

Incarnation: The Mystery Of Christmas

Hope of Glory
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Hope of Glory Philippians 2:5-6

If you have your Bibles, and I hope that you do, I want to invite you to open with me to Philippians 2. That's where we are going to camp out over the next four weeks as we think about the mammoth realities that are represented in The Mystery of Christmas. The "incarnation" is a thick word, and I want us to begin to see it unfold this morning, I hope and pray, in a powerful and a fresh way.

We all know that Christmas is a pretty confusing time. It just doesn't seem to add up, to make sense. We read about the humility and poverty of a stable and a baby that was born amidst that humility and poverty, and yet we surround ourselves with the wealth and indulgence of gift giving. We read about a star in Bethlehem, and everywhere we go we are surrounded by blinking lights of all kinds of colors and shapes and sizes. We see the story of a room in the Inn, obscure and dirty. But when we think about Christmas, we think about warm houses and fireplaces and family feasts around the table. We sing about shepherds, and then we see a lot of salesmen. We read about angels, and then we talk about reindeer, one that even has a big, bright red nose.

And somewhere along the way there's a disconnect. I'm not trying to be Scrooge here, but there's a disconnect between what we see revealed in the Christmas story and what we see around us. And I'm not even trying to be cliché by saying to us that we need to keep Christ in Christmas. We've heard that enough before.

What I'm saying is that even in the church, those of us who are focused on Christ have a tendency to miss the whole point, even those of us who are in the church and who know the story and who focus on the story, Mary and Joseph and the angels. We focus on the wise men and the shepherds and we focus on all the circumstances surrounding this story. Even then we have the possibility of completely missing the point of Christmas.

The Question We Need to Ask ...

The mystery of Christmas is not found primarily in the circumstances of the birth of Jesus, but in the identity of the baby in the manger.

The question we need to ask... This is a foundational truth that we are going to unpack over the next four weeks. The mystery of Christmas is not found primarily in the circumstances of the birth of Jesus, but in the identity of the baby in the manger. That is the mystery of what Christmas is all about. It's not in all the circumstances and all the trappings, but in the identity of the fact that God - what a mammoth reality - would become a baby, a crying, screaming, bedwetting baby that needed to be taught and changed and fed, that was dependent upon His own creation to nurture Him, sitting there with nothing to do but lie and stare like little children do often in the distance and wiggle around and make all kinds of

noises that you have no clue what they are saying. This is the mammoth reality of a God who became like that. That is the mystery of what Christmas is all about.

We must dare to ask the question, "Who is Jesus?"

So, what I want us to do is dive into that mystery and dare to ask the question: who is Jesus? Who is the baby that was in this manger? This is a huge question. It's a huge question on a number of different levels. It's a huge question because, number one, it's a historic question. Even in early church history and ever since then, you have people debating the identity of this baby that was in the manger. You've got guys like Apollos, Athanasius and Arius; all these guys in church history who having major debates about who Christ is. Is He God? Is He man? Is He both together? Is He fully God, fully man, part God and part man? How does that work?

And you've got obviously the historic divide, the wedge that is driven between Judaism and Christianity. It's grounded in the identity of who Christ is. And not just Judaism and Christianity, but across the board, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, even Muslims. I remember numerous conversations that I had on the streets of India with Muslims talking about the identity of who Christ is. This is a historic question.

Second, it's an important question. It's a very important question. In fact, I think it may be the most important question in Christianity. Because if Jesus is God, if this baby really is God, then that makes sense of everything else in the New Testament and it answers all the rest of our questions about Jesus.

Think about it. It's the most staggering claim. If Jesus is God, then it makes complete sense that He would walk on water, don't you think? He made the water. I think He could walk on it. If Jesus is God, is it really that surprising to see Him take five loaves and two fish and feed over 5,000 people? Is that a shock to us? No. He made the loaves and the fish, and He made even the stomachs that are partaking of this food.

