

The Fullness of God in Him

Colossians 1:15-20

December 24, 2017

The Bible clearly represents the birth of Jesus Christ as a momentous event, one of unparalleled importance of cosmic even significance as we see the angels break through the heavens. So important was the birth of this baby that on the night that he was born an angelic host opened up the sky in the night. They violated the barrier that separates the immaterial world from the material world. They shone glory down upon a group of lowly shepherds with blinding light. And they proclaimed glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

Directed by the angels those shepherds went to see where the child was laid and they found him. They found him in a lowly manger as the angels had said. And then they bowed down and worshipped him. Not more than a year later a caravan of wise men, presumably traveling from Persia, they too came seeking

this child. They had studied the prophecies, probably prophecies of Daniel. Following a celestial sign, a star that appeared mysteriously in the east and it miraculously led them to Jerusalem and then on to Bethlehem.

These noble men when they entered the house, when they saw that child with Mary his mother they too fell down and worshipped him. They worshipped at the feet of the newborn baby boy. Even as we talk about this, even as we read the text, we need to understand, we need to recognize that many, many today scoff at this. Angels? Indeed.

Uncharted, rogue, miraculous stars? Oh please. Many consider themselves to be far too sophisticated to believe in such things as a miraculous virgin birth. Let alone all the miracles that he performed during his lifetime; the most important of which came after his life had ended, that is when he rose from the dead. And yet they still believe in Santa Clause. Those stories are for children they say, nothing more. Let's not get too caught up in all this religious stuff, those

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are ancient myths for an ancient time. We're way beyond that in our day aren't we?

We understand the darkness of unbelief, we ourselves, many of us can remember even, we've been there before. The unbelieving mind is deceived, it's blinded by a dominant, dominating secular world view in our day. People are raised to be biased against the existence of the supernatural. Without any philosophical justification for that at all. Most people simply believe what they've been told. They just believe what they have been taught in their version of Sunday School, which is the public school system that I was raised in. Without serious inquiry they hold to a secular faith. They hold to a religion we might call scientism.

But setting all that aside for a moment, I want us to ask a different question this morning. One that does not harbor an anti-supernatural skepticism. One that respects the true integrity of these biblical narratives that we have read. And here's the question. Why worship that baby? That is to say what justifies the worship of this baby? Why would both angels and

men humble themselves before this child? Changing their plans, changing habits, changing even their bodily posture to bow down and worship him.

Later on why would the apostle Paul pronounce an eternal curse on anyone who does not worship him. In 1 Corinthians 16:22 he writes, "If anyone does not love the Lord let him be accursed." What makes this person so special? What makes this one individual human being so special that our response to him is so dire and grave and so eternally significant? It is because of this reason. God chose this one man to fully glorify himself to everyone before all that is not God he sent this one to glorify himself. God chose to make his glory known in and by and through this one man.

And this one man did make God's glory known and he made it known perfectly. If there is an immortal, invisible, almighty, all sufficient God who created this universe, the earth and everything that we know, and there is. And if this God has revealed himself in his inerrant infallible word, the bible, and he has. And if this God revealed his wisdom in holy scripture

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providing the only sufficient explanation in the world that explains perfectly all that is, all of human experience, and he has done so.

The bible is God's word and as such it reveals the wisdom of the all seeing, all knowing, God. It reveals to us what no other world view is able to explain. Telling us where we come from, where we are going. It tells us how we got here. It also explains what went wrong with the world. It reveals the only sufficient source of the laws that govern our universe. Whether laws of nature like gravity or laws of physics. It explains laws of logic like the law of non-contradiction. It explains laws that govern human relationships like the absolutes that we all assume of morality and ethics.

The bible reveals the origin of language. It reveals the source, the person who gave us rules of grammar that govern our communication where make valid arguments, inferences, where we can advance thought. It explains the origin and standards of intangible principles like love, like beauty, like justice. All of this and so much more could be said besides, but this at

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least reveals in scripture an intellect that is infinitely superior to our own.

