

December 16, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Christmas in Hebrews (part 1)

Hebrews 1-2

- 1. To communicate with us (1:1-2a)**
- 2. To taste death for us (2:9, 14-15)**
- 3. To be merciful to us (2:17; 4:15)**

This morning, I want to catch the wave of the Christmas season and have us reflect a bit upon the meaning of Christmas. Christmas, of course is the time each year when we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The birth of Jesus was unique in many ways. In many places, His birth was prophesied in Scripture. His birth was prophesied to take place in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). His birth was prophesied to be of the lineage of David (Ps. 110). The circumstances surrounding His birth were also unique. He was born of a virgin, just as the prophesy had maintained (Isaiah 7:14). Perhaps most unique of all was that His birth was God coming in the flesh (John 1:1, 14). Truly it was "Immanuel," which means, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). At Christmas, we celebrate God's gift to us.

When you celebrate somebody's birthday, you don't simply celebrate the day that they were born. Often on my children's birthdays, I like to tell them of what took place on that day when they were born. My wife isn't particularly thrilled with these stories, because in many ways, these days were not days to celebrate. On somebody's birthday, you celebrate the life that started on that day. Whenever our children have birthdays, I often find myself thanking the Lord for the years that He has given our child and praying that He would provide more years to come, that they would live their lives to the glory of Christ.

In the same way, it's not merely the birth of Christ that we celebrate at Christmas time. We celebrate everything that happened as a result of the birth of Jesus. We celebrate His life. We celebrate His sacrificial death. We celebrate His resurrection. We celebrate His continuing role as high priest. We celebrate the fact that He will come back again and claim a people for Himself. In fact, it is His life that makes His birth so special. At Christmas time, we rejoice at the news of Christ coming to save us.

I thought that this Christmas season would be a good opportunity for us to reflect upon why Jesus came. And for this, I want for us to spend some time this Sunday (and next) in the book of Hebrews. My message this morning is entitled, "Christmas in Hebrews."

The book of Hebrews is all about Christ. It's all about who Jesus is and what Jesus did. It's all about how superior Christ is in every way. Christ is superior to the angels (Hebrews 1-2) Christ is superior to Moses (Hebrews 3) Christ is superior to Aaron (Hebrews 5, 7) Christ is superior to the Levitical Priests (Heb. 7:11-28). Christ offered the superior sacrifice (Hebrews 9-10).

What makes the book of Hebrews particularly appropriate for us this Christmas season is that the superiority of Christ in these ways have all come about through the incarnation. He is superior to the angels, because Jesus was brought into this world as God's Son--a name which He never gave to the angels (Heb. 1:5-8). He is superior to Moses, because Jesus was the Son, come into the flesh, rather than a servant in the house (Heb. 3:1-6). He is superior to Aaron and the Levitical priests, because in the days of His flesh, Jesus was designated as a priest according to a better priestly order (i.e. that of Melchizedek, rather than that of Aaron or Levi) (Heb. 5-7; see especially 7:11). He offered a superior sacrifice, because He offered His own body (Heb. 9-10). He offered His own flesh!

This morning we will look at three specific reasons the writer to the Hebrews gives as to why Jesus came into the flesh. The first is found in the very first 2 verses of the book. So, look at how this book begins....

Hebrews 1:1-2

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

1. To communicate with us (1:1-2a)

Until Jesus came, God's mode of communication with His people was through the prophets. "God ... spoke ... to the fathers in the prophets" (Heb. 1:1). God selected certain men whom He anointed as prophets. God would speak to them. They would then turn around and speak to the people.

When God called Moses, He said, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh" (Ex. 7:1-2). When God called Jeremiah, He gave him the commission, "All that I command you, you shall speak" (Jer. 1:7). When God called Ezekiel, He told him, "Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me" (Ez. 3:17). When Isaiah was commissioned by the LORD, he was given God's message to proclaim to all Israel (Is. 6). Indeed, this was the role of the prophet. The prophet spoke the words of God to the people. Literally hundreds of times you can read in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, "Thus says the LORD." It's because the prophets spoke what they heard from God.

