

CHRISTMAS DAY

Hebrews 1:1-4

What Child is this?

What I'm going to say may shock, maybe even scandalize you: There is such a thing as an ugly baby. Trust me, I've seen one. Whose baby was it? I'll tell you; It was.... no, I am just kidding, none of you have had ugly babies; of course, I am talking about other people who go to other churches. But there are ugly babies. Fortunately, it is not just a baby's appearance that makes it beautiful in a family's eyes. It is also who that baby is, where it came from, and how it is related to them. Today, we set the most beautiful baby in the entire world before our eyes. I do not know that His appearance was particularly beautiful, in fact, Isaiah says there was nothing too attractive about His appearance, but I do know that who He is, where He came from, and how He is related to us makes Him the most beautiful baby of all.

This Baby is "*the radiance of the glory of God.*" What does that mean? Let me answer a question with a question. How many of you have seen the sun? Most of you, no doubt, honestly think you have seen the sun, but I have bad news: you have seen the light of the sun, but you have not seen the sun, unless you have been to outer space. While mom may have told you to get your head out of the clouds a few times and a friend may have called you a space cadet, so far as I know, no one here has been to space. You have seen the light of the sun, but not the sun, just as you have seen the effects of the wind, and not the wind itself. In fact, if you did look at the sun itself with the naked eye, what would happen?

I remember in high school that there was some sort of big solar event that happened so that we got to go outside and look at the sun. What was the solar event? I don't know. But I remember we got out of school for it. Isn't that just like high school? So, we went out to look at the sun, but we had to use these high tech devices to do so. We took a piece of paper and poked a hole in it. What can I say; the school budget was tight that year. Why did we need our fancy paper devices? So we didn't burn our eyes.

So also, if we looked directly at God in all His glory without the proper preparation, we would go blind and be ruined. God told Moses as much. But in Christ, we have God before our eyes and He wants us to look to Him. He is the radiance of the glory of God, but in His mercy, He veiled that glory to an extent that we could look at Him with the naked eye. Through Christ's incarnation, we can look at God, and we don't need a fancy paper-with-a-hole-in-it poor man's scientist tool. Christ is God and Man for the expressed purpose that we might see and know God. What a beautiful baby!

Now I used a big word a few sentences ago that some may not know. The word is "incarnation." What is Christ's incarnation? Let's take the word apart. What is the first word you see? "In" would be the correct answer, which is why I am sure you were all thinking it. Christ came into something. Into what? Well, what is a carnivore? Carne is Latin for flesh. A carnivore eats flesh. Christ's incarnation is the event by which Christ, the eternal Son of God, also became the Son of Man. Our salvation hinges on this fact.

As true man, Christ can say that the Father is greater than He is. As true God, Christ can say that He and the Father are One. As true man, Christ can say that He does not know the day or hour of His coming. As true God, Christ can not correct St. Peter when the apostle says Christ knows all things. As true man, Christ can be born of a Virgin. As true God, Christ can also be eternally begotten. As true man, Christ can be the heir of all things. As true God, everything can already be Christ's. As true man, Christ can die. As true God, Christ's death can pay for the sins of the world. I could go on, trust me, I could go on, but I think you get the point. This little human Child before our eyes today is also the eternal God.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us more. He is "*the exact image of God's substance.*" Most of us know what an image is. It is something that looks like what it represents. If we go to a sculptor to get our image fashioned, the sculptor takes a hunk of wood or concrete and gets to work and, afterward, if the artist is worth his chisel, we have a hunk of wood or concrete that looks like us. Yet, our image is still a hunk of wood or concrete, isn't it? You can't talk to it—well, you can't have a conversation with it. It is an image of you, but not the same substance.

Sometimes people tell me that my boys are “a spitting image” of me. Now I don’t know if this is because of their rugged good looks, their endearing personality, or their razor-sharp wit, but, needless to say, they mean that the kid looks like me, whether or not that is a compliment. But even my sons, who may be my “spitting image,” are not of the same substance as me. They are of a similar substance, but not the same. They have some of Mom’s genes, and thank God for that, because otherwise they’d have no German in them, and then they wouldn’t be so adorably stubborn.

Christ is “*the exact image of God’s substance.*” He is God’s face. He is God through and through. He is an accurate representation of Him and He is Him. The Father and the Son, while two separate persons, are nonetheless One God.

When Tricia and I went to Germany, I bought my parents a beer stein with the twelve apostles on it. It was mine. I could have kept it for myself, but I chose to give it to my parents as a gift of love. Now, should I outlive Mom and Dad, it is my inheritance, or at least it better be, which I knew when I gave it to them. But imagine if I did something so amazing that it made my parents so proud that they decided to give me back the stein before they died—say, for instance, I became a pastor. That would be something, wouldn’t it, to get back what was originally mine in the first place? So also, except not in a sinful way, Christ always knew that He would receive back all that He gave up to come down to save us according to His Father’s will. Christ, as the Son of God, became an heir to all that is God’s when He gave up His full enjoyment of those things as the Son of Man. When His saving work was done, He inherited all those things again, receiving them back from the very proud Father for whom He had given up the full use of them according to His human nature.

The writer to the Hebrews also says Christ “*upholds the universe by the word of His power.*” Christ, who died for us, is also He who upholds the world for our benefit. He does not force those who live in it to do His will, and He does not end it when they disobey, but He upholds it in the hope that we might come to know His goodness and grace and, having done so, more fully enjoy this world which He upholds. He is the upholder of the world, and think of how many times we would have destroyed it already if He weren’t.

But so what? What does who Christ is mean for us? What does it benefit me if this Child is God? It means and benefits me everything, because this Child is these things for me, for us. The writer to the Hebrews says, “*After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*” This Child was born to purify us of our sins. He purified our birth by His birth, our everyday life by His everyday life, our worship by His worship, our love by His love, and our death by His death. He paid for our sins by taking our place under God’s wrath, and He got the job done. After all, that is why He ascended to heaven. It was finished. Everything necessary for our salvation was completed.

So now what? The writer to the Hebrews writes, “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us in His Son.*” God spoke. God spoke through men and then ultimately “in His Son.” He spoke, past tense. We need not expect any further message. All we need to know about our God and our salvation was spoken in Christ. If you want to see the sun, look at its light. If you want to know God, look at His Son. So now what? God has spoken. Let us do what every polite person does when someone important speaks. Let us listen. Look to Jesus and hear all that God wants you to know, through the prophets, through the apostles, and in His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. He is the heir of all things, and, like a good brother, He wants to share His inheritance with us.

There are ugly babies, but this is not one of them. This is the most beautiful baby of all because of who He is, where He came from, and how He is related to us. He is God. He is from God the Father in heaven. He is our Substitute and Savior. Who has ever seen such a child! And if you think looking at Him is great, listen to Him—it is even better. Amen.