

LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING: The King Deliveredⁱ Colossians 1:15-20

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Church Family! It is so good to see you this morning, as always. I do want to take the opportunity to welcome those of you that are guests. Thanks for trusting us with your Sunday. It is my prayer that our church already feels like home to you.

We would like to connect with you. There are a couple of ways you can help us do that. One, feel free to text, anytime, the keyword TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant to the number 94-000. When you do, you'll be sent a link where you can share with us basic contact information. I will then look forward to following up with you this coming week. Or another way you can connect with us is by stopping by our information center located in the main lobby area under the banner "Hope is Here." We have a gift there for you to say thanks for joining us today. It is the highlight of my week to visit with those of you that are our guests. We are thrilled you have joined us today.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are in the third week of a Christmas teaching series that we have called, "Let Earth Receive Her King." We have talked about The King Promised and The King Announced. This week we will be talking about The King Delivered. So, I want to invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to the New Testament. To the book of Colossians. We are going to be looking at chapter 1 verses 15 through 20 this morning.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: The Depth of the Bible

I once heard a preacher once say, "The Bible is deep enough for a theologian to drown in and yet shallow enough for a child of God to wade in."ⁱⁱ I am sure that you have found that to be true as you have studied God's Word. I know that is certainly the case for me. I have a master's degree in theology and there is so much of the Bible that remains a mystery for me. But God is also faithful to provide His Holy Spirit that gives us insight to the Word of God.

I point that out this morning because we are going to dive into some of the deeper waters of Scripture this morning. When we talk about the King delivered, we are talking about the birth of Christ and specifically the incarnation. And there is no way I can do justice to the incarnation of Jesus in a

single sermon. And even a series of sermons on the topic would not be able to fully exhaust this profound truth. But that is what we are talking about today, the incarnation of Christ. Christmas is all about Jesus' incarnation. As we try to wrap our minds around this profound truth, my goal is that we get through it together. And maybe today's message lingers on your heart and in your mind through Christmas.

So, the way we are going to tackle this this morning is to look at the incarnation's definition, the incarnation's significance, and the incarnation's hope. That is where we are going this morning. And my prayer is that this deeper dive might serve as a way of fully grasping the weight of Christmas. That it would deepen our celebration this time of year.

MESSAGE:

So, let's begin by looking at the incarnation...

1) **Defined.**

The word incarnation is a theological term that means that, "Jesus, the Son of God, took on flesh."ⁱⁱⁱ It is the act of God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus. John 1:14 communicates this truth. *¹⁴And the Word [reference to Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* The incarnation is Jesus becoming flesh, human.

Now, there is another theological word that is important to understand. It is hypostatic union. This describes to the 2 natures of Jesus. That while He was fully man, He was also fully God. The incarnation is Jesus taking on of flesh, and the hypostatic union is Jesus being fully God and fully man.^{iv} This is an absolute important doctrine. Because if Jesus is just man, then He is a liar because He claimed to be God. And if Jesus is just God, then He was not born of a virgin and the Gospel accounts are invalid. But Jesus was born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and therefore He was fully man and fully God.

Our text this morning, Colossians 1, shows us this in detail. Let's look at it. Colossians 1:15. *¹⁵He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* Couple words here that define the incarnation, image and firstborn.

First, let's talk about the word image. Paul, the writer of Colossians, says that Jesus is, "*the image of the invisible God.*" In other words, Jesus is the one who

makes visible He who is invisible.^v God the Father is Spirit and therefore is invisible. No one has physically seen God. In fact, the Bible says that God is light and that His light is unapproachable. Jesus also said in John 14:9, *“⁹Jesus 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.** How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”* So, the incarnation defined is Jesus, God in the flesh.

Now, Paul uses the word, “image.” It is the word, “eikon” [icon] in the original language. It is where we get our word “icon.” To us, icon, means a copy or likeness. But to the Greeks it meant exact representation. As a result, Jesus is the exact representation of God.

The book of Hebrews explains this in greater detail. Hebrews 1:1-3. *“¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his **Son** [that is that God has revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus], *whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.* ³He [Jesus] *is the [very] radiance of the glory of God and **the exact imprint of his** [God’s] **nature**, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”* Jesus is the exact imprint, the exact representation of God Himself.*

Now, what about us being made in the image of God? Does that mean that we are an exact representation of God? No. Genesis tells us that we are made ***IN*** the image of God. Jesus ***IS*** the image of God. The incarnation of Jesus is God taking on flesh. He is, therefore, Immanuel, which means “God with us.”

