

## **“When We Centre on Christ . . . We See Humanity Differently”**

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*Third in an Advent Series*

Luke 1.26-38

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God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a city in Galilee, to a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David's house. The virgin's name was Mary. When the angel came to her, he said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Lord is with you!" She was confused by these words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen since I haven't had sexual relations with a man?"

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come over you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the one who is to be born will be holy. He will be called God's Son. Look, even in her old age, your relative Elizabeth has conceived a son. This woman who was labeled 'unable to conceive' is now six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God."

Then Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be with me just as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Luke 1.26b-38  
(Common English Bible)

"You're going to have a baby!" I'm guessing that sort of news was delivered to each of our moms too, sometime before they delivered us. It's so human. Mary's reaction too. Confusion. Surprise. Humbleness. Fear. Excitement. So human. Looking ahead, you know it will get rough for Mary, Joseph, and their Jesus. So human.

Yet, it's a human story unlike any other. Mary gets a glimpse of her child, not by an ultrasound, but an angel. Greatness! Ruler of God's People! Son of God Most High! Some human!

Jesus, so wonderfully like us, and so wonderfully unlike us. Both, his likeness and his unlikeness, are great news!

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For a couple of weeks I've had us imagine a dingy-dark room. Inside the room is us and everything in the *kosmos*. It's all we know. We see in the shadows, grope in the dark.

Then, I've imagined a window appearing. The window is Jesus. We look at him, and we can see outside now! God is the outside. We can see what God is like. What do we see? Jesus shows us God the Almighty becoming a servant, for us. He is the Master of life submitting to death, for us. Not distant nor aloof, God is with us. When Jesus is at our centre, we see God differently.

There's more. The window lets light in, and we can see inside our world much better than before. What do we see? This *kosmos* is God-created. This *kosmos* God delights in. This *kosmos* is not God, yet God chooses to fill it with God's presence. God enters into all its created messiness. In Jesus, the fullness of God becomes flesh and blood, the stuff of the *kosmos*. When Jesus is at the centre, we see our world differently.

Today, look at this Jesus-window again. It is a mirror. You see yourself in it, and all of us crowded around. It is very familiar . . . but not. When Jesus is at our centre, we see ourselves differently.

### III

See him in the mirror, human as we are.<sup>1</sup> He gets hungry and thirsty. He needs to be held. He will grow and mature. He will worship and pray. Tears, he will shed. Fear, he will feel. He won't know all the answers. Everyone belongs to a time and place, and he's taken for his address Judea, Roman Empire, when Herod was king.

He will face temptations, as we all do. His will be more intense. And, unlike us, he will stay faithful to God.<sup>2</sup> This will not mark him out as somehow unhuman. Rather, he is what all humanity should be. We are designed to walk in step with God, act in sync with God, love with the perfect love God pours into us. Jesus, the true human, does this.

Last week, we heard from the Bible that Jesus is "*the image of the invisible God*."<sup>3</sup> "Image of God" sounds very important, divine even. Then I remember where that phrase first shows up? In the beginning . . .

*God created humankind in God's image,  
in the image of God, God created them;  
male and female God created them.*<sup>4</sup>

That's all of us, folks. Images of God. Want to see us, as God makes us? Look at Jesus, "image of God." Notice his character, his heart. How is he with people? How is he with God? Look at what fires him up. See what concerns him most. He is the reflection of who

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<sup>1</sup> Docetism is an error in Christian theology, which says that Jesus was fully divine and only seemed to be human. It was rejected by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and is considered a grave mistake (i.e., a heresy). However, it continues to pop up in understandings of Jesus which downplay his human nature. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Docetism>.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 276f.

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:15.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:27.

we truly are: you, me, and all of us. Look at Jesus. He is us, as God made us to be in our God-given, divinely-designed fullness!<sup>5</sup>

When we see Jesus, we see ourselves differently.

Let me take a selfie!

#### IV

There is Jesus, with me beside him! All you too. Crammed around, it seems to be everyone.

Know what? We are not looking so good. I'm not talking about outside stuff. The heart stuff. Looking at us, beside him, we're a mess! An ugly mess.

I just read a book by Father Patrick Desbois, The Holocaust by Bullets it's called. He gathers accounts from witnesses, now elderly, who saw their Jewish neighbours murdered, close-up. Some 1.5 million of God's people lie in mass-graves, unmarked, in fields around villages through Eastern Europe.

Father Desbois writes:

*I am convinced that there is only one human race—a human race that shoots two-year-old children. For better or for worse I belong to that human race. . . .*<sup>6</sup>

I want to scream, "Not me!" Or, better, those who do such things are monsters, inhuman. But then, I realize that dividing up between "us good people" and "those bad people," "human" and "subhuman," that is what fuels these atrocities. And all the day-to-day, petty crimes we commit against each other, you and I. We are all in this together.

I see us. I see Jesus. I want to smash the mirror.

It's Jesus we smash. Jesus provokes us. We see who we are, and we see in him who God makes us to be, and that threatens us. We can't stand him, who he is and who he shows us to be. Shortly after Mary's child is born, the family will be in flight from a tyrant's terror. Herod's murder rage does not make it into our Christmas pageants, but not because it's abnormal. It's too ordinary, and so human! "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son. . . .*" I love that part. But then it says, "*The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light. . . .*"<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "The foundation for our affirmation that Jesus is the true human lies in his claim as confirmed by the resurrection. [It] signifies that Jesus himself is the one true human person and therefore the paradigm for all human beings. Jesus, in other words, is the revelation of humanness as intended by God. What each of us is designed to be — and what God intends, even destines us to become — has already been revealed in the man Jesus of Nazareth." Grenz, 282.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Desbois, The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews, trans. Catherine Spencer (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 67.

<sup>7</sup> John 3.19 (ESV)

Look into that mirror, in shards. Shattered by our self-loathing. Shattered by our disdain of God.

When we see Jesus, we see ourselves differently.

I don't like what I see.

V

Look into that broken mess, once more. Can you see through the cracks? God's grace abounds!

Jesus came into our mess, immersed himself in our ugliness. He loves us. We smashed him, and he smashed the powers that keep us chained. We condemned him, and he forgave the sins that condemn us. And he began to put us back together. Even us! Each of us. All of us.

Jesus became like us, to make us like him.<sup>8</sup>

He is remaking us into God's image again. He is restoring us to our place and wholeness within God's *kosmos*.

C. S. Lewis had some remarkable thoughts about this:

*If we let Him . . . [Christ] will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less.*<sup>9</sup>

Look at this Jesus-window-mirror. Cracked, from things we've thrown against it. And coming back together, by God's grace: restoring, recreating, renewing, saving, forgiving, healing, freeing. God's grace, abounding.

When we find Christ at the centre, we see humanity — us and all of us — differently. We see us as God made us to be. And, as we too often are. And—praise God—we see the One who can make us right again.

Amen!

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<sup>8</sup> This was classically said by Irenaeus of Lyon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century: "*The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.*" *Against Heresies*, book 5, preface.

<sup>9</sup> *Mere Christianity*, (London: Collins, 1952), 173-74.