

**CHRISTMAS
WITH THE FOUR
DISCIPLINES
(SYSTEMATICS)**



WARM UP


What is one of your favorite Christmas carols?

SYSTEMATICS DISCIPLINE

Today we are looking at Christmas through our 3rd lens of discipline, systematics. Systematics makes a “system” of the thoughts found in Scripture. You can also think of systematics as being the discipline of categories – putting the doctrines found in the Christmas story into categories of thought.

Systematics can include things such as sanctification (how the Holy Spirit makes us holy), imperfection (how we human beings sin), and providence (how God continues to support the world as His creation).

One way of thinking about systematics is often in terms of heresy. Since much of systematics develop out of controversies about God (e.g. The Pelagian belief that we are expected to be holy and that Jesus is merely an example for us to follow), you can begin to talk about “Soteriology” of the doctrine of Salvation.



What are some examples of systematic categories that you can think of?

THE TRINITY

Another way of thinking about systematics is “Creedal statements”. What do the Creeds tell us about who God is and who we are?

In order to truly understand who Jesus is and why Christmas is important, we have to begin to talk about how He is related to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

While the Trinity is notoriously a theological topic that goes beyond our understanding (3 in one, 1 in three), there are some things we can say about the Trinity that relate to Christmas.

He is not just a human being that God “adopts” but He is the 2nd person of the Trinity. (John 1, Matthew 1) born into a human body.

He is “the Son,” a title that relates particularly to His role of being born.

He has no human father, but comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit.




What Trinitarian heresies might change how we see the message of Christmas?

THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Christmas is the story of God being born into the world as a human being. We may take for granted what that means unless we unpack it systematically.

We believe that Jesus is 100% God and 100% man (another way that math and God don't seem to work out). The systematic ways of talking about this is "attributes". Jesus displays divine attributes and human attributes, but all of those are contained in His human body.

When Jesus is born, He is not simply "pretending" to be human, nor is there some aspect of His divinity that is left in heaven like some extra dough would be left by a cookie cutter.



Where in the Christmas story do we find divine or human attributes of Jesus?

THE STATE OF HUMILIATION

Related to the person of Christ, we have the states of humiliation and exaltation. We know that the Son is not always “Jesus,” but that He gains that name by being born into our history. The period from His conception to His burial is called the state of His humiliation. This is contrasted with two other periods. First we have His “pre-incarnate” period before He is born into human history. Secondly, we have the period that we know of as His “exaltation”. In His exaltation, Jesus remains Jesus. This means that He remains fully human, but He is exalted and returns to His rightful and previous place at the right hand of the Father.

Why might it matter to believe that once born as a human that Jesus remains human?

ANGELOGY

If you're looking for the story in the Bible with the most "per capita angels," then you're going to be looking at the story of Jesus' birth. Not only do angels appear to Zechariah and Mary in the story, foretelling Jesus' birth, but angels also figure in to the announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds, and later on, to Joseph to both tell him to flee Bethlehem and return to Nazareth.




What can we derive about angels from the Christmas story?



WORD MADE FLESH – COMMUNICATION OF ATTRIBUTES

Christmas is the story of The Son, who is also called “The Word” being born as a human into our history. The systematic implications here are pretty heavy. For much of human history, God’s engagement with human kind has been through His Word. We can see this in how the Torah is near personified in Jewish thought. This Word then is born as a human for our sake. Jesus’ birth then has implications for how God is present with us through a. His Word (the Son) preached, b. His Word (the Son) given to us in the Sacrament, c.) His Word (the Son) inhabiting the Church (His Body). Jesus being born into our world makes a “thin place” through which God continues to communicate Himself to us.




In what ways is Jesus like “the Torah born in our world”?

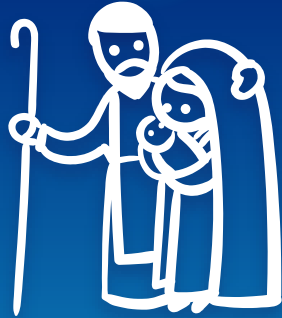
SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

Jesus is born into our world to be our “substitution”. He is born into the world to do what human beings have never been able to do – that is, live completely faithfully in His relationship with God. This is something that our first human parents failed at and something that we continue to fail at doing. Because of this, God substituted Himself into our world – holding Himself through Jesus to the requirements of faithfulness. Jesus then goes to the Cross to distribute His faithfulness to us, giving up claims to His own faithfulness by dying.

This image is presented to us in sacrificial theology as an innocent who is born for the purpose of being sacrificed in death.



What about the Christmas story shows that Jesus is born to be a substitute?



NEXT WEEK

Join us next week as we talk about Jesus' birth
through the PRACTICAL discipline