Children often play a game called "telephone," where one person whispers a message into another's ear. Then, whatever was heard is whispered into the ear of the next person, who then whispers it to the next. This is what the prophets did (only they never missed the message that came from the LORD). Whatever they heard the LORD speak to them, they turned around and spoke to the people.

Many of the Old Testament prophetic books begin with an announcement that God's word had come to them. Hosea 1:1, "The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beeri. Joel 1:1, "The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel." Micah 1:1, "The word of the LORD which came to Micah of Moresheth." Zephaniah 1:1, "The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi." During the days of the Old Testament, God spoke His message through prophets. What they heard the LORD speak, they spoke.

Now, the writer to the Hebrews says that "God ... spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways." This is so true. These prophets came from various different circumstances and spoke to various different people. Moses was a fugitive in Midian who spoke to slaves in Egypt (Ex. 2:15). Hosea was an Israelite with a troubled marriage (Hos. 1). Amos was a simple shepherd from Tekoa who brought a message to sinful Israel in the north (Amos 7:14). Zephaniah was a prophet of royal descent who spoke to Judah. Jeremiah was the son of a priest (Jer. 1:1). Isaiah had other prophets in his family (Isaiah 8:3).

These prophets prophesied in many different ways. Some received visions. Some received dreams. Some received a bodily visit from the Angel of the Lord, Himself. Some of these prophets prophesied for a long time. Isaiah's prophesy lasted some 50 years. In 2 Kings 13:11 we read of an "old prophet." Other prophets had a relatively short time in their ministry. Some prophets were engaged in miraculous ministries, like Elisha and Elijah. Other prophets had very specific duties, like Jonah, who was sent to Nineveh. Some prophets were led to write their message down for us. Other prophets may never have written anything down. This is how God spoke to those who lived in the days before Christ. But, with the coming of Jesus, all of this changed. With the coming of Jesus, God has spoken to us in Him!

Look again at Hebrews 1:2, "In these last days *has spoken* to us in His Son." There is a finality in these words. While verse 1 indicates the various ways in which God spoke to His people in the past, verse 2 speaks of one final way that He has spoken. It is "in His Son." That's not to deny the New Testament written revelation (say, of Peter or Paul). But, it is to say that the focus of God's communication in these days is focused in His Son. In other words, it's no longer a message that God mediated through His prophets. Rather, the message that is for today comes directly "in His Son."

One theologian who has articulated this fact well is J. I. Packer. He said, "The preacher's commission is to declare the whole counsel of God; but the cross is the center of that counsel, and ... the traveler through the Bible landscape misses his way as soon as he loses sight of the hill called Calvary." [\[1\]](#)

My wife grew up in California, well in sight of some mountains around her. Over the years, she learned to use the mountains to keep her bearings. She knew that Mount Diablo was northeast of her house. If she would happen to look at the mountain and see that it was south of her, she knew that she was well north of home. Well, when she moved to the Midwest, she found it a bit more difficult to keep her bearings. She had no mountains to gauge where she was. With the Scriptures, if you lose sight of Calvary when reading the Bible, you will lose your way and get lost theologically. This is because the message of the Bible is about His Son. God communicates today "in His Son."

This is the amazing thing about the incarnation. God sent His Son to dwell with us. He lived with us. He walked with us. He talked with us. He ate with us. He communicated directly with us. The apostle John said in his first epistle, ...

1 John 1:1-3

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life--and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also.

John said, "We saw Him. We touched Him. We heard Him. Now, we are proclaiming Him to you!" This is the reality of Christmas. God, Himself, has come among us. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Regarding this Hebrews passage, the purpose of His coming was to communicate. Just as the Old Testament prophets communicated with God's people with their message of "repentance and forgiveness." So did Jesus come and communicate to His people His message.

