



יהושע בן נצרתי
מלך היהודים
JESUS NAZARENUS
REX
IUDAEORUM

THE Condensation OF Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ descended below all things that we might receive hope and joy in this life and exaltation in the next.

By David L. Frischknecht

Curriculum Department

During the time my family and I lived in Europe, we visited the Frederiksborg Castle in Denmark, where many of the Carl Bloch paintings of the Savior are displayed. The paintings are crowded into a small room, sometimes called the King's Oratory. There is a glass partition on the floor in front of the altar.

As we viewed the paintings, our family members took turns explaining what was happening in each one. We progressed from the birth of the Lord through His temptation by the devil and His preaching and healing. When we got to the Crucifixion I said, "And this is when He died."

The two youngest children insisted, "No, He's alive." I stooped down to ask them to use their quiet voices and to explain more about the Crucifixion. That's when I saw what they were seeing. From their angle, we could see on the glass partition the reflection of one painting superimposed on another painting. One was the painting of the Lord on the cross, and the other was the painting of His Resurrection. In both paintings His arms are stretched out, in the one on the cross and in the other as He is leaving the tomb. When I first saw the paintings imposed one

on the other, it startled me. In that moment the images seemed to match perfectly. It seemed as if I were looking at the Savior's spirit leaving His body on the cross.

Upon closer inspection I discovered the illusion, then enjoyed looking at each painting separately—*The Crucifixion* and *The Resurrection*. But the memory of the two paintings superimposed is imprinted on my mind. In a single view, they encapsulated the Lord's condescension and His transcendent glory. And in one moment, the reality of the Crucifixion and of the Resurrection was confirmed by the Spirit in my heart and soul.

This experience has come to my mind over the years when I have studied and pondered three aspects of the Lord's condescension: the reality of His condescension, the breadth and totality of His condescension, and the continuing blessing of His condescension for us today.

The Reality of the Condescension

The condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ generally refers to His leaving His high and holy station in heaven and coming to live as a man on earth to accomplish the Atonement and

Resurrection. Jesus came to live where mankind lives and as mankind lives so He could raise mankind to live where the Father lives and as the Father lives. Because He descended to earth to lift us to heaven, each one of us can have the “perfect brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20) of progressing into the kingdom and presence of God.

President John Taylor (1808–77) said of the condescension of Christ, “It was further necessary that He should descend below all things, in order that He might raise others above all things; for if He could not raise Himself and be exalted through those principles brought about by the atonement, He could not raise others; He could not do for others what He could not do for Himself.”¹

Nephi’s vision may be the best scriptural summary of the Lord’s condescension, to the degree a summary is possible (see 1 Nephi 11:14–33). His description of the condescension includes the Redeemer’s coming to earth; His being baptized by John; the Holy Ghost descending upon Him; His going forth among the people with great power; their casting Him out from among them; His calling of twelve apostles; His providing for angels to come down from heaven to minister unto the children of men; His healing the sick and afflicted with all manner of diseases; His casting out of devils and unclean spirits; and His being judged by the people, lifted up upon a cross, and slain for the sins of the world.

The Lord’s coming to earth was essential to the Father’s plan. There had to be a Savior, a Redeemer, a Great Mediator. Jesus told the Father, “Send me” (Abraham 3:27) because He loved God our Eternal Father and because He loved us. He explained to the Nephites, “I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Nephi 27:13).

The Breadth of the Condescension

The wonder of the Lord’s condescension is most meaningful when we contemplate how far He descended. The irony of the Jews’ rejection of Him pierces more deeply when we contemplate who He had been for them before He came to earth.

For example, before the Lord Omnipotent came to earth, He was known as “the Creator of all things from the beginning” (Mosiah 3:8; Helaman 14:12). Contrast that with the Jews’ query, “Is not this the carpenter?” (Mark 6:3). The Creator of all things became a carpenter.

Similarly, consider the contrast between “Shepherd” and “Lamb.” In the Old Testament the Lord was called the “Shepherd of Israel” (Psalm 80:1). Isaiah described Him as the One who gathers His lambs with His arm (see Isaiah 40:11). In His earthly life, that lamb-gathering Shepherd became God’s Lamb, sacrificed for Israel and for the whole world (see John 1:36).

Consider this difference. Before Jesus came to earth He was called “the Father of heaven and earth” (Mosiah 3:8). On earth He was mistaken as “the son of Joseph” (John 6:42).

When the Israelites were finally ready to enter the promised land, it was Jehovah who stopped the River Jordan and made it stand in its place so His people could cross on dry ground (see Joshua 3). Contrast His power in performing that miracle with His humility when, as Jesus of Nazareth, He was immersed by John in the same River Jordan (see Matthew 3:13–17).

In ancient Israel, Jehovah spared thousands and thousands of firstborn sons on the night of the Passover (see Exodus 12). When He came to earth in the flesh, Jesus rased from the dead the only son of a widow (see Luke 7:12–15).

The Lord saved thousands. The Lord saved one.