Is it really that surprising even when you come to the resurrection? Think about it. When we realize Jesus is God, then the staggering thought is not that He rose from the grave. The staggering thought is that He died. It makes complete sense that He rose from the grave. What astounds us is the fact that God in the flesh actually died. This truth changes everything. It turns everything upside down.

I'll share with you a quote from C.S. Lewis. Just to give you a heads up, C.S. Lewis is going to help preach this sermon with me today. I'll refer to him a couple of different times. He said this: "The doctrine of Christ's divinity seems to me not something stuck on which you can unstick, but something that peeks out at every point so that you would have to unravel the whole web to get rid of it." It's foundational. So, it's historic and it's important.

Third, it's an awesome question. It's an awesome question that I believe we far too often take for granted in the church today. May we never cease to be amazed by the fact that God became man. This is a mammoth reality that cannot become commonplace and it cannot get drowned out in all the tinsel and commercialism that surround us over the next few weeks. This is a huge reality. It is awesome to think about. It's historic, it's important, it's awesome.

Four, it is a personal question. And what I want you to hear today is that the truth we are about to look at has ramifications for every single one of our lives. Every single one of our lives hinges on the answer to this question: Who is Jesus?

So, you've got Philippians 2 opened up. I will go ahead and let you know this is going to be the passage from which we are going to be studying for the next four weeks, Philippians 2:5-11. It is an incredible passage of Scripture. I think it is the greatest picture of the Christmas story in all Scripture. The only thing is, you are not going to see shepherds anywhere and you are not going to see Mary, and Joseph is not going to be here and angels aren't going to be here. There's not going to be a star and there's not going to be wise men. That's not what it's going to focus on.

I want us to read this passage and then begin to unpack it. Look at Verse 5 in Philippians 2. Paul writes, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 2:5)—I want to let you know this is what is called by many people a Christ hymn. This is a hymn to Christ that exalts Christ for who He is.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 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 (Phil. 2:6-11).

All of that was said about a little baby in a stable. I want us to see four truths over the next four weeks that come out of this, four pictures of who Christ is. Today we are looking at Jesus as God. The very start of this passage I'm calling The Hope of Glory, and we'll see how that unfolds in just a second.

Look at verse 6, "*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*" (Phil. 2:6). This obviously sets Jesus apart from everybody else in all of history. This is not just your normal guy. This is not your normal baby. This is someone who, being in very nature God. The words in the original language of the New Testament right there really are talking about His essence, the essential, His being, what He exists as. He exists in the nature, in the form. The word in the original language of the New Testament is "morphe" from which we get the word "form." He is the form of God. That doesn't mean He's like God or he's similar to God. It means He is in His essence, He exists as God.

He being in the very nature of God, in fact, you see later on it talks about taking the very nature of a servant. That word "nature" is a little bit different than the one we just looked at. This is His very form. He is God now. That's what the text is saying. This text is saying very clearly that Jesus is God.

What does that mean? What does it mean for Jesus, a little baby boy, to be God in the flesh? Well, what I want to do is I want to use another passage that's going to help us understand the first part of Philippians 2. I want you to go to John 1. I want you to see how John starts his Gospel, how John tells the Christmas story. I want us to read through the first part of John 1, and I want you to see some verses that set the stage for everything else that we see about Jesus throughout the rest of the book of John. And it really revolves around the identity of who He is, on the fact that He is in very nature God. Look at John 1:1. We are going to read down about halfway through this chapter. I want you to see who He is,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."' From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (John 1:1-18).

These verses right here help unpack what Philippians 2:6 has just told us.

The Baby We Need to See...

He is the Word of God.

What does it mean for Jesus to be God? I want you to see what John is telling us about the fact that Jesus is God. First of all, number one, the baby we need to see, He is the Word of God. He is the word of God. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (John 1:1-2). Now, what's that all about? What's all this "Word" talk? Who is the "Word"? We see later in verse 14 that the Word became flesh. We know that's referring to Jesus.