In our day and age, there are many ways in which we can communicate with people. We can take out our cell phones and text message each other. It's an effective way to communicating with people. It doesn't matter where they are in this world. It doesn't matter where you are in this world. If you have a signal, you can punch a few keys on your phone and send a quick message to anybody you want. But, text messaging has its drawbacks. It's not the easiest way to write very much. You have to punch a bunch of buttons to send only a short message. But, it is quick.

If you have something bigger that you want to communicate, you can use email. With email, you can communicate massive amounts of information easily. Within five minutes of sitting at my computer, I can send you the content of 15 books for you to read. It would take you well over a month to read through all of it, if you devoted yourself to reading these books every moment you had available.

With email, you can communicate with a massive number of people with ease. Each week at Rock Valley Bible Church, we distribute several emails to the church body. It's wonderful. I can type up anything and send it to all of you. It's a great way to communicate with all of you. But, email has its drawbacks. It's very difficult to communicate emotion and intent. For instance, email is a terrible tool for confrontation. I have received emails from people that have been crushing in their criticism. In some instances, when I later spoke with the person sending the email, I discovered that I had misunderstood their intent. I have done the same thing to others. Despite my best intentions, my emails have been misunderstood. And I have learned the painful way that email isn't the best way to communicate with others on sensitive topics, as

email is cold, hard, and factual.

If you need to communicate your heart with something, far better is a phone call. Again, our technology is wonderful, you can dial up a number and have a chat with others clear around the world. You are able to communicate so many more things over the phone that you can with text messaging or with email. With a phone call, you can be sensitive with your words. Over the phone you can communicate your heart in the matter.

But, there are times when even a phone call won't do. There are times when you need to be face to face with others to communicate your heart with others. When a soldier dies in battle, the family doesn't get a letter explaining that they lost their son in war. Neither do they call on the phone. Several soldiers show up at the front door to deliver the news and comfort to the next of kin.

Face to face communication is the most intimate, caring sort of communication that we have. Nothing in a marriage helps more than face to face communication. Nothing in sales helps more than a face to face conversation. Nothing shows that you care more than a face to face communication.

This is what God chose to do with His Son. When God wanted to communicate with us in the greatest degree, He sent His Son to communicate with us personally, face to face. And what did Jesus communicate? First of all, He communicated *God's love*.

How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure [\[2\]](#)

Jesus communicated God's love in more ways than with words. His life communicated *God's grace*. Jesus touched the leper. Jesus associated with the tax collectors and the prostitutes. Jesus forgave the worst of sinners. He granted salvation to the thief on the cross. He prayed that the Father forgive those who were nailing Him to the cross.

Jesus communicated *God's heart*. The Pharisees were interested in the letter of the law. Jesus communicated the spirit of the law. Jesus brought the little children into His arms. Jesus wept over the unrepentant Jerusalem.

He communicated *God's message*. From the beginning, His message was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). He called the rich man to sell all of his possessions and follow Christ (Matt. 19:21). He told His would-be followers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him (Mark 8:34). These are but a few of the things that our Lord communicated by coming into the flesh.

What's Christmas about? It's about God communicating with us in the most personal and intimate and caring way possible. Jesus came into the flesh (1) To communicate with us (1:1-2a). Looking over in chapter 2, we find some more reasons why Jesus came in the flesh. Jesus came into the flesh ...

2. To taste death for us (2:9, 14-15)

Hebrews 2:9 reads, "But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, [namely,] Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."

By skipping ahead nearly a chapter and a half to get to this point, we have skipped a few verses that help us to understand what the writer is talking about at this point. Verse 9 begins by telling us that Jesus "made for a little while lower than the angels." This is a reference to the incarnation. To be "lower than the angels," means that you are a man. This is clear in verses 6 and 7. Consider what they say, "But one has testified somewhere, saying, 'What is man, that you remember him? or the Son of man, that you are concerned about him? You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor.'" These words are a quotation from Psalm 8, talking about our position as human beings. Right now, we are "lower than the angels." In 2 Peter 2:11, Peter says that angels are greater in might and power than we are. In this sense, we are "lower than the angels."