Unlike any intellect we are able to discover on our own given ten thousand lifetimes of human experience and investigation and inquiry, we would never find what is contained in here. With impeccable, unbroken, consistency, with no contradiction whatsoever, with perfect reliability God speaks through his word. Would you like to meet the man who can introduce you to the divine mind who gave us this?

To the divine mind who revealed everything, who created all things. Would you like to meet the man who can introduce you to that perfect being who is the source of all being? Even better, would you like to meet the man who can reconcile you to that divine person? So that when you meet him you are not utterly undone in the holy presence of the almighty God. Because folks, that's what Christmas is about. It's about worship, it's about the worship of the true and living God in and through the person of Jesus Christ.

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John wrote in John 1:18, "No one has ever seen God." The only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. That's what Christmas is about. It is in Jesus Christ that we behold the invisible God made visible. In him we find the ineffable God explained and interpreted. In him we observe the incomprehensible God incarnated to be like us, robed in human flesh. In him we behold the divine essence united with true humanity of this one perfect life, who is Jesus Christ.

This is the person that our world so desperately needs. Frankly folks this is the person that we all need every single day of our lives. In him is all our hope, in him is all our joy, in him all of our questions are answered. All curiosities are satisfied. Most immediately, most fundamentally, in him all our sins are forgiven. Our lives are freed from sin and sorrow and the fear of coming judgment. Our hearts are set free from corruption. Our consciences become clear and our minds become truly alive that we might know and admire and worship our God.

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The more we know Jesus Christ the dearer he becomes to us and like angels and the best of men and women, from prophets to priests to kings, from lowly shepherds who had to work on Christmas eve to noble wisemen, to the angelic hosts. Like all who truly know him we likewise fall down in worship. With one voice, in one accord, we praise his holy name. We love him profoundly and we obey him joyfully.

Why do we bow down? Because we worship. We worship at his feet. We worship the one true and living God at the feet of Jesus Christ. And I can think of no better text to show you how Christ fully glorified and manifested God to us than the one found in the first chapter of Colossians. If you would, please turn in your bibles to that first chapter of Colossians.

There is a word of greeting from the apostle Paul. This is a church, by the way that he never, he didn't start. It was actually one of his dear disciples that he evangelized that went and started the church in Colossae, all the churches in the Lycus valley like Laodicea, all through the Lycus valley, those churches were started by a man named Epaphras. Paul had never

visited there and yet he wrote this letter because of great concern.

There's an opening section of greeting and then he gets right into a prayer report to speak of how he gives thanks for them. In the opening section there, verses 9-14, Paul describes his prayers of gratitude for this church. Reveals how he has been praying for them with specifics and in verse 11, if you'll look there, he blesses them he says, "May you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

Stop there, what is, what is "the inheritance of the saints in light?" It's God; God is the inheritance of the saints. The saints inherit not mere riches and treasures, not power and influence, not even merely the heavens and the earth. Oh that's all way too small. The saints, they inherit the maker of all that is. Amazing.

Look at verse 13, this God our inheritance, he is the one who "has delivered us from the domain of darkness." He's, "transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Look, to know this God, to receive him as your inheritance, one must first be reconciled to him. One must first have his sins forgiven, completely taken away, so that the slate is wiped clean.

Not only that, but we must not just be innocent or spotless before God, but also we must be perfect before God. That is we must fulfill all righteousness. Having fulfilled his perfect law, having perfectly conformed to his holiness. Impossible, you say, and you're right about that. How am I, filled with sin, going to be, have all my sins, how can I purge myself of all my sins? How can I completely fulfill a law that I've already broken? No one but God can conform to the holiness of God.

But that's the good news for these Colossian saints. The Gospel for them and for all of us is that what we cannot do,

what is impossible for us, is possible with God. For God has accomplished this through his beloved Son. Incarnate in Jesus Christ, in Christ is our only hope. And now the problem for the Colossians, there are a number of influences from the surrounding culture that were distracting them from their devotion and simplicity of knowing and loving and worshipping Jesus Christ.

It's not, like, unlike our own day. So many, many distractions in their world as there are in ours. And Paul wants these Colossians and he would have you and me as well beloved to refocus, to remove all distraction, to power down everything in your life that's trying to get in to your head, and devote ourselves instead to knowing and loving and worshiping Jesus Christ and him alone.

