

Christmas Day
December 25, 2016
Marley United Methodist Church

Colossians 1:15-20

Who is This Jesus?

I'll let you in on a little secret that most pastors/preachers would never admit in public. There are two Sundays in the year on which I dread having to preach – and I have reason to believe many of my colleagues feel the same. They are Easter and Christmas. Now, it is not that they are empty Scriptures leaving us scratching our heads trying to figure out what to say – it is that they commemorate events that are so important, so significant, so mind-boggling that the best we can offer pales in comparison to the mighty works of God. I mean, after reading the Christmas story from the gospels what more can I say, or perhaps the question is, what more should I say? Why try to gild the lily?

None the less, here we are and I suspect you would not take it well if I simply said to you, 'let's consider the meaning of Christmas in silence for the next 15 minutes' and then sat down. You've come here rightly expecting the church to interpret this event and shed some light on what it means in your lives. So, never feeling more inadequate or humble than I do at this minute, let us begin.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

What is the meaning of Christmas? Or to put it another way, Who is this Jesus?

The answer may just surprise you.

For many, Christmas is the time to think of Jesus Christ as a baby in a manger. While the birth of Christ is a special and miraculous event, it isn't

the primary focus. The central truth of the Christmas story is this: the Child of Christmas is the Lord God Almighty.

But instead of sitting high and lifted up as we usually think of him, he is God in a manger. Christmas is not about the Savior's infancy; it is about the baby's deity. One more baby being born into the world is, in the larger scope of things, no big deal. And the humble birth of Jesus Christ was never intended to conceal the reality that God himself was being born into the world.

But the modern world's version of Christmas does just that – it covers up the reality that God has come amongst us. And consequently for the greater part of humanity, Christmas has no legitimate meaning at all. I don't suppose anyone can ever fathom what it means for God to be born in a manger. How does one explain the Almighty stooping to become a tiny infant? How can we begin to wrap our minds around the fact that God trusted one of us to feed him and change his diapers? Can you imagine Joseph giving him a swat on the fanny when he misbehaved, let alone taking him to the woodshed? Our minds cannot begin to understand what was involved in God's becoming human.

Nor can anyone explain how God could become a baby. Yet He did. Without forsaking His divine nature or diminishing His deity one little bit, He was born into our world as a tiny infant. He was fully human, with all the needs and emotions that are common to us all. Yet He was also fully God--all wise and all powerful. Nothing sets my teeth on edge at this time of year more than hearing someone say 'Christmas is for kids'. Children can not begin to understand that God became one of us. They may respond to the cuteness of a baby, but they can not comprehend the Incarnation. We adults can't understand it either and I sometimes wonder if children aren't more capable of accepting it emotionally than the rest of us. And maybe that fact alone should instruct us that dealing with the concept is an emotional exercise, not an intellectual one.

For nearly 2,000 years, debate has been raging about who Jesus really is. Cults and skeptics have offered various explanations. The history of

theology is full of the difficulties of Christology – the study of the meaning of being Christ.

Some say He a created being. Look at the Nicene Creed – it was written precisely to refute those opinions – “And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. “ Only one, begotten not created.

He has also been described as a high angel, a good teacher, a prophet, and a good man. The common thread of all such theories is that they make Jesus less than God. But the biblical evidence is overwhelming: this child in the manger is the very incarnation of God.

One passage in particular captures the essence of Jesus' divine nature and underscores the truths that make Christmas truly wonderful. You heard it read earlier, hear it again.

Colossians 1:15-20 says,

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,
¹⁶ for all things in heaven and on earth were created in him – all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers – all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him.

¹⁸ “He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things.

¹⁹ “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son
²⁰ and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross – through him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”

Wow, now there is something to meditate on for the next several weeks – For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son--starting right there in the manger. Think on that for a moment – All God’s fullness dwelling in this infant.

We have a saying, "Like Father, Like Son". And we know what that means – and it is true that you and I are created in the image of God – but this Scripture is saying something more than that. It is saying that although we were created in the image of God, we only resemble Him. Jesus, on the other hand, is God's exact image. Did he not say "If you have known me, you will know my Father also. And from now on you do know him and you have seen him." (John 14.7)

The scripture is saying that God Himself is fully manifest – fully present, fully visible – in computer jargon he is interactive, the interface of God-- in the person of His Son, who is none other than Jesus Christ. He is more than just an exact image of God – he is God in a user-friendly form.

"It was the Father's good pleasure for all (His) fullness to dwell in Him." He is not just an outline of God; He is fully God. Colossians 2:9 is even more explicit: "In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." Nothing is lacking. No attribute is absent. He is God in the fullest possible sense, the perfect image.

Colossians 1:15 says Jesus is "the first born of all creation." Those who reject the deity of Christ have made much of that phrase. But the word translated "first born" describes Jesus' rank, not His birth order. The first-born in a Hebrew family was the heir, the ranking one, the one who had the right of inheritance. And in a royal family, the first born had the right to rule.

So Christ is the One who inherits all creation and the right to rule over it. Christ is not part of creation; He is the Creator, the very arm of God, active from the beginning in calling the universe and all creatures into existence. John 1:3 says, "All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

Christ was the Person of the Trinity through whom the world was made and for whom it was fashioned. The size of the universe is incomprehensible. Who made all that? Some scientists say there was this big explosion that eventually formed a primordial swamp, and ... well,

science cannot explain it. And I can't explain how but I do know that God created it all. Who? That baby in the manger in Bethlehem--He made everything.

Today is the day the church sets aside especially to recognize and worship Immanuel--the God who is with us. That is who Jesus is – and that is what Christmas is all about.

Amen