

“The Christmas Story”
Colossians 1:12-20
(Preached at Trinity, December 19, 2021)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. This Saturday is Christmas. It is the greatest of secular holidays.
 - It is characterized by garland and tinsel, lights and Christmas trees.
 - It is characterized by the singing of such holiday classics as “White Christmas,” “Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire,” “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer,” “Jingle Bells,” and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.”
 - It is characterized by family gatherings and good food and the exchanging of gifts.
2. This time of the year is actually the celebration of two separate holidays. One is this secular holiday, the other is the celebration of the birth of our Savior. I’ve said many times we shouldn’t try to somehow incorporate the two. Enjoy the cultural, secular holiday rich in tradition without trying to find someway to make the Christmas tree something religious.

But in the midst of this Christmas season we must never forget the wondrous Christmas story, the story of the birth of Jesus Christ our Savior.

This morning I want us to leave the secular holiday behind so we can consider the true Christmas story. I want us to spend a few glorious minutes just considering Jesus.
3. Remove from your minds any last-minute shopping plans. Remove from your minds the images of sparkling lights and decorations. Remove from your minds any family or social gatherings you may have planned. I want us to spend these precious moments gazing upon the excellence of Christ.
 - A. As we read in Song of Solomon 5:16 – “He *is* altogether lovely.”
 - B. Paul wrote:

Phil. 3:8 NAU - “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,”
4. Christianity can simply be summed up in one word – Jesus!

How much do you know Him? Not just knowing *about* Him, but knowing Him. Are you willing to invest the time seeking Him – praying and studying to know Him more?

There is no higher knowledge, no deeper contemplation than contemplating Christ. It is a deep well that demands that you dive in. The deeper you plunge the more your heart is ravaged with the ecstasies of Christ.
5. This morning I want to direct your attention to this passage in Colossians. Paul was full of Christ. Read his epistles. They overflow with the excellence Christ.
3. This morning we’ll focus primarily on **verse 15**. This verse describes the wonder of Christ’s incarnation—that the eternal Son of God took upon Himself human flesh. Paul describes both aspects of the incarnation.

He is Divine – the exact image of the invisible God

He is human – the firstborn of all creation

We’ll also look at God’s eternal purpose in the incarnation.

I. The Incarnation was God's revelation of Himself in bodily form

"He is the image of the invisible God"

A. God cannot be known except through revelation – He is transcendent

1. God dwells beyond the realm of our existence. He dwells outside of time and space. He dwells outside the material world. God is a pure Spirit and dwells in the realm of the unseen. In our fallen condition God is outside our knowledge. This means God cannot be known.
 - a. Paul describes Him as "invisible."
"He is the image of the invisible God"
John 1:18 NAU - "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*."
 - b. Not only does God dwell beyond the realm of our eyes, He dwells beyond the bounds of our comprehension. For us to know God demands that He reveal Himself to us in a manner that we can comprehend—He has to make Himself known.
 - c. LBC 2:1 – "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions . . ."
2. God's revelation of Himself is divided into two types:
 - a. General or natural revelation – creation, providence, conscience
 - b. Special revelation – three types:
 - (1) External manifestations – Most often seen in theophany – Burning Bush, Pillar of Fire, the thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai, the fire from heaven consuming the sacrifice & altar at the prayer of Elijah – Israel responded:
"the LORD, He is God!"
 - (2) Internal suggestion – characteristic in prophecy, visions, dreams
 - (3) Concursive operation – the inspiration of God upon the writers of Scripture working in, with, and through them.
3. Scripture is God's revelation of Himself.

B. God's ultimate revelation of Himself is through the incarnation of Christ.

Hebrews 1:1-2 NAU - "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."

1. The invisible God became visible
Colossians 1:15 NAU - "He is the image of the invisible God"
2. Neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit has ever appeared in bodily form, yet the eternal Son of God became man. That which was invisible and intangible became visible and tangible.
3. It is not possible to know God apart from Christ.
John 14:6 NAU - "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

C. What did Paul mean by "Image of God?"

1. He meant that Jesus Christ is perfect in His likeness with God.
2. Man was created in the image of God, but this only means there are some similarities between us and the nature of God. There are some attributes of God that we refer to as incommunicable. We cannot share them.
3. When we speak of Christ in the image of God we are to understand that His is an exact likeness – the same in every way. He shares all of the attributes of God.
Hebrews 1:3 NAU - "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power."
4. The divine glory appears in Christ because He is the exact image of God. If God is eternal, then it must be that Jesus Christ is from everlasting to everlasting.
Psalm 90:2 NAU - "Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."
Psalm 93:2 NAU - "Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting."
5. Spurgeon's Catechism – Question #4
 Q. What is God?
 A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.
 This equally describes Christ

