

'Baby Jesus, Eternal God'

[Presented by a certain welder from Alberton, Montana, December 2011.]

I would like to examine this morning the familiar story of the birth of Christ. A story that is very familiar to all of us for we have known the story from early childhood.

The story of the birth of the Baby Jesus in our culture is very muddled, a mixture of traditions, of family and friends, of gifts and giving, of over indulgence, of get-togethers and parties. Some of it truly bringing honor to Jesus but most of it not.

Our culture seems to want to have a celebration without the Celebrity. We have February 21 to celebrate George Washington's and Abe Lincoln birthdays, and they have to share a day, and Martin Luther King gets his own day. And as far as I know the ACLU has never sued anyone over celebrating those days. But the Lord Jesus Christ has been the subject of innumerable lawsuits. So it seems our society wants a big Christmas celebration, but 'let's just keep Jesus out of it'.

I am not a believer in Jesus statues, but the situation in Whitefish is a good example: The organization "Freedom from Religion" from Madison, Wisconsin is pressuring the Forest Service to remove the statue from Federal ground, in this intolerable mix of Church and State.

I think their co-president's statement is quite telling; she says "our goal is to ensure that there is no preferential treatment of religion by government or the appearance that people who believe in Jesus are somehow better Americans than those of us who don't". Sounds to me like she has quite the chip on her shoulder.

Oh and by the way she has received quite a lot of hate mail, including physical threats. "Well it's mostly obscene that can't be played on TV, and I think the one that was most vicious said "Stay the (blank) out of Montana! If one of your members ever shows up here, they will never leave. They will be planted with the statue."

Now believe me that doesn't bring any honor to Jesus either, does it?

But what about the true Christmas? What about the true story of this Baby lying in a manger in the city of Bethlehem? What about the Christ around whom our calendar pivots with BC (before Christ) and AD anno Domini Latin for "year of Lord"?

Oh and by the way did you know there is a strong push to change B.C. and A.D. to B.C.E. and C.E; which stands for 'before common era', and 'common era'? There are many educators and historians challenging the centuries old method of calendar keeping, all in the name of 'political correctness', a term I have learned to despise over the years.

But enough of man and his dismal wisdom! Let's turn to God and His wisdom and see what He has to teach us today.

It has often been stated that the four Gospels present the good news of Jesus from four different perspectives: Matthew presents 'Jesus as King'; primarily to the Jewish people, he shows them how Jesus is their King and prophesied Messiah. He references more than 60 Old Testament prophecies concerning the Jewish Messiah and coming King. He spends the first 17 verses of Matthew chronicling Jesus's genealogy starting with Abraham, a very important task when proving Kingship and the rightful Heir to the throne. Starting in vs. 18 he begins to tell the story of the virgin birth and the wise men and all the other things we associate with the Christmas story.

Mark presents 'Jesus as servant', so he makes no mention of 'genealogy', or of 'virgin births', 'of shepherds', or 'inns with no room', or 'stars in the east with wise men', none of that. His concern is presenting Jesus as 'servant,' so he starts with John the Baptist and Jesus's early ministry. We see the theme of Mark's gospel in chapter 10, verse 45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." That is the thrust of Mark's gospel... that Jesus came to serve, and truly He did come as a servant.

Luke on the other hand emphasizes 'the humanity of Jesus'. He starts his gospel a full year before the birth of Christ with the story of Zacharias and his encounter with an angel who tells him his wife, which the scripture says "was well advanced in years" would bear a son, his name would be John, and that he would "make ready a people prepared for the Lord". So Luke brings out many of the minute human details leading up to the birth of Christ, as well as the most detailed account of Jesus's birth. Matthew carefully laid out Christ's kingly genealogy thru His earthly father Joseph; Luke follows Jesus's human genealogy thru His mother Mary.

