

Jesus, Our God

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20

By Pastor John H. Noordhof

Williamsburg Christian Reformed Church

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Morning Service

People of God: Another baptism in advent. Two in four weeks. Hopefully, we're not tired of witnessing baptisms. Instead, let's allow the presence of this baby to be a reminder of another baby that needs to be at the center of attention at this time of year: the baby Jesus.

As I mentioned two weeks ago, there are lots of distractions that take our eyes away from the reason for the season. Like the madness of shopping. A case in point is the re-opening of the rebuilt IKEA store, the largest IKEA store now in Canada. The media was full of stories about the devoted fans of IKEA. Its grand opening drew thousands of people, causing concerns about traffic jams. Some even camped out to be the first to get in. To be honest, I just don't get what the fuss is all about. To me, it's another large box store, one to be avoided during this crazy shopping season.

Maybe I'm just a Scrooge that says, "bah, humbug" to all this madness of shopping. Maybe I'm just a set-in-my-ways bachelor, content with how my house is furnished. Perhaps Joe and Kristen can appreciate a store like IKEA better than me, as they recently had to furnish a house after living in an apartment, as well as getting ready for a newborn—whose early arrival caught them a little off guard. They still had to buy a car seat and a few other essential items before Hailey could be brought home.

I'm not sure if the birth of Jesus caught Joseph and Mary off guard. It's possible. After all, they weren't able to secure a place in one of the homes of Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. They ended up in the stable. There was no IKEA furniture for the baby room. Instead, Jesus had to sleep in a manger for a crib. It was just the bare essentials. It was a very humble, even humiliating beginning for any child, let alone for the type of child Jesus was.

After all, Jesus was no ordinary baby. In these weeks of advent, we are looking for the REAL Jesus—we are asking who really was this baby. It's a question; it's a search that forces us to get beyond the manger scene—

though that is an important part of the answer. The answer given in Colossians throws any simple and narrow view of Jesus out the window.

The baby Jesus wasn't just another baby, like Hailey. We can look down at Hailey and marvel at how fearfully and wonderfully she is made, to use the phrase of Psalm 139, and that she too reflects the image of God, even now able to praise God in her way, as Psalm 8 reminds us.

Joe and Kristen might ponder at what she might become: What gifts and abilities will she demonstrate? What kind of personality will she exhibit? Perhaps they might be concerned at how her sinful nature might reveal itself in her life or how she might experience the brokenness of this world. How will she fare in this rebellious world? Will she have faith in God, accepting the promises given to her in her baptism? These are the prayers and concerns any believing parent will have about their newborn child.

When Joseph and Mary looked down at the baby Jesus, they knew he was different from any other baby that may have born that night, that he was unique in terms of any child born at any time in the history of the world. After all, the angels told each of them separately about the uniqueness of this baby. The shepherds who came to see this newborn were also told about how this child was special. The wise men, too, came with their description of the child: a king. (A description considered last week.) But did any of them fully grasp what all this meant? I don't think so.

It took time for people to recognize the full depth and significance of the birth of Jesus. That's why in looking for the REAL Jesus; we need to get beyond the manger scene. It took the ministry of Jesus to begin to reveal who he really was: His teachings centered on the coming Kingdom of God. His healings demonstrated the wholeness he could bring to the brokenness of life. His death was a payment for sin. His resurrection was a defeat of death. His ascension was a triumph over all the enemies of God. It took the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the disciples to grasp what all of this meant.

And so, when Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse, he is able to describe Jesus in ways that would have floored the shepherds and the wise men, perhaps even Joseph and Mary. In the passage that we read phrase after phrase is piled on top of each to describe Jesus. Hear again highlights from this passage:

- He is the image of the invisible God.
- He is the firstborn over all creation.
- By him all things were created.
- He was before all things.

- In everything he might have the supremacy.
- God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.
- Through him to reconcile to himself all things.

Don't these descriptions just blow your mind away? Don't they just dash the simple and narrow view that most people have of Jesus?

These are descriptions of Jesus that force us to confess that Jesus was not only fully human, he was fully God. In the words of John 1: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. In the words of Isaiah 7: He is Immanuel, God with us. And now these descriptions of Colossians 1 build on these insights in a way that is absolutely amazing.

