

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 477 -

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter has been copied from the Colson's Center Breakpoint Daily by John Stonestreet. This particular article was co-authored with Dr. Glenn Sunshine. This excellent article is about Augustine's Christmas Sermons and is so eloquent that I have taken the liberty of reproducing it verbatim.

*“From the earliest days of the Church, Christian theologians have marveled at the paradoxes found in the incarnation. Among the earliest expressions of this marveling comes from St. Augustine, the most influential theologian in Western Christianity. Augustine was born in 354 in Thagaste, a Roman city in modern Algeria. A brilliant thinker, he initially rejected Christianity as an intellectually empty faith, despite the faithfulness of his mother. After wandering through various pagan philosophies, the equally brilliant St. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, showed him how Christianity was superior to pagan philosophies. Augustine became a Christian, and eventually returned to Hippo, where he was elected bishop.*

*Augustine was an expert orator. He had been a teacher of rhetoric in Milan when he met Ambrose. As a Christian, he used his intellectual abilities and communication skills to address both the pressing theological issues and conflicts facing the Church in the late fourth and early fifth centuries as well as the challenges brought by opponents of Christianity.*

*He also employed his impressive skills in his preaching. In his many years as bishop at Hippo, Augustine preached many Christmas sermons that discussed various aspects of the incarnation. One of his most striking sermons addresses the many paradoxes involved in God taking on human flesh. For example, in what is known as Sermon 184, which Augustine delivered sometime before A.D. 396, he pointed out the paradox of God's sovereignty with the vulnerability of becoming a child: “The one who holds the world in being was lying in a manger; he was simultaneously speechless infant and Word. The heavens cannot contain him, [yet] a woman carried him in her bosom. She was ruling our ruler, carrying the one in whom we are, suckling [the bread of life].”*

*In Sermon 191, delivered years later in either A.D. 411 or 412, Augustine was even more pointed about the paradox of the incarnation: “The maker of man, he was made man, so that the director of the stars might be a babe at the breast; that bread might be hungry, and the fountain thirsty; that the light might sleep, and the way be weary from a journey; that the truth might be accused by false witnesses, and the judge of the living and the dead be judged by a mortal judge; that justice might be convicted by the unjust, and discipline be scourged with whips; that the cluster of grapes might be crowned with thorns, and the foundation be hung up on a tree; that strength might grow weak, eternal health [might] be wounded, life [might] die.”*

*Like his listeners then, Augustine would want us to consider in the incarnation that which we so often overlook in our familiarity with the story. He also encouraged a response appropriate to the great mystery of the incarnation. In Sermon 184, he said: “So then, let us celebrate the birthday of the Lord with all due festive gatherings. Let men rejoice, let women rejoice. Christ has been born, a man; he has been born of a woman; and each sex has been honored. Now therefore, let everyone, having been condemned in the first man, pass over to the second. It was a woman who sold us death; a woman who bore us life.”*

*As Augustine explained, Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh so that our sinful flesh might be cleansed and purified. This shows that it is not the flesh itself at fault, but the sin that corrupts it. That sin must die so that we might live. Thus, Augustine affirmed the created goodness of the body, and with it, the goodness of Creation. He also reminded his listeners that Jesus was born without sin so that we who have sin might be reborn through faith.*

*Not everything in Augustine's Christmas sermons is as theologically clear, but we would do well to ponder his words on the wonder and the many paradoxes of the incarnation and join him in celebrating and rejoicing in the birth of our Lord.*

*This Breakpoint was co-authored by Dr. Glenn Sunshine. For more resources to live like a Christian in this cultural moment, go to [breakpoint.org](http://breakpoint.org).”*

Merry Christmas,

Grandpa Boyce