

SERMONS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S

Jesus Is The Reason The Nativity of Our Lord Christmas Day December 25, 2009

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Hebrews 1:1-12 (NIV)

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father " ? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? ⁶ And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." ⁷ In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." ⁸ But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." ¹⁰ He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. ¹² You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

A merry Christmas to you all. I hope everyone here is enjoying this wonderful time of year with family, friends, and loved ones. There's a saying that's become so common among Christians this time of year that it's become something of a slogan: **"Jesus is the Reason for the Season."** And of course, that's true. What we know as a period of mammoth commercial importance has its origins in the Christian calendar, which began four weeks ago on the First Sunday in Advent. The beginning of the Christian year focuses on The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is indeed the reason for the season.

But I don't think we ought to stop there. One of the great scandals of Christianity, something that makes it shocking and unpalatable to many people, isn't just that Jesus is the reason for Christmas because we celebrate his birth and all its amazing and prophetic circumstances. It's that Jesus is God, the Creator. Jesus is the reason for the season, but Jesus is the reason for everything else as well. Jesus Christ is the center of the creation and the destiny of the universe, and of everything and everyone in it. That's why the Christian calendar begins with his coming and his birth. There is no one who has ever been born, or will ever be born, who is not affected by Jesus Christ. Our readings from Hebrews this morning make that clear.

The first thing we learn about Jesus from the Letter to the Hebrews is that God has spoken to us by him. There's no doubt that Jesus spoke God's words to us while he was on earth. As he says in John 12:49, **"I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it."** But there's more.

God didn't send a text, or a fax, or an email to communicate with us. He didn't even send a trusted messenger, a prophet. God the Father chose to relate to human beings by sending his eternal Son to be a human being. In today's political parlance, that in itself "sends a message". It tells us that first and foremost, God is seeking relationship with things outside of himself: the universe, and human beings. The reason is that the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is a relationship.

In fact, Jesus is the reason for personal relationships themselves. The relationship between God the Son and God the Father is the beginning of all relationships that have ever existed because it existed long before they did. And it is through God the Son that God the Father chose to create a physical universe to which he can relate, and which shows off his own beauty and order and majesty.

The universe shows off the God who made it through his Son in all its greatness and elegance and beauty. These are moral characteristics. The physical universe is not simply intricate and mysterious and vast. It is not simply ordered

and rational. It has characteristics that drive scientists and mathematicians to describe the organization of the universe as “elegant,” or “beautiful,” or “wonderful.” We often apply these words to people, but not with the same meaning. When scientific investigators use them to describe the physical universe, they are trying to express their sense of awe and majesty at the staggering perfection they have encountered in their research. They are using words with moral connotations to describe something that science considers as inanimate matter.

But God isn't looking for relationship with inanimate matter. He's looking for a relationship with us, the human beings he has made in his own image and likeness. The problem is that we don't relate to him as he intended. We don't relate to one another as he intended. We put ourselves first. We try to win out over other people. We seek our own happiness and comfort and contentment before we consider anything else. Most of the time most of us are probably unaware that we do this. That's because we train ourselves all our lives not to, or to appear not to, with varying degrees of success. But ultimately, do we think of ourselves **first** in relationship with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, or do we think of ourselves in relation to our parents, our children, our church, our neighbors, our co-workers? I know I don't.

All these relationships are the context or the background against which we live our lives. But behind them all is that single relationship between God the Father and God the Son that has been since before the world was made. That's what this reading from Hebrews is saying when it points out the difference between the Father's relationships with his angels and with his Son. Verses 5 and 6: **“For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father ” ? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”?** These are only two among many prophetic descriptions of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Yet it's this same Son whose birth as an infant human being we celebrate this morning.

In Jesus Christ, God has done more than create invent relationships. He has done more than create the universe and sustain it with his powerful word. He has healed the catastrophic wound between himself and his creation. As perfect and ordered and stunning as the universe is, the collective behavior of the human race over millennia of time is nothing like it. We find it difficult to sustain our relationship with our God and Father. But he hasn't left it up to us. He has sent his Son to repair the breach.

As the angel of the Lord told Joseph before the Son of God became the Son of Man, **“you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)** Or in the words of our reading

from Hebrews, **“After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”**

There’s a reason the Christian year begins with Advent and Christmas. It reminds us that everything begins with Jesus. He is the reason, not just for the season, but for everything. Jesus is the reason we live—**“in him was life” (John 1:4)**—he is our reason for being—**“all things were made through him”**; **“through him he made the universe”**—he is our only means of relationship with the father—**“he provided purification for sins”**—he is our pattern for life in this world—**“he was tempted in every way as we are yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15)**—he is our way into the life of the world to come, a dimension of bliss and rest and joy and contentment only glimpses of which we enjoy in this world. As we begin another Christian year, and another calendar year, let us think about these things. Let us think about the reason for the season, and for everything else, the baby born in Bethlehem, the eternal King and Creator of all.

Let us pray.