

The Nativity of our Lord: Christmas Day, 2022
"What to Do with Jesus"
Hebrews 1:1-9

In the past, God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in many ways. 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. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of the divine nature. He sustains all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The Son became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say:

You are my Son. Today I have begotten you?

And again:

I will be his Father, and he will be my Son.

And again, when he brought his firstborn into the world, he said:

Let all God's angels worship him.

About the angels he says:

He makes his messengers winds and his ministers flaming fire.

But about the Son he says:

**God, your throne is forever and ever,
and the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy
beyond your companions.**

Not long ago, two friends of mine had their first baby., and afterwards told me this funny story. I think almost all parents will be able to relate to their experience. In the time leading up to the birth, the baby's dad and mom were happy; they were looking forward to their long-awaited blessing of a child. They were excited, too. And when the day of the birth came, they were still so excited and happy and optimistic. And then, for two days after the birth, everything was pretty easy. They had nurses and hospital staff all around them to provide them all the help they needed as new parents. The baby was always happy or sleeping, because everyone around knew exactly what to do with her, and how to handle her.

And then came the time for mom and baby to be discharged from the hospital. As dad got to the car, he strapped the baby into the car seat. The car ride home was peaceful and happy. But as soon as the car was parked in the driveway, the new parents looked right at each other with the

kind of panic that, according to them, you can only understand if you've been in that situation. They could read each other's minds, and both said it out loud. "What do we do now?"

"What do we do now?" is a pretty important question after a birth. We Christians have been waiting for a birth throughout the season of Advent. And today, we celebrate that birth. We are not Jesus' parents, of course, but we are his people, and he has been born to us. The baby Jesus is here. And he is yours. So what are you going to do with Jesus now?

That exact question was once staring a group of Jewish Christians right in the face. These Jewish, or "Hebrew" Christians had come to know Jesus for the very first time. By the work of the Holy Spirit, they had come to trust in Jesus as the Son of God, and their Savior from sin.

But now, the Hebrew Christians just weren't sure what to do with Jesus anymore. Apparently, they were under a lot of pressure to leave Jesus behind, and return to their old Christ-less religion. They were probably feeling this pressure from fellow Hebrews who had not converted to Christianity. And they may also have been feeling the pressure to abandon Christ from the society that surrounded them. After all, Judaism was legal and acceptable in their world; but Christianity was illegal, and Christians were considered losers and lawbreakers. Under that kind of pressure, answering the question, "What do we do with Jesus now?" was a real challenge for these Hebrew Christians. And they were on the verge of giving a terrible answer: "Let's give into the pressure, and leave Christ behind."

The writer to the Hebrews, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote to these Christians to lead them to a different answer. Just in the first nine verses of this letter, the writer answers the question, "What do we do with Jesus now?" this way: Don't give in to the pressure to leave Jesus. Honor him for who he is, and worship him for what he does.

On this Christmas Day, we Christians also need to be reminded of what to do with the newborn King that God has sent us. And it may sound odd, but we need this reminder for much the same reason the Hebrew Christians did. It's very unlikely that many of us are feeling heat from Jewish friends to convert to Judaism as those Hebrew Christians were. And Christianity is legal in our land. So, it's not for those specific reasons that we need this reminder.

But do we ever feel pressure to leave Jesus behind? Does following Jesus make us social and cultural oddballs? Often it does, or at least it should, if you're obeying Jesus' commands and letting your light shine. Do we feel pressure from the world around us to leave Jesus behind, and just do what's "easier" by going through life without him? Do we feel heat to keep our Christianity quiet, to distance ourselves from Jesus when we're out in the world? Do the demands of work and family leave us feeling forced to miss opportunities to grow closer to him by hearing his Word?

Maybe we could just think back for a moment through the four weeks of the Advent season we just completed. Did we give Jesus the full honor he deserves throughout those four weeks? Did we take every opportunity to praise him for all the glorious things he has done – and is still doing – for us? If your answer, like mine, is "no," ask yourself: what got more of your devotion than he did?

What caused us to cast Christ aside over the past four weeks, in the very season we set aside to prepare our hearts for him? Well, in order to fit in to the world's holiday shuffle, we had to buy a lot of stuff, visit a lot of people, write a lot of cards, stuff ourselves with candy, stare at the pretty lights, watch George Bailey run around screaming in Bedford Falls, and on and on and on.

