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The Nativity of Our Lord

December 25, 2014

Text: Hebrews 1:1–12

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Last night, I made the claim that love is the greatest, most accurate one-word description of Christmas. Jesus is divine love made flesh and blood. God is love and Jesus is God. True love is the desire and the will to do what is good and best for the beloved. Love is totally outward focused. It seeks only the best for the one who is loved.

John's Gospel cuts to the chase when it comes to the birth of Jesus. In simple but profound words, John says that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." The Word of God, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Holy Trinity, became flesh. No angels, shepherds, mangers, or pregnant Mary. John, it seems, to take it for granted that his Christian readers know all those beautiful events.

Lest we think John finds all these Christmas details unimportant, we must remember that it's John who's called the apostle of love; he's the one who reveals to us that God is love. Jesus is love made flesh and dwelt among us. Simple words to be sure, but also some of the most profound, world changing theology ever written!

The writer to the Hebrews also skips the niceties of Jesus' birth. He cut to the chase when he wrote, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (vs. 1–2). Jesus is the final, complete revelation of God. For He is God in human flesh and blood. He speaks the words and will of the Father. He reveals God's love in divine words, actions, and deeds. Beginning with that very first Christmas day in Bethlehem, people who want to hear God speak must turn to Jesus.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us why Jesus is qualified to be God the Father's final revelation. God the Father has made Jesus the "heir of all things." And through Jesus, the Father "created the world." In other words, that baby that was born in Bethlehem owns this entire universe for He's the One who actually created it all.

Here's one of the great mysteries of Christmas. Everything belongs to Jesus yet He must depend upon His righteous mom and dad to give Him food and drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, and everything He needs to live.

Remember Luke's comment that there was no room in the inn for Joseph and a very pregnant Mary? That inn belonged to Jesus and the innkeeper told its owner to go live with the animals!! Not much would change when Jesus began His public ministry at about the age of 30. Luke records Jesus as saying "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (9:58). Everything belongs to Him for He created all things. But Jesus set aside all the riches of heaven so He can save humanity from their sins. It's love at work, seeking the good of the beloved.

Lest we think Christmas is only a nice story about shepherds and cute babies or gifts and decoration, vs. 3 thunders the deeper glory of Bethlehem, "He (i.e., Jesus) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power." All of the divine attributes that God the Father Jesus possesses in full measure. If you want to see God's glory, look to Jesus. That includes His lowly birth in Bethlehem's manger, His life and ministry conducted in poverty, and most especially His crucifixion and resurrection in Jerusalem. When baby Jesus is cooing at His Virgin Mary, like any newborn does with his mother, He is also upholding the universe. More profound still...when Jesus is gasping for breath on Calvary's cross, He sustains the integrity of the universe.

When you are toasting the Lord Jesus over you dinner table, maybe we should say something like this, "To the Christ Child who holds every atom and molecule of the universe in place!"

God the Father and God the Holy Spirit work in and through Jesus, the Christ born of the King David's lineage through Mary. That's the marvelous, beautiful, and powerful message of Christmas. To find God the Father one must look only to the Jesus born in Bethlehem's manger. To be filled with the Holy Spirit, one must turn to the Son become flesh and blood. Martin Luther was so taken by this Biblical truth he said that if anyone looks for God in any other way than through Jesus that person would find only the devil. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's nature.

One of the great themes of Christmas is the activity of angels. Gabriel was sent to an elderly Zechariah and Elizabeth to announce the birth of John the Baptist. Six months later, Gabriel went to Mary proclaiming that she had found favor with God and would

give birth to God's Son. When Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy, he naturally concluded she had been sexually unfaithful to him for her child wasn't his. An angel instructed Joseph to take Mary as his wife and give her Holy Spirit-conceived Son the name Jesus. And then of course, angels visited shepherds proclaiming the Christ had been born in Bethlehem.

You can't have Christmas without angels. Pure and simple. But the author of Hebrews seems to go out of his way in the rest of chapter one to show how Jesus is far superior to those marvelous, powerful angels. "After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs" (vs. 3b-4). Simply put...those angels can't hold a candle to the Lord Jesus.

The next few verses are a staggering list of OT citations indicating why Jesus is superior to the angels. For one, Jesus is God's only begotten Son. The angels are ministering spirits but not begotten sons. Two lengthier quotes are provided in vs. 8-10; they are taken from Psalm 45, Isaiah 61, and Psalm 102. Jesus is God in the flesh. He is divine love in its fullest expression of creation, redemption, and ultimate glorification.

It's so easy to get distracted with the celebrations surrounding Christmas. But you're here today because you know that Christmas is primarily about Jesus. In these last days, God speaks to us through His Son, the Virgin born Lord Jesus Christ. To hear Jesus is to hear God. And Christmas reminds us that Jesus speaks and does the greatest and most powerful word in human language: love. God the Son upholds the universe, became flesh on Christmas, suffered and died on Good Friday, rose from the dead on Easter, and promises to come again on the Last Day because He loves. The most profound thing you can tell anyone today or any day is "Jesus loves me."

Beloved of God, a very Merry Christmas to you all.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.