Sort of recapture their attention, to reset their focus, Paul writes the following words, look at verse 15. "He," that is the one in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins, "he is the image of the invisible God," he is, "the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on

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earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authority, all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

Listen, if the assurance of your eternal condition, your eternal salvation, is guaranteed by the person described in that text you can have absolute unshakeable confidence that you have peace with God. No more to be plagued by sin. No more to be overcome by temptation. No more to be defiled in your conscience. No more to live in fear of judgment, of rejection, of condemnation. No more to live in regret of what should have been and could have been but is not because you were not able.

Listen, no more need to live in fear of man. No more need to live in fear of his deceiving and confusing and all

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contradictory opinion. You do not have to worry that you're not able to follow the, the so called higher life of enlightened mystics. You don't have to concern yourself that you're outside the so called secret knowledge of any modern day Gnostic. No need to feel intimidated in the presence of those who are studied, and cultured, and lettered, and educated in modern philosophy and modern theory and modern science and all the rest.

Why? Because Jesus is the one in whom Colossians 2:3, he is the one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." You know what all means in that text? All means all, and that's all, all means. If you're his, and he is yours, then the vault of wisdom and knowledge is wide open to you. For Colossians 2:9 and 10, "In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."

Christ, since he is all surpassingly supreme, you can find in him all confidence, and assurance, and hope, and joy, and reason for gratitude. We are talking here about the greatest

gift of all time. So Merry Christmas folks. This is the gift God gave the world. Which is known and enjoyed by all who believe the Gospel.

Christ fully glorified God. That's what this text is teaching. So let's unwrap God's gift of his Son that's found in this passage by describing what makes Christ here all, so all surpassingly glorious, so worthy of all our praise. Which demands that we bow on our knees and worship him. We're going to look at just two points this morning. You're going to write down in your notes, if you'd like to, two points: Christ the creator and Christ the redeemer. Christ the creator and Christ the redeemer.

First point, let's consider the glory of God revealed in Christ the creator. The glory of God revealed in Christ the creator. The Son, as we see here in verses 15-17, the Son glorified God by creating the world and sustaining it. He glorified God by creating and sustaining the world. Let's start in verse 15, it says "he is the image of the invisible God, the

first born of all creation." The word, image, there, it's a word *eikon* which, which we get the word, icon, from.

It can refer to what represents something else or what manifests something else. Surely both are true of Christ, representing and manifesting God, but the meaning here is manifestation. He is the image, he is the manifestation of the invisible God, Colossians 2:9 as we just read, "in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily." So Jesus is an exact visible manifestation of an invisible God. And I hope that you see that is an incredible statement.

What is he saying here? Because it sounds logically contradictory to speak of making God, who is according to his essential nature, invisible. What does it mean to make him visible? That seems to meddle with one of God's essential attributes doesn't it, you see the problem right? If there is one single ever so slight of a change to the essential nature of God, just one micron of modification in the essential being of God, well then he ceases to be all that he is.

If he, in his essential nature, is not invisible, he ceases to be God. How can Paul possibly say here that the Son brings God invisibility to visibility. Well by virtue of creation, first of all. By virtue of creation. All creation from the farthest, largest, star to the nearest smallest atom, all creation reveals something about God.

As Paul writes in Romans 1:20, God's "invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made." The Son has made God known by creating and sustaining the world. For, verse 16, "For by him 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." That's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? That's the point.

This is why the Son of God is called in verse 15 "the first born of all creation." Not the first one born, as in he's

brought into existence through a womb, that's not the sense here. But preeminent one, first born being preeminent. It anticipates his incarnation. The word first born, is the word *prototokos* and it can refer to birth order in a literal sense. But the literal sense provides for a, a metaphorical sense which is common use in the ancient world. It comes to us with immense, weighty theological significance and meaning.

The word first born, *prototokos*, refers to not just first birth order but all that's conveyed on and given to the first born in a family. So it's the status of the first born. David though the youngest of his family was called the first born of his family. All the status of the first born, the honor, the privilege of the first born, all the rights the privileges, the honor, the responsibility of the father, all of it, transferred without diminishment, without degradation, to the one given the status of the first born. That's what Paul is conveying here.

