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# Hail the Incarnate Deity

Colossians 1:15-20

*It is safe to hang your eternal hope exclusively upon Jesus because he is nothing less than God in flesh.*

LTS: Philippians 2:1-11

## Introduction:

Well, it's Christmas time once again and as every year we get the joyful privilege of gathering together to worship Christ the newborn King.

When we gather to worship at Christmastime, it's hard to imagine that anyone would be reluctant to entrust his life to the Savior. That's because we have tasted repeatedly and discovered that the Lord is good; that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and all His promises for us are trustworthy. We have benefited from the lavishness of his past grace so it seems only natural that we would trust him for his promises of future grace. Nevertheless, I suspect in a cultural moment such as this, there are many who are on the fence about Jesus.

In our pluralistic society there are legions of voices that take exception to the exclusivity of a Gospel that declares that there is only One God, and one Savior sufficient to meet our every need. To say that Jesus spoke with divine authority when he declared, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father by through me,*" is to offend the spirit of our age. But this is nothing new. Our ancient brothers and sisters in the city of Colossae lived in a culture where it was almost universally accepted that there are many gods, and many paths to the gods.

The true God, however, who spoke *Long ago, at many times and in many ways to our fathers by the prophets... in these last days he has spoken to us in his Son*. Because of his great love for sinners, Christ Jesus (the Son of God) stepped down from his heavenly throne and "took on the form of a servant *being born in the likeness of men.*" (Phil. 2:7). The apostle John said it like this: "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14). To the church in Galatia Paul said, "*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman*" (Gal. 4:4). That woman as you know, was a young girl named Mary who was betrothed to her husband, Joseph.

This is what Christmas is about – the incarnation of God.

- Are you familiar with the term Incarnation?
- Incarnation comes from the Latin word *Caro*, which means “flesh.” Incarnation means “in flesh.”
- More specifically, it means God in human flesh.

It’s about how the transcendent Lord of heaven humbled himself to enter the world the way we all entered the world... by birth as a helpless, dependent baby.

Of course, I realize that you know these things. Every Christian knows them. But there are always some who question whether this Jesus, born in poverty and obscurity, really has the credentials to be the Savior of the world. To be sure,

- the wisemen seemed duly impressed by this child.
- Simeon and Anna at the Temple thought he was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy.
- When he was twelve years old the teachers in the temple were amazed at his grasp of truth.
- And when he became a Rabbi, none of the brilliant teachers in Israel were his equal.
- Most impressive of all, he was able to heal the sick and raise the dead, and none of his contemporaries (not even his enemies) denied any of his miracles.

Nevertheless, while the ability to perform miracles is impressive, it doesn’t necessarily qualify one to be the Savior of the world. So, we come back around to the question: What qualifies Jesus as the sufficient savior of the world? Why should you have confidence that entrusting your life forever to Jesus is wise and safe?

Thankfully, the apostle Paul - inspired by the Spirit of God Himself - happily takes up this question by peeling back the veil of time and space to reveal who Jesus was and is before and after his 33 years of life in the world.

How will Paul accomplish this? How will he persuade us that even as an infant in a lowly cattle stall Jesus possessed all the credentials necessary to qualify Him as the eternal Savior? Well, he will do it by pointing us to Jesus’ unique relationship with five things; namely, his relationship with

- The Father
- The Cosmos
- The Angels:
- The Church:
- The Future

I love to preach about Christmas from this text and I think you will see that it provides the perfect foundation upon which all biblical claims concerning Jesus securely stand. Let's begin as always by standing together and listening to the public reading of God's word.

Read. Col. 1:13-20

*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

*<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Paul's goal in this passage is to magnify in our hearts the preeminence of Christ by revealing his eternal credentials. Let's first consider...

## **I. Jesus' Relationship with the Father.**

1. Paul says of Jesus, (15) "*He is the "image of the invisible God."*

A. The word for "image" here is "Icon." If you have had opportunity to visit a Russian or Greek orthodox church you have observed many pictures of the saints, apostles, Jesus, Mary, Joseph. These pictures are commonly called Icons. That gives us a hint of what Paul has in mind. Jesus is the "Icon" the likeness, or image of God. But Paul doesn't mean that He is merely a picture or stamp of God. Rather, he means that Jesus is the invisible God made visible. In other words, He is that Person of the triune Godhead who came to live among men as a man.

2. We know Paul intends to tell us that Jesus the Man is actually the eternal "I Am" because in this very letter he says things such as (2:9) "*in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.*" And the fact of his eternal nature is borne out by other words of God. For example:

A. Phil. 2:6, before coming to earth he existed in the form of God.

B. Heb. 1:3 *“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint (GK: charaktar) of his nature...”*

C. John 14:8-9 Philip said to Jesus, *“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”*<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, *“Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”*

3. J.I. Packer concludes - with the backing of 2,100 years of Christian theology “the Christmas message rests on the staggering fact that the child in the manger was – God<sup>1</sup>

4. Since we are talking about Jesus’ relationship with the Father, it may be enlightening to step back and revisit verses 12-13,

Read v. 12-13.

