

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Divine Credentials of the Christmas Child

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-19

Code: 81-32

I want to kind of go back to the basics, if I can, with you this morning, and that is to talk about Immanuel, "God with us" - Who is this child? The announcement to Joseph was that this child would be named Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins; and that His name would be Immanuel, which in Hebrew means "God with us." God came down to save His people from their sins.

As we read in Luke, Mary said, "How can this happen? I am a virgin." And the angel declared to her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and by His power the Son of God would take up residence in her womb, so that the child would be both God and man, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want us to think about the reality of who Christ is today. Pilate called Him the man without fault. Philosopher Diderot called Him the unsurpassed. Napoleon said He was the emperor of love. Philosopher Strauss said He's the highest model of religion. John Stuart Mill said He was the guide of humanity. Lecky said He is the highest pattern of virtue. Kant said He's the Holy One. Martineau said He's the divine flower of humanity. Even Renan, the French atheist, said He is the greatest among the sons of men.

Theodore Parker called Him the youth with God in His heart. Frances Cobb said He was regenerator of humanity. Robert Owen called Him the irreproachable. Dalai Lama says He is a reincarnated Buddhist; in fact, He was reincarnated as Buddha. Nietzsche said He's a fable. Gandhi called Him the innocent one. And Gorbachev said He's the first socialist. I appreciate all the compliments, but none of those is a true understanding of who is this child.

Thomas got it right when he said, "My Lord and my God." The Father declared from heaven of Him, "This is My beloved Son." But I want us to turn to the words of the apostle Paul in Colossians chapter 1, Colossians chapter 1. Here the Holy Spirit pulls together a portrait of Christ with many beautiful strokes identifying Him. In fact, this passage identifies Him with regard to His relationships: His relationship to God, to the world, to angels, to the church, and to all others.

Listen, beginning in verse 15, as the apostle Paul, inspired by the Spirit, writes concerning the child: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him." This is really a stunning summary of statements that give us an accurate portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's begin as Paul begins with His relationship to God, verse 15: "He is the image of the invisible God." Now we know in Genesis chapter 1, verses 26 and 27, the Bible says that God created man,

God made man in His own image, according to His own likeness. Humanity was created by a divine pattern. We were made. We were created on the sixth day in the image of God, according to God's likeness. That is not true of any other creature. No other creature was made in God's image. We share physical and biological features with the rest of living creation because we have to share the same environment.

But when it comes to man, he has completely unique metaphysical and spiritual features that belong to no other creature. Both ontologically as to his being, and ethically as to his understanding, he is like God. Man alone can reason. Man alone can think abstractly. Man alone comprehends morality. Man understands beauty. Man possesses emotion. Man expresses will. Man understands artistry, creativity, craftsmanship. Man has complex language, extremely complex language far beyond any form of communication by any other creatures. Man experiences love; and man is defined as having, in the basic definition, meaningful relationships.

God, a trinity, three-in-one, is a God of relationship, and created us to have relationships with one another, and even with Himself. That's the creation of man. But here it doesn't say God made Jesus in His image; it says He *is* the image of the invisible God. Man was created in God's image. Man is not God. Christ *is* the image of God, and therefore is God. He was not created by God.

In chapter 2 and verse 9 of this epistle, we read this brief statement: "For in Him" – that is in Christ – "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." That is the most clear statement in the epistles as to the deity of Christ. "In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." All that God is He is in bodily form, not made to bear some of the marks of the image of God, but who *is* the image of God. He is the glory of God shining in human form.

Philippians chapter 2, verse 6, Paul says, "He was in the *morphē* of God" - in the form of God – "but thought it not something to grasp to be equal with God, but emptied Himself." In other words, He was equal with God in eternity, but didn't hold onto that and was willing to give up the prerogatives of that being, that equality, and take on the form of a servant, be humbled to death.

Hebrews chapter 1 says this another way, speaking of Christ: "He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature." He is "the exact representation" of God's nature.

John chapter 1, verse 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Down in verse 14 he says, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Verse 18, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him."

God is invisible; no one has seen God. Paul says Jesus is the image of the invisible God. "Image" is *eikōn*. It means "the reproduction," "the replica," "the exact image," "the precise copy." He is God to us in a visible form. The form of the word *eikōn* was often used for a portrait. That was to be an accurate representation of an individual.

