

Every year Christmas is a time to remember. It is a great day to remember. To remember the story including Mary, Joseph, and the innkeeper. To remember the story including shepherds and the magi coming to visit the Christ child. To remember what the angels sang, what gifts were given. To even remember what the stars were doing that night: in particular one star, the star of Bethlehem. Christmas is a great day to remember what God had done "long ago."

But we must not leave Christmas- and the spirit of Christmas- in the long ago. There is danger in leaving Christmas in the long ago. The danger is in leaving it back there, where it is safe, not intrusive, doesn't ask anything of us, makes no changes. For the sake of silver lining perspectives and not ruining the mood, it is easier for us to forget how controversial the Christmas story can be. As hard as it may be at times, we must not leave Christmas- and the spirit of Christmas- in the long ago.

The author of Hebrews helps us in this endeavor by moving on in his writing to say, "In these last days God has spoken to us by a Son." Obviously, the author of Hebrews is speaking from firsthand experience of Jesus' birth and the faith of God interceding yet again to save God's children. As it was for the author and people of Jesus' day, 'these last days' are not something of the past, but something of the present. As God remains alive and active in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, 'these last days' are still today and, in that acknowledgement, we are invited to open our eyes and hearts to recognize how God has been and is speaking to us even now.

There is something we don't quite get if we just take what is written without further understanding of the author's intent. When the author of Hebrews highlights that God speaks through the Son, he was declaring boldly that God wasn't having just any conversation. What the author is highlighting is that God, through the Son, was giving the final word and providing the ultimate way. By sending Jesus, God was having the ultimate conversation with us so that we would listen, know, and be so influenced and transformed we would never forget. God's son Jesus was, is, and always will be the total revelation of God, God's will, and God's way.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, unto us a child is born! Unto us a Son, a Savior, is given! Make it personal: Unto me a child is born! Unto you a child is born! Unto me a Son, a Savior, is given! Unto you a Son, a Savior, is given! This is the good news.

I noted on Christmas Eve that I would be spending some time this morning during worship exploring the seven Christological statements included in this Hebrews text. As I read this text

in preparation for this season, the question 'What Child Is This?' rose to the surface. As in, 'Who is this baby, Jesus? Who is this Son? What is this baby, Jesus, all about? What is this Son all about?' Well, the author of Hebrews wanted there to be no doubt in describing who this baby, Jesus, the Son, is. He wanted us to understand the amazing story of God incarnate through the deep mystery of the holy birth.

So, what child is this God has sent and spoken to us with? Who is this child that comes to fulfill God's unique and definitive revelation?

Seven Christological Clauses:

1. **Heir of all things**- Heir to God... This is important because of what it can mean for us. What this means for those who are in Christ, those who trust and believe and do their best in living for Christ, is that Christ, as the bridge connecting us to God, provides through his birth, life, and death a will/testament that provides us, his followers, an inheritance of God's gifts. Christ was not, is not, the only one to receive God's gifts. The power and mystery of faith in Christ, who is the way, truth, and life, is that those who believe, like you and me, also receive God's gifts: grace, love, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, joy, hope, peace, and salvation. As believers, we are set for the greatest inheritance ever imagined. (That puts a smile on my face 😊)
2. **Agency through which God created the world**- "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." (John 1:1-4) Before the birth of Jesus, previous revelation of God was through the ancestors and prophets of the faith. Now, with the birth of Jesus, we can connect all the dots from the beginning of creation and know of God's continued plan being carried out. It is comforting to know that Jesus was not just some after thought or emotional reaction to the state of the world. Jesus was with God from the beginning of it all and his birth marked the time in which he needed to intercede by becoming human.
3. **Radiant light of God's glory**- God is glorious and the most glorious moments occur when the presence of God breaks into the world. And because Jesus is God incarnate, this phrase is used to describe the ways in which the Son and Father relate as a unity with two distinct identities. This is the reason images of Christ are portrayed with Christ's face radiating beauty, reverence, winsomeness, and kindness. Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world," because of the power of God radiating glory through him.
4. **Exact representation of God**- Jesus is God incarnate, Emmanuel, God with us. What this means is that Jesus is the imprint or stamp bearing the exact likeness of God. Before Jesus, no one ever knew what God looked like. It was believed that you could not look at God and to see God's face was forbidden. When God sent Jesus, God

changed that. Instead of just being the Almighty and Sovereign God, God became personable. The Son is the visible impression of the very reality of God; God with us.

