

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

The Rev. Jonathan Gibson

Title: What Child is This

Christmas Eve at 10:00 PM

The Text: Hebrews 1:1-4

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

.....

So here it is Christmas Eve. It is a time of the year the sparkles with lights and music that lifts our spirits out of the ordinary routine of life into a world of joyful exuberance. One carol that I have come to enjoy this season is called "Christmas Day", by Michael W. Smith. I would like us to have a listen to it now.

Christmas Day

Snow covered rooftops
Lights on the trees
The sound of singing I hear down every street
Families have gathered from miles away
Oh merry Christmas
It's Christmas day

You see that old tree down Cotton Lane
Those lights keep shining
It's always the same
We hear the church bells
Ring out to say

Oh merry Christmas
It's Christmas day

String the lights and hang the stockings
Decorate with green and red
Made the cookies for ol' Santa
Made a runway for his sled
Singing carols on a sleigh ride
Gather 'round the manger scene
Open presents, read the letters
And together we will sing

Oh merry Christmas
Joy to the world
For every nation
For every boy and girl

Let's light a candle
For peace we pray
Oh merry Christmas
It's Christmas day
Let's light a candle
For peace we pray
Oh merry Christmas
It's Christmas day
Oh merry Christmas
It's Christmas day

What is it about this day that sees it celebrated with the most joyful music of the year? What child is this, who warrants all this attention? If this was just an ordinary boy born two thousand years ago in some back water Province of the Roman Empire, in some none-descript village, Michael W. Smith and countless others would not be releasing Christmas Albums in 2007.

But as the Bible teaches us this is no ordinary boy. The writer to the Hebrews understood this very well and so he relates to us four things about this boy that make him absolutely unique.

Jesus:

1. Sets the boundaries of history:
2. Is the Master of the Present

3. Is the one who has solved the deepest problem in human life -- the problem of human sinfulness.
4. Is the one who has won the right to the worship of all creation,

1. He sets the boundaries of history:

In verse 2 we read:

whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

Jesus is the end of the future and the beginning of the past. All things find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This means that life is to be understood as a journey that is to have a specific destination. The bible teaches us that we are not walking aimlessly through this world, shaped by chance occurrences that have not meaning or goal. No, because Jesus has been appointed the heir of all things, history has both a direction and an end point. Christians believe that life is like a race. We are not just running around the track waiting for the whistle to blow and life to end without any clearly marked finish line. Rather we believe that there is a purpose to the race and that Jesus Christ is the one who gives the race direction and he is our goal.

St Paul puts it like this in 1 Corinthians 9:

You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally.

But not only is Jesus the end of the future he is the beginning of the past. I think it is stunning that in a pre-scientific world that this writer could speak of Jesus as the creator of the worlds. This is the Bible's claim. This baby, born in Bethlehem is the one through whom the whole Universe was created. The hymn "See Amid the Winter Snow" puts it like this:

*Lo, within a manger lies
he who built the starry skies;
he who, thronèd in height sublime,
sits amid the cherubim*

Do you understand what this means? That just as the future has a direction and fulfillment in Jesus Christ and is ordered, so too is the past. Creation has a creator whose name we can know and in whom our lives find meaning. It has been a gift to look at the moon as I have awakened early these past mornings and to realize that I know the moon's maker and can thank him for its beauty.

So, what child is this to you? Do you know him as the one who sets the boundaries of history? For if you do, you can then see that he is also

The Master of the Present as well

In verse 3 we read:

³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

Stanford University, in California is the site of the Stanford Linear Accelerator. It is a mighty two-mile long atom smasher. It is a great lever with which scientists are prying the lid off the secrets of matter as they discover what is in the miniature world of the atom, the neutron, and the proton, etc. And some amazing things are coming out. They are finding secrets they never knew existed, they are discovering a complexity they never dreamed of, and they are finding particles that they cannot even invent enough names for. But one thing they are consistently discovering is that there is some strange force that holds everything together. They do not know what to call it, and they do not know how to identify it. They talk about a kind of "cosmic glue" that holds things together. Isn't it fascinating that here in the Word of God you have that exact kind of terminology used of Jesus of Nazareth! If you want a name for the force that holds the universe together it is very simple: His name is Jesus. He sustains all things by the word of his power, or as Colossians puts it, "all things are held together by him," (Colossians 1: 17b RSV).

