

From 1983 to 2005 nearly two million people were killed during a civil war in Sudan. One of the sad consequences of that dark period is the nearly 30,000 young boys were displaced by the bloodshed. They are called The Lost Boys. Many of them were granted refugee status and are spread out all over the U.S. It's hard to imagine the challenges faced by refugees. Even something so routine to us in America like the celebration of Christmas seems strange to them...Lost Boys clip...The Lost Boys may be confused about Christmas but they are not confused about Christ. Many Americans are. Christmas inevitably brings to the surface a lot of underlying confusion about Jesus. Yesterday, in a church not far from here, two pastors debated the subject, "Who is Christ for me?" Apparently they think we each get to decide. What a perfect Christmas gift, a designer Christ, custom-made in our own image and after our own taste.

This time of year all the trappings of the holiday season accumulate, layer upon layer, disfiguring the Christ of Christmas. We disfigure Christ when we secularize that which is sacred. A popular movie a couple of years ago had a prayer scene where Jesus is addressed as the "8 lb. 6 oz. newborn infant Jesus...the Christmas Jesus...tiny infant Jesus." What follows is a discussion on how everyone else at the table pictures Jesus. "I like to picture Jesus as a Ninja fightin' off evil Samurai," or "I like to think of Jesus with giant eagle wings." The sacred becomes a secular joke.

We can disfigure Christ by sanctifying the secular. Like the pastor who wrote a Christmas article for the denominational newsletter: "There are few causes to which I am more passionately committed than that of Santa Claus. Santa Claus deserves not just any place in the church but the highest place of honor, where he should be enthroned as the long-bearded, ancient of days, the divine and holy one whom we call God...Santa Claus is God the Son. `You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why, Santa Claus is coming to town' simply refers to God the Son slipping into the secrets of the heart as easily as he slips down the chimney of the house...Santa Claus is God the Father, the creator of heaven and earth, in whose hand is a pack bursting at its seams with the gifts of His creation. Santa Claus is God the Holy Spirit who comes with the sound of gentle laughter with a shape like a bowl full of jelly to sow in the night the seeds of good humor. Santa Claus indeed deserves the exalted and enthroned place in the church, for he is God, Son, Father and Holy Spirit. So there he is: God the Son, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit. I've seen him in the toy store. I've seen him in his car on the freeway. And when I saw him with his crazy beard and his baggy red suit, I saw more than the seasonal merchant of cheap plastic toys, I saw no less than the triune God," ("The Episcopal News--The Diocese of Los Angeles," written by the rector of St. Mark's Church in Upland, California, quoted by John MacArthur in a Christmas message titled, "The Incarnation of the Triune God.") To be fair, I think the pastor was trying to say that Santa Claus can remind us of God somehow but his attempt to sanctify the secular confuses more than it clarifies.

Perhaps the greatest source of confusion about Jesus is the tension between His humanity and His divinity. How could Jesus be both God and man? How can He be a "baby in a manger" and the God who creates the babies at the same time? It is hard to conceive of someone who is 100% God and 100% man. The biblical writers knew this and responded by using a rare word to describe Jesus, "monogenesis" or "only begotten." This word is sometimes translated, "one-of-a-kind." "Only begotten" is not intended to convey how many people there are in God's immediate family. It is a term used to convey that the God-ness of God, His essence or DNA, is shared by Jesus the Son. But "only begotten" also conveys the uniqueness of Jesus who,

unlike any human being, was fully God and fully man.

To truly appreciate Christmas we have to embrace the full story. In order for the Christmas message to be wonder-full we have to know the fullness of God and of God's plan to save us. If Jesus is fully God but not a man then we have a Savior who cannot identify with our humanity. If Jesus is fully man but not God then we have a Savior who has no power to conquer sin and death. The wonder of the incarnation is that Jesus, the only-begotten, is fully God and fully man. To fully appreciate the wonder of Christmas is to fully embrace the fullness of God demonstrated in His incarnation.

John 1:1-14 presents the eye-witness testimony of one who knew Jesus well. Let's take a look at what John says about Jesus.

Jesus existed as God from the beginning...v. 1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." There have always been groups who have resisted the mystery implied in these two phrases: "the Word was with God," and "the Word was God." They say you can't have it both ways. Either he *was* God, or he was *with* God. If he was *with* God, he wasn't God. And if he *was* God, he wasn't with God. So to escape the tension some groups like the JW's, have even changed their translation of the Bible. Their New World Translation reads, "The Word was with God and the word was *a* God." For good grammatical and contextual reasons the Christian Church has never accepted such teaching as true. What the verse teaches is that the one we call Jesus Christ, before he was made flesh, was God who existed "in the beginning." That is why we worship Jesus and say with Thomas in John 20:28, "My Lord and my God."