Consider, for example, the opening description: He is the image of the invisible God. He is the representative of God. He has the fullness of God dwelling in him, as a later phrase explains.

While every human being is created **in** the image of God, Jesus Christ **is** the image of God. Note the difference: in versus is. We are created in the image of God. Jesus **IS** the image. He shares in the divine nature. As the image of God, Christ is not a poor copy of the original but a perfect reflection of God. Some years ago, there was a commercial on TV for a color photocopier to illustrate this point.

Our photocopiers can do an excellent job. Sometimes you can't tell the original from the copy. Others times the difference is very clear. Of course, our photocopiers can't do color. But in this TV commercial for a color photocopier, a man makes hundreds of photocopies of a very famous and expensive picture. When he has finished his task, he drops them all so that the original is mixed up with the copies. But as he searches throughout the pile he can't tell the difference between the copy and the original. Of course, that's the point of the commercial. The photocopier is so good you can't tell the difference.

Perhaps that can help us understand how Christ is the image of the invisible God. They are not the same. There is a distinction between the Father and the Son. But in their nature as God there is no difference. They share fully in the divine qualities and attributes. The Son of God is no pale imitation of God, no black and white copy of a colorful original. Instead Jesus fully shares the divine nature.

Many of these descriptions also connect Jesus Christ to the creation. By him all things were created. While we, correctly, link the creating work of God to God the Father, God the Son was also intimately involved in the creation of the world. All things were created by him and for him. More than that, it is through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross the creation is being

restored and renewed. Through Jesus, God is reconciling to himself all things.

And so, the work of Jesus is as broad and all encompassing as the creation. The work of Jesus is more than the forgiveness of our sins, it is more than securing our place in heaven, the work of Jesus is the launch of a new creation, whereby all things will be made new.

And all this comes through one who was born in a stable, whose crib was a manger. Isn't that absolutely amazing? But that's the real Jesus of Christmas. Jesus was more than just a cute, cuddly baby; Jesus was more than just a wise teacher, who had a compassionate heart for the downcast of society—Jesus was and is God with us—Immanuel. These descriptions of Colossians One led the church to confess that Jesus was not fully human, he was also fully God.

It's a portrayal of Jesus that smashes the common perceptions of who Jesus is. Yes, our society will accept a very human Jesus—but this Jesus—well, that's something else. After all, if this description in Colossians One is the real Jesus, then that raises the stakes. Because this Jesus leads to our worship of him. It leads to our submission to him—looking to him not only as the one in whom we can have salvation; we also look to him to reshape and reorder our lives. It leads us to bend our knees and confess: Jesus is Lord. He is Lord of creation. He is Lord of my life.

How tempting it is, then, even for believers to “tame” Jesus. To keep Jesus in the manger. To keep Jesus at our level. We'll sing our Christmas songs, we'll make sure we wish each other a Merry Christmas—and not Season Greetings; we'll say we want to keep the Christ—in Christmas. These are all good things. But do we live out these sentiments? Do we submit ourselves to the real Jesus?

Sometimes, it is tempting to tame Jesus. To downplay these lofty descriptions of Jesus. Because then, perhaps, the Christian faith won't be so offensive in our society. Because then, perhaps, we won't have to change our sinful habits. Because then, perhaps, we won't have to re-orient our lives to this new creation we have in Jesus Christ.

But, if Jesus isn't the person described in these verses, then, what would we be left with? A very sentimental manger scene but without any real hope for the future. It is only because Jesus is the person described in these verses that he could bear our sin upon the cross so that we do not have bear that guilt anymore. It is only because Jesus is the one through the creation was made and is being reconciled that we have a glorious future in store for us in the new creation.

We need Jesus to be the person described in these verses for our sake,

and for the sake of this world. Hailey needs Jesus to be this person. He is the one through whom Hailey was given life. He is the one through whom she can have new life, as signified in her baptism. Hailey needs Jesus to be more than just this baby in the manger. She needs him to be him to be the image of the invisible God, the one through whom creation was made. The one through whom creation is being redeemed.

So it is for all of us. We need this Jesus. Amen.