But why is John calling Jesus the Word? That seems kind of like a contemporary, hip kind of name today for Jesus. Of all the names to introduce Jesus why does John refer to Him as the Word? Why would he say that? Think about it. "In the beginning" he starts off. Does that phrase remind you of anything? Undoubtedly it reminds you of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning"—who? In the beginning "God". Before anything else was, "God". In the beginning, the Word.

If in the beginning, God was there, and in the beginning the Word was there, then we've got the Word being equated with God. "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." We see from the very beginning, "And God said let there be light." God said this, and creation happened according to God's what? - according to God's Word. All of creation. In Genesis 1,

2 and 3, over and over again we see the word of God mentioned. God spoke and it came to be. God's power, God's might in creation is revealed through His Word. So, God reveals Himself through His word. Later on Psalm 107:20 talks about how God brought salvation to His people and healing and rescued His people by His Word.

Over and over again throughout the Old Testament the Word is the picture of how God reveals Himself, how God reveals His power. It literally means His self-expression. I want you to think about that for a second. The Word of God is His revelation, His self-expression, the expression of Himself.

So, as we begin to think about the identity of Christ, what we are seeing unfold from the start in the book of John is the fact that He is the self-expression of who? - of God. He is the self-expression of God. He is the revelation of God. He is God revealed in the flesh, in a baby. This is God, His self-expression right here in the manger. "The Word was with God." So obviously Jesus had a relationship with God. "And the Word was God." And Jesus was God. So, Jesus had a relationship with God and He was God.

Now, how do you figure that out? It's the whole mystery of the Trinity. What we are seeing is that we see Jesus and the Father in cooperation, in relationship. At the same time, in essence one person being in very nature God.

Now let's look at a question we definitely know we can answer. I want you to think about something with me. Because if we can answer this question, then it will help us along the way in getting our arms around the fact that Jesus is God. The question I think we need to answer is, "Did Jesus ever say that He was God?" What I want to show you is if we can answer that question, then I think it will give us a whole new understanding of what it means for Jesus to be God. Did Jesus ever say that He was God?

I tell you what I'm going to do. I've got a hundred dollars for the first person who can show me in the Gospels where Jesus said the words, "I am God." Go for it. Show me in the Gospels where Jesus says, "I am God." Obviously, a preacher would never offer that much money if he didn't know that he wasn't going to have to give it. The Gospels never show Jesus saying, "I am God." In fact, that's what many people say, especially Muslims. They will say, "Well, in the New Testament, Jesus doesn't even say he's God. Why do you believe that? He says that He is the son of God, but He never even said He was God." The next time you have somebody ask you that, I want us to be a people who are ready to show in Scripture that Jesus does, in fact, claim to be God, though He never says the words directly, "I am God."

Let me show you some places and you might write these verses down. Turn with me to the right. Look at John 5. John 5:16-47 is probably one of the clearest, most comprehensive pictures that we have of the deity of Christ. And I want you to see how Jesus, when He talks about being the Son of God and God being His Father, is actually equating Himself with God.

Look at John 5:16. The context is Jesus just healed a guy on the Sabbath, and some religious leaders got mad at the guy who had been healed because he's carrying his mat on the Sabbath. Can you imagine? The guy has never walked before in his life. He picks up his mat and he starts to walk for the first time in his life, and the religious leaders come up to him and say, "Put your mat down. What are you thinking?"

So, they approach Jesus. What happened here? Look at verse 16. "*So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."* For this reason the

Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:16-18).

So, when He talks about God as His Father, He's not talking about how I have a father and you may have a father. He's not talking about it that way. He's talking about how God the Father and then Him right there in the flesh are equated with one another, making himself equal with God.

And that was part of what He was doing working on the Sabbath. The Jews knew that even on the Sabbath that God didn't completely rest from working. He was sustaining all of creation. But they had stringent rules to make sure that they stopped. So, for Jesus to be working and to claim the right, the authority, the prerogative to work on that day, He was equating Himself with the God of the Sabbath and the Lord of the Sabbath.

