

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

December 2011

Dearest Friends,

This month we celebrate Advent, and Christmas, and all the wonderful things that come with it. Having this in mind, I wanted to share something a friend of mine wrote to me in a very late-night email. He is a Catholic layman, living in Eastern Europe. I had sent him a copy of *Beautiful Outlaw*, and it is in that context he wrote me during the wee hours:

It is late night and I was putting my little ones to bed (they are not that little any more but they like it anyways). I'm still sitting here next to their beds and they had fallen to sleep at least an hour ago but I'm reading on the Humility of Jesus. I am disarmed, naked, amazed and in awe with this Jesus. It is like a new Incarnation – the Word is becoming Flesh in me now. I think the Incarnation didn't finish but it continues. Just wanted to share this with you.

Now there's a fresh take on Advent – the Word becoming flesh in *us*. The Incarnation didn't finish but continues!!

We evangelicals have heard it repeated so often – that the purpose of Christ coming to earth was to bring salvation – that we have often lost sight of the larger scope of his coming. Yes, yes, to rescue us from our sin and the clutches of the evil one. By all means, yes! But there is *more*. This month I am re-reading Athanasius' wonderful little book *On the Incarnation*, and treasuring his insights, chief among them this one:

Christ became what we are, so that we might become what he is.

Take this slowly, one thought at a time. First, Jesus embraced a genuine humanity. “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity...made like his brothers in every way” (Hebrews 2:14,17). Jesus shared in your humanity. Pause, and let that sink in. Baby Jesus wasn't wearing a halo. Apologies to *Away In a Manger*, but yes he cried; he spit up his food; he needed to be held, and his diapers needing changing; this infant was a *real* human baby, cooing and gurgling, hiccupping and laughing. (Wouldn't you have loved to hear his little laugh?!) He needed to learn to walk, to talk, to tie his shoes. The reality of the Incarnation is stunning, stunning, stunning. And Jesus the man wasn't faking it, either – Gethsemane was real, the sorrow, the anguish, all of it. His humanity was *real*.

So, with the coming of Advent, we relish the truth that Jesus took on a genuine humanity. And why, why in heaven's name did he set aside heaven in order to be born a man among men (he loved to call himself the Son of Man)? *Why?* Again, Athanasius:

Because death and corruption were gaining ever firmer hold on them, the human race was in process of destruction. Man, who was created in God's image...was disappearing, and the work of God was being undone. The law of death, which followed from the Transgression, prevailed upon us, and from it there was no escape. The thing that was happening was in truth both monstrous and unfitting.

He, the Image of the Father, came and dwelt in our midst, in order that He might renew mankind made after Himself.

Athanasius uses the following illustration:

You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and then the likeness is re-drawn on the same material. Even so it was with the All-holy Son of God. Thus by His own power He restored the whole nature of man.

The purpose of Christ embracing humanity was so that he might restore ours. Paul says that his whole life of labor was so that the Incarnation might continue...in us: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth *until Christ is formed in you*" (Galatians 4:19). Until this man, this life, is formed in you. Christ was first formed in Mary's womb; now he is being formed in us...the Word becoming flesh again, in us. It is a truth unique to Christianity and no other religion.

Think of it – God set about in Jesus Christ the restoration of your humanity. What thought could be more hopeful? What if the marvelous personality of Jesus could be re-birthed in you? What if his powerful and generous life could be re-birthed in you? It *can*; it *must*. The Incarnation is *meant* to continue – in us. And so, this Christmas season, we can pray with new hope those wonderful lines in *O Little Town of Bethlehem*,

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today.

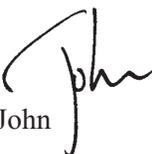
Yes, O yes, Jesus come, and let your life transform mine; may your glorious humanity lift mine from the ashes, and restore me in every way. For *this* we celebrate Christmas.

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We are witnessing it happen, by the way, in such depth and breadth it is taking our breath away. God is using Ransomed Heart to restore lives in his image. In order to carry on this stunning work, we do need help here at year's end. Giving to Ransomed Heart is one of Stasi and my favorite things to do, because we know how well these dollars are used and how far, far reaching the redemption is that comes as a result. So we ask you to join us in giving here, and to ask Jesus, "How might I bless the work of Ransomed Heart? What would you have me give?" O thank you so much!

I pray this year's Advent and Christmas season is one where the truth of Jesus' humanity comes afresh to you, and with it a deeper impartation of his life restoring yours.

With love, from all of us,


John