That's the best that Paul could do with words to say that Christ was the precise portrait of God. But even that falls infinitely short, so he can't leave it there. He's got to unpack that so that we understand the fullness of it, lest we think that Christ is some statue or some facsimile but not the

real thing.

In the fourteenth chapter of John, Jesus talking to His disciples, and He says to them in verse 9, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.” Profound statements of being.

John 10, verse 30, Jesus speaking to the Jews says, “I and the Father are one.” The Jews had a predictable response. “They picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?’ The Jews answered Him, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.’” There was no question in the minds of His enemies that He claimed to be God; and He demonstrated the reality of that claim by His words and His works.

Again, back to Colossians chapter 1, and down to verse 19: “It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.” That could be a reference again to His deity as chapter 2, verse 9; and it certainly embodies that. But it even means more than that to us in a redemptive sense, and I’ll show you that in a bit.

The text of Scripture is absolutely crystal clear. God is invisible. No one has seen God. God Himself said, “No one can see Me and live.” You would be incinerated. Jesus is God, and Jesus puts God on display in a visible way. Look at His life. Look at His deeds, His miracles, His attitude toward sin and righteousness, toward people and their struggles and their problems, toward life, toward death, toward children, toward religion, toward sin and unrighteousness, and you see God’s attitude toward all of that. So first of all, in His relationship to God, He is one, He is God, God the Son.

But there’s another statement made in verse 15 that speaks further to this. He is identified as the firstborn of all creation. Now that’s not chronology, because there were many people born before He was born. And it also does not mean that He was created in the sense that He was not existing, and being created came into existence. He wasn’t created, He always was – we’ll see more of that in a moment. And He certainly wasn’t the first person created. So what does this mean? Well, Hebrews 10:5 says, “A body You have prepared for Me.” He already existed, God just made a body for Him to be placed into, to come into this world to live and die and rise again.

But in what sense then is He the firstborn? “Firstborn” is a word in the Greek, *prōtotokos*. It basically means, it means “the primary one.” It’s about primogenitor, not chronology. Of all the people who have ever been created – and certainly Christ’s body was created – of all the people ever created He is the premier one. That’s what “firstborn” means. You have to see it in the Middle Eastern context of primogenitor.

The firstborn was the son who had all the rights. The firstborn was the son who carried on the family authority. The firstborn was the one who had the primary right of inheritance, the special place of privilege, prestige, honor. He was the father’s heir. And that is exactly what this is saying. He is the eternal God who came into the world in the form of a man, and is declared to be the very heir of all that God possesses; for He Himself has a right to it since He is God.

There is an interesting verse back in Psalm 89 in which we have God's prophetic comment on this truth. Psalm 89 - listen to the words - verse 27, speaking of the coming Messiah, the Son of God: "I shall also make him My firstborn. I will make him My heir, the highest of the kings of the earth. My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall be confirmed to him. So I will establish his descendants forever and his throne as the days of heaven." He is establishing the Messiah as the King of kings, the highest of the kings of the earth, giving Him an everlasting throne in an everlasting heaven. And that's what it means that "He's My firstborn." He inherits everything.

There's a picture of this in the book of Revelation in chapter 5 as John sees a vision of God sitting on His throne. And He has a book, and the book is written inside and on the back and sealed with seven seals. That was a typical way that Romans did their will, they rolled it up as a scroll; and every so often they would seal it, roll a little more, seal it, roll it a little more and seal it, so that it could not be opened without notice. Only the heir had the right to open the scroll and break the seals and receive the inheritance.

This scroll in the hand of God is the title deed to the universe. And John says, "I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?' And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the book or look into it." There was no worthy heir. There was no firstborn who appeared to take the inheritance from the hand of God on His throne - the title deed to the universe.

John says, "I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or look into it; and one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.' And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures)" - those are angels - "and the elders" - representing the saints - "a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns" - speaking of His power - "and seven eyes," - speaking of the sevenfold Holy Spirit - "sent out into all the earth. And He came" - this is the Lamb of God - "and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne." And He then begins to open the book, and He starts opening the seals and taking back the universe. That's a picture of the future.

