

To God Alone Be The Glory

“What child is this?” one of our Christmas carols asks. And we love the answer: “This, this is Christ the King...” Isaiah brings out the same point in the Old Testament lesson for Christmas Eve (9:2-7). *6To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

What juxtaposition! Isaiah lays ‘the full weight of governing’ on the shoulders of a baby! Then he lays the full weight of names on that baby, God’s names! And even though all who are born eventually die, Isaiah predicts unending peace in the unending kingdom of this baby. No wonder the Christian Church on earth reads this portion of God’s Word on Christmas Eve! God’s people love to be reminded that baby Jesus is more than just a baby. And so every Christmas we engage in some form of juxtaposition—the laying side-by-side of things or ideas that don’t normally go together.

I really enjoy watching for juxtapositions in the Christmas story and in the whole life of Christ, trying to notice all the ways God placed certain things side by side that normally you wouldn’t expect to be side by side. For instance, Jesus was born a child, yet Isaiah and the other prophets of old, and the angels at his birth, called Jesus King and Lord and God. Ponder that for a minute. If he was carried in the womb and then on the arm, he was a human baby like you and I once were. Yet Isaiah calls him *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God*. How can a human be God? For that matter, how can God be a human? Aren’t God and man things that are mutually exclusive of each other? Yet the Bible lays these two truths about Jesus side by side. What juxtaposition!

More examples. Jesus was and is King, yet he was born in a stable rather than in a palace with a doctor or a midwife. Prince Jesus was bedded down where barn animals feed. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, even of those shepherds who came to visit him on his first night out of the womb. Jesus is the Light of the world, yet the wisemen followed the light of a star in order to find him. Jesus is our heavenly Father’s gift to

us, yet he received gifts from the wisemen (who arrived in Bethlehem later on, as much as two years after Jesus was born). Helpless baby Jesus came to save powerful King Herod from hell, but Herod saw the baby as a threat and tried to kill him. What juxtaposition!

The Bible reveals that the Son of God (Jesus) took part in creation (Colossians 1:16-17). You could say he designed the universe, yet as a human he took on the lowly life of a peasant carpenter, still a designer, but on a much smaller scale. The Bible also reveals that Jesus is very active in keeping the world going. To say it in a practical way, when cats have kittens or dogs have puppies or cows have calves, Jesus is involved in that, keeping God's creation going. So when Jesus was laid in the manger, that feeding trough for cattle or sheep or donkeys, he was lying next to animals that he had helped create. When his mother fed him, she was feeding the one who feeds the pheasants and the bears and the deer and the fish. Jesus continued governing the universe (v 7), even as he lay there nestled in the hay and needing his diaper changed. What juxtaposition!

He was and is the Almighty, yet he didn't act all high and mighty. He knows everything, yet he had to learn how to talk and walk and sing and swing a hammer and use woodworking tools. He knew it all, yet he was never a know-it-all. In John's Gospel he is called the Word of God because, having heard God's eternal thoughts about love for sinners and repentance and forgiveness, he came and spoke God's thoughts to us. He put God's thoughts into words for us. So Jesus is the Word of God, yet he studied the Word of God throughout his life. In heaven Jesus will be our temple, yet he was brought by his parents to the Jewish Temple where, as a twelve-year-old, he listened to the teachers and asked them questions about the very Scriptures which testified about him. What juxtaposition!

Jesus could have been a name-dropper: "Hey, apostles, did I ever tell you about the days when I used to walk with Enoch? Oh, you should have seen how high Moses jumped when I called to him out of the burning bush!" Jesus could have bragged about all the upscale property he owns along Lake Pepin or on the bluffs: "Yeah, and Red Wing and Rochester? They really belongs

to me too.” He could have been a twelve-year-old showoff: “Hey, Mom & Dad, why don’t I fly you back to Nazareth to make up for the three days you lost searching for me while I stayed behind at the Temple.” But Jesus wasn’t born to show off. He was born to show up, show up for his appointment with the cross at age 33. He showed up so that when we show up at the gates of heaven, the Father will recognize us as forgiven and let us in to the heavenly mansions that await all who believe in Jesus.

When Jesus grew into a man, he went about doing good (see Acts 10:38). It didn’t matter to Jesus who people were. If he lived in Lake City, he would be friends with Hispanics and Hmong and Norwegians and even Germans. Jesus ate dinner with the rich as well as the poor, the well-behaved as well as the prostitutes. He had a whole world to redeem, yet he took the time to walk to that wedding in Cana. As a result of Jesus’ showing love and sharing the good news about God’s love, people generally liked him and wanted to be near him.

But Jesus ascended to heaven a long time ago. He hasn’t shown his face on earth since. Don’t get me wrong,

he’s here right now with us who have gathered in his name. But how are people to know Jesus’ love today since they can’t see him? Who will show them Jesus’ love?

Maybe you’ve heard the story about the drunkard named Joe. Joe was so attached to liquor that no one had any hope of him ever sobering up, not even at this one Christian center for outreach to addicts. But God’s Word is powerful, powerful enough to change even the stubborn, like you and me. And God’s Word changed Joe. We don’t always see such dramatic changes in everyone, but God gives extra grace where it is needed. Joe became a caring man. He would do whatever they asked him to do at the outreach center. Scrub the toilets? Okay. Clean up after a violently sick alcoholic? No problem. Joe almost always smiled and seemed grateful that there was a way he could help. Joe’s compassion for others, compared to his former selfishness—what juxtaposition!

*On one occasion when the pastor of the center was preaching to the addicts who had gathered there, a man came down the aisle calling out for God to change him. The repentant drunkard cried, “Oh, Lord, make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!”

*The pastor corrected the man,

“Don’t you mean, ‘Make me like Jesus’?” The penitent drunkard looked at the pastor with obvious confusion. He asked, “Is he like Joe?”

The sad fact is that there are thousands of people who, like the man in the aisle, don’t know who Jesus is or how he lived or what he did to save us from all our sins. We used to be able to count on a large segment of Christians to show up for church at least on Christmas and Easter, and in this way to be renewed a little for their daily walk with the Lord by God’s message of love for sinners in Christ. But many people who call themselves Christians don’t even come to God’s house for Jesus’ birthday or his resurrection anymore. The majority of children are now growing up without religious training at home or in Sunday school or Lutheran Elementary School. You, my dear friends, might therefore be the only chance for certain people to rub elbows with a Christian who is still trying to be like Jesus. How will anyone know Jesus through you if you won’t forgive those who wronged you and try to reconcile with them? How will anyone know Jesus through you if you get just as drunk or high as anyone else at the party? How will anyone know Jesus through you if you drop just as many

F-bombs or shoot just as many GD bullets as everyone else? And how will God change you unless he can work in you through his Word Sunday after Sunday?

So, dear friend of Jesus, act in such a way that people see you as in a rather odd juxtaposition with ways of the world. And if they want to be honest like you, or compassionate like you, or loyal like you, you can explain that you’re just trying to be like Jesus, and that God is the one who has turned you into a better version of you, and that God did all this in you through the Bible. Keep being friendly and kind to everyone no matter what. You never know who will give you a chance to draw them closer to Jesus as, not just a good example, but more importantly as *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*, our Savior from sin.

Most people are aware of their shortcomings. Once they know you love them, they may let you talk about your shortcomings and how bad your sins are in God’s sight, and then they may let you help them see how bad their shortcomings are. And when it dawns on them how awesome it is for holy God to welcome sinners close to him, they may say, “What juxtaposition! Us next to God because of Christmas!”