The Son is the image of the invisible God. Which gives him the highest privilege as the first born of all creation. Understand this, though mankind, in Genesis 1 and 2, mankind was

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created in God's image. God created him male and female. Adam and Eve created in his image, representative head over all of creation Adam was. And yet Adam and Eve fell into sin. Eve was tempted, Adam transgressed, knowingly transgressed.

They tarnished and distorted that image and everyone born in the likeness of Adam has been born into a tarnished and distorted image of God ever since. The remnants are there. We can recognize our creator, we still bare his image in many ways. Even fallen mankind does. But it wasn't until Jesus Christ, until he came in the flesh, that we saw in him without any diminishment, no distortion, no perversion, no degradation whatsoever. We saw in him the perfect image of God.

Many of you know that the men in this church have been getting together on Saturday mornings over the past year to study theology. We have learned and meditated on some incredible realities of God. We've rejoiced in those things, in fact I can't understand why all men in our church, if you're not working, you've got some family thing, why you're not there! Because we are loving studying the attributes of God. It's

absolutely wonderful, it's bringing awe and joy to everything we do here.

We've learned and meditated on incredible realities. The attributes of God who has made himself known and revealed himself through creation. In the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, posted on our website, you can read it for yourself, but we learned this statement very, very careful and precise and accurate in its language. It says this, "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God. Whose subsistence is in and of himself. Infinite in being and perfection, whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself. A most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions. Who alone hath immortality. Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto. Who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute."

The confession continues in another section, "God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself, is alone in and unto himself all sufficient. Not standing in need of any creature which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from

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them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things." Glorious language. Precise, accurate.

Folks, that God explains all that there is; no other God, no other system, no finding of science, none of it explains all that there is, only that God. And if you've done any study in comparative religions, you know that there is no other God in any other religion like the one described with such biblical accuracy here. Everything from those statements comes directly from scripture. It's not what we've come up with, it's what God has revealed about himself in the bible. There is no one like him.

And the Son of God, that babe, laid in a manger, he has made that God known. He has made the one who is invisible, and incomprehensible, and unfathomable to us, all those attributes of this invisible God, he has made visible; starting with creation, starting with all of the things that have been made. Like a single beam of light, we men found this illustration helpful as to understand how God's perfect being could show up

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Greeley

all over the world and refract all over in the glory of creation. It's like a single beam of light that passes through a prism and reveals to us a myriad of colors in the spectrum and yet each ray shares the same essential properties of that original beam on the other side of the prism. In a similar way the single beam of God's perfection, his invisible essence, it's passed through the prism of Christ in creation.

And on the, on this side of creation, what we can see, what we can know as creatures within God's creation, we perceive his invisible attributes, his eternal power, his divine nature, clearly perceived in the things that have been made. The God who said let there be light has been revealed by Christ. Who is the first born, the preeminent one of all creation, because he created all things. What things? Look back at verse 16, "things in heaven and on earth." Which is to say all the things that are up there and all the things that are down here. Pretty simple, Paul is speaking very comprehensibly of spatial reality. He's leaving nothing out.

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When he writes about things that are in heaven and on earth it's basically like conveying the east and the west of space. That is to say there is no place the son did not create. Also he has created all things visible and invisible, which is to say he created things of material substance as well as things of immaterial substance, or subsistence. Scientific inquiry in our time has been captivated by the material world, and rightly so. Everybody understands that, from galaxies, to atomic particles as we focus our telescopes upward, and our microscopes downward, everything in between, it utterly boggles the mind and captures our imagination. A single field of study can exhaust a thousand lifetimes devoted to learning. This vast material world is at, beyond our comprehension. But to conduct all of those scientific investigations we rely on all of the realities of the immaterial world. Immaterial nature.

There are realities like mathematics, like laws of logic, like principles of uniformity and inference. All of which are independent, and absolute, invariant and universal. They have no material form and yet we rely on them all the time. The Son of God created all of it; material and immaterial, time and space,

things visible and invisible, things material, things immaterial.