He is God's *prōtokos*. He is God's heir. He is an heir of everything God possesses. He is the one who in the future will take the title deed to the universe and will take back the universe, establish His kingdom, and then create a new heaven and a new earth.

The Jews said, "We don't stone You for a good work, we stone You because You're a man and You claim to be God. That is blasphemy." And it is. He is either God or He is a blasphemer.

But if you look at His life, He displayed power over nature, power over disease, power over death. He discriminated regarding the moral character of all men. He says in Matthew 25 one day He will come back and judge every single human being. In John 5 He says the Father has committed that judgment to Him. He will discriminate and determine the eternal destiny of every human being. He said, "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and earth." He claimed to be God and He claimed to have the power that only God has over everything and everyone. And He gladly received the words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

Secondly, I want you to notice His relationship to the world. It's in verses 16 and 17, His relationship

to the world. “For by Him,” verse 16, “all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth.” Just stop there. And He created it all in six days.

Living in the modern world we understand what the universe is, don't we? I don't need to go through the drama of reminding you of the vastness of infinite space and everything in it. Nor do I need to remind you of the heavenly bodies: sun, moon, stars, and bits and pieces of things flying around. Nor do I need to remind you of the complexity of life on the earth, the microcosm of creation in its infinite glory. He created all of it. By Him all things were created.

John 1 said there was nothing created that wasn't created by Him. In Genesis 1 it says God created: “In the beginning, God created.” In John 1 it says the Word was God and He created, and nothing was created that He didn't create.

Who is this child? This child is God. This child is the heir to the universe. This child is the Creator of everything that exists, everything that exists. In Him was life. No one gave Him life; He possessed it everlastingly. In Him was life.

And everything He created was good. Seven times in Genesis 1 it says, “And God saw it and it was good, and it was good, and it was good, and it was good,” because He is good and He can only produce what is good. In the fall, man stained this universe with his sin. But Christ will remake it good and permanently good. He is the agent of creation.

Romans 11:36, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Everything came from Him and ends in being given to Him. He will regather the entire universe in a new creation for His own glory. He is the Creator. How important it is to get beyond the manger and see the reality.

And there's more. Verse 17 gives an obvious statement: “He's before all things.” If you're the Creator you have to be there before the creation. “He is before all things.” That's why in Revelation 22:13 He says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” He is before all things. That simple statement speaks of Christ as an eternal being. He is the only one who existed before the creation.

In that wonderful prophecy that I know you're familiar with in Micah, where Micah is given from the Lord a promise that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. Listen to that verse, Micah 5:2, “But as for you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah,” – an insignificant, little village a few miles south of Jerusalem. “As for you, Bethlehem, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.” That's the Messiah. The Messiah is going to come from Bethlehem, and the Jews knew it and declared it even when the Lord was born.

But I want you to listen to the rest of the verse; this is the part that gets overlooked. “From you One will go forth for Me to be a ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.” Listen to that my dear Jewish friends. The Messiah is an eternal being who will be born in Bethlehem. That narrows it down to one possibility: an eternal being born in Bethlehem, the Creator of the universe, the one who was before all things.

Not only is that His relationship to the universe, the world, but there's more. The end of verse 17, “in

Him all things hold together.” “In Him all things hold together.” This has been the dilemma of scientists for many years, the quantum leap. How can something go out of existence in one place, come into existence in the other place, and never traverse the space in between? Let me be a little more specific.

I was reading from a nuclear physicist the following: “Everything that exists in material form is made up of atoms.” We’re familiar with that. An atom has a nucleus, infinitesimally small, and in that nucleus there are positive charged protons. They exist in the nucleus of every atom. Physicists know that they should repel each other.

And so, the physicist asks the question, “What holds the nucleus together?” Or, “Why doesn’t it all fly apart? Why doesn’t every atom completely explode?” This particular physicist said, “Every object is made up of potential nuclear explosions. There’s no scientific reason why atoms don’t explode.”

And on the other side, it is extremely difficult to split an atom. It takes massive amount of scientific effort into this modern world to even get to the place where we understand atomic structure. And it’s very difficult to split an atom, which by its own nature should explode on its own. This scientist said, “All the massive nuclei have no right to exist. They should blow up instantly. Some power holds them together. As yet, the secret has not been discovered.”

