



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

January 6, 2013

Epiphany 1

Sermon Text: [Hebrews 1:1-9](#)

Pastor Jonathan Bourman

First Lesson: [Isaiah 60:1-6](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 72](#)

Second Lesson: [Ephesians 3:2-12](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Give Jesus An Upgrade at Christmastime

Maybe you noticed in there, and then again, maybe you didn't, that there wasn't a manger. There wasn't a hint of hay. There was no Mary. There was no Joseph. And there weren't even any angels, at least not in the way we might expect. In fact, if you really think about what I just read to you, there is not a word about what we traditionally have come to know as Christmas.

So what in the world does the writer to the Hebrews have to say to us during the Christmas season? That's a good question. We can begin to get an answer to that question by making an observation. The writer is abrupt. If you didn't know better, you might even say the writer is impolite. You might even say he is rude.

When you get a gift, you always say "thank you" because it's etiquette. It's manners. It's the right thing to do. When you sit down and you write a letter to somebody, you start with a greeting. It's etiquette. It's the right thing to do. If you are an ancient Christian writing to ancient people, you are going to say something like this, "To so and so, grace and peace to you." But the writer to the Hebrews doesn't do that.

So the question is, why does the writer to the Hebrews just dispense with the niceties? Why does he just jump right in? The answer is, it must have been bad. It must have been really bad. Sort of like when the paramedics show up at your house and they don't say "Good morning. How are you today?" They get out the paddle.

So it must have been bad that the writer of the Hebrews just throws the niceties out the window and he jumps right in. It must have been an emergency situation. It turns out it was. He tells us right away what was happening here is that Jesus was suffering a massive downgrade. Did you catch it in there? Let me read it: "*So he (Jesus) became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say.*" I could keep reading but you can notice what he is arguing right away, can't you? Jesus is better than angels.

I should clarify something for us all though that Jesus is never called Jesus in here, and that's intentional. He's always called God's Son because the writer wants to focus us on Jesus' Son-ship and his deity. Now that brings up some questions for us. Why does the writer have to emphasize Jesus' Son-ship and deity then? Why does he have to argue? They should know better that Jesus is better than angels. And why does he

have to throw the niceties out the window and dive right into a letter? The answer is that it must have been bad. Jesus was suffering a massive downgrade in the minds of those ancient people.

Here's a temptation, right? Those bad ancient Christians...before we shake our heads in disappointment at them, let's realize something. The letter to the Hebrews is a unique book in the New Testament. Philippians was written to Philippians. Colossians was written to Colossians. Galatians was written to Galatians. Specific people, specific places, but not Hebrews. Hebrews was specifically written to be written to everybody. Hebrews was written to be an all inclusive universal tape for Christianity. So that tells us something. It tells us that this downgrading of Jesus happens all over Christendom. What's unique to situations is how that plays itself out. For these Christians at this time the problem was angelology. The people were all into angels and spirits and stuff, and it was really messing up their spiritual life. That's not our problem today. We downgrade Jesus in a different way.

God gave my wife and I a few months ago, four months ago now, a chance to adopt a little girl. I was sitting with her reading a book called "What is Christmas." The jacket of the book promised this...it will teach kids the true meaning of Christmas. Apparently the author of the book thought that kids would have trouble cutting through the mistletoe and the presents and the cookies and the time with family and Santa Claus to finally realize that Christmas is about Jesus. This Christmas season that came home to me in a powerful way that the author was right.

Back home at Trinity, I went to a preschool Christmas program. One by one the kids came on the screen and they were asked, before they were intentionally taught by our teachers, what Christmas was about. You can maybe guess what they said they were asked, what is Christmas? Each child had one answer, one word. Guess what it was. Presents. That brought home to me a scary spiritual reality. The irony at Christmastime is that it's at Christmastime when Jesus has the most competition, right?

Isn't that just like the devil? The devil isn't going to show up to mature Christians with a pitchfork in his hand. That's not how it works. The devil, the Bible tells us, shows up as an angel of light. He is going to show up in the most innocent way, with the most malevolent evil plans. So what happens is Jesus gets downgraded at Christmas. It happens in our worship life. It happens in our home life.

Every year, since I was a little kid, you go to church and you go to the Christmas programs that the kids put on, and they are doing [Luke 2](#), you know what I'm talking about, and they get to that part about the angels, and then all the kids go "suddenly appeared!" And everybody looks at each other and we grin. I'm so guilty of that because it's so cute. In that moment, Jesus gets downgraded for cuteness, because I fail to ponder the fact that for the first time in world history the circumstances demanded an angel choir, and Jesus gets downgraded.

