

### Jesus became One of Us

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, *“Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus had! Although He was in the form of God, yet He did not consider His equality with God as a prize to exploit. Instead, He emptied Himself, took on the form of a slave and became like other human beings; and, when He was found in the appearance of a human being”* (2:5-7).

Paul wrote to the Philippians during a time of persecution and affliction. The Philippian congregation was a small group and was dear to him. Luke remained among them for a time, as well. Their love for Paul and for their Christian brothers and sisters around the world - as Paul noted the Philippians' generosity in his letters to the Corinthians - however, did not displace them from their situation.

Philippi was a Roman colony, but there was no Jewish synagogue there. In all likelihood, the members of this congregation were converted to the faith from idolatry. They were poor and few in number and, as a whole, looked down upon by the world. Even in the early years of the Church, Christians were looked down upon for their faith in Christ, sometimes harmed or killed. Put this all together – the Philippians' poverty, their lack of numbers, and the external pressures of the world – and you can understand why Paul wrote to them. Even for the strongest Christians, the struggles of this life make it very tempting to turn inward on oneself, to focus on our own needs and cares. In contrast, Paul directed the Philippians to the mind of Christ, which was set only on them and on us. Christ only had His mind set on us, resulting in our salvation. By faith, He sets our minds on Him and on each other.

Luther says the following as part of his explanation of the Second Article of the Creed. *“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.”* Jesus is *“true God,”* and when Paul says that Jesus *“was in the form of God,”* this tells us that not only was Jesus God, but He did God's “stuff.” He created, led, and defended His people. He provided for them in the wilderness.

Yet, Jesus did not consider His *“equality with God as a prize to exploit”* - something to be grasped. The Spirit's language here in the Greek echoes the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve saw that the forbidden tree was good for eating and making one wise, they grasped and ate it. They grasped after being and acting like God; so, also, do we when we sin. Every sin we commit involves making ourselves the judges of right and wrong. Every sin is a small attempt to make ourselves God. But Jesus did not grasp after being God – even though He was God. Instead, He went the opposite route. He *“emptied Himself,”* He *“took on the form of a slave and became like other human beings.”* We confess that Jesus became in every way as we are. He became true flesh and blood and was subject to the hardships we endure, except without sin (Heb. 4:15).

Paul writes, *“He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”* (Phil. 2:8). Jesus lowered Himself to the punishment of the Law in our place; He took the punishment from God we racked up by our many sins. In the Gospels, we hear how Jesus was treated along the way. His own people tried to stone Him for speaking the truth. He was betrayed by one of His own disciples. He was struck and spit upon and mocked. He was flogged and crucified. Properly understood, He did not have to endure all these things; Jesus willingly submitted Himself to the will of the Father as Isaac did to Abraham when he carried the wood for sacrifice. Jesus did it all because, even in suffering, He had one thing on His mind: us. Even in His affliction, Jesus had His mind set on us and secured, by His death, our salvation.