

Who is this Baby
Christmas 1-December 29, 2024

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalms 147

Galatians 3:23-24; 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

Who really does that baby over there in the manger represent? Who was this that was born in the manger in the small village of Bethlehem? Who is this that grew up, walked around Galilee for three years and was then put to death? What does it all mean? Is this really who we say we worship? Can you think of images that portray a human in any weaker state. That of a newborn baby. That of a man crucified on a cross? Yet this is the man that we have a relationship with. This is our God, part of the Trinity.

This morning we are discussing a mystery. The most amazing mystery in the world. In fact, to truly believe it, we can only do so through the Grace of God.

By their nature holy mysteries defy explanation. Yet they convey to those who will receive them a profound sense of the magnitude of God's tender mercy and almost unimaginable devotion and love towards us.¹

Mystery is theology's label for any divine reality that we know is actual - because it says so in the Bible - while not knowing it is possible since it is beyond what we grasp in our minds. We know mystery by faith, taking God's

¹ *Synthesis, December 27, 2009, "Tradition"*

word for it and we see it as above, although not against, reason. Examples of holy mystery include the Trinity, God's sovereignty over human freedom, and union with the risen Christ in new birth.

This morning we are looking at the mystery described to us in today's Gospel. It is the mystery where God so loved us that he came and changed the world forever. That mystery is the Incarnation. Today, I read John's Prologue. Not only is it a thematic summary of John's Gospel, it is the fullest statement of the meaning of the birth and death of Jesus Christ. It is about the full meaning of everything he was, and is, and did.

Unlike Luke, today's Gospel does not discuss the little baby born in the manger. No, John is concerned with the cosmic dimensions of the pre-existent world outside human time and place.

He takes us back before creation. In words that recall Genesis Chapter One, he says "In the beginning was the Word" or Logos. Before creation was this logos. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. This relationship between Word and God is further described: "He, that is the Word, was in the beginning with God". The Word was not only there before creation, but verse 3 and 4 says that he was a full participant in the creation and that he brought forth life and the life was the light of all people." In many ways this idea of pre-existence is very difficult, if not impossible to grasp. But it does mean something important: If the Word was with God before time began, if God's Word is part of the eternal scheme of things, it means that God was always *like Jesus*.² In Genesis 1, the climax is the creation of humans, made in God's image. In John 1, the climax is the arrival of a human being, the Word became 'flesh'.³

In the Word made flesh, God takes on not only actual flesh but also and most importantly the human condition. But the Word made flesh is more than just

² *The Gospel of John, Volume 1*, William Barclay, p. 37.

³ *John for Everyone, Part 1*, N.T. Wright, p. 3.

the bodyness. In the Word made flesh, God declares there is no squalor, no evil, no societal ill, no violence, no despair, no darkness, personal or collective, that can extinguish the light of the Word made flesh, the light of Jesus Christ.

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." The light, the perfect goodness, God, overcomes darkness, evil. Not only is creation affirmed, but we see the connection between creation and salvation.

In Verse 6, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John. At this point we are told in no uncertain terms that God sent a messenger to tell us who the baby was, who this man was, the one that we Crucified. John came to tell us about the light, so that we all might believe through him. This true light, which enlightens everyone and this light was in fact coming into our world.

So here we are, this Word, this light, this baby, this man came into our world. Remember that this is also God himself who created each of us and this world that he came into. Yet, we refused to know him. We refused to accept him. We certainly know that story through the Gospels, but isn't that story just as true today as we live much of our lives devoid of any thought or relationship with him. Indeed, when he sends the Word specifically to Israel, the chosen people don't recognize him. This is the central problem which dominates the whole gospel story. Jesus comes to God's people, and God's people do what the rest of the world do: they prefer darkness to light.⁴

But then God shows us his love that is a mystery that we still cannot fully grasp. He lets us know that All who receive him, who believe in his name, have power to become the Children of God. We will be born of God, not of blood or of the will of the flesh. He has come to dwell not only among us, but

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John for Everyone, Part 1, N.T. Wright, p. 3

in us. He is one of us. This, indeed, is the most exciting thing about the Prologue. We are in it too: "To anyone who did accept him." (Verse 12)⁵