Not only that but the son created all the different levels of power and influence. Verse 16, "Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." Whatever the structure, whatever the politics, whatever the rankings, whatever the relative relations of power, whether human or angelic, power structures, the Son of God made it all. I'm talking about human governments, whether regional or national or international, from Barack Obama to Donald Trump, from Vladimir Putin to Xi Jinping, we're talking about all of it.

We're talking about angelic government as well. Whether holy angels or unholy demons, all of them are under the authority and sovereignty of Christ because he, the Son of God, created all things. Yes, even Satan and his demons are held fast at the bitter end of Christ's leash to do God's bidding. It's not a yin and yang, it's not dark verses light, there's no equal power to God in the universe. All things created through him and for him. By him all things are created, John 1:3 says "all

things are made through him and without him was not anything made that was made." Again, pretty comprehensive. If there's anything in the created category the Son of God is the one who did it.

Which means, contrary to any modern day Arian, the Son of God is outside of the created category. Anything that's been created he did it. So when God in the beginning decreed "Let there be," it was the Son of God who executed his decree and thus all things are created through him. Then at the end of verse 16 notice it says "all things are created through him and for him." For him, that is to say the Son of God is not only the beginning, not only the means and the agency, but he is the end of all things.

He is the end for which all things were created, he is the culmination, he is the climactic goal. In order that the son may bring all glory to the Father. And so the Son of God takes very keen interest in caring for this world that he has been given to create. He preserves it. He sustains it, verse 17, "He is before all things and in him all things hold together." That verb, hold

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together, translated hold together, it means they continue to exist. They continue to endure in a condition of coherence, in a condition of integrity. They don't disintegrate, because he wills it to remain together.

Listen, the only way that things can cohere, the only way that things can adhere to one another, bind together, stick together, is because God willed it to be so through Christ. The Son of God makes it so. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that the son sustains the world, he upholds the universe by the word of his power. For every single atom, little atomic particles, sub atomic particles, every single atom in the universe, the only reason it remains stuck together. The only reason it doesn't split apart and cause an atomic explosion, is because the Son of God is holding it together by the word of his power. Atomic scientists understand perfectly the power of the Son of God in holding things together whether they know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord or not. They know it in ignorance, if they don't know him.

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Whenever they stop to ponder what, what forces keep the nucleus of an atom from blowing itself apart they are utterly stymied. The nucleus of an atom consists of positively charged protons and neutrally charged neutrons and it has an overall positive charge. By all calculation, by all observation, by all understanding, that should not be able to cohere, to exist, to be, to remain stable, because particles with the same charge repel one another. So physicists, they realize that there is another force, an invisible force holding the nucleus of an atom together. They don't have a name for it and so they've defaulted to the best name physicists can come up with, they call it the strong force. What they perceive, but they do not know or understand, God has here identified for us. That unidentified strong force holding the nucleus of the atom together is none other than the Son of God. And we know him by name, Jesus.

For many of us we know him personally as Savior, Redeemer, and friend. Son of God upholds the universe by the word of his power and by that power all things hold together. Galaxies, solar systems, ecosystems and yes even atoms and their little nuclei. But we know him not as an impersonal strong force, we know him as Savior, Redeemer, and friend. But that's just one

level of glory folks. That's just, that's just the context within which his true glory is known and this is staggering to consider because the true glory of Christmas and the true Christmas gift of God in his son is what Paul speaks of next in the passage.

The Son of God, he set the stage by creating the world, verses 15-17, then he redeemed the world in verses 18-20. After it had fallen into sin and corruption, that's our second point. Christ the redeemer, the glory of God revealed in Christ the Redeemer. That's our second point, the glory of God revealed in Christ the Redeemer. The Son of God glorified God the Father by redeeming the church and by reconciling to God all things. And here we should add the word fully glorified, completely glorified. That is that Christ fully glorified God, he completely glorified God by redeeming the church.