What holds them together is the Creator. He holds everything together. And Peter tells us, in 2 Peter 3, that the day is coming when He lets go, and the entire universe will have an atomic implosion, and the elements will melt with fervent heat. The universal wipeout of the present universe to be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth.

The deists used to say that God started everything and then went away, indifferent to it all. That’s not true. This entire universe would explode if He didn’t hold it together by His own power. How powerful is He? You think it was something to create a few fish and loaves one day on a hillside in Galilee? No, look at Him as the one who holds every atom in the universe from exploding. He makes the universe a *kosmos* instead of a chaos.

Laws of nature are not the laws of nature, they’re the laws of God. *Nature* is a word to describe what you see, not a word to describe the power behind it. There’s only one word to describe the power behind it and that’s *God*, the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s why the psalmist said “the firmament shows His handiwork.” This is the child in Bethlehem in His relation to God and His relation to the created world.

Thirdly, His relation to angels. Angels do exist, clearly, as do demons, who are fallen angels. But go back to verse 16 for a moment. With regard to angels, He has created everything in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, which would include angels and every other invisible reality like personality, intellect, and every other invisible aspect of reality. But in particular, looking at angels, Paul says, “Let’s include, among the invisible, thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him, including them.” Now he moves from the physical creation to the angelic creation. This is angelic language: thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities.

This is the kind of language Paul uses in Ephesians 1 where it says, “Christ has been seated in the heavenlies,” verse 21, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.” Again, describing

angels: the authorities, the powers.

Chapter 6 of Ephesians, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the powers, the world forces of this darkness, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies.” You have holy angels and fallen angels, and our Lord is the authority over all of them.

I think probably some of the people that were milling around with the Colossian Christians had tried to convince them that Jesus was an angel. And that wouldn't be anything new; that's a very popular and still extant idea. Angels are seen as some kind of supernatural being that have powers beyond the human. It's been a very popular thing through the ages to make Jesus into an angel or an emanation, some created being that descended from God. And at the beginning of the descent He's one of the good ones; and the more there were descending beings, the worse they became. No, Jesus is not an angel; He is the one who created the angels. He created them all. He created even the ones that fell, and He triumphed over them.

In Colossians chapter 2 and verse 15, even when He was dead on the cross, His body on the cross, His Spirit went to declare His triumph over the angels. “He disarmed the rulers and authorities, made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through His work on the cross.” He declared His victory over the fallen angels even in His death. They did not triumph; He showed up at their celebration. First Peter 3:19 says, “He made proclamation to the spirits in prison,” and it attaches it to His death. He showed up, as it were, in the presence of the celebrating demons to declare His triumph over them.

Good angels cannot add anything to the fullness and the riches and the resources which are in Christ, and fallen angels cannot take anything away. Fallen angels one day He will send into the eternal lake of fire. The holy angels will worship Him forever in His presence.

Fourthly, beyond His relationship to angels and the created world and God, is His relationship to the church, to the church. That's verse 18. “He is also head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” He's head of the body, the church; we understand that.

There are four great facts about Christ here. “He is the head of the body.” This is a perfect metaphor, because if you don't have a head, guess what? Your body doesn't function. In fact, when doctors want to ascertain whether you're dead they check your head, they check your brain, because everything that happens in your body is a result of the function of your brain, your head.

Christ is the head of the body. The church is simply the organism that responds to His will and word. Christ is the organic and ruling head. He is life. In Him was life, and He is to us life. Christ is the ruling head of His church.

Science certainly has confirmed the theology of Paul in choosing this particular metaphor. Everything comes from the brain, everything. It sends all the messages that make the body function. Christ is not someone in the church who is a nobler teacher than others. He is the head over the church, without which the church is dead. And that is a good way to view cults and false forms of Christianity as headless bodies. He is the guiding, directing, dominating Lord of the church, expressing His will through His word, and His power through His Spirit.

And then it says, “He is the beginning.” What does that mean? *Archē*, “the beginning.” It really means “the source,” “the source.” He is the source of the church. We were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. He gives us life through His Spirit; He regenerates us. There is a church because He gave it life. He continues to give life to everyone in His church.