II. Jesus is also fully human - Jesus is both God and man
 Paul refers to Him as "the firstborn of all creation."

- A. We refer to this union of human and Divine as a hypostatic union – Divinity and humanity in one individual essence
1. It is not a union of persons but of natures:
 - a. In the Trinity we find a unity of persons: the union of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as one divine essence—the union of three persons in one God
 - b. Jesus Christ is not the union of two persons; but the union of two natures in one person.
 - c. This doctrine is known as *communicatio idiomatum* (Latin for "communication of properties"). It is the teaching that the attributes of both the divine and human natures are ascribed to the one person of Jesus.
 - d. But in this union of natures both natures stay intact. The Divine nature is not weakened, nor is the human nature somehow enhanced by the Divine.
 2. In the person of Christ God has fully revealed Himself
Col 2:9 - "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form"
 3. Many have had difficulty in reconciling the two natures in one person – it has been the source of many of the heresies of the church—denying either the deity or the humanity of Christ. Or to deny His unipersonality by teaching that He was actually two persons.

- B. In the incarnation, the eternal Son of God took on flesh. He was born as a man.
1. Paul calls Him “the firstborn of all creation.” He was begotten of God before the world began. He is eternally begotten.
John 1:14 NAU - "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."
 - a. **LBC 2:3** – “. . . the Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son . . .”
 - b. It doesn’t refer to procreation but to uniqueness.
 Jesus is the only eternal Son of God sent forth from the Father
 - c. William G.T. Shedd stated it well:
 “When the Father generates the Son, he does not call another substance into existence from nonentity, as he does when he makes the universe. These internal activities are not temporal and transient, but eternal and unceasing. They have neither beginning nor ending nor cessation. Neither of them is before the other in time. All are eternal and therefore simultaneous. The first person is not the eternal Father before the second person is eternal Son. An eternal Father cannot exist before the eternal Son.”¹
 - c. Yet, the eternal Son was born. He became man.
 2. In His humanity Jesus had all of the qualities of man
 Our ancient confessions describe Him as “truly God and truly man.”
LBC 8:2 – “two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.”
 3. Jesus possessed all of the elements of our humanity
 He was limited in His understanding – this is unfathomable for us.
 - a. The Bible tells us He grew in wisdom. He had to learn to walk and learn to talk.
Luke 2:52 NAU - "And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."
 - b. The God who declares the end from the beginning had to see it unfold bit by bit. He experienced events in time.
 - c. He understood hunger and thirst. He understood grief and sorrow. He experienced pain and suffering. He would have known headaches.
 - d. He could savor all of the enjoyments we know. He tasted each flavor for the first time. He learned to identify all of the aromas that we experience. He could enjoy the coolness of the early morning, but also the discomfort of the noonday heat.

¹ Shedd, William G.T. (2003) *Dogmatic Theology*. Third Edition, Edited by Alan W.Gomes. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Page 242.

- e. He also knew the temptations of Satan. Yet He did not sin.
Hebrews 4:15 NAU - "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin."
 He was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness so that He could be tempted by Satan and prevail.
Matthew 4:1 NAU - "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."
Mark 1:12 NAU - "the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness."
- 3. The changeless God in His incarnation endured change
 - a. Not in His deity but in His humanity. God cannot change, and yet the life of Jesus was one of continual change.
 - b. He grew. He went from infancy to childhood to adult.
 He experienced joy then grief

III. The Incarnation of Christ was the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose

Colossians 1:19-20 NAU - "For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross"

A. The Bible declares that Jesus became flesh according to the will of God

Colossians 1:19-20 NAU - "For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him"

Colossians 1:13-14 NAU - "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

- 1. God the Father has elected a multitude of sinful men unto salvation
- 2. The Father pledged to give these people to His Son and the Son agreed to redeem them from their sin.
- 3. The Father SENT His Son into the world. John 3:16 – "He gave"
John 6:38-39 NAU - "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."
- 4. Jesus came in obedience to the Father
Philippians 2:8 NAU - "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
John 4:34 NAU - "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work."

B. Jesus came to redeem His people from their sins

Matthew 1:21 NAU - "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Colossians 1:13-14 NAU - "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

- 1. His name Jesus means Savior – He is the Savior of His people.
 "He will save His people . . ."

2. The whole issue of our Lord's coming was the need to redeem His people from their sins. The end of the incarnation is that Jesus would suffer and die and then raised again and then ascend to sit at the right hand of God.
Colossians 1:14-15 NAU - "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

Conclusion:

1. This is the glory of Christmas. It is the celebration of the coming of the eternal Son to deliver His people from their sins. The pressing question is do you know Him? --- the Biblical Christ.
2. It is the duty of every human being to bow down before this King – to submit to Him. The preaching of the gospel is the preaching of our Lord's Kingdom – His reign, His rule, His dominion.
 Jesus said at the Great Commission, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth."
3. Just as He came the first time, He is coming again to judge the living and the dead. He is coming again to bring all things to order.
 Every man will come before His throne of judgment
Romans 14:10 NAU - "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God."
4. As we consider the Christ of Christmas look into the radiance of His glory.
 He is glorious, He is Wonderful – He is the Christ.
 Seek to know Him more, to love Him more, and to honor Him more.