And that's just during the holiday season. The rest of the year, followers of Christ are under consistent compulsion to fit in with the ways of the rest of the world, which does not include doing anything with Christ but dumping him. Under that kind of pressure to let Jesus go and leave him behind, how will we answer the question, "What are we going to do with Jesus now?"

The writer to the Hebrews had a sound strategy for strengthening these Hebrew Christians against the pressure pulling them away from Christ. His strategy, supplied by the Holy Spirit, was very simple: show them who Christ is; show them what he's done. And God will strengthen them to withstand the pressure. He will give them a strong faith to answer the question, "What are you going to do with Jesus?" the right way.

So he writes: **The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of the divine nature.** Jesus Christ, born to us on Christmas Day, is the very same divine substance as God the Father. He is equal with God the Father, and deserves all the same glory. The writer to the Hebrews goes out of his way, three different times, to compare Jesus to the angels of heaven, and prove from Scripture that Christ is superior to them, and equal to God the Father. Even the angels in heaven worship Christ for who he is, and give him all the honor they give the Father. God the Father honors Christ by setting the ascended Christ over all creation. These are all facts the writer to the Hebrews brings out one after another after another. And his point is clear. All honor belongs to Christ. He deserves it simply for who he is: God.

To prove further the deity of Christ, the writer also points to the fact that God created all things through the Son. Jesus is eternal; he was present at creation with the Father and the Spirit, and all three created together. Now Jesus is ruling all things together with the Father. Our Jesus is God. So honor him for who he is.

It may be tempting on Christmas to look at a helpless looking baby in a manger and forget the fact that he's also the Almighty God of heaven. But he is. He's there in the manger, as a baby, by choice. He humbled himself that much, to do for us what only God could. So as we see that baby, we must hold these words in our hearts: **...he is the exact imprint of the divine nature.** He's not lying helplessly in a manger because he's less than God. He has come that way to work for us. So we not only honor him as true God, we also worship him for what he does.

Jesus came into this world as the Word. "The Word" is what he's called in the Gospel we heard today from John chapter 1. But why? What do words do? Why do we use them? When a word comes out of your mouth and reaches another person's ears and gets processed by their brain, the word is a revelation. The word reveals to someone else's mind the thoughts or ideas that were hidden in your mind. Jesus is the Word because through him God the Father tells us what is on his mind. Jesus communicates to us the fact that God is gracious and merciful. Jesus reveals to us that God made a plan to save sinners, and carried it out through the baby born on Christmas. Jesus is God's Word, God's revelation to us: **In the past, God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in many ways. In these last days, he has**

spoken to us by his Son. The mind of God, his grace and mercy – we know it because Jesus came to reveal it.

Jesus revealed the gracious, merciful mind of God not only by what he said, but also by the saving life he lived. Jesus proclaimed that God is love who sent his Son to save. And he not only proclaimed that fact when he preached. He fulfilled that message of salvation by carrying out God's plan to purify us.

After being born on Christmas, Jesus Christ **provided purification for sins.** That purification that Christ gave us has two parts to it. The first step in our purification was that Jesus had to live a pure life himself. And that's what Jesus did for us. And then came the second part of Jesus' purification process: he gave up his perfect life on the cross to purify you and me from every sin we've committed. The very Savior that we have felt pressure – and sometimes given in to it – to leave behind, refused to leave us behind in our sin. Instead, he went to suffer and die to forgive all of our sins. His blood purifies us from those sins and all the rest.

What amazing things Christ has done for us! He didn't stop there. In verse five the writer also alludes to Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning. With the power that only God has, Jesus rose three days after he died, paving the way to everlasting life for us. His whole life, death, and resurrection is a word, a message from God's mouth to our ears: "I love you; and I forgive you in Christ."

And our Lord Jesus, whose humble birth we celebrate today, was exalted after he rose. Now he sits on high at the right hand of God, working everything for our good. His work to save us is complete, but he's still not done working for us. At this very moment he is ruling heaven and earth in our interest.

What a sublime approach the writer takes with these struggling Christians! Show them who Jesus is, and the temptation to toss him away will scatter. Show them what Jesus has done for them, and the temptation to leave him behind will fade. The baby born to us is also Almighty God. Remember that, and he will have your honor. Remember what he's done for you: how he revealed the Father's love and his saving plan. Remember how he lived that plan, and how he rules for you. And through any pressure to leave about him, no matter how much, you will hold on to Jesus tight and worship Christ with all your heart. Amen.