When he created the universe and all things in it, he was just getting started. Here is where he completes it. Here is where he fulfills it. He redeems the church and reconciles all things into proper relationship with God. Paul introduces the

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thought in verse 18, first sentence, he is the head of the body the church. Grammatically that kind of stands out in the Greek text because it's the central thought about the supremacy of the Son of God. It's the turning point of this text, it's the, the crux of the matter, it's the crucial point the hinge upon which all depends. That is he could not reveal God's glory to us apart from creation and he couldn't reveal the fullness of God's glory apart from redemption.

And Beloved this is something for us to behold. God's eternal power and his divine nature have been clearly perceived in creation through what has been made. But it's the mercy of God, it's his kindness to fallen sinners, it's his love and his grace, it's his compassion and his tenderness, those are the attributes that he waited to send Christ into the world to reveal fully and complete the fullness of God's glory. Out in the mass of fallen condemned humanity God has seen fit to redeem a people for his own possession. And Paul calls those people the church in verse 18. They are a people for whom Titus 2:14 says Jesus Christ gave himself to redeem them from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession and who are zealous for good works.

This people for his possession Paul has called this people the body, the church here in verse 18. So we see the glory of Christ and thus we see the full glory of God the Father in two ways. That Christ is the head of the body, he is head of the church, body and church, same people, two ways of looking at it. First that Christ is head of the body, the body here is a metaphor that speaks of organic connection. Just as your head is attached to your body and you really want to keep that connection, same way here.

When glorifying God in creation there remained a creator, creature distinction. He didn't enter into it like he does in redemption. When glorifying God in redemption the Son of God entered into that work. The Son of God took on flesh. He entered into his creation through the tender womb of the virgin Mary. To become a tender baby, helpless, dependent, laid in a manger. Then he grew up to become the head of the body of a redeemed people. The word head in the New Testament primarily speaks of authority. Where the head goes the body will follow. What the head decides to do, like produce good works, the body is going

to perform. So Christ is here pictured the leader of this body, the head of the body, the authority that directs the body according to his perfect will.

There's a second way of looking at this people. Christ is the head not just of the body, but of the church, the church. In Greek the word church is the word *ekklesia*, and it's constructed out of a preposition, *ek*, which means out of and the verb *kaleo*, to call. So, literally to call out of. So these are, the church, are the called out ones. There are many assemblies, in, before the New Testament. Assemblies that were political. Assemblies that were according to trades, and guilds and things like that. There were sports assemblies and all the rest just like we have today.

So this is a word that's in common usage as a specific assembly which has certain characteristics. Certain reason that they're gathered together. So this word *ekklesia* refers to an assembly that's called out of the mass of condemned humanity. It is an assembly that is united together by divine grace in

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redemption. It's united by the Holy Spirit in union with Christ and called out of that mass for a special purpose.

Peter puts it this way, 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light." Christ is the head of that assembly. He is the head of that people. He is the sole authority over the church, and why wouldn't he be.

As verse 18 continues we see that he is the church's beginning. He is the first born from the dead, and I'll tell you folks this is the most costly Christmas gift ever given. Because it was purchased at the expense of the life of Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem, he was laid gently and tenderly in a manger, he was wrapped in swaddling cloths, but he died in Jerusalem. He was nailed brutally to a cross and he was wrapped in grave cloths and laid in a tomb. This perfect image of God, this first born, he was born to die. Christ, the all perfect, all sufficient, sacrifice for the sins of his people the church.

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As it says in Isaiah 53:10, it was the will of the Lord, Yahweh, to crush him. He has put him to grief.

So like a pascal lamb, raised from its birth to be without spot or defect without blemish, without stain, in order that it might be slaughtered in sacrifice to provide a temporary atonement for the offeror. So Christ was raised by God to be the lamb of God, slain for the sins of his people, sacrificed for the church. God accepted that perfect sacrifice.

He laid himself down, he died on the cross. He was laid in a tomb and then God demonstrated his approval of that sacrifice, that it was indeed acceptable. He raised Jesus up from the dead. Proclaiming forever: Yes, I accept you my beloved. We've all heard that in the most famous of bible verses, John 3:16, "For God so," or thus, "loved the world," loving the world in this way, "that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

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Greeley

Those who die with Christ to sin and to self, they are the ones who will share in the resurrection life that Jesus has, that Jesus possesses, and that he gives freely to all who believe. For them Jesus Christ is, verse 18, he is the beginning, he is the first born from the dead. That word first born again, *prototokos*, just like we saw back in verse 15, there he was first born in the sense of honor and preeminence by virtue of creating all created things. But here Christ is first born as the first one, the forerunner and the progenitor of a new humanity. That's why he is called the beginning. It's the word *arche*.