But, though we are "lower than angels," we are crowned with glory and honor in a way that angels are not. Human beings are the pinnacle of creation. Of all things created, Adam and Eve were created last. Of all things created, it is only human beings that are created in the image of God. In many ways, this prepared the way for the Son of God to take on flesh and blood. This is what the writer to the Hebrews means when he says that Jesus "was made for a little while lower than the angels" in verse 9. He's talking about the incarnation. He's talking about God taking on flesh.

Verse 9 continues to explain why it is that God took on flesh. Look there at the end of the verse, "so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." In other words, "He came into the flesh, so that He might die." He lived to die. When Jesus was living, He knew this. He knew that His life was headed toward death.

On several occasions, Jesus told His disciples of how He was headed up to Jerusalem to die (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). He told His disciples, "The Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Shortly before His death, Jesus told His disciples, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ... Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name" (John 12:23-24, 27-28). Jesus knew why He came to live among us. He came to die! Or, as the writer to the Hebrews say, He came to taste death.

Long before He came into the flesh, Jesus knew that He would come to die. In the first chapter of Ephesians, we read that before the foundation of the world, we were chosen in Christ. That is, we were chosen to be heirs of His kingdom through the work of the Son, which, of

course, meant His death. Jesus knew full well that when He came to earth, He would be "despised and forsaken" (Is. 53:3). Jesus knew that He would be "pierced through for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities" (Is. 53:5). Jesus knew that He would be "led to slaughter" (Is. 53:7) in this life. But, such is the love of Christ, that He gave His life for His friends (John 15:13).

So, Jesus knew that His life was for the purpose of dying. He knew it while He was in the flesh. He knew it before He came into the flesh. In fact, the death of Jesus was present at His birth, ... at the first Christmas. When the angel told Mary to name her son, "Jesus," the angel gave the explanation, "for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Although Mary may not have understood this, and although the angel may not have understood this, God certainly understood this. "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). Jesus would have to shed His blood. It wasn't an accident that Jesus would be crucified on the cross for our sins!

But, the good news is that His death was the very means by which we might escape death. Look at how verse 9 says it, that "He might taste death for everyone." When Jesus experienced the full reality of His death as a sacrifice upon the cross, it wasn't merely for Himself. On the contrary, because He was sinless, there was no reason for Him to die. Rather, His death had a purpose that was outside of Himself. His death was "for everyone." Now, that doesn't mean universal salvation for everybody. Even in the next verse we see this phrase reduced, in that he would bring "many sons to glory" (Heb. 2:10).

The work of Jesus upon the cross had a great scope, but it applies only to those who believe. Throughout the book of Hebrews, we see that this is definitely the case. He urges the people to believe in Jesus. He says, "don't drift away ... [from] what we have heard" (2:1). Speaking of others, he said, "the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard" (Heb. 4:2). Turning his attention to the readers, he said, "We who have believed enter that rest" (Heb. 4:3). And so, Jesus came into the flesh and tasted death for us who believe, "that He might bring us to glory" (2:10).

In this way, Jesus was like Christopher Columbus, who sailed to the new world. When he came up with the idea of sailing west, he looked to all sorts of people for funding a trip across the ocean to Asia. It was difficult to secure funding, because of the great amount of doubt that existed in such a venture. Nobody knew for sure how far it was across the ocean. Nobody knew if they could get there with their ships. They all knew that they would reach a point (when half of their supplies were gone) in which they would have to consider turning around if they didn't see land, so as to make it the rest of the journey home. So great was that doubt that Ferdinand and Isabella, who funded his first trip, didn't really expect that he would ever return.