It is only in Luke that we learn of the angel coming to Zacharias, it is only in Luke that we learn of the angel Gabriel telling Mary she will bear a Son, and only in Luke do we read about Mary's visit to Elizabeth and the baby leaping in her womb at the voice of Mary. It is only in Luke we hear of John the Baptist's birth and his early years growing up. Only Luke tells us why Joseph and Mary needed to leave Nazareth and travel to Bethlehem for a census, and only he gives a detailed account of a birth in a stable with a manger. Only Luke tells of an angel revealing to Shepherds that "there is born to you this day in the City of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord". And only Luke speaks of Christ's circumcision, and of Joseph and Mary's baby dedication in the Temple when Jesus was about 40 days old.

All of the most intricate details of the human side of Jesus are given to us in the Gospel of Luke. Luke was a physician, so naturally the Holy Spirit would use him to bring out these very real human events as they occurred, giving us this beautiful picture that we can relate to.

And it was a passage from Luke that Charles Schulz chose for Linus to read in a Charlie Brown Christmas which has brought the true story of Christmas to millions of kids who may only have had the Santa Claus story told to them otherwise.

And then we come to the Gospel of John. Matthew presented Christ as 'King', Mark presented Him 'as servant', Luke as the 'man', and John presents The Lord as 'God'.

He begins with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. There is no mention of anything about the physical aspects of Jesus being born, of family, or of genealogies. Who needs genealogy when you are the beginning of all things? John launches into the aspects of Christ that no human could have known anything about; it is only because the Holy Spirit revealed it to him that he could even conceive of the truths that he was privileged to reveal.

"In the beginning was the Word". Have you ever asked yourself why does John refer to Christ as 'the Word' and how do we know that he is talking about Jesus when he refers to the Word anyway?

Well that part is easy. All we have to do is read verse 14 and it is clear he is talking about Jesus. vs. 14 says "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

So it is clear John is referring to Jesus when he calls Him the Word, but why does he choose to call Him the Word?

Have you ever asked yourself that? I know that I have, and I have pondered that question for quite some time.

I think the first clue to answering that question is right here in this passage. Look with me at vs. 18. Here John states, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."

So John states that no one has seen "God at any time". This can be collaborated by many other passages of scripture.

Deut 4:12 says "And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the word, but saw no form; you only heard a voice."

I John 4:12 says "No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us"

Exodus chapter 20:22 and 23 says, "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel; 'you have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make anything to be with Me, gods of silver, or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves."

Now here God says to Moses "you have seen that I have talked with you from heaven" and then His next statement is "you shall not make any gods of silver or of gold". Now how are these related?... "I spoke with you from heaven, so don't make any graven images."

God goes on to say in verse 24, "An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. Verse 25: And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it."

So what is God saying to Moses here? He is saying "When you build an altar for Me, I want it built out of natural dirt or natural rock". Nothing about the altar could be thought of by anybody as representing an image of God. If you take a stone and carve it into a square or a triangle or any other shape, somebody in the crowd is going to believe that shape is representative of the image of God and next week in downtown Mount Sinai here's Shim'om the silver smith with a table of silver triangles yelling out "Get your image of God... You saw them here first!"

I think another passage that will shed light on this subject is I Kings chapter 19: 11&12

Here God is talking to Elijah, I Kings 19 vs. 11 and 12 "Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice."

He says here, there was a strong wind but the Lord was not in the wind, an earthquake but the Lord was not in the earthquake, a fire but the Lord was not in the fire, and then a still small voice.

All of this noisy stuff was just to get Elijah's attention and then a still small voice.....

"None of these things are representative of Me accept My voice, My words Elijah, this is what I want you to pay attention to."

Now I know we have drifted a long way away from the Gospel of John but listen to what Paul says in Colossians chapter 1 verse 15. "He [referring to Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

He says "Christ is the first born over all creation" so does that mean He was created? No! The word used here is 'prototokos', it means 'first in importance, the preeminent one'. It says "He is the first born from the dead", does this mean He was the first to die? No! Again same word 'prototokos' means 'He is first in the importance of His death', and obviously no one who ever has or ever will die all combined mean anything compared to the death of our Lord on the cross.