5. ***Sustainer of all creation***- Just as Jesus was there in the beginning and the agency through which God created the world, Jesus is the agency through which God sustains the world. It is through the power of Jesus' name and the embodiment of Jesus' way that the world has strength to endure. This is embodied fully in the main purpose of Jesus' birth and life, his death for all humanity.
6. ***Purifier of Sins***- In his death, Jesus defeated death and darkness, overcoming them with life and light. The death of Christ was a sacrificial act that would stand for eternity. In this good news, those who believe, like you and me, are opened to the mercies of God, which are new every morning. In this good news, you and I are given new opportunity, a second (or third...) chance, and the strength to be who God has created us to be.
7. ***Seated at God's right hand***- After the death and resurrection, Jesus declared that he must now go and be with God. It was then he promised that an advocate, the Holy Spirit, will remain with us at all times and in all places. When Jesus ascended, he was seated at the side of the Majesty on High. This is not a seat far from us. Just the opposite. It is a seat that allows Jesus to remain in a position to intercede for the faithful and share with us the glory of God. How does Jesus do this? Through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

In Jesus all the fulness of God dwells. The son is the very essence of God. Jesus, as God in the flesh, embodied the fullness of God, manifesting the full character of the one whose holiness is compassionate, whose judgment is forgiving, whose power is redeeming, whose knowledge is comprehensible, and whose sovereignty is self-emptying. In Jesus, we witness the true fulfillment of Prophet, Priest, and King. And for added measure, the author of Hebrews powerfully states that Jesus is incomparable and superior to all other angels. Jesus is THE one.

If someone were to ask you, 'What Child Is This?', what might you respond with? The Christmas carol, 'What Child Is This?', by William Chatterton Dix, gives us another window in which to consider.

William Dix was the son of a surgeon residing in Bristol, England. He was a businessman in Scotland for most of his life, working at the managerial level of the Maritime Insurance Company. In 1865, William was 29 years old when he suffered from a near-fatal bout of sickness. He was afflicted with severe depression, and this near-death experience changed him. While in recovery, he experienced a spiritual awakening that

inspired him to begin writing hymns. While being an avid reader of the Bible, he crafted the lyrics of “What Child Is This?”

At the heart of his writing of this hymn is the encouragement and urgency to accept Christ. Inspired by the adoration of the shepherds, who paid a visit to Jesus in the manger, William reflects on what the shepherds might have been pondering during their encounter with the newborn baby, Jesus.

Being in a manger was considered a less than ideal condition for a child, let alone Jesus, to be born. Why would Jesus, the Christ, be displayed in such a humble environment? Does this ‘mean estate’ connect and refer the birth of Christ with his future sufferings. As we come to know, Christ’s future includes anguish and distress.

Those who will witness Christ’s life, the joy and sorrow, the death and glory, will be none other than highest members of society and the lowest contributors, kings and peasants. Christ was born for all and all have the equal opportunity to know Christ.

The answers to ‘What Child Is This?’ gives the feeling that God has transformed into the form of man through this baby, and that the almighty has arrived to rescue humanity. Christ is a certain and clear sign. It is only fitting then that we declare with courage and faith, with marvel and wonder in amazement, the true sense of asking the question ‘What Child Is This?’ and know of Christ’s great power and presence in our lives.

Because of who this baby, Jesus, the Son, is, Christmas is not just a day, or 12 days, set aside for celebration in December. Christmas is a spirit to hold dear and afford room to live in and throughout our lives. Christmas is about God’s gift of salvation to all, and we, as God’s people, are called to live as those who have received this gift in hopes that others might receive it as well. Christmas is an invitation for all of us to be reminded what child this truly is. Christmas is an invitation for us to ask ourselves where God has been and where God is now speaking to us; what signs of hope, peace, joy, and love do we see and experience.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, unto us a child is born! Unto us a Son, a Savior, is given! Alleluia! Amen.