Did Jesus ever claim to be God? Yes, He declared His eternal pre-existence when He said, "Before Abraham was I am." (Jn. 8:58) He used the "I am" of Ex. 3 claiming equality with God. That's how the religious leaders heard it because v. 59 says, "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him." Jesus is the eternally present God. He is eternally in the present mode, "I am." He was in the beginning, He is and He will always be. He is simply "I am."

Jesus is "The Word." Have you ever wondered why he is called "the Word"? He could have been called "the Power or Force": "In the beginning was the Force and the Force was with God and the Force was God." But power alone would be inadequate since power explains nothing. We explain ourselves with words. Words capture the meaning of what we do more than the power to do what we do. God shows forth His power throughout history, but he gave priority to the Word. He puts a high value on clarity and communication.

Calling Jesus "the Word" is John's way of emphasizing that Jesus came to earth for the sake of communication. First, and foremost, He exists, and has always existed, from all eternity for the sake of communication with the Father. Secondly, but infinitely important for us, the Son of God became divine communication to us. Jesus is the ultimate expression of God.

Jesus created everything...1:3: "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." There are at least two reasons John says this about the Word here. One is that it underscores that He is God. When we think of God, we think immediately of Creator. God is the origin and explanation for everything that exists. So when

John says, "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made," he means Jesus is God the Creator and He is *not* created.

Hebrews 1 echoes this when it says that throughout history God has spoken in many ways to many people but, "In these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, *through whom also He made the world*. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power." **Hebrews 1:2-3**

Verse 10 underscores the seriousness of the man's guilty blindness, and the greatness of the world's evil in rejecting Jesus. He comes to us as our *Maker*, and *still* the world will not receive him. But there is hope for us and it is found in v. 4.

Jesus has life, and that life becomes the light of men...John 1:4: "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." All life originates in the Word. That is obvious because, as we have seen already, he is the Creator of all things. But here the focus seems to be spiritual life. In other words, there are two overwhelming problems we humans face: we are spiritually dead and therefore spiritually blind. John is saying Jesus is the remedy to both problems: He has the life we need, and this life becomes the Light we need. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."

The life Jesus gives provides light. It not only enables us to see, but Jesus himself is the Light that is seen. When we were unbelievers we were blind to the truth and beauty – the glory – of Jesus. So when John says, "In him was life and that life was the Light of men," he means that Jesus, the Word-Made-Flesh, is both the power to see His glory *and* the glory seen. That's why v. 14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have *seen his glory*."

We have all experienced the confusion that comes from hearing only one side of a story. Those who believe one side of a story can be easily misled or confused. Unfortunately this selective hearing usually results in damaged relationships. The consequence of believing only one side of the story about Jesus is far worse, eternally worse. Jesus is not just a good person, an example of how to live. He is not Gandhi, or Nelson Mandela, or Mother Teresa. He is the divine Son of God, the Savior who takes away the sin of the world. What difference does this make?

If Jesus is God then...I am NOT. As we celebrate Christmas we humbly confess that we are merely created beings with a very limited perspective, a limited life span and limited authority. My perspective, my future, my authority in this life is derived from "the Word made flesh."

If Jesus is God then...He is the FINAL word. He is not whatever you want Him to be. The topic of yesterday's lecture was, "Who is Jesus is to you?" But that's not really the question? We don't get to choose who Jesus is. God has revealed Himself to us through the glorious birth, life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the God of the universe and the Lord of all. As C. S. Lewis eloquently pointed out in *Mere Christianity* our options may not be so open-ended.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral

teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg— or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at 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 patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” C. S. Lewis

If Jesus is God then...He is the only life-giver. In spite of all the holiday cheer, Christmas is often a time of disappointment and discouragement. We all want to experience life, true life, meaningful life, abundant life, eternal life. If you expect to find life through things like presents and parties and people then you will be as disappointed as a child without a chimney on Christmas Eve. But Jesus came that we might have life, real life. John 1:12-13 contains a wonderful promise: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Jesus is God so “let every heart prepare Him room.”

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Claus is God the Holy Spirit who comes with the sound of gentle laughter with a shape like a bowl full of jelly to sow in the night the seeds of good humor. Santa Claus indeed deserves the exalted and enthroned place in the church, for he is God, Son, Father and Holy Spirit. So there he is: God the Son, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit. I've seen him in the toy store. I've seen him in his car on the freeway. And when I saw him with his crazy beard and his baggy red suit, I saw more than the seasonal merchant of cheap plastic toys, I saw no less than the triune God," ("The Episcopal News--The Diocese of Los Angeles," written by the rector of St. Mark's Church in Upland, California, quoted by John MacArthur in a Christmas message titled, "The Incarnation of the Triune God.")