

“This Is God’s Son”

Is there an easier time to be a Christian than Christmas? I know people don’t always seem to think so. Many talk about a “war on Christmas” in our society. In order to be politically correct, you can’t even use the word “Christmas.” Instead of “Merry Christmas,” it’s “Happy Holidays!” Instead of a Christmas tree or party, it’s a holiday tree or a winter party. And I understand that these sorts of things can be frustrating and seem to assault Christianity specifically. In the end, though, my experience, at least in general, has been very different. I’ve never seen someone get upset because I wished them a “Merry Christmas” or a “blessed Christmas.” And I don’t think that there are many of our neighbors who would be offended by our use of word Christmas, even if they wouldn’t necessarily use it themselves.

It really seems to me that Christmas is a particularly easy time to be a Christian. Consider this: if there are just two times when someone shows up to church all year, one of them is probably Christmas. And throughout the season, you can hear Christmas songs on the radio twenty-four hours a day. I realize that many of them are purely secular songs that don’t have anything to do with a baby in a manger, but some of them do. Christmas time is an easy time to be generally nice to people, because in many ways people are more generally nice to each other. People are often happy about the holiday, many of them get some time off from work or school. They give and receive presents and decorate houses with lights. Christmas is an easy celebration to get swept into.

So maybe the question is why is the world so comfortable with Christmas? Could it be that for them, Christmas is only about the decorations and the parties? Could it be that all they know about real story of Christmas is something about a baby in a manger? They picture the nativity scene with its baby and mother and father and think that it is so very cute and sweet and friendly.

And we sometimes think about Christmas the same way, don’t we? It is easy to miss out on what really makes Christmas so special. Yes, it is a little baby laid in a manger, but there is so much more to it than that! This little baby is God’s Son! That’s what our Christmas Day service is all about. Our lessons invite us to look into that manger again and to see more than what is obvious and to really celebrate the coming of this special baby.

The baby Jesus is so special because he brings God to us. God, who created the world, created human beings to live in it and have a relationship with him. But that relationship was ruined by sin. Sin separates us from God. It prevents people from reaching up to God, so God had to take the initiative to come to us. And he has done so in a variety of ways.

That’s how the book of Hebrews begins. In the past, God spoke to people through prophets. He did so at many times and in various ways. Some prophets spoke and wrote in poetry. Some used object lessons. Some foretold the future. But again and again, God spoke to his people through them. He made sure that they heard what they needed to hear. He warned people about the consequences of their sinfulness, and he assured them of his gracious love. “[But now,]” says the writer, **“in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”** God’s Son comes with a message. He is God’s communication to us. In him we learn who God truly is and what he is really like. In the same way, John’s Gospel calls him the Word.

Both our sermon text and that Gospel make it very clear that God’s Son is God. The little baby born to Mary and placed in a manger, is the one through whom the universe was made. He is eternal. He sustains all things by the power of his word. And in these statements are mysteries upon mysteries. These are matters that we can by no means fully comprehend! That God’s Son is God himself is a reflection of the fact that God is triune, that he is three in one in a way that nothing in our experience is. And how can you and I fathom that God who created the universe, who created our world, who created us would come into our world as one of us?

But that is exactly what we celebrate at Christmas, that God did precisely that. The Son of God came into the world in flesh and blood, born of a woman. **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us”** (John 1:14). The writer to the Hebrews explains, **“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”** This is God come to us. In this baby is everything that God is and everything that God is like. And just to be clear, this is not talking about the physical attributes of the child. This is not like how you or I might say, “That baby has his daddy’s eyes or ears or smile.” This is to say that everything that we can say about God we can say about the baby lying in Bethlehem’s manger. **“[He is] sustaining all things by his powerful word.”** He is almighty, he is eternal, and he is gracious above all.

That is why the Son of God brought God to us. This was God’s plan to rescue you and me from our sins, and to rescue a whole world of sinners from the sins that have entrapped them ever since the very beginning of mankind. Hebrews goes on, **“After he had provided purification for sins...”** That is what God’s Son came to do. That is why he was born of a virgin mother. That is why he humbled himself to be laid in a manger and to grow up in a sinful world. He went on to teach and to suffer and to die. He was seeking our purification. He was cleansing us from our sins. The whole concept of purification ought to remind us of the Old Testament sacrifices that one after another were necessary for the people because of their sin. They pointed ahead to this sacrifice. And I can’t help but think about how the Israelites raising their sheep and their goats would look at a young animal and realize: “This is a perfect specimen with no defects. This is one the likes of whom God requires for sacrifices. I have an offering to give to him.” That is Jesus, even as a baby in the manger: he is here to provide the sacrifice. He is the perfect offering that God demands for the full and final purification from our sins.

This is what so many miss when they think about the story of Christmas. They may know about the little baby. They may even realize that he is the true God come into our world. But so many believe that he came to show us how to live or to be our friend on earth. He came to be our greatest friend because he came to offer himself for our purification from sin. This is God’s Son, and this is why he came.

And because he accomplished what he set out to do, he deserves our worship and praise. In fact, our text makes it clear that he has always deserved our praise. **“When God brings his firstborn in to the world,”** it explains, **“he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’”** As great even as God’s perfect angel messengers are, Jesus is greater. They are the ones that God sends to announce his birth and to praise and worship him. The angels came to Jesus’ earthly parents to tell them about the coming of this special baby. They announced his birth to the shepherds on Christmas night. And then they filled the sky with bright and shining glory as they praised God for sending his Son into the world.

This was no ordinary birth. This was no ordinary child. Let all God’s angels worship him. This is God’s Son! And let us join with them to give him our worship and praise. That is why we have gathered to sing hymns of praise and to hear God’s Word. That is why we celebrate Christmas in so many ways year after year. This is God’s Son. Let us worship him. Let us praise him.

And we will praise him forever. Hebrews tells us, **“About the Son [God] says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.’”** Aspects of our Christmas celebrations will end all too soon. The trees and lights will be put away. The presents will be unwrapped and used and eventually be used up or broken. Schedules will return to normal—business as usual. But the true meaning of Christmas will never fade away. It will never perish. It will last not just for this life, but also into eternity. This is God’s Son who rescued us from the hell we deserved so that heaven is ours. We will praise him there forever.

So, yes, in many ways Christmas is an easy time to be a Christian. But I realize that Christmas is not always and only easy for everyone. There are plenty of reasons why the holidays may be difficult based on history and experiences, but it is my prayer for all of you that today and forever your Christmas celebration may be blessed. You realize who it is who was born to Mary and laid in the manger. This is Jesus. This is God’s Son. This is our forgiveness and our salvation. This is Christmas! Joy to the World! Amen.

The Text: Hebrews 1:1–9 (NIV)

¹ In the past God spoke to our ancestors 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 also 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 spirits, and his servants flames of fire."

⁸ But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice 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."