

Jesus Christ: The First Missionary

*"I came forth from the Father and have come into the world.
Again, I leave the world and go to the Father." - John 16:28*

Missions is when evangelism crosses cultural, language, or geographical boundaries. By that definition Jesus Christ was the first – and the foremost missionary.

When Jesus came from heaven to earth, it was not only a change of geographical locations, but it was also a change of dimensions. When Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:3), he was referring to a place that was distant and different.

The places from which people come determines much about their personalities and about their manner. For example, southerners are not merely from the south geographically; they *are southerners*. Jesus is not merely from heaven; He is heavenly: "And He said to them, 'You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world'" (John 8:23). First Corinthians 15:47 calls Jesus, "The man of heaven."

Missionaries are *sent*. There are missionary-sending agencies who train, equip, and fund our missionaries. There are faithful church members who support the missionaries with sacrificial gifts and earnest prayer. And there are parents who go to the airport to see off their children... and their grandchildren. *They also send*. And so did God the Father. Multiple times, Jesus spoke of "The Father who sent me."

The work of a missionary is to leave one culture and adapt to another. Though not always the case, missionaries often move from a culture of relative comfort and convenience to one far less so.

One missionary told of going to a new village. He was accompanied by someone from another village, who would often assist him. The people from the new village welcomed them, offering their best food. When no one was looking, his helper, seeing the look on the missionary's face, commented

sympathetically, "You're right; the grub worms in our village are much better!"

In another tribal group, when its members want to give their guests a grand welcome, they carpet their huts with fresh dung. "Come on in; take your shoes off!"

Jesus came from heaven to earth. Could one imagine a greater difference in cultures?

As Jesus was approaching his death, he prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." Before his incarnation, he was in glory with the Father. But now, what a change!

The incarnation represents culture shock of inexpressible proportions.

- From being the recipient of worship to going unrecognized... challenged, debated, mocked.
- From the throne of glory to a feed trough.
- From streets of gold to a stable with manure on the floor.
- From reigning in omnipotence to life as a nursing infant.
- From speaking worlds into existence to making furniture by hand.
- From a sinless environment to a sin-filled world... and finally the victim of sinners' cruelty.

Jesus left a gated community, safe from manipulation and crime and violence. And he came here, not for an adventure... not as a tourist for a short visit and to see the sights. The cross lay ahead. Suffering and death and the bearing of sin. Jesus had come on history's greatest rescue mission, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to rescue us when we were helpless, and our situation was hopeless.

Imagine Jesus in the manger. As a baby born in the usual way... experiencing the usual things, growing up in the usual way... coming to grips in the "baby way" with what has happened.

*His tiny red face has a serious look
Giving the impression of one
wise beyond many years...
wise beyond the minutes since his birth.*

*His head turns neither left nor right
Focusing into the night
Intuitively searching in his spirit
For a sense of what his little mind
would not yet understand.
Intuitively, he knows this is different.
There are sounds - though many are so trivial...
He feels the nurture he is receiving...
Loving, but of another kind.*

*It can sometimes get a little cold
and even when he's held,
he senses a measure of homesickness
and a certain kind of loneliness
Though he does not yet have words for it.*

*He would put words to it later...
He had left...
The glory he had had with Father
Before the world was.*

*For, on the way out, as he had
exited heaven's door
He had removed his glory robes
And hung them on a hook.*

*Remaining now before him
There is mission
There is suffering
There is sacrifice
Before he would reenter the door,
And taking them off their hook,
Put on again the robes of glory.*

-- The Face, Derek Gentle

The mission of the cross is the message our missionaries, which they carry around the globe today. The crucifixion was horrible treatment for the first missionary, but good news for His people, whom he will save from their sins.

Missionaries return home for visits on furlough and eventually come home to retire. Jesus completed His ministry and mission. And then, as He had told those to whom He was sent, “A little while, and you will not see Me... because I go to the Father” (John 16:16).

We are sent in the same sense in which Jesus was sent. He said so: “As the Father has sent me, so send I you” (John 20:21).

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