If you ever want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. The way Jesus loved people demonstrates the way God loves us. Jesus dealt with people by way of grace and mercy. Take for example the woman caught in adultery. “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.” Jesus shows us the love and mercy of God. But He also shows us the righteousness and justice of God. Remember when the money changers were making profit at God’s temple and Jesus came in and overturned the tables. God is a God of justice. And in Jesus we have the perfect union of God’s loving kindness and His perfect justice. And because Jesus demonstrates God perfectly to us, we are to imitate Him the same way.

That’s what is wrapped up in the word “image.” Now, let’s look at the word, “firstborn.”

Paul says, Jesus is *“**the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**”* Understanding the word “firstborn” is vitally important because Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons have taken this verse to mean something completely different. As a result, they have come to believe that Jesus is not God, but that He is like God or He is a god among many, or that He became a god. There are 3 reasons why that is in error. Let me share them with you.

A) Firstborn doesn’t just refer to birth order.

We have a tendency to read the term “firstborn” and think that it is talking about birth order. Like in my family, Carsyn is our firstborn. She is the oldest of our children. If you take that to be the case, then God has many children of which Jesus was born first. And then those children can become like Jesus, God.

Now, it is true that we are adopted by God at the moment of our salvation and in that way, we become children of God. But there is only one begotten Son of God. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave **His one and only Son.**” The belief systems that see this as birth order fails to see that firstborn doesn’t just refer to birth order. This leads me to the second reason...

B) Firstborn is a position of prominence.

Because firstborn, in this case, doesn’t just refer to birth order, it is a reference to Jesus’ position of prominence. The Old Testament talks about this and provides a few examples. Jacob and Esau, Ishmael and Isaac, and Manasseh and Ephraim are all biblical examples of firstborn being a position, not order.

Joseph had Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh was the firstborn in birth order, but Ephraim received the benefits of the firstborn by way of position. Jacob was born second to Esau, but Jacob received the birthright. And in the case of Ishmael and Isaac, God promised Abraham a son. Abraham had Ishmael by why of his servant, not his wife. Ishmael was not the promised son, but he was born first. Isaac was born second, but he was the promised son from God.

The point is that the term here that Jesus is the firstborn is not in reference to Him being one of many begotten children of God. He is God in the flesh. He is not like God or a god, He is God. But a third reason to believe this is that...

C) The context provides clarity.

Let me give you a bible study tool that will serve you well. When it comes to interpreting the Bible, you must let Scripture interpret Scripture. It is possible to

build an entire theology in error by simply looking at one verse or a fraction of a verse. That's why we must look at the context so as to interpret it correctly.

Well, what is the context of verse 15? Let's read verses 16 through 19. ***16**For by him [being Jesus] 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. **17**And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18**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. **19**For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” These verses tell us that Jesus is the agent of all of creation, both what is visible and what is invisible. That he is before all things. To have done that and be that means that He has to be God. If He is not God, then the creator of the creation would have to first be created. That is not the case. And Jesus being before all things is speaking, then, about the preexistence of Christ.*

In other words, Jesus was not created at His birth. Jesus has always existed. He is God. God, in Trinity, The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit are eternal in nature. God exists into eternity past and into eternity future. There is no beginning and no end to God. Jesus, in Revelation, is the Alpha, the beginning, and the end, the Omega. This is Jesus. The incarnation of Christ, what we celebrate at Christmas, is that God taking on flesh and being found in human form.

All that to say that Jesus is the image of God, the exact representation of God. Jesus is God incarnate, God in flesh. That is my humble way of defining the incarnation. Now, let's look at the incarnation's...

2) Significance.

Why is the incarnation of Jesus so important? What is the significance of this theological truth? Well, there are 3 ways the incarnation is significant.^{vi} First is that the incarnation...

A) Fulfills prophecy.

The means by which the Messiah came was not by accident or by last minute planning. The incarnation was God plan from the very beginning. It was predicted in the Old Testament that God would take on human form by way of birth. Isaiah 9:6, written in 730 B.C., says, ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name***

shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

In this verse, the prophet Isaiah foretells of a son, but not any ordinary son. Isaiah accentuates that by using extravagant titles, one being Mighty God, to describe the child. All of the titles Isaiah uses point to Jesus' deity. So, the incarnation is a fulfillment of a long-foretold prophecy. Secondly, the incarnation is significant because it...

B) Shows Jesus' humility.

Jesus is not the typical king requiring pomp and circumstance. The incarnation of Jesus taking place the way in which it did, in a stable, demonstrates Jesus desire to serve rather than be served. Philippians 2 tells of the humility of our Lord. Verses 6 through 8. ***6**who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7**but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8**And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

It is this action, the incarnation, that distinguishes Christianity from all other religious belief systems. We are not on a journey to work our way toward God. No! God came to us because it was impossible for us to make our way to Him. The birth of Jesus is the action that proves that to us.