That is not only true of the physical universe, including our bodies and all that we are, but it is true of all the other forces and powers in the universe -- physical, psychological, social, spiritual, whatever, -- he is in charge of them all. After the resurrection, when our Lord appeared to the disciples by the Sea of Galilee, in the most forthright terms, simple, artlessly, he said to them, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28: 18b KJV) means he not only controls all the physical forces of the planet and the universe, but he

controls all the events that occur upon them. This is something Christians tend to forget. We get so used to seeing things through the secular eyes of the media, and other propaganda forces around us, that we forget that behind the events that fill the pages of our newspapers is a mighty controlling hand that is blending them all together, permitting some things to happen, restraining other things.

So what child is this to you? Do you know him as the one who sets the boundaries of history and is the master of the present as well? For if you do you can also see him as

**The one who has solved the deepest problem in human life --
the problem of human sinfulness.**

In the second half a verse three we read:

*When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand
of the Majesty on high*

Everybody today is asking, in the face of some of the tragic things that are happening, "What's wrong with humanity? What's wrong with life? Why is the world in a continual mess? Why are our papers filled with murder and violence and hate and corruption and darkness?" I was shocked by the details of Robert Pickton's trial and his cold blooded and calculated machinations that resulted in woman meeting a most horrible death. We cannot understand why a sixteen year-old Muslim girl, Aqsa Parvez, was murdered, and her 57 year-old father Muhammad Parvez, has been charged with murder in connection with the death of his daughter. It is unconscionable that a father would make public pictures of his year-old daughter on the internet depicting him sexually abusing her as, CBC News reported last week

Why all this murder and violence and evil? The answer of Scripture universally is, "Man's sin," or, to put it even more realistically, and more helpfully, to us, "Man's selfishness." That is what lies at the root of it all, the terrible taint that all of us possess that can never be washed away by our own efforts. Like Lady Macbeth, there are times we all want to cry out, "Out damned spot!" Yet it is never gone.

The amazing declaration of Scripture is that the reason the Creator of the world became the Babe of Bethlehem was that he might make purification for human selfishness, that he might solve the insoluble problem, and wash away the unwashable stain. The good news of

Christmas, of course, is that every one of us who has turned our will over to Jesus Christ, who has come to him, and who follows him finds again and again that he has the power to cleanse us. He has the power to put away the guilt of the past, whether it is the past 50 years of life or the past five minutes of time. He has the power to cleanse it, and wash it away, and to set us on our feet again with a clean slate and a fresh page to write on every day, to live life again in the power and the grace of the living God. Now, that is the greatest message of all. When he had made purification for sins (what agony, what terrible hurt is involved in that phrase), he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Jesus is Lord: this was the early creed of the Church and it is the creed of all who come to know him now. He has solved that desperate problem of human life; he is in control and in charge of all human events.

The poet, James Russell Lowell, puts it this way:

Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone 'tis strong;
Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne.
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadows,
Keeping watch above his own.

So what child is this to you? Do you know him as the one who sets the boundaries of history and is the master of the present as well? Do you see him as the one who has solved the deepest problem in human life -- the problem of human sinfulness? For if you do, you can also see him as:

The one who has won the right to the worship of all creation,

See what the writer says in verse four:

having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

To say that Jesus name is more excellent than that of the angels means that he is the one worthy of our worship. With this we come full circle and can answer the question I asked at the beginning of this sermon. What is it about this day that sees it celebrated with the most joyful music of the year? And here is the answer. Because Jesus is the

one who sets the boundaries of history, because Jesus is the one who is the master of the present as well, because Jesus is the one who has solved the deepest problem in human, the problem of human sinfulness, he has won the right of the worship of all creation. One of the primary ways we humans worship Jesus is through music. But here is the most important thing about worship. While music points to this need within us all to worship Jesus, many of us place the worship of Jesus way down on our list of priorities.

This is understandable if you do not see him for who he really is. But because you now have heard what the writer to the Hebrews has told us about who Jesus is, what are you going to do with this information? Will it make any difference in your life? I hope and pray it will.

Because although Christmas will soon be gone for another year, when you know Jesus as the writer to the Hebrews presents him, Jesus then lives in our souls, which become the place where he can dwell by faith. This enables us to know him and worship him not only on December 25th but also on July 25th and the other 363 days of the year as well.

So what will you say when asked the question:

“What child is this?”

How your answer will influence the priority you will give Jesus in your life.