Over in the second volume written by Luke the evangelist we're going through Luke volume 1, you could say, Luke's Gospel in our regular Sunday services, we'll be getting back into that in January, but over in the second volume written by Luke the evangelist, Acts 1:1, Luke summarized there the content of his entire first volume. The Gospel of Luke, and he says it this way, here's the summary, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach."

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

Began? That's a lot of stuff. "Began to do and teach." Very important to keep in mind. The Gospel of Luke along with all the other Gospels, Matthew, Mark and John, they're merely the beginning. They record what Jesus began to do. All his miracles, all his mercy, all his compassion, and what Jesus began to teach: The Sermon on the Mount, his parables. Jesus is the beginning of a new humanity.

Which is why Paul calls him elsewhere the last Adam. The first creation suffered bondage to corruption because of the failure of the first Adam. But the second creation enjoys the victory of the last Adam. Which is why it is written the first man became a living being, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. If anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation.

So Jesus Christ, this babe born in Bethlehem who died on Calvary's cross, he's the progenitor of a brand new humanity. Behold the old is passing away. The old humanity, dead in the sin of Adam is going to die off. They who remain in Adam, they who remain in their sin and corruption, they who remain doing

what they want to do, willingly enslaved to their sins, they will all perish in everlasting fire.

But, behold all things are being made new. And this new humanity, for all who repent and believe the Gospel, they are united to Christ, they're alive forevermore, that's the Gospel. Paul wrote about that Gospel summarizing its essence in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and then he appeared to many."

That's the true hope of Christmas. Yes, it's about the birth of the Son of God, the incarnation as he's robed in true humanity. Yes the hope of Christmas is in the unparalleled righteousness of Jesus Christ as he fulfilled all the law of God in perfect submission and without sin. But all those truths would be meaningless to us, would fall on deaf ears, hard hearts, would meet blind eyes, if it weren't for the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. He came to die, that we would have life.

God accepted that perfect sacrifice, demonstrating his full approval, raising him from the dead, that all who believe in Christ would likewise follow him in resurrection life. We know Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:14, that "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." So Christ is the first born. He's the *prototokos* in creation and now also in redemption he is the *prototokos*. He is the first born, he is preeminent, verse 18, "In order that in everything he might be preeminent."

You know what God keeps doing here in this text? It's what he does throughout all of scripture, he keeps pointing us to Jesus Christ. Look at him. Look carefully at him. Meditate on Christ, why? Look at verse 19, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." That's why. Would you spurn God's gift to you by looking elsewhere? Would you spurn God's gift to you by looking at trinkets, trifles, trivialities?

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Greeley

Again back to the joy of Christmas. God is pleased to glorify himself by creating the world in, through and for his son. But he's pleased to demonstrate the fullness of his glory by redeeming the church in Christ. In Christ the fullness of God's glory is made complete, it's made perfect. Showing his compassion for sinners, his love for his people, his grace to save them. We started by asking why worship this baby? Why do angels and men bow down at the feet of a mere baby? Why worship this man? Because beloved, Jesus Christ is God's gift for us at Christmas. His own beloved son is the gift that he gave to you and to me. Will you turn from your sins? Will you look to Christ? Will you look upon him, meditate, reflect and believe in him for eternal life? You should, you know why?

Because verse 20, look at it, God has chosen through Christ, he's chosen to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven. Well, what does that mean? Does this mean that everyone will ultimately be saved? Even those who reject his word? Even those who spurn his grace? Even those who live exactly as they want to live indulging in their disobedience, making all their excuses?

Is Paul teaching Universalism here? The eventual salvation of the entire human race without exception? No, not at all. Not at all. Because if that were the case then we would need to include in the "all things, whether in heaven or on earth" we'd need to put all things demonic too, wouldn't we? That would be consistent but we know from scripture that "Satan and all who follow him will be thrown alive in the lake of fire that burns with sulfur," Revelation 19:20.

