

## Engage360 Episode 151 | 2024 Christmas Reflections; Dr. Done Payne

[00:00:16] **Don Payne:** Hi, friends. Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. I'm your host, Don Payne, and I want to thank you for joining us for our annual Christmas Reflection. Strategic planners emphasize starting with the end in view. They insist that every aspect of a process align with and lead to the envisioned outcomes. What we celebrate at Christmas, the incarnation of the Son of God, exhibits that type of strategic planning on God's part. The Incarnation was not really something brand new on God's part, it was one big episode in how God has been working all along. And even though it was a big, definitive episode, as the long awaited fulfillment of God's promises for a Deliverer, it was still part of the drama that will culminate with the Second Advent. The making right of all things and the new creation.

How was it, though, that the Incarnation carried along that narrative toward its culmination? Actually, the Incarnation was a poignant episode in a pattern that we can see all throughout Scripture in God's strategic planning process. It's poignant and definitive because the Incarnation was necessary for our salvation. And here's how through the incarnation, the son of God was able to encompass our humanity into his own. And through his life, he offered to the father on our behalf, the worship and obedience that we all have failed to offer. And then through his death, he absorbed God's judgment against all sin, our sin, on our behalf. And through his resurrection, he defeated death. And doing that as God, meant that he could defeat sin death and evil as the enemies that would otherwise always defeat us. So his life and his righteousness and his sacrifice and his resurrection win the day for us. I hope that much is at least somewhat familiar to you.

But let's look at an underlayer of that life giving narrative. What do we learn about God from the Incarnation? This is where we see that the Incarnation is not actually something brand new, but was part of the way that God has always worked to bring life. It was one of God's unique acts of bringing something out of nothing. Possibility from impossibility, bringing hope from desperation and hopelessness, bringing victory from defeat, and freedom out of bondage, and life from death. What God did to bring the Messiah, the Savior, into the world through a young virgin was the same kind of thing God did in Jesus Christ in creating the world out of nothing that existed before God. We call that creation *ex nihilo* in Latin. What God did to bring our Savior into the world through a young virgin, which is a human impossibility, was the same kind of thing God did in delivering his people from 400 years of hopeless, powerless enslavement. It was the same kind of thing God did in breathing new life into the dead bones in Ezekiel's vision. Scroll forward to the end of Jesus' earthly life and ministry, and we see it's the same kind of thing God did in raising him from the dead. And in every one of our lives, it's the same kind of thing God does in delivering us from our condition of being dead to God in our sin. As Paul put it in Ephesians 2 We were dead in our transgressions and sins and he made us alive in Christ raising us up with Christ

Do you see the pattern? Do you see the strategic planning? Everything God does aligns with and leads to that ultimate outcome of life, creating life, restoring and renewing life as only God can do. That's the God of the Incarnation. The Incarnation points upward from a baby in a first century stable to the God who always does the undoable. The impossible, the God who gives life where there is no possibility of life, the God who brings hope where there is no hope, the God who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, the God who loves us when there is nothing intrinsically lovable about us, but only because God has chosen to love us. God is always about raising up raising up a world. Raising up a people, raising up a messiah, raising up people again in the messiah. God brought about Jesus' human life out of an impossible situation. And then as the Son of God, Jesus brought back into existence an obedient humanity that can have harmony and peace with God again. And he did this by willingly enduring the limitations, fears, frustrations and tears of our brokenness, but

without any sin of his own. God has always been the God who brings something out of nothing. And on a micro scale in our personal lives, this is the God to whom we can appeal for his grace and his presence and his wisdom. When we are in impossible situations.

At this season, we can be profoundly grateful for the gift of the Incarnation. But as we look at the Incarnation, it functions like a prism that exposes all the colors that make up a single beam of light. We can see through the Incarnation the vast and centuries long pattern of how God has always worked to bring things about, to create, and to recreate life. And that in turn tells us something about our true condition, our need, our predicament. No matter how competent or accomplished or capable or well socialized or whatever we are, we're all helpless and hopeless at our core. Helpless and hopeless to have the kind of life God made us for, the relationship with God that we're made for. We can't create or achieve that. We're dead in those core ways. And that's why the Incarnation is part of the Gospel. This is how God works to bring us back from life, from such a dead condition, a deadness that's so dead we often can't even see how dead we are apart from the God who alone can bring us back to life.

At this time of year, most of us symbolize gratitude by giving and receiving gifts. If you've ever received a gift only later to realize that the sacrifice that the giver made to give you that gift, you'll have some sense of how our gratitude can expand. A child may experience expanding gratitude toward parents as he or she becomes more aware over time of all that the parents have sacrificed. And likewise, we're enriched to have the dimensions of our gratitude to God expanded by getting a fuller glimpse into the ways God has always been working to give us life and to give us life again. That's what we learn from the incarnation.

From all of us here at Denver Seminary, we're grateful to God for you. Whether you're a student, a faculty or staff member, a board member, a donor, whatever your relationship is to Denver Seminary. Thanks for being part of God's mission with us to train people to engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of scripture. And our gratitude to you is deep because your part in Denver seminary's mission means that you are part of how God continues to do what he did in the incarnation and all along the way, bringing life out of death, hope out of hopelessness, liberation out of bondage and something out of nothing. May you enjoy this Advent and Christmas season more than ever because of that awareness. Merry Christmas and God bless every one of you from us here at Denver Seminary.