As you go deeper into this chapter, we're not going to be able to study it in depth, but you see later on Jesus talking about how He's the Judge of all men. In Jewish thought, undoubtedly the judge of all men was God himself. And He starts telling these guys that one day He's going to stand before all men as Judge. If you want to make some religious leaders in the New Testament mad, you tell them that you are going to stand before them as Judge. He's equating himself with God.

Turn to the right to John 8, the end of John 8:54. Jesus has some conversations with some religious leaders again. Let's start in verse 54. They are talking about how He may be demon possessed, or maybe a Samaritan. Jesus replies in verse 54, *"Jesus replied, 'If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you'"* (John 8:54-55)—He just kind of gets to the point right there. *"But I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; He saw it and was glad"* (John 8:55-56)—well this really riles them up. *"You are not yet fifty years old,' the Jews said to him, 'and you have seen Abraham!'"* (John 8:57). Verse 58, *"I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'"* (John 8:58).

Let's stop there for just a second. We've got to understand the context here. In our day, this doesn't seem like a big deal to say, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" If I came up to you and said, "I am," you would look at me and say, "You are weird. What are you talking about? What does that mean?"

Well we know in the Old Testament when God revealed His name to His people, they asked, "Who shall I tell them sends me?" Moses said. God said, "Tell them I am sent me." This is a theme all throughout the book of John. In John 6:35 Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." John 8:12, "I am the light of the world." John 10:1 and John 10:11 talks about "I am the good shepherd," and "I am the gate." Chapter 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life." John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life." John 15:1 and 5, "I am the vine." Over and over John is intentionally showing how Jesus taught that He was the "I am." He says before Abraham was born, guess who was? - "I am. I have been and I always will be. Before Abraham was born, I am."

Just to make sure we are not reading into this text something that's not there, look at what they did next. In verse 59 it says, *"At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds"* (John 8:59). Why would they want to stone Him? You stone a blasphemer. You stone someone who equates himself with God. When you equate yourself with God, you are not going to live long after that. John 8:58, I

love the fact that Jesus hid Himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. I'm not sure how it happened, but He got away. He was equating Himself with God.

Keep going to the right and you come to John 10. We'll start in verse 24 to get the Jewish picture, the Jewish question of Jesus.

The Jews gathered around him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.'

Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one' (John 10:24-30).

It sounds like He is equating Himself with God.

Look at what happened next in verse 31, *"Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God'" (John 10:31-33).*

There were a lot of people a couple thousand years ago that knew pretty clearly that Jesus was claiming to be God, and they weren't very happy about it. This continues on. You come to the end of John 20 with Jesus revealing His divinity in His words and His deeds, obviously, the things He did, whether it was raising His hand and calming the wind and waves, whether it was feeding 5,000, performing these miracles or healing people or bringing people back to life, John 11, obviously showing that Jesus has the power and the authority of God Himself.

When you get to John 20, Jesus has risen from the grave, which is another pretty good picture of the fact that something is different about Him. When you get to John 20:26, Jesus is spending time with His disciples. Look what happens, *"A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (John 20:26-28).*

Now, this was the opportunity. Thomas looks at Jesus and says, "My Lord and my God." If Jesus was not teaching that He is God, this would have been Jesus' perfect opportunity to say, "What did you call me? Thomas, you've got it all backwards. You missed the point. I'm not God." That's not what He says. In verse 29, *"Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'" (John 20:29).*

So, over and over again in the book of John we see Jesus claiming to be God, though He doesn't say the words, "I am God." We see this over and over again. And this is just one of the Gospels. You've got Matthew, Mark and Luke, as well. Mark 2:1-11, going back to even C.S. Lewis when he talked about this passage when Jesus healed the paralytic and then claimed to have the authority to forgive his sins. C. S. Lewis said that was the biggest claim that Jesus made; it was kind of the back breaker for Him in seeing the divinity of Christ. For

you to do something wrong, and for me to say you have to come to me because you have offended me and sinned against me is a very bold claim. So, over and over again Jesus is claiming to be God in the Gospels.

Now, once we've got that established, once we see in the Gospels that Jesus claimed to be God, because of that truth, then we've got four options for the question of who is Jesus. Four options.