Now, anyone who followed after Columbus had relative ease, because they knew it could be done. They knew how far it was to the new world. They knew how long it would take. When they reached a point where their supplies were half-gone, they could continue on their voyage, because they knew that they were already 2/3 the way on their trip. It was much easier to follow. So also Jesus, has blazed the trail for us. Jesus tasted death for us. He got to the other side of this life, and then came back to tell about it, just as Columbus did.

And now, as we face death, we have nothing to fear. In fact, the writer to the Hebrews mentions this down in verses 14 and 15, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

Again, we see the mentioning of Christmas. "Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same [flesh and blood]." Jesus came into the flesh. His coming was with a purpose. In fact, there are two purposes in His death. (1) The first purpose has to do with defeating Satan. (2) The second purpose has to do with freeing us from fear.

a. Defeating Satan

Midway through verse 14 we see the first purpose, "that through death he might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Down through the ages, Satan has brought his attacks upon many. He tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11). He threw others into prison (Rev. 2:10). He put it in the heart of Judas to betray our Lord (John 13:2). He destroyed Job's life, taking away his children and his health (Job 1-2).

But, the biggest weapon that Satan possesses in his arsenal is the death card. Should he so choose (and should God so give him permission), he can put us to death. Remember when Satan and the LORD had a discussion about Job? God said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life" (Job. 2:6). The implication is that Satan could have taken his life if God had permitted it. With the many other attacks that Satan may bring upon our lives, He needs to have God's permission to do so. Regarding Peter, Jesus said, "Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat" (Luke 22:31).

In many ways, our death is ultimately the worst thing that Satan can do to us. But, Christ has made him powerless, by conquering death. John Owen's classic on the atonement is entitled, "The Death of Death in the Death of Christ." "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ will all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that has conquered this death and gives us hope.

b. Freeing us from Fear

Getting back to Hebrews, we see in verse 15 the second purpose behind the death of Christ. He died so that He "might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (verse 15).

When people live under the fear of death, there is a bondage that develops. This is the reason why we don't like to think about death, because it comes with a bondage in our souls. But, through the incarnation and death and resurrection, Christ has freed us from that bondage.

Recently, I read an account a woman who endured a great battle, the loss of one of her children. Two years later, she was diagnosed with cancer. Her response? It wasn't a response of fear. It was a response of hope. Here is what she said, ...

I don't fear death in the way I once did. I don't fear pain and physical difficulty the way I once did. I experienced far more than watching a child die with an illness. As I watched my child get thinner and thinner and seem to waste away into death, I saw the Lord grow stronger and stronger in my life. He became more powerful and awesome week by week as my Savior, Redeemer, Healer, and Lord. The darker the days became as my child grew sicker and sicker, the brighter the Lord shone in my life. He continues to shine now.

I intend to recover from this disease called cancer so I can continue to be a mother to my other two children. I intend to live my life victoriously in Christ Jesus until the day He calls me home. But if He should call me home sooner rather than later, I'm ready for that as well. He has shown me His sustaining grace and love, and He continues to reveal His grace and love to me every day. I know Him in ways I didn't know Him a few years ago. I have full confidence that He will never leave me nor forsake me. He will only hold me tighter and tighter in His everlasting embrace. [\[3\]](#)

That's the perspective that we can have through the death of Christ for us. We can look beyond the grave to the grace that will come to us.

Later in Hebrews, the writer talks about the hope that we have because of the trail that Jesus blazed for us. "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us" (Heb. 6:19-20a).

Christmas time is a time of hope! Christ has come to conquer death, so we no longer need to fear death.

Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that men no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth. [\[4\]](#)

Let's now look at yet another reason why Christ has come into the flesh. He came, ...
3. To be merciful to us (2:17; 4:15)

Let's consider verse 17, "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

Again, it is amazing at how clearly this verse, deep in the book of Hebrews, speaks about Christmas. It begins by describing Jesus being "made like His brethren in all things." This refers to the incarnation. Jesus took on flesh and blood.

