THE PROPHETICAL, HISTORICAL INCARNATION

It is at “Christmastime” that certain, old, well-known prophecies concerning the birth of Christ are selected from the Old Testament as reminders why the church holds dear to her heart certain beliefs concerning His birth, including that He was God incarnated, and the purpose of it – to make possible men’s reconciliation to God.

Isaiah 7:14 is quite familiar. “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” Matthew, in the first chapter of his gospel record, reminds us that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, born of the virgin Mary who was espoused to Joseph. Only two chapters further, there is another familiar Old Testament prophecy concerning this same subject. “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Unquestionably, Jesus is the fulfillment of that declaration. And then, of course, there is Micah 5:2 identifying the place of Christ’s birth. “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” Both Matthew and Luke assure us that this Old Testament prophecy, too, was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. We read these quotations on many of the Christmas cards that we either send or receive.

But are you familiar with another Old Testament prophecy, somewhat obscure only because it is never mentioned, concerning not only the birth of Christ but its purpose?

That prophecy is found in one of the lesser read Old Testament books, the book of Zechariah, chapter 12, a prophetic chapter. Like most prophetic passages, the time frame of this one, too, is debated. Some think it was fulfilled in time past. Some think it will be fulfilled in time future. And still others believe it is being fulfilled daily by, in, and through the church. But there is one fact that is not debated by anyone in the three camps: the prophetic utterance in verse ten that God would be incarnated and then suffer. As I read it, and as you absorb its truth, remember that it was penned centuries before Jesus, the Christ, was born, incarnated:

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.”

That it is God who was speaking is indisputable. Verse 1 says that it was He. And God said that He, God, would be “pierced.” Another prophetic
statement also concerning this truth, Psalm 22:16, could not be more clear: “They pierced My hands and My feet.” God would receive a literal wound in a literal body. Flesh and bone can be “pierced” but not a spirit or an apparition.

If you miss the point, it is this. Zechariah 12:10 prophesies that God would be incarnated. And should you still not understand my point, remember Matthew 1:23? “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us.’”

After Jesus resurrected from the tomb, Jesus “showed [His disciples] His hands and His side,” John 20:20 and they “were glad when they saw the Lord.” Thomas was told in John 20:27 to “Reach [his, Thomas’] finger...and look at [Jesus’] hands; and reach [his, Thomas’] hand ... and put it into [Jesus’] side...”. This cannot be done to a spirit or to an apparition — to that which is not flesh and blood. God became incarnate. “...the Word became flesh” just as John 1:14 says He did. But why? Why was Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man, born? Surely not so that we could have one more special holiday in our calendar year to celebrate!

The truth is that God was incarnated only to die. That was the purpose of His incarnation — so that later His hands, His feet, and His side could be and would be “pierced” on the cross. His birth was so that He ultimately would die. There would be no celebration of His birth, no observance of His birth, unless He went on to die for the sins of men. Only the sacrifice of an incarnate, holy, perfect, God could satisfy the requirements for saving men from their sins. As much as the incarnation was planned so was the crucifixion. The Lamb had been “slain from the foundation of the world” says Revelation 13:8.

Without “Easter” there would be no purpose for “Christmas.” And without “Christmas” there could have been no “Easter.” At the Table of our Lord, every Lord’s Day we remember “Easter” — the resurrection. But had there been no incarnation there could have been no “piercing,” no sacrifice, no atonement, no hope. Amid all the festivities of this time of year, we dare not forget the most important “tree” — the “tree” upon which hung not an ornament, but the body of the holy Savior for all men, Jesus of Nazareth, God incarnate.