The first option would be to believe that Jesus is just a legend. Yeah, Jesus claimed to be God, but it's just a story. It's fictional. It's mythological. Some people might say that. We don't have time to look into the veracity and authenticity and reliability of Scripture, but I can stand on solid ground and say to you that there is no ancient document that has anywhere near the historical reliability of this document, the archeological, even secular backing of this book. Over and over again throughout history for 2,000 years people have said this book is going to go out. But it hasn't because it is true. Over and over again. This is more than just a legend, more than just a story that was made up. So, we've got that one option that it's a legend, it's all just a legend.

The second option. If Jesus claimed to be God, then He must have been a liar. Is He a liar? Now, it's at this point that we think about the most common view of Jesus in our culture today. As expressed by Thomas Jefferson, "Jesus is the highest, the greatest of human teachers. He is a great teacher, a great man who had powerful things to say, things that His people need to listen to more. He had great teachings. He wasn't God. He was a great teacher, a great man."

Now, at this point, because we've established the fact that Jesus claimed to be God that was obviously at the core of His teaching. This wasn't just a side thing, a tangent over here. Oh, by the way, I'm God. This is at the core. His teaching revolved around Himself. And so if at the core of His teaching He's saying He is God, and He's not God, then that might make Him a liar. And if He's a liar, then the last thing we would stand and say is He is a great teacher. Do you call a great teacher a person who at the core is lying and deceiving everyone that he teaches? Do you call a great man somebody who goes about deceiving people intentionally his entire ministry? Obviously, that would not be a great man. But that's one option. A legend, a liar.

Third, is He a lunatic? Has He just plain lost it? Because if this is true that He said these things, it's not a legend. And if He believed they were true, He wasn't trying to lie. He believed they were true. But if they are not true, then He was just kind of crazy. Here is a guy who thought He was God. He really thought He was God, but He was pretty out there on that.

Now, if I start claiming to be God, then you know that it's time for me to step down from leadership and it's time for me to get some help in certain areas. You know that. But if I claim to be God and then start walking on water and feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish and raising people from the grave and healing people with diseases and sickness, you might stand up and say, "Well, I'll at least hear you out on this thing."

But that's one option. Jesus thought He was God, was trying to be as truthful as possible, but He had just lost it. So, maybe He's a legend, maybe He's a liar, maybe He's a lunatic. The thing is that hardly anybody in our culture would say that Jesus was a crazy guy who had completely lost it. Even lost people have much respect for Jesus as a person. They wouldn't say He's a lunatic and wouldn't say He's a liar.

Well, if we cross those out and He's not a lunatic and He's not a liar and He's not a legend, then the only possibility is the fact that He is Lord. You've heard this before, possibly from my co-preacher today, C.S. Lewis, who said this: "You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit on Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us, and He did not intend to."

All of us must come down and say Jesus is one of these things. It's not an option to call Jesus a great man or a great human teacher. He is either just a legend from the past, He is a liar, He is a lunatic, or He is the Lord of all creation. That's the identity of this baby. That's what it means for Him to be the Word, the self-expression of God.

I wish we had time to dive into Hebrews 1:3. It says that He is the radiance of God's glory. Verse 8 calls the Son, God. It's incredible all throughout Hebrews, especially those first few chapters dealing with the picture of Jesus as God. Colossians 2:9 says the fullness of God, the fullness of deity dwells in Jesus. Over and over again, in the very beginning of Revelation God says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning at the end." At the very end of Revelation, guess who said the exact same words? - Jesus does. Jesus rises up and says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." Jesus is God. Over and over again we see that He's the Word of God.

He is the Author of Life.

Three more truths I want you to see about the identity of this baby. Second, He is the Author of Life. I want you to look at a passage with me. Turn to the right and go past Philipians to Colossians. I want you to look at Colossians 1 with me. These are some amazing verses that give us a picture. Now, John 1 had said, "In Him was life and that life was the light of men." All life summed up in Him. Colossians 1 unpacks that one for us.