We read here in verse 17 that Jesus was made like His brethren "in all things." This implies that His sharing in our experience went far beyond the physical. It means that He experienced all of the pleasures and pains of life. He could suffer the hunger pangs of a little child. He could experience the love of a mother's embrace. He could face the pain of stepping on a nail. He could enjoy the warmth of the sun's rays during the summer. He could be hurt by those at school who were mean to Him. He could know the satisfaction of a cool drink on a hot day. He could live through the joys and sorrows of relationships. He could experience the anguish of losing a close friend to death (John 11:35). He could feel the pain of being betrayed by a close friend (Luke 22:48). He could experience the joy of dwelling in unity (Ps. 133:1).

Jesus experienced life as a man, and in so doing, it has enabled him "to be merciful to us." That is the point of verse 17, "He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God."

However, in order to be a merciful high priest, he first had to be a faithful high priest.

a. Faithful

Long ago, it was prophesied that Jesus would be a high priest. You can find that prophecy in Psalm 110. But, in order for Jesus to be such a high priest, He had to become one of us. See, the role of a high priest is to plead God's mercy on behalf of sinners. "Every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices" (Heb. 5:1). For a high priest to represent other men, he had to be a fellow man himself. This is the reality of the incarnation. Jesus became one of us.

When the high priest entered into the presence of God on behalf of the people, he needed a sacrifice. He would bring this sacrifice, which he would offer on the mercy seat, first for his own sins. Then, once he was cleansed of his own sin, he would bring another sacrifice, which was for the sins of the people. Upon offering this sacrifice, he would plead for God's

mercy to be shown upon the people. He would never enter this place without taking blood (Heb. 9:7), lest the anger of God consume Him.

This is exactly what Jesus did. Only, Jesus didn't bring the blood of bulls and goats to the Lord. Rather, He brought His own blood (Heb. 9:12). And in bringing His own blood, He "made propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17). And the reality of this is wonderful!

Jesus has offered the perfect sacrifice for sins, once for all. Through faith, we experience the effects of this forgiveness. No longer to we stand condemned before the throne of God above. But now, we have a perfect plea. We have a great high priest, who ever lives to plead for me.

b. Merciful

The wonderful thing about this high priest is that He is a merciful high priest. Not only did Jesus accomplish the work for us. But, He is also a kind and compassionate high priest, who looks down upon the sins that so easily entangle us and has a merciful disposition in His heart.

Later in Hebrews, we read about the typical high priest of the Old Testament times. He is able to "deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness" (Hebrews 5:2). This is what Jesus can do with us. He can "deal gently" with us, because, He knows what it is like to be in the weakness of the flesh.

That's the point of verse 18, "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He suffered, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." Jesus experienced temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). He knew what it was like to have His flesh desire bread when He was hungry. He knew what it was like to feel like He needed prove Himself to be right. He knew what it was like to have the temptation to take a shortcut to reach His ultimate goal through sinful means. He felt these things firsthand. And because He experienced these things, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

And this is the great reality of Christmas! God has come into the flesh to walk among us. And through His experiences among us, He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses in a way that He could never do otherwise.

It is often said that you should never criticize anybody until you have walked a mile in their shoes. Because, you just don't know the difficulties that others face, until you face them yourselves. But, because of what began that Christmas morning in Bethlehem so long ago, Jesus has walked a mile in our shoes.

I don't care how great the hurt is. I don't care how great the pain is. I don't care how unique your circumstances are this morning. Jesus knows about it. He can sympathize with your troubles. And He will be merciful to you if you would but come to Him seeking help.

I want to close my message with a few verses from the end of Hebrews, chapter 4.

Hebrews 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as [we are, yet] without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus can sympathize with our every weakness. He can come to us in mercy and grace and kindness. Christmas calls us to draw near to our merciful and faithful high priest.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 16, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, p. 386.

[2] Words by Stuart Townend.

[3] Quoted by John MacArthur in *Safe in the Arms of God*, pp. 139-140.

[4] Words by Charles Wesley.