The church was ordained in eternity past between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The church was brought into existence on the day of Pentecost by the Spirit, whom the Son sent after the Father exalted Him. It is the Spirit who gives us life and ushers us into the church - the Spirit of Christ. We are the church, and we are in the church because He has given us life. That’s what he means in 1 Corinthians 12 when he says, “We have been by Christ, immersed into the church through the Holy Spirit.” He is not someone in the church; He is the head of the church and the source of the church.

Thirdly, “He is the firstborn from the dead.” Now we already know what “firstborn” means. He isn’t the first person to rise; He raised people from the dead. There are a few in the Old Testament that were raised from the dead. That’s not talking about being the first one chronologically. What it’s saying is, of all the people who will ever be raised from the dead – and by the way, everyone will be eventually. John 5, Jesus said He will raise the righteous to life and the unrighteous to condemnation. They will all be raised into heaven or hell.

Of all that have ever or will ever be raised from the dead, He is the premier one. There’s that word *prōtotokos* again. It has to do with the one who has the primary position. He is the superior. He is the Supreme One. He is not – listen – He is not a dead hero; He is a living founder and life-giver and ruler, and He is the living presence in His church, and He is the one by whose power *all* will rise.

Paul’s not done, he wants to add a final word, “so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” What else can I say? He’s the premier one in everything, in everything. That looks at His resurrection, because He is of all that have ever risen, the premier one. That gives Him the first place in everything. And that is exactly what Paul says in Philippians, that God raised Him from the dead and gave Him a “name which is above every name,” the name Lord. And at that name “every knee shall bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

By His resurrection He showed that He had conquered every enemy: sin and death and hell - every opposing power - all the forces of Satan. There’s nothing in life or death that can hold Him. He is life; He overpowered death. So as regards the church He is the ruler of the church. He is the life-giving source of the church. He is the living, constant power of the church, because He’s alive from the dead. And by virtue of that resurrection He is the victor and the sovereign over all who live.

There’s one final statement in verse 19, and this may be the most wonderful of all: “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.” And I know that sounds like what I told you earlier – chapter 2, verse 9 – but it’s not the same. Chapter 2, verse 9 says, “The fullness of Deity dwells in Him bodily.” That’s His deity. This says there’s a fullness in Him that was given Him by the Father. You see that?

It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him. The Father didn’t make Him God, He was eternally God. This is not talking about His deity; this is something the Father was

pleased to give Him. This is a fullness that the Father was pleased to let Him have.

What is it? It's not His nature. It's not His divine attributes. He possesses them by virtue of His existence. What is the fullness? What fullness is He talking about? Go back to John 1:14, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." That's the fullness we're talking about.

Now listen carefully. The fullness that is in Christ is the fullness of grace and truth, and it's *all* the fullness in Him. *All* grace, *all* truth, *all* divine love, *all* justifying righteousness, *all* true pardon, *all* divine forgiveness, adoption, inheritance, sanctification, holiness, wisdom, strength, knowledge, understanding, peace, joy, comfort – *all* those spiritual realities, *all* of them, the fullness of *all* spiritual realities are *all* in Christ, all that anyone needs. So it isn't Christ plus someone else or something else. All that any sinner needs is in one person: in Christ. He is all you need, by divine design, by divine intention, by divine purpose - ours in divine experience. He is sufficient.

Chapter 2, verse 3 says it's in Him that are hidden *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, *all* of them. That's why verse 10 says, "In Him you have been made" – What? – "complete." Jesus needs no supplement. Jesus has no deficiency. He has no rival. He is everything.

Over in chapter 2, verse 19, Paul says, "If you hold fast to the head," – who is Christ – "from whom the entire body," – the church – "by holding fast to the head, the entire body is supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, and grows with a growth which is from God." All you have to do is hold fast to Christ. Everything is in Him.

Father, we thank You that we have been able to take a look at the Redeemer, our Lord. Our hearts are full to overflowing as we think about the vast, sweeping realities that have taxed our feeble brains to think of who He is, that baby in a manger, that man who walked the earth; that One who died, who rose, who ascended, and who will return. And more than that, it's not that we know about Him, to think of it; we know Him. More than that, we are *in* Him and He is *in* us; and therefore, we have all sufficiency in all things. All that pertains to life and godliness is ours, because Christ is ours and we are His; and we live in Him and He lives in us, and we are inseparable. Fill us with joy in the comprehension of this glorious Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

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