Look at Colossians 1:15. These are amazing verses. I want you to think about all of the universe, everything in all creation, including every single one of us. Colossians 1:15 says,

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15-17).

Do you realize the mammoth truth we just read? That all of the universe, with its billions and billions of miles and planets and stars and the sun, everything is held together by Jesus, everything. All of our lives, the way life works, our bodies, everything is held together by Jesus. The identity of this baby. He is the author of life. Do you catch this? The author of life is now a baby in a manger dependent on the creation that He has made to sustain His life. You wrestle with that and you will get a headache real quick. This baby is the author of all life, and He holds it all together. In Him was life and that life was the light of men. He is the author of life.

He is the Light of the World.

Third, He is the Light of the World. If you go back to John, it is talking about John the Baptist: "*He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world*" (John 1:8-9). If you do a study of light throughout the book of John, you will see riches unfold, this idea that Jesus is the light of the world. In a world that is dark, in a world that is filled with pain and suffering and trial and sorrow; in a world that is dark, when Jesus comes on the scene, light comes on the

scene. You know what it does to the darkness? It penetrates and drowns out the darkness. It completely overwhelms it, and all attention is not drawn to darkness anymore. Even in the darkest room, one little candle lights up and all the attention is drawn to that light. He is the Light of the world amidst the darkness. He is the author of life and He is the light of the world.

He is the Hope of Glory.

And then fourth, He is the Hope of Glory. John 1:14 says, "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" In John 1:14 where it says the Word made His dwelling among us, it literally means He "tabernacled" among us. It's the same word that we see used in the Old Testament to refer to the tabernacle or the temple or the tent of meeting, which was basically the place where the glory of God dwelled among His people.

The temple was the place where God dwelled among His people, where they would come to encounter the glory of God. They would come to the temple, same thing they would come to the tabernacle, where God's presence dwelled, and that's how they would encounter His glory. And so when we see the picture of this baby coming to earth, John tells us the Word became flesh and He "tabernacle" among us. You used to go to the temple to see the glory of God. Now come to this baby and see the glory of God. We have beheld His glory.

The glory of the one and only literally means the unique son—the "monogenous". The unique son is in the manger, the unique Son of God. If you want to see the glory of God, you don't go to the tent of meeting and you don't go to the tabernacle anymore and you don't go to the temple. You go to Jesus. He has revealed the glory of God.

This has been anticipated all throughout the Old Testament. Isaiah 46:13, God says I'm going to give Him glory to Israel. They had anticipated it. It had been prophesied. The glory of God is coming to Israel. And now the glory of God, the anticipated glory of God, is revealed in the God of glory Himself as a baby in a manger. It's everything they have been waiting for. They didn't realize it, obviously, many of them, but it was summed up in this self-expression of God.

Those are some thick theological truths. He is the Word of God, He is the author of life, He is the light of the world, and He is the hope of glory. But I don't want us to keep those in just the theological realm. I want us to make sure to realize how practical these truths are.

Last night I had the opportunity to go up to Children's Hospital where Ella Grace Dorsey has been since late February. We talked about her last week and we prayed for her, and many of you gave blood. So many of you gave blood that they had to start making appointments and telling you to come back later because there were too many people from Brook Hills coming at this time. So, you responded and you've been praying for that family for months and months and months.

Well, her condition decreased pretty rapidly over the rest of the week. It got to Friday or Saturday, and they were afraid to even move her because any slight move might cause her to pass away. Yesterday afternoon it had gotten very bleak, and they attempted to move her so that Lonnie and Anita, her parents, could spend some time holding her.

And so for about the last eight hours of Ella Grace's life, Lonnie and Anita had the opportunity to hold that baby girl in their arms. And there wasn't enough oxygen getting to her body, and four days away from her one-year birthday Ella Grace Dorsey passed away last night. So that these truths don't stay in the theological realm, I want to remind you that

this little one-year-old girl was not just in Lonnie and Anita's arms. She was in the arms of the author of life, the God who became a baby just like her. She was in His hands and she was in the hands of the light of the world.

