

1 Christmas Sermon  
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When we read some portions of scripture, it becomes pretty obvious pretty quickly what the take-home message is supposed to be. “Love God, love your neighbor, care for the poor, the sick, the oppressed.” All of those messages can be found explicitly in the Bible, and it doesn’t take much effort to figure out what we’re supposed to do with those messages. They’re simple. They’re straightforward. They may not be easy to accomplish, but they’re easy to understand.

But every once in a while we come across a passage like today’s Gospel reading. A passage that doesn’t seem to apply to our everyday lives. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Scripture like this can be tempting to just gloss over. When we first glance at it, it may not even seem to make sense. But passages like today’s gospel are just as important as scripture that instructs us about how we should act in our everyday lives. Passages like today’s gospel may even be more important, because they teach us about the very nature of God.

Last week we celebrated the incarnation—God’s coming down to earth in human form in the person of Jesus, the Christ, the messiah. We retold the story of the Christ-child being born of the Virgin Mary in humble circumstances. And that is the aspect of God the Son that we tend to focus on the most—God the Son in human form, walking this earth and living as we do, yet without sin. In fact, we become so focused on God the Son incarnate that we may forget that God the Son existed well before Christ walked this earth, well before this earth was even created, and well before time began.

We’ve talked before about how God is Trinitarian in nature—how God is one God, and also comprised of three persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit), who are each distinct, but also completely intertwined—who are each fully God. Though the word “trinity” never appears in the New Testament, passages like today’s Gospel reading teach us this truth about God. Yes, it is true that “the Word became flesh and lived among us”, but it is also true that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

If we look to the book of Genesis, we see the Trinitarian God at work in creation. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” And it was through the Word that all things were created. “God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light” and in this way all things came to be. Here we see the persons of God at work, with the Spirit hovering over the waters and the Word, God the Son, spurring on the creation of all that is.

Yes, God the Son walked this earth in human form nearly 2000 years ago, but God the Son was also present at the creation of the world, and in fact has existed eternally, as the Trinitarian God has existed eternally, since before time even began. But why is this important? What is so wrong about focusing on the fact that God the Son came down in human form? After all, it was this miracle that led to our salvation, as we could only be saved from our sins by God the Son sacrificing himself for us, and conquering death for us.

It is true that Christ being born, and dying, and rising again is central to our faith, but to forget that God the Son exists eternally does a great disservice to our faith. Though it is important, especially during the Christmas season, to remember that God the Son was born for us, it becomes tempting for people to start modeling their idea of God after the incarnation. So many people think of God as a giant man in the sky. Part of this is because we use a lot of male language and male imagery for God, but this is also because we focus so much on Christ being born in human form—in male human form.

But even though Christ was a man, God the Son eternal is not a man, nor is God the Father, nor is God the Holy Spirit. And none of the persons of the Trinity is a woman either. Because God isn’t a giant man in the sky. God is God. God is all-powerful, and all-knowing, and all-present and so above our human understanding that we cannot possibly fully comprehend God. God’s very Trinitarian nature, one of the most fundamental aspects of God, is a truth that we cannot truly understand—our minds cannot fathom how God can be one God while simultaneously being the three persons of the Trinity. God is so above our human knowing that we cannot hope to fully appreciate God in our lifetimes. So to think of God as a giant man in the sky is to do a great disservice to our faith and is a modern form of idolatry, as worshipping a giant man in the sky is not truly worshipping God. Yet as children of God, we cannot help but seek to know the one by whom we were created.

Last week’s Gospel reminded us that God the Son came down to this earth in the form of a man. But this week’s Gospel reminds us that God the Son existed from before that human form existed, from before the world existed, from before existence existed. As did God the Father. As did God the Holy Spirit. And yes, reading this truth about God in scripture doesn’t exactly spur us on to some specific action like Christ’s

instructions to love our neighbors and to care for the less fortunate do. And yes, any attempts we humans make to know God are going to fall short. But as followers of Christ and creatures of God, it is our responsibility to try—to try to learn what we can about the very nature of God—not only so we can learn what God is, but also so that we know what God isn't. So this Christmas, let us celebrate God the Son becoming incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and being made man. But let us also celebrate God the Son, who is not a giant man in the sky, but who was in the beginning with God, and who IS God, and through whom all things were made. Let us ponder the holy mystery of the Trinity—Once God in Three Persons. And let us seek to come to a deeper understanding of the nature of God, until that time that we will see God face to face. Amen.