*<sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,*

5. What I want you to see here is that Paul’s emphasis is that the Father’s relationship with the Son is NOT focused on their relationship of mission, or relationship of nature, but rather their *relationship of Love*. The Father “delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.”

6. You see, Jesus is not merely the Father’s only Son. He is the Father’s beloved Son. More literally, He is the Son of the Father’s love. And EVERYTHING God has ever done in the Cosmos he has done for the express purpose of exalting the Son of His love. Jesus is that Son.

7. You know, when you think deeply about, Jesus’ relationship with the Father you realize that this is the only credential he needs to qualify as the Savior of the World. *He is the invisible God made visible.*

Everything else is secondary. And that’s why your decision to entrust your life and eternal future is wise and safe. But there’s more. Jesus’ relationship with the father is of first importance. But,

8. Jesus’ second credential is ...

## II. His relationship with Cosmos:

1. Paul says of Jesus (15) *“He is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation.”*

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<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God—20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, (Downers Grove, 1993), 57

2. The idea of Christ being the “Firstborn of all creation” is often misunderstood. A number of cults use this verse to suggest that Jesus was a created being. But that is NOT at all what Paul means here.

3. The term “Firstborn” comes from the word *prototokos* meaning the highest in rank. This was a commonly understood idea among the Jews. In Israel, the firstborn son inherited special rights and privileges. His BIRTHRIGHT was a double portion of the estate and leadership of the family.<sup>2</sup>

But the person who received the right of the firstborn was NOT always the son who was born first. Joseph, for example. Joseph was the 11<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob, and yet the status of being the “firstborn” was transferred to him (Gen. 48:20-22).

4. Likewise, David was the youngest son of Jesse, and yet, in Psalm 89 God promises “I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” In this case David (or perhaps David’s future Son, the Messiah) would be given the right of the firstborn. You see, the one who holds the rank of “Firstborn” is preeminent over all others.

5. In the verse before us (15) Jesus is “the firstborn of all creation in the sense that as God’s firstborn (and only begotten) son, all creation is his inheritance.

6. The author of Hebrews said it like this: “*In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things...*” Moreover, Paul explains that the entire Cosmos belongs to Jesus because He actually created it. He says, “*For by him all things were created, whether visible or invisible.*”

A. Sometimes the visible creation is absolutely AWESOME in beauty, power, and intricacy.

But there are many things in the created order that are invisible to us. For example:

- 1) Our eyes can’t perceive the earth’s magnetic field but it’s there, and every day it shields us from what would otherwise be deadly radiation from the Sun.
- 2) We can’t see radio waves, or microwaves, or sound waves, but we use them all the time to enhance our work and leisure.
- 3) Without the help of a powerful microscopes we can’t see single-cell creatures, or germs, molecules, but they are there. And they exist because Jesus made them.

7. And BTW: John the apostle makes this perfectly clear when in the first chapter of his Gospel he says, “*All things were made by Him and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*”

8. This is exactly what we see in Col. 1:16, *By Him all things were created.* The word for “*All Things*” means “everything, or the whole thing. That is, by Him a whole universe of things<sup>3</sup> were

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., [\*Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Marvin Richardson Vincent, [\*Word Studies in the New Testament\*](#), vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1887), 469.

created. If there is anything in the universe that has come into being, it came into being because Jesus brought it into being. What Paul is revealing to us is that Jesus Christ is not just the Son of God, and One with God, He is Creator God.

9. And if you jump ahead with me in v.16, Paul continues in this vein by declaring that the universe and everything in it *“were created by Him and for him.”* Moreover, he existed before any of them. Paul declares (17) that *“He is before all things.”* That is, before there was any created thing in the cosmos, “Jesus is.”

10. Not only that, but the reason the Cosmos doesn’t go flying apart into Chaotic Oblivion is because (17) *“In Him all things hold together.”*

- A. Why does the earth maintain its perfect axis so that we don’t burn up or freeze to death?
- B. Why does the earth maintain a perfect distance from the Sun?
- C. Why do the planets and heavenly bodies fly in perfect orbit so that their movements have always been measurable and predictable?
- D. Answer: Because Christ Jesus not only created them, he actively sustains them. Listen, we are NOT Deists who think of God as the great watchmaker who wound up the cosmos and then left it to wind down. No, the Lord actively sustains all His creation by the power of His word.

11. What is Jesus’s relationship with the Cosmos? Only this, that

- A. He owns it all
- B. because He made it.
- C. Therefore, He is the “Firstborn” of all creation. How’s that for credentials?
- D. So, when we see the beauty and majesty of Creation, perhaps we should stop for a moment with our families and say out loud “O Come Let Us Adore Him.”

This brings us to Jesus’ third credential

### III. Christ’s Relationship with Angels:

1. Paul writes (16), *“By Him all things were created, in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities...”*

2. Do those words sound a little cryptic and vague? I think so. But Paul helps us understand what he means when we consider some things he wrote to the church of Ephesus.

