him from among us or within us or for us: 'I shall be filled when your glory is manifested'. He and the Father are one: whoever sees him sees the Father also. So then, he the Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory. He will bring us back, he will show us his face; and we shall be saved, we shall be filled, he will be sufficient for us.

Until this happens, until he shows us what is sufficient for us, until we drink him as the fountain of life and are filled, - until then we are exiles from him and walk by faith, until then we hunger and thirst for justice, and long with a passion beyond words for the beauty of the form of God; - until then, let us celebrate his birth in the form of a slave with humble devotion.

December 20

"His Birth and Our New Birth" by Oswald Chambers in his devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* December 25

'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us' —Matthew 1:23

His Birth in History. “. . . that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Jesus Christ was born into this world, not from it. He did not emerge out of history; He came into history from the outside. Jesus Christ is not the best human being the human race can boast of— He is a Being for whom the human race can take no credit at all. He is not man becoming God, but God Incarnate— God coming into human flesh from outside it. His life is the highest and the holiest entering through the most humble of doors. Our Lord's birth was an advent— the appearance of God in human form.

His Birth in Me. “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you . . .” (Galatians 4:19). Just as our Lord came into human history from outside it, He must also come into me from outside. Have I allowed my personal human life to become a “Bethlehem” for the Son of God? I cannot enter the realm of the kingdom of God unless I am born again from above by a birth totally unlike physical birth. “You must be born again” (John 3:7). This is not a command, but a fact based on the authority of God. The evidence of the new birth is that I yield myself so completely to God that “Christ is formed” in me. And once “Christ is formed” in me, His nature immediately begins to work through me.

God Evident in the Flesh. This is what is made so profoundly possible for you and for me through the redemption of man by Jesus Christ.

December 21

Confession of 1976 9.08-9

1. Jesus Christ

9.08 In Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful men and women. But his complete obedience led him into conflict with his people. His life and teaching judged their goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself freely for them, he took upon himself the judgment under which everyone stands convicted. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord. The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for all.

9.09 God's reconciling act in Jesus Christ is a mystery which the Scriptures describe in various ways. It is called the sacrifice of a lamb, a shepherd's life given for his sheep, atonement by a priest; again it is ransom of a slave, payment of debt, vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, and victory over the powers of evil. These are expressions of a truth which remains beyond the reach of all theory in the depths of God's love for humankind. They reveal the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of God's reconciling work.

December 22

Part 1 Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics*; Vol. IV, Part 3.2, "The Doctrine of Reconciliation."

That Jesus Christ in calling man to be a Christian unites Himself with him means first from His own standpoint that He is unique as the One who in His life and death was humiliated and exalted in the place and for the sake of all, as the One in whom the reconciliation of the world to God and the justification and sanctification of all were accomplished. In all this He has no assistant nor fellow-worker to accompany Him, let alone any corredemptor or corredemptrix. He is absolutely isolated from all others. Without them, He intervenes for them. But as this One, when it is a matter of the revelation of this work as inaugurated in His resurrection from the dead and continued in the work of His Holy Spirit, when it is a matter of His work in its prophetic dimension, He cannot and will not remain alone, nor can He be solitary in the reconciled world on His way to His future, conclusive and universal revelation. He cannot and will not be the Master without disciples, the Leader without followers, the Head without members, the King without fellows in His people, Himself without His own, Christ without Christians. The fact that the One who is disclosed in His resurrection from the dead and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is really the omnipotent God who stooped down in unmerited love to man, the Lord who became a servant, has in the time which moves to its end in His final revelation a counterpart in the fact that as the Proclaimer of the act of God accomplished in Him, in His prophetic office and work, He does not go alone but wills to be what He is and do what He does in company with others whom He calls for the purpose, namely, with the despicable folk called Christians. He attests to the world the reconciliation to God effected in Him, the covenant of God with man fulfilled in Him, as He associates with Christians, making common cause and conjoining Himself with them. He does not merely do this ideally or partially, but really and totally. He does not merely comfort, encourage, admonish or protect them remotely or from afar. But as He calls them to Himself in the divine power of His Spirit, He refreshes them by offering and giving Himself to them and making them His own. That He wills and does this is in analogy to the mystery and miracle of Christmas the true ratio of Christian existence as this is celebrated, adored and proclaimed within the community of Christians in the common administration of the Lord's Supper, instituted to represent the perfect fellowship between Him and them which He has established an implication which we cannot do more than indicate in the present context.