So, the incarnation is significant because it fulfills prophecy, and it shows Jesus' humility. But thirdly, the incarnation is significant because...

C) It is necessary for salvation.

Without the incarnation, Jesus is merely a human whose death was in vain. If Jesus was merely human, then He was born in sin, like all of us. And if He was born in sin, then He is not the perfect, sinless sacrifice that is required for the forgiveness of sin.

Hebrews 2:17 makes this point clear. ***17**Therefore he [Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that [for a purpose. That] he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation [satisfactory payment] for the sins of the people. God had to become man so that He could pay the price of salvation which was impossible for us to pay. If Jesus is not God, then His death is in vain and is meaningless.*

But that is not the case because Jesus is God and is the perfect, once for all, sacrifice for your sin and mine.

So, we've talked about the incarnation's definition and its significance. Now, let's talk about how the incarnation...

3) Brings hope.

The incarnation is Heaven invading earth. But Heaven invaded earth for a very specific purpose. Look at verse 20 of Colossians 1. *20and through him [Jesus] to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.* In Jesus' incarnation and in His death, burial, and resurrection, we are reconciled to God, at peace with God. And the peace we experience with God is not the result of what we do, but rather based on what Jesus has done. And that is great news.

Further, the fact that God invaded earth, even to the most obscure of places, in the most desperate of circumstances proves that you and I are never outside of God's reach in our lives. If God can invade the mess of a stable in little ole Bethlehem, then He can and will invade the mess of the struggle you are in. There is hope in any relationship, hope in any circumstance, and hope in any condition. Christmas, the incarnation of Christ, is the announcement that God loves you, sees you, and has a plan for you. And that brings hope.

You know, I have been asked by many people why Jesus had to die. If God loves us, then why couldn't He just forgive us? Why a death? Let me see if I can explain it to us as it relates to Jesus' coming.

In the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned and they realized their nakedness and were ashamed, God covered them. But to do so meant that an animal had to die. Sin always brings death.

And God, in His perfect justice, can't just turn a blind eye to an offense. To do so would require ceasing to be a righteous judge. If I were to offend you in a way that we went to court, you'd be very upset if the judge just turned a blind eye to my offense. Justice would not have been served. Well, in an infinite way, God cannot turn a blind eye to the offense of our sin. And because He is perfectly just, and perfectly loving, His love and justice collide in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

The hope of Christmas is that regardless of the mess that surrounds us or the mess that even we have created, God still sees us and loves us. He sent His Son, Jesus, born of a virgin, fully man yet fully God, Immanuel, God with us, so that we can know His love. I hope you hear that message of hope this Christmas.

CONCLUSION:

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation for this message: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Colossians & Philemon*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1992; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 1-11*, Moody Press, Chicago, 2006; David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Colossians / Philemon*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1998; Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine: Essential Teaching of the Christian Faith*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1999; James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical Vol. 2*, BIBAL Press, North Richland Hills, 2000; Saint Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, SVS Press: Yonkers, 2011; BibleRef, “Colossians 1:15-20,” accessed online: <https://www.bibleref.com/Colossians/1/Colossians-1-15.html>; J.D. Greear, “God With Us: Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery,” sermon preached at Summit Church, December, 8, 2013, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/come-behold-the-wondrous-mystery-colossians-115-20>; Skip Heitzig, “Why Jesus is Supreme,” sermon preached at Calvary Albuquerque, Sunday, July 24, 2022, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/324/sermon/4696>; Bob Deffinbaugh, “3. The Spirit of Christ,” published by Bible.org, accessed online: <https://bible.org/seriespage/spirit-christ-philippians-21-13>; Joseph Scheumann, “Five Truths About the Incarnation,” article published by Desiring God, December 25, 2013, accessed online: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-truths-about-the-incarnation>; Alistair Begg, “The Incarnation, Explained by Jesus,” published by Truth For Life, December 26, 1999, accessed online: <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/the-incarnation-explained-by-jesus/>; H.B. Charles, “The Good News of the Incarnation,” published by Preaching.com, accessed online: <https://www.preaching.com/sermons/sermon-the-good-news-of-the-incarnation/>; Chip Ingram, “What Child is This: Who Is He?,” published by Living on the Edge with Chip Ingram, accessed online: <https://messagingnotes.livingontheedge.org/What-Child-Is-This.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Illustration Ideas, “Deep & Shallow,” accessed online: <https://illustrationideas.bible/deep-shallow/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Got Questions, “What is the meaning of the Incarnation of Christ?,” article published by GotQuestions.org, accessed online: <https://www.gotquestions.org/incarnation-of-Christ.html>.

^{iv} For more discussion on the hypostatic union, see the GotQuestions article here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/hypostatic-union.html>.

^v Heitzig.

^{vi} These three components are pointed out by Scheumann.