

Well, Merry Christmas everyone! This is my favorite time of year. It isn't for any one particular reason; it's for all the reasons! I love Christmas music – particularly Anglican sacred choral music. I love the shorter, colder days reading by a fire with snow falling outside. Well, perhaps I like this idea of this, but the pleasant Southern California Christmases are hard to beat, especially considering the blizzards roaring through the rest of the country. I love giving gifts (I might even love receiving gifts). I love worshipping God in his Church with His people; I love the hope that enters into the world in this darkest season. We are indeed very blessed to be here together singing praises and praying to our Lord in honor of His Incarnation, the pivot of history. Tonight we celebrate the point where the curse of humanity began to be turned back. This is when the tiniest pin-prick of light was initiated while the darkness of sin and suffering was at its peak. But through that smallest gleam of light, the birth of the newborn God-man, Jesus Christ, the flood of God's love began to pour into our lives, and it continues to pour into us even unto this day.

How is this possible? We humans, the pinnacle of God's Creation, turned away from God in order to exalt ourselves over God. Why would God save us by becoming one of us? The answer? Because God is God. He is infinite love, and we were created to receive His love. God would not destroy the creature who was called into being for the express purpose of receiving the Love of God. Yet the holy love of God, poured out upon such rebellious and self-serving creatures, could only destroy those creatures, not elevate them to unhindered fellowship with the Triune Godhead. The fallen could not continue in the presence of the Holy. Thus, humanity needed to be remade—it needed to be purged of its sins. And thus Jesus Christ, God made man and Man perfected in God, was born into the world to be the vanguard of the new humanity.

The epistle lesson tonight, from the beginning of the letter to the Hebrews, highlights this very thing, pointing to the Superiority of Christ above all angels and above all humanity. Christ is God's message to us from the Father. Everything that we need to know in order to be reunited with God is found in Jesus Christ. All things in Creation are *in* Christ, *through* Christ, and *for* Christ. In this passage we read that Christ is the brightness, the fulness, of the Glory of God, and He is the perfect image of God. In the Old Testament, humanity was forbidden from attempting to image God, but in Jesus, God has imaged Himself. Jesus is the Icon of God, and more so, He is God. The image and the reality find unity in the person of Christ. The epistle states that it is Christ who purges our sins. In Christ, our sin was nailed to the cross. We died with Him so that our original spiritual death, the consequence of our sin, was itself put to death. The wages of our sin have been paid in Christ's death for us. And now we must live unto Christ. We must live into the new life that Jesus won for us just as Christ now lives and is no longer dead, but is instead seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places. We consider ourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. And it is He that rules our lives, and this world, from His throne in heaven.

All of this we now comprehend to be inseparably connected with that lowly babe in the manger two thousand years ago. In the epistle again, we read that God says of Christ, “Thou art my Son, this

day have I begotten Thee. And again, when He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, ... let all the angels of God worship him.” Christ, the eternally begotten of the Father, is truly the Son of God. The angels worship the Son, and we too unashamedly worship the Son who is our Lord and the vanguard of the new humanity. We gather around the manger to glimpse the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of God, and our minds reel with cognitive dissonance: “How can this be? God made man? The Creator of the universe revealed to us through a baby of poverty and nakedness and helplessness?” Of course this makes no sense. We will never comprehend it. But yet it is true, and so we bow to worship this infant. O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

But the story doesn't end there. Were we only to gaze upon the Baby Christ before being sent to perdition, could we complain? No; it would be enough. Who would dare ask for more? But yet the love of God is even further revealed to us, for while we were yet sinners, this baby would grow up, and show us the perfect way, and be rejected by His own brethren and fellow human beings, and then die for us, not merely saving us from the ultimate death, but giving us eternal life. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” This is the miracle of the birth of Jesus Christ – that his birth, has become our re-birth, that his righteousness has become our righteousness, that as He is the only-begotten, the eternally begotten, we too have now been re-begotten of God and made Sons of God, fellow heirs with Jesus Christ, inheritors of the eternal blessing of unity with God. Not just forgiven, though that would be enough. Not just brought near as servants, though that would certainly be enough. Not just guests, though surely that would be enough – who would dare presume more? In and through the miracle of the Birth of Christ that we celebrate tonight, we have been made Sons of God, intimately related to the Father, known and beloved by the King, joint heirs with Christ of the eternal riches and blessings that belong to the King's family.

The birth of Jesus Christ was the genesis of new life for us all. It was that flicker of light in the darkness that has grown and grown so that now the darkness flees from it. And yet, as God did not impose Himself upon Adam and Eve at the dawn of humanity, love demands that He still does not impose Himself upon us. Not all believe. Not all are made Sons of God. So that Baby in the manger who stopped at nothing to pour the Love of God out upon us, waits patiently for us to believe, not only with our lips, but in our lives. In your minds and hearts tonight, remember the great love of God for you. Gaze again upon the Christ child, meek and lowly, rejoice for this marvelous gift, and mourn for the sin in our lives that required the death of this gift. But then be still and listen. Hear God's voice, gently spoken unto us by His Son. Believe in Me. I love you. I came, I died, and I rose for you. You are my brothers and sisters forevermore. I will be with you and I will strengthen you. So will you live for me? Now go in the joy and peace of Christ, and sin no more.

The blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost be with you and remain with you always. AMEN.