- A. In Eph. 1:21 we learn that when Jesus rose from the dead the Father *“seated Him at His right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and*

*dominion, and above every name that is named...*” And Paul uses those same terms in Eph 6 where he teaches us how to prepare for spiritual warfare.

B. These terms (*thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities...*) are used almost exclusively for angelic and demonic beings. This was a big deal in Colossae because, the pagans in that ancient city worshipped angels. In Col. 2:18 Paul warned, “Don’t let anyone disqualify you by insisting on the worship of angels...”

3. Jesus is superior to the angels Because He created them. They love him. They worship him. They serve Him. And by the way, contrary to that little figurine on the top of many of your Christmas trees, the Scriptures NEVER portray an angel as a woman!

4. Nevertheless, on the night Jesus was born a multitude of the Heavenly Host appeared to the shepherds ...declaring (or shouting or singing) “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom the Lord is pleased.”

5. That’s a charming Christmas scene, but we should remember that angels and other members of the invisible heavenly host are imposing a fearful. Witness those who stood over the throne of the Lord (Isa. 6) who with faces covered Cried out “Holy, Holy, Holy! Is the Lord God Almighty! The Whole earth is full of his glory.” This was a terrifying scene to Isaiah. And yet, the Son of God who was seated on that throne (Jn. 12:41) is their sovereign King – who would be born into the world and given the name, Jesus.

6. The point is, Christ is Not an angel. He is preeminent over the angels. They bow before Him. He is their Creator, and they exist for his pleasure.

So, we have looked at Jesus’ relationship with the Father, with the Cosmos, with the Angels. Now Paul tells us about...

## IV. Christ’s Relationship with the Church:

Read v. 18-19

*And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*

1. That Jesus is the head of the church tells us that of all the peoples of the earth, he set his exclusive affection upon the church. He created her by giving her life, purchased her by his death on the cross, and made an exclusive promise to her NOT to be shared with outsiders. The

promise is this, that those who believe in him – even if they die – will have everlasting life. Indeed, death for them will NOT be the end, but merely the beginning of resurrection life.

2. On what basis do members of the church receive eternal life? They receive it by grace, through faith, as a gift from God. They get it from Christ himself: He who promises them resurrection is, in fact, “the Firstborn from the dead.”

3. Notice, once again, that Paul calls Jesus “The firstborn (the *Prototokos*). And this time he means that of all who will be raised from the dead Jesus is Preeminent.

4. What makes Jesus preeminent over all the cosmos, over All angels, and all his church? Only this, that (19) that “*In Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*”

5. Notice the word “pleased.” It pleased the Father that all His fullness (the fullest measure of God) would dwell in Jesus.

6. How do we know that Jesus has the credentials to be the savior of the world? We know it because of Jesus’ relationship with the Father, with the Cosmos, with the Angels, with the church, and finally, we know it because of...

## V. Christ’s relationship with the Future:

Read v. 20

*...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

1. Perhaps you’ve never considered this before but Jesus’ death on the cross NOT ONLY atoned for our sins and exalted Christ as the only mediator and Savior, it also is the basis upon which *God will restore all of creation and make every wrong right.*

2. I take Paul’s statement here to be eschatological. That is, when God’s plan to redeem a people for Christ’s own possession is finally complete, the Father will do one more thing to exalt the Son. He will give him a new heaven and new earth. The curse will be cured, and the rebellion will be conquered.

3. Listen to how Paul describes it in Eph. 1:9-10; That along with forgiving our sins he has also made known to us “*the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*”

4. Again in Romans 8:19–23 we read,



*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.<sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.<sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

5. This is an amazing revelation! The finished work of Christ on the cross guarantees NOT only our eternal salvation but also the restoration of Creation. No longer will man fear the earth or anything in creation. No longer will animals be a terror to us or us to them. As the prophet Isaiah says (Isa 11:6–9)

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.<sup>7</sup> ...They shall NOT hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

6. You see, when Paul speaks of all things being reconciled in Christ, he is not teaching universalism. Rather, he is showing us that the preeminence of Christ is so magnificent that in the end everything will be rendered to its proper order. The heavens and the Earth will be restored. Sin will be banished forever. Believers will finally experience the fullness of eternal life in the presence of Christ. The unbelieving will fall under God's righteous judgment, and Christ will rule as Lord of all. As Paul famously said, on that day *at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Phil 2:10–11)

7. Let there be no mistake. Jesus Christ possesses all the credentials necessary to be the Savior of the world. So, what are you waiting for? Today would be the perfect day to finally surrender to His rule, and experience the fulness of Joy that comes from being forgiven of your every sin?

Won't you invite Him in even now?

8. The second verse of “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” reads,

Christ by highest heav’n adored,  
Christ the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold Him come,  
Offspring of the Virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail the incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus our Emmanuel.  
Hark the Herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!”

*It is safe to hang your eternal hope exclusively upon Jesus because he is nothing less than God in flesh.*