It happens in our home life too. Every Christmastime we make sure to get the perfect Christmas tree. And we decorate those cookies. But not for a minute does the family sit down together just as a family to worship the Christ. So Jesus gets downgraded. Even the very Christian act of giving gifts can take center stage to the more important, the most important act of receiving God's gift, the Christ child at Christmastime. Do you see what I'm saying? Jesus gets downgraded.

This is what is beating on God's heart as he dives into this Scripture. This is what he says about it. Because it's an emergency situation, he dispenses with the niceties and he dives right in to lay a message. This is the message he has for us... *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but 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 representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.* Do you see what he is saying in there? He is saying... in the past, in many different places, for many different people, God spoke.

But he is not going to do it that way anymore because he does not have to because the message is here. Do you see what he's saying? He's saying Jesus is it. Jesus is God's message to humankind. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the beginning and the end of everything that God intends to say to us. By the way, he says if you have any doubts about that, he's not just a message. He is the appointed heir. He is the rightful owner of everything that exists. That's what the writer says. And he's not just the owner of it. He's not just the recipient of everything that exists. He is the creator of it. Do you see what he is saying? Walk through this with me.

Jesus is the end all be all of God's message to us. Jesus is the appointed heir of everything that exists. Jesus is the one through whom all the universe was created. Do you see what he is saying? He is saying, the writer tells us, that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory. Do you know what that means? That means that when you look at Jesus, when you see him in the Scriptures, you are seeing everything that God is. The writer says he is the exact representation of God's being. Do you see what the writer is doing here? He is saying that Jesus, in one word, is God. He is taking Jesus and elevating him to the highest heights of deity.

There is no shortcut to getting the heart and the mind around the reality that God came and he walked this earth. You know what I find amazing every Christmas? Nobody questions, nobody in the world, non-Christians, Christians, nobody questions historical reality that Jesus was born. They question his identity. They question if he rose from the dead. They question when he came. Nobody questions the historical reality that Jesus came. We know that Jesus is God. God came and he walked this earth.

We had a Christmas concert at Trinity, I guess it was 2-3 weeks ago now. One of the songs that really hit me during that concert was a song called "Mary, Did You Know". It is a song, if you didn't notice this, that is dedicated to taking Jesus and elevating him to the heights of deity. Some of the lines in there are so moving. Here are some of the

awesome ones that really hit me that night. “Mary, did you know that your Son walked where angels trod?” “Mary, did you know that when you kiss your Son that you’ve kissed the face of God?” “Mary, did you know that your Son is the great I Am?” That is an overwhelming reality.

Think about it. The One who is the rightful heir of the entire universe, the One who took the sun and the moon and the stars and put them in orbit, the One who knew you and knit you together in your mother’s womb, that One came. That One walked right here. I’ll tell you this...he didn’t do it to be an anthropologist. It’s not like he was sitting up in heaven one day and he was going “Dad, Father, I just want to go see what it’s like to live with the natives down there. I want to check it out.” Jesus came, God came because there was a God-sized job to do. Only God could come here and provide the purification for all the sins in the history of the world. Only God could come and provide rivers of forgiveness that wash and flow over every aspect of our human brokenness. Only God could do that. Correction... only God did.

Here’s what the writer told us. He takes us right before the cross in the Christmas season. He provided purification for sins. We talk about this during the Christmas season. We say “Jesus is the reason for the season.” I like to think of it in a little different way, from God’s perspective. The reason for the season is you. The reason for the season is me. Jesus came, God came to provide purification for us.

Back to our original question... what does the writer to the Hebrews say to us during the Christmas season? He says, for a minute, forget about the hay. Don’t worry about the manger. Don’t even bother focusing on Mary or Joseph. He says to take this moment to give Jesus, in your soul, the ultimate upgrade. Stop right now and claim Jesus’ deity in your heart. God had to come because there was a God-sized job to do. He had to provide purification for sins. And he did that.

Now, if you catch my drift, that gives us the freedom to do everything we do at Christmastime with that heavy on our souls. Grin when the Christmas programs happen and the kids are so cute. Put your tree up. Decorate cookies. Do it all. Have all the warm and grand trappings that are Christmas at Christmastime. Do it all. But through it all, stop and peer into the manger and realize to yourselves that lying in the manger is all the fullness of the deity. Realize that the maker, the owner, the upholder, the receiver of all that exists got squeezed out of a birth canal. He met his mom. He began to experience the world as one of us, and for all of us. He came because there was a God-sized job to do, the purification for sins.

Do you know what that means? It means it’s not just happy talk, to say that we are fully saints of God. Because in Christ, we actually are. Amen.