How, then, do we enter into that life? We enter into it by *believing in Jesus Christ*. As it says latter in John, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." To believe in Jesus means to take Jesus at his word, to accept his commandments as absolutely binding, to believe without question that what he says is true. For John, belief means the conviction of the mind – that Jesus is the Son of God, the trust of the heart that – everything he says is true and the basing of every action – on the unshakable assurance that we must take him at his word.⁶

In case we have not gotten it yet, Verse 14 sums it up by telling us that the Word became flesh and lived among us. That is, the Word that was our Creator, came and lived along side of us. The Word enters the realm of human history and dwells, pitches his tent, among us.⁷ He experienced all that we experience and more when it comes to temptation. We saw him in his glory, the glory as of a father's son. He was and is full of grace and truth. From him, in all his fulness we receive grace upon grace: this free gift from God upon free gift from God.

Moses brought the law down from the mountain. However, Jesus Christ has brought us grace and truth. In the end, we find that it is the Son of God that makes the Father known to us.

Christianity's belief in Christ's relationship to God are found in John's Prologue. Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of God, who shares in the divinity of God *and also* bears the fullness of our humanity. This is the mystery of the Incarnation; the eternal Word taking on full human nature - a genuine

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *The Gospel of John. Volume 1.* William Barclay, p. 44.

⁷ *Synthesis.*

enfleshment who could experience feeling and need, and who could be crucified and killed.

John tells us in no uncertain terms that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Way of Jesus is not simply about an inwardly focused or otherworldly spirituality, or social activism that is often viewed as its alternative. Rather, it is the Way of humility and self-denial – for the sake of others.

Truth is not to be found in the abstract notions or theories, but rather in the person of Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God and the living embodiment of truth. From this perspective, knowing truth depends on being in proper relationship to this one person who is divine truth. Jesus is categorically different from all other prophets, witnesses, and messengers from God. Jesus is all of these things, yet more. Along with the Father, and the Spirit, Jesus himself is God. The Spirit of truth bears witness to Jesus (not to some philosophy or theory) as the incarnate manifestation of truth- truth that "has moved in to the neighborhood," as Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*. When we claim Jesus is unique, we mean that he is in an altogether different category from Moses, Buddha, Mohammad, or whomever. Such religious geniuses have indeed spoken many truths, but those truths are truths only insofar as they finally point to the Truth of God, that is, the life and work of Jesus Christ.

Recognizing that Jesus is not just the Truth, but also the Life means that we're not just being called to change our world view or to take up a new moral agenda. We are being invited into a relationship with God. Not an abstract, ethereal relationship, but rather a concrete fellowship of love with God through his people. To be a Christian means to participate in Life, that is, in Jesus Christ as he participates in life of the triune God.⁸

It has been written: "The Christian faith is not a religion of spiritual truths, of moral or inner principles by which one ought to live. It is a claim, [that was

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Christianity Today, December 2009, "Still the Way, the Truth, and the Life", John R Franke

]radical in the ancient world and [is] still more radical today, that God has reached into human history to do those things necessary to restore the relationship between Himself and us." This scandal of the divine becoming fully human, make who we are fundamentally different from every other religion on earth.

The reality of the Incarnation according to the New Testament witness, is that it cause rejoicing in heaven and upheaval on earth. I suspect this is because, as children fond of darkness, we are much more comfortable keeping the Light of the world in heaven - and away from our darkness on earth ... We want truth to be confined to the realm of the eternal, the permanent, and the universal- where it is a whole lot less imposing, a great deal less threatening than the thought of God "pitching a tent" through Jesus and dwelling among us.

It seems to me that we want a picture of God, not the Incarnation. Give us God in a sermon. Give us God in a cloud or a sunset. Give us God as a beautiful idea, as an abstract theological speculation. Give us God in tablets of stone or in a burning bush or in choirs of angels or in a fiery prophet- but not in a wailing new born in a particular place, in a particular time, with specific parents in a small village.

But it is in this historical event of God becoming human flesh in Jesus that the very meaning of all life and history are to be encountered. And in that encounter comes the power of salvation to make us all children of God.⁹

That is who that Baby is!

⁹ *Synthesis*, p. 4.