

Christmas Day
Hebrews 1:1-9
12/25/17

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Pt 1:2)

Hebrews 1:1-9

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You probably have a nativity scene somewhere in your house. If not, surely you have seen one before. There's one just outside the front door of the church. You look at the nativity scene and your eyes are drawn to one place – a baby lying in a manger. The mother and father are depicted there next to him. There might be shepherds in the manger scene. Maybe a cow or donkey or some sheep. But all attention is focused on that little child – so meek, so mild, so gentle.

But just who is that child? Is he just another baby boy born to a poor family in poor circumstances? Is he just a symbol of the peace and love the world dreams to attain? Who is this child about whom angels sang and shepherds worshiped? Who is this child laid on a bed of hay?

In this text from Hebrews, we hear some unusual descriptions of that child. **“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being...”** What could the writer of Hebrews mean by that? Well, lying there in the manger you see God himself. You see **“the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being...”** That means you see everything of God and about God in that little newborn baby boy.

There you find the Word of God incarnate – in the flesh. John wrote in the Gospel today, **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** There, in that manger of Bethlehem, God displays his glory in the only way humans could view it.

The First Lesson today didn't seem very “Christmassy,” did it? What does Moses's asking to see God's glory have to do with Christmas? Really, everything! There was never a man like Moses. He was the leader of God's people, hand-picked by God for that special task of leading God's people out of slavery in Egypt and to the Promised Land of Canaan. After Moses' death, God tell us, **“Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses”** (Deuteronomy 34:10).

But when Moses said, **“show me your glory”** (Exodus 33:18), God answered him **“you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live”** (Exodus 33:20). Not even Moses, the great prophet and leader of God's people could stand to be in the presence of God. As a human being cannot look into the light of the sun without being blinded by its brilliance, sinful people living here on this earth cannot behold the glory of a holy God without being destroyed.

Your sin separates you from God. You deserve nothing from him but his wrath and anger. You could not climb up to him in heaven because you, a sinful human being could not stand in his presence.

So God came down to you. When you look into the manger of Bethlehem you see the almighty God who came down to you. When we look at Jesus we see God and everything about God in perfect detail. If we want to see how merciful God is, look in the manger and see Jesus come down to dwell among us.

If we want to see how loving God is, look in the manger and see the almighty God wrapped in human flesh.

Who is this child of Bethlehem? He is the almighty God who came down to his creation because his creatures couldn't come up to him. He is the almighty God who clothed himself in human flesh so that his creatures could know him. But more than that, this child is our Savior from sin!

As Mary and Joseph sat there staring at their new baby boy, they saw God's plan coming to completion. God's Son was there at creation. The writer of Hebrews says here, **"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."** John, in the Gospel, said, **"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made"** (John 1:3). God created a perfect world, he placed perfect people in that perfect world. He gave Adam and Eve everything, including his companionship.

But the jewel of God's creation ruined his perfect creation. Because of the fall into sin of Adam and Eve all of creation has been plunged into the death of sin. But God had a plan to fix what we had broken.

You wonder if Mary's joy at the birth of Jesus was a little bittersweet. She had been informed by the angel Gabriel of exactly whom her newborn baby was. She knew he was the Son of God, she knew he was the Savior. She also knew from the Old Testament that her cute, little baby would suffer for her sins. Perhaps she recalled the words of Isaiah, **"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed"** (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Her Son – well, God's Son really – would be her substitute and show how great God's love is for those who love him not. Through a life without sin from the moment of his conception until that life ended on the cross, Jesus would provide the perfect payment for sins. No sin is too great for the forgiveness of the almighty God – your Savior from sin – the Babe of Bethlehem! That's what makes that scene in the stable so beautiful. There you see the extent of God's love for you. Your God came down so that by his death on the cross he could raise you up to him in heaven through the forgiveness won for you.

That becomes yours and mine because God has spoken to us by his Son through his Word. **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..."** Isn't it marvelous that here in this text we see the fullness of the person of Christ and what that means for you and me? In the person of Christ we see One who is fully God and fully human yet without sin. We see how God did not forsake humanity, but in love gave us hope and forgiveness by honoring humanity and taking on our flesh. As we discover this in the pages of Scripture, we realize how amazing God's love is that he would send his Son to bring us his message of free and full forgiveness for our sins. Through that saving message, God has made you his own and shared his glory with you. When you look inside the manger, you don't see a poor baby. You see your Savior.

Who is this child? He is your almighty God, he is your Savior from sin, but read the rest of this text and see your hope of glory. God didn't just become a man to die, but to be exalted. You see, **"after he**

had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” After Jesus had suffered and died, he was exalted. He – the God-man – was exalted.

What assurance, what peace, what comfort that gives us this Christmas! That tiny baby lying in a manger now rules over all things for the good of his people, as Paul once wrote, **“[God] seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion...and God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church”** (Ephesians 1:20-22). How comforting to know that the One who came down from heaven in order to be your Savior has returned to heaven, not to forget you, but to see that you will join him there one day!

What a beautiful scene! Who is that child at the center of our Christmas celebrations? We know the answer as we peer again into that manger bed. There we find God’s glory – on full display, yet hidden in a newborn baby. There we find our salvation and there we find our glory everlasting.

Amen

Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. (Ps 72:18-19)

Amen