For those of us who live after the Savior’s life and suffering on earth, the hymn “Jesus, Once of Humble Birth” (no. 196) reminds us that Jesus came to earth in humble circumstances but will return one day in power and glory:

*Jesus, once of humble birth,
Now in glory comes to earth.*

But the Lord’s faithful followers who lived before His life on earth could have sung of His condescension with the same hymn, only reversing the order of the concepts in each couplet:

*Once in glory o'er all the earth;
Now He comes of humble birth.
Once in heaven did He reign,
Now He suffers grief and pain.*

*Once, the Lord, the great I Am;
Now a meek and lowly Lamb.
Once His chariot was the cloud;
Now upon the cross He bows.*

*Once in glory He appeared;
Now He groans in blood and tears.
Once their King He was known;
Now rejected by His own.*

*Once exalted to a throne;
Now forsaken, left alone.
Once the great Anointed Heir;
Now all things He meekly bears.²*

And each Christmas we sing in the last verse of "Silent Night":

*Jesus, Lord, at thy birth; Jesus, Lord, at
thy birth.³*

But we would be correct, too, if we sang, "Jesus, Lord *before* Thy birth." Long before.

Consider the Psalmist's attempt to describe how far the Lord descended:

"The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.

"Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high,

"Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!

"He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;

"That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people" (Psalm 113:4–8).

The Lord Omnipotent, who reigneth, who was and is from all eternity to all eternity,



Isaiah described Him as the One who gathers His lambs with His arm. In His earthly life, that lamb-gathering Shepherd became God's Lamb, sacrificed for Israel and for the whole world.



He was and is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Holy and Only Begotten Son of the Living God. He was with the Father from the beginning. He is in the Father and the Father in Him; and in Him has the Father glorified His name.

descends from His most lofty position to the very lowliest—raising the poor out of the dust and the needy out of the dunghill.

He descended below all, that all might be raised with Him and the Father.

The Lord Still Condescends to Lift Us

Another aspect of the Lord's condescension that helps us exercise faith in Him is this: His mercy, grace, loving-kindness, and long-suffering bless us today, tomorrow, and forever. Because He experienced the condescension of mortality, He knows how to bless and succor us. "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:17–18; see also Alma 7:11–13).

Can we have faith enough in Him and in the inclusiveness of His love to believe He hears and answers and helps us, even us, in our lowly, dingy, feeble state? That He still reaches to those who are spiritually in-the-dust poor and spiritually dunghill-filthy?

The Lord continues to do for mankind the things He did during His earthly ministry that were part of His condescension. He, Himself—or by angels or authorized servants on earth—preaches the gospel, administers ordinances, performs miracles, and heals the afflictions of people today. He continues to be mindful of us. He is mindful of us as a people. But most miraculously He is still mindful of us individually. In some marvelous way, and though He is not physically

present with each of us, He still feels the tug on the hem of His garment from a humble handmaiden in the midst of a multitude. He still hears the cry of the blind, perceives the longing of the sincere publican, calls common men to be His servants, tells the repentant sinner to go and sin no more. He still pleads our cause universally and individually before the Father. He still calls us by name and invites us to arise and come forth unto Him. He still condescends from His high and holy place to lift us.

The gift of His grace, His love, and His condescension blesses us all. Many of us have felt that divine strength and support in our lives. I have felt it many times, but perhaps none more so than in the following experience.

One day during my service as bishop, I felt burdened, even overwhelmed, by the troubles and trials of the ward members. It seemed that every single one was suffering. In every home there was some kind of pain, heartache, sorrow, or worry. I knelt to pray, but as the sum of all the troubles accumulated in my mind, I sank from an upright kneeling position to a position of being stooped over, all the way to the floor.

In my prayer I poured out my soul, saying things like this (names have been changed):

“Father, Mary is expecting a baby out of wedlock. She is no more than a girl herself. What will she do? How can she do it?”

“And her mother,” I cried. “Mary’s mother is heartbroken and devastated. How will she go on?”

The name and face of another ward member came to mind. “What about Roger? He has multiple sclerosis. The doctors say he is going to die. What will his wife and sons ever do?”

“And in the Smiths’ home. Their son is so crippled. They have taken care of him night and day for 35 years. How can they go on?”

And there were others. In every case, the answer came clearly and powerfully that God was very aware of each individual. He knew the unwed teen. He knew her mother. He had a plan for the husband with multiple

sclerosis and for his wife and sons. And for 35 years, night and day, the Lord had watched over the crippled son and his family.

As each person appeared in my mind, the undeniable witness came, in words too sacred to repeat, that the great plan of happiness and the Atonement were active and efficacious in each life. One by one the burdens of these brothers and sisters were lifted from my soul. The Holy Spirit imparted feelings of comfort and reassurance as if to say, “Bishop, let the Lord take these burdens. Rise up. Do the best you can. Things will work out for these people. You’ll be fine, too. Go be their bishop. The Lord will be their Savior.”

I discovered that I had returned to an upright kneeling position. Little by little the load *had* been lifted. I knew with a sure conviction that the Savior knew each person. His suffering and death thousands of years ago had atoned for them. But just as certain and much more immediate was the sure knowledge that He bore their present burdens. His love was complete, His power comprehensive, and His intercession current.

Conclusion

May we remember the Lord—who He is, what He has done, and what He has promised to do. Before and after He was a baby in Bethlehem and a carpenter in Nazareth, He was and is the God of Israel and the God of the whole earth. He was and is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Holy and Only Begotten Son of the Living God. He was with the Father from the beginning. He is in the Father and the Father in Him; and in Him has the Father glorified His name (see 3 Nephi 9:15). May we remember and believe that He has all wisdom and all power in heaven and in earth (see Mosiah 4:9). And may we have faith that He yet condescends to help and lift the least and the last, even you, even me. ■

NOTES

1. John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement* (1892), 144.
2. Compare “Jesus, Once of Humble Birth,” *Hymns*, no. 196.
3. *Hymns*, no. 204.