Those who remain devoted to their sins, according the Revelation 21:8, that is "the cowardly, the faithless," you say unbelieving, "the detestable, the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

You think that dying here and now, as terrifying as that is, the process is to many of us, you think that's the problem? That's not the problem, this is just the first death. The second

death is the death that never dies. The second death is the death in the lake of fire. Living forever in torment. No, there will be people who go there.

Reconciling to himself all things, that does not mean universal salvation. But the truth expressed here, it's a sobering reality, it's one that gives a word of warning here at the end of the text as we think about those who ignore God's gift of Christ at Christmas, but it is at the same time a warning to those who are living and that means it's a gracious warning. This is grace from God. For those who do not believe, for those who refuse to repent, that is a situation that cannot remain in perpetuity. That is a situation that God will not abide.

He is going to bring all things into right relationship to himself, whether in grace or in judgment. He's eventually going to call a stop to it all. To rebel against the gracious creator and sustainer of the universe, God will not allow it. His justice, it must be satisfied, otherwise if it's not satisfied and he winks at sin or he lets things pass without it

GRACE CHURCH



Greeley

being punished fully and completely, well then he forfeits the attribute of justice. Do you want a judge like that in your court room? Do you want a judge like that who's going to let some things go, because he's a nice guy?

No, we demand justice from a judge, that's what makes him a just judge. Should we expect any less of the judge of all the earth who will do what's right? The rebellion of fallen humanity that's a wrong that must be made right, which is in its essence a kind of reconciliation, that is to make things right, to put things into proper reckoning. It's like reconciling a financial account that's been out of order for far too long. And God will in Christ reconcile all things to himself. Even to those who do not bow the knee in worship. He will make them bow.

Same truth we find in Philippians 2:9-11 Paul says, "God has highly exalted Jesus Christ and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." That's reconciliation folks. For those of us who repent

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

and believe, for those of us who belong to Christ's body to his elect church we're reconciled to God by his amazing grace.

He initiated, he saved us, not by works that we had done, but by his mercy he saved us. Through Christ we have peace by the blood of his cross, verse 20. We're reconciled because he has turned us from enemies into friends and we now bow not because we're forced to bow, but because we long to bow. We rejoice to bow before him and worship.

You think those angels were compelled, by some external force, to proclaim glory to God in the highest? No. They rejoiced and so too do all who have been saved by his grace. But for those who refuse to bow, for those who remain fixed in their pride and their self-centeredness and their love for sin, they will be made to bow one day. They will be crushed beneath his rod of iron.

And so friends this Christmas we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Bow before him. If you are already

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Greeley

reconciled to God implore others on behalf of Christ to do the same as you've done, if it's good for you why isn't it good for the entire world. That's what Christmas is about, the fullness of God in Christ. God was pleased to make all his fullness known in him. He's the one who created the world. He's the one who completed the glory of God by redeeming a people for his own possession. Bow with me before him now in a word of worship and prayer.

Our eternal God and heavenly Father, you are infinite, perfect, immortal, invisible, the only wise God and we come before you on this Christmas eve on Sunday to worship you here on the Lord's day. The day that we remember and worship because this is the day that you resurrected Jesus Christ from the dead. You demonstrated your approval of his sacrifice for our sins, the sins of all who believe. We thank you for accepting that sacrifice as you must because he is the perfect one, he is the one you ordained, he is the one you decreed, and in him you have decreed all of us who believe.

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Greeley

We give ourselves wholly and fully to you thanking you once again as we draw near to this tender time of Christmas celebration remembering the birth of Jesus Christ. Tender babe laid in a manger, there in a cattle stall. Nothing humanly speaking to commend him but an unstoppable force by your divine decree and will. We love you Father because of Jesus Christ. We worship you Father because of Jesus Christ. But we ask that you would be pleased with our celebrations this Christmas, as we proclaim the glory of his Gospel and uplift the son as you would have us do. Please help us to do that by your Holy Spirit. May we be fully pleasing to you conforming to his image by your grace. It's in Jesus' name we pray.