So back to the Gospel of John, he says "In the beginning was the Word". What are the very first words that we have given to us from God? Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." So John using the very same words Moses used in Genesis is saying from the beginning of time, from the very first explanation of Gods power, which we know not from some image of God, but from that "still small voice" we have the words of God and what John is saying is "Jesus is the physical representation of that invisible God". Just as Paul said in Colossians 1:15 "He is the image of the invisible God"

You have to ask yourself, "What do we know of the God that we worship?" Psalm 19 tells us that "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork."

So what we know of God we can see in His creation around us. In Romans 1:20 we read "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,"

Paul states "His invisible attributes," God is invisible, but Jesus is that visible reflection of God that we can see, He is the first born over all creation, the first in importance.

So what proof do we have that God exists? Scripture tells us by His creation we see God, and Jesus is representative of that, and we know God by His WORD and Jesus is the physical representation of that.

Everything that we know about this invisible God is made visible for us in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the exact image of the invisible God.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word Was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

Jesus was that little baby in a stable in Bethlehem but for the most part people then and people of today don't recognize that He is God, as well as the exact physical image of God sent to earth to save you and me. "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it".

John 1:10 and 11 says "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."

So just to clarify, and if you are not following me I understand completely because as I was developing this thought I had difficulty getting my mind wrapped around it and especially getting it down in words.

But we know from scripture that God is spirit and no one has seen God at any time. And we know that God wants no image of Him made of any kind. When we think about God and the evidence that God exists, we think of His creation, and God says when you think of My creation don't think of creating some graven image of Me, think of Jesus. And the other way we know that God exists is through His Word, the Bible and John's point here in the Gospel of John is 'Jesus is the exact physical representation of that Word'.

Colossians 1:19 and 20 "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

So what about this little baby 'born in a stable, lying in a manger'? In Luke 2:7 it says "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Where is Joseph? Where are the midwives? Luke indicates Mary delivered this Child completely by herself with no help from anyone, no family, no friends, all alone in a stable far away from her hometown.

I had to ask myself why did God set it up this way? Why did God plan that the mother of our Lord who is just about to deliver, has to sit on a donkey or worse yet walk the 120 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. You can't say it's to fulfill the prophesy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, because God is the one who gave the prophesy. He could have orchestrated it any way He wanted, but for some reason He planned it this way.

I just wonder if one of the keys to this situation can't be found back in the Gospel of John. You remember we read in verse 11 of chapter 1 that, "He came to His own and His own did not receive Him."

Well you know who else they didn't receive? Mary and Joseph! In their home town rumors would run rampant of the ill-conceived illegitimate baby Mary was having, they either could not or would not see that this was a miracle, that God the Creator of the Universe was taking on flesh to be the Redeemer of the world. They couldn't see it; they would rather gossip and tell stories.

These rumors persisted throughout Jesus's life. John 8 vs. 39 says, "They answered and said to Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father" (the devil). "Then they said to Him, We were not born of fornication; we have one Father-God."

These Jews in rejecting Jesus were hanging on to their lineage, "we know who our parents are, we were not born of fornicators as you were."

So could it be that God designed that Mary and Joseph were uprooted from friends and family so that Mary could have a peaceful delivery?

Could it be God's foresight into how mean people can be when they are self-righteous and judging others, that prompted Him to design this plan of moving Mary to this animal shelter where He could give her the space she needed to deliver our Lord and be able to relish the moment of bonding with her new baby without the condemnation of the crowd around her?

It's not recorded in scripture, but other historians of this time talk of the push for Mary to be put on trial and stoned if convicted of fornication. Even Joseph had to wrestle with this where scripture tells us he planned to put her away secretly and not make a public example of her, until God sent an angel to straighten him out.

God in His infinite foresight knew the world would reject the Christ. He came to His own and His own did not receive Him, and He was the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.

So the question for the world today, and for us, is everything surrounding this virgin birth of the Savior of the world was an absolute miracle orchestrated by God for the purpose of redeeming the very men who stand in the darkness and reject Him.

Can we see it for the miracle it is and rejoice that "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting Life?"

P.S. from the Welder's wife: After presenting this message in church, he said that he wished he had said more about the shepherds. Back in those days they were some of the hard working, humble, everyday guys, and they were the ones who were ecstatic over Christ's birth, & told everyone that they met!