

Christmas Eve, 2018.

A few weeks ago, my ridiculous three year old son Isaac and I were walking down Oak Park Avenue when we passed one of those outdoor manger scenes that particularly pious and well-organized people manage to put up in their front yard. I feel a certain pressure to make sure that the preacher's kid, here, is near the top of his Sunday School class, so we stopped for a little quiz.

"Isaac," I said, "do you know who those people are?" And he did this amazing thing he's started where he puts his hand under his chin to indicate how hard he's thinking and then he said, "Yes. That's Baby Jesus." I was of course elated, and encouraged enough to push my luck. "That's right! And who else is there?" Isaac again furrowed his perfect little brow, and began listing the members of the holy family: "Um, Mommy Jesus, Daddy Jesus, Sister Jesus, and Uncle Eric." We aren't quite sure where his new obsession with his uncle Eric has come from, since he hasn't seen my very nice brother in law for a year. In a later conversation with my wife Jackie, "Sister Jesus," perhaps better known as the archangel, evolved into "Flying Jesus," who uses her powers of flight to find the bad guys. Like Skye, from Paw Patrol.

So things went a little sideways at the end. But in my paternal besottedness, I have since realized that Isaac was citing the ancient Christian doctrine of theosis, without footnoting Saints Clement, Athanasius, Irenaeus, or Gregory. Stick with me for a moment here, while I justify the ways of Isaac to men. One of the oldest catchphrases of the church to make sense of Christmas (it's actually quite a bit older than the date of Christmas) is "God became human so that humans might become god."

It's guaranteed to make those of us raised Protestant a bit twitchy, but it's almost universally endorsed by the big shots of the first three centuries of Christianity. The Word of God took on human flesh so that we of human flesh might become something more, might be adopted into the family of God, join the divine dance of the Trinity, and borrow some of the attributes of God.

But don't get the wrong idea. Another phrasing of it is that God became human *to show us how* to become god. Jesus is the pattern for us of the divine life. Which means that being made something more, enjoying the fruits of the incarnation, won't mean getting a scepter and the power to make everyone do what we want. It will mean instead being like Jesus, the god who was born and first worshiped in a manger, who grew up to gather about him a group of friends to traipse around the Galilean countryside healing and teaching, who spoke truth to power but never tried to take a throne for himself, who was holiness personified and spent most of his time with sinners and outcasts, who showed us the truth about ourselves and forgave.

Isaac was kind of right. The coming of Jesus calls us all and makes it possible for us all to be daddy Jesus, mommy Jesus, Peter Jesus, Mary Jesus, Richard Jesus, Laura Jesus. It makes it possible for us to be what this screaming world most needs. This pure gift and calling is difficult—like the gift and calling of receiving a child. It is something that we couldn't earn that also requires tremendous work. And we receive it because the God who is just couldn't bear not to have us be a part of the family. Let us go to Bethlehem and be transformed, and then go out to transform the world. Amen.