December 23

Part 2 Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics*; Vol. IV, Part 3.2, "The Doctrine of Reconciliation."

We now turn to what must be thought and said concerning this union of His with Christians from their standpoint. There is, of course, no one, apostle, saint or the Virgin, who can contribute in the very slightest to what is accomplished for all by the one Jesus Christ in His life and death. In relation to His high-priestly and kingly work even a Paul can only know what has been done for us by God in Him (I Cor. 2:12). But those to whom He reveals and makes known this life and death of His as the act of God for their salvation and His own glory do not confront this act of revelation, this work of atonement in its prophetic dimension, as hearers and spectators who are left to themselves and ordained for pure passivity. What kind of vocation, illumination and awakening would it be, what kind of knowledge, if they were merely left gaping at the One who discloses Himself to them? No, as surely as He does not will to tread alone His way as the Proclaimer of the kingdom, so

surely they for their part must be with Him, companions of the living One who are made alive by Him, witnesses in His discipleship to that which He wills to reveal to the world as having been effected in Him, namely, to the reconciliation accomplished and the covenant fulfilled in Him. This is what He makes them as He calls them to Himself, as He does this really and totally, as He does not leave them to themselves, as He does not remain outside them, as He gives Himself to them, as in the divine power of His Spirit He unites Himself with them. That they may become and be those with whom He unites Himself by His Word; that they may be those who are born again from above by His presence and action in their own lives; that they may be continually nourished by Him this is, from their standpoint, the ratio of Christian existence. Here again we are naturally reminded of the mystery and miracle of Christmas, and must make provisional reference to the Lord's Supper.

December 24

Part 1 of perhaps the first Christmas sermon ever preached. By St. John Chrysostom (347-407)

BEHOLD a new and wondrous mystery. My ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and he that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side, the Sun of justice. And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed, He had the power, He descended, He redeemed; all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He Who is, is Born; and He Who is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became He man, nor through increase became He God from man; but being the Word He became flesh, His nature, because of impassability, remaining unchanged.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him Angels, nor Archangels, nor Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor Principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech. For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

December 25

Part 2 of perhaps the first Christmas sermon ever preached. By St. John Chrysostom (347-407)

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend.

Nature here rested, while the Will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The Only Begotten, Who is before all ages, Who cannot be touched or be perceived, Who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us he may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that men cannot see. For since men believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than

the ears, they doubt of that which they do not see, and so He has deigned to show Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all doubt.

Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple, and as He had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and, putting Him on, this day came forth; unashamed of the lowliness of our nature'. For it was to Him no lowering to put on what He Himself had made. Let that handiwork be forever glorified, which became the cloak of its own Creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made before the clay had come into His hand, so neither could this corruptible body be glorified, until it had first become the garment of its Maker.

What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infants bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit, that He may save me.

Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been 'in planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He became Flesh. He did not become God. He was God. Wherefore He became flesh, so that He Whom heaven did not contain, a manger would this day receive. He was placed in a manger, so that He, by whom all things are nourished, may receive an infant's food from His Virgin Mother. So, the Father of all ages, as an infant at the breast, nestles in the virginal arms, that the Magi may more easily see Him. Since this day the Magi too have come, and made a beginning of withstanding tyranny; and the heavens give glory, as the Lord is revealed by a star.

To Him, then, Who out of confusion has wrought a clear path, to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Ghost, we offer all praise, now and for ever. Amen.