Words cannot express walking into that room last night and seeing Anita hold this precious baby and hearing Lonnie and Anita talk about the hope they had in Christ. There was no darkness in that room. It was filled with light, because Jesus has overcome the world and He has overcome pain and He has overcome suffering and He has overcome disease and sickness. He has conquered it. The light has penetrated the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. There was light all over that room.

And the beauty of it was that it was a glorious picture of the hope of Christ, the hope of glory, to know that today Ella Grace Dorsey is happier than the happiest person on the face of this earth has ever been and that she is beholding His face and seeing Him as He is, the author of her life, the light of the world and the hope of glory for a precious little one-year-old girl. This is awesome news that God became a man, and it's the baby we need to see.

The Decision We Need to Make...

Now, with that truth, with that picture, all of us have a decision to make. I told you from the beginning the ramifications of this truth would penetrate each one of our lives and hearts. We have a decision to make, and there are only two options. They are spelled out here in John 1.

Reject Him ...

Option number one is to reject Him. John 1:10, "*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.*" That's one option, to reject Him. It's an option that many took in that day, and it's an option that many may take today. And basically rejecting Him is saying I do not recognize Him according to John 1:10-11, I do not recognize Him, and I do not receive Him.

I want you to realize that it is a frightening thing, in light of the truths that we've seen, to say to this God, "I do not recognize you as the Word of God, as the light of the world, I do not recognize you as the hope of glory, I do not recognize you as the author of my life and, therefore, I do not receive you." That is standing in the face of Jesus and rejecting Him.

And the only options there are for you to be saying that, "Jesus, you are just a legend, it's just a myth, it's just fiction." That's one thing you might be saying. The second thing you might be saying is that, "You are a liar. At the core you have lied. Therefore, I don't believe you and I don't receive you because you are a liar." Or, number three, "You are crazy. You are a lunatic." That is what it means to reject Christ, and it's one option we have according to John 1.

Revere Him ...

The second option is to revere Him. John 1:12, "*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*" That's the second option, to revere Him, which is basically saying I believe in Him and I belong to Him. That's the second option.

Here is why this truth is so important. Please don't miss this. If Jesus is not fully God, then He is completely unable to take the payment of our sins upon himself. Who can bear the infinite wrath and justice of God the Father? A mere man who did good things and taught good things? Absolutely not. If we don't have the divinity of Christ, if Jesus is not God, we don't have salvation and we don't have Christianity. And it all hinges on this.

However, when we believe in this truth, when we see this truth, we recognize it and we receive it and we believe in it, the result is we have the right to become children of God, His sons and His daughters, His people. The only way to do that is through believing in Him, believing these truths, saying in your lives, "I see that you are the Word of God, you are the light of the world, you are the author of my life, you are the hope of all glory, and I embrace you."

And, therefore, worship of Christ is equated with worship of God. When we sing, "Holy, holy, holy, praise the Lord, hallelujah", we sing to Christ, because He deserves our praise and honor and glory. The mammoth reality of Christmas is that this baby is worthy of all of our worship. Reject Him or revere Him.

In the next few minutes, those are the two options I want to put before all of us. I want to challenge every man, woman, boy and girl to deal personally with those two options. Today if you know Him, if you are His sons and daughters, if you have believed in Him and you belong to Him, then this is a time where we revere Him.

If you are here and you've never come to the point where you have believed in His truths and revered God in the flesh in the form of Jesus, then I want to invite you for the first time to say, "God, I believe that what you said is true. Jesus, you are not a liar and not a legend and not a lunatic. You are the Lord of my life, and I trust you to be my hope of glory."

I want to invite you if you have never trusted in Him to do that today. If you choose to reject Him, then just observe as we revere Christ.

Dear God, we pray that you would give us a fresh glimpse of your glory even in these moments; God, that the mammoth realities of what we've seen in your Word would sink into our hearts as we reflect on how your Son died, how you in the flesh died so that we can be forgiven of our sins and we can have the hope of glory. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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