

2024 Christmas Day Service 10 AM

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 December 2024

Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

- [0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, give us an increase of grace this Christmas morning. Where we lack knowledge, inform us. Where we lack character, transform us.
- And where we lack the will, help us to perform. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen. Once upon a time in a land far away, there was a birth.
- It is not how the Christmas story begins. That sounds like another Christmas Day sermon I preach. Then you have a pretty good memory. If you weren't here that morning, thanks for coming today.
- My name is James Wagner. While today's story doesn't start with once upon a time in a land far away, I now have revised my kind of comments on that. Because it sounds a little bit like that when you look down at the passage from Hebrews chapter 1 beginning at the first verse.
- If you want to turn to that, you can on page 1001. As it begins with, long ago. At many times and in many ways.
- [1 : 1 2] Did you hear the difference in the details this time? The Christmas story isn't a myth, but uniquely and more than miraculous.
- The Christmas story isn't a fantasy, but factually rich. And the devil isn't in the details according to some. It's God who's in the details, but of course not like Santa counting who's naughty or nice.
- God is into the details because he did something completely new like never before. God sent his son and spoke to us with unique clarity by sending him on this day that we celebrate his birth.
- And why did God do this? Well, because he wants us to know him. That is, God's knowledge of himself to us. And he also wants to meet our need.
- So we'll look at two things this morning. Just God's knowledge and our need. So first, God's knowledge. The God who wants us to know him. After the hook to pique our interest by the author of this letter, this message, we read this.
- [2 : 2 6] God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a son. In other words, God is and always has been here getting a message to us.
- And not only was God there and is, God is present now. But he's made us as the one who speaks to listen and to hear.
- Because the key words in this sentence is spoke and has spoken. That makes us listeners, though, as you know, we don't always hear. Still, God at many times and in many ways has spoken to us.
- And there are two definite ways he's spoken to us since his creation of us. And what are those ways? They're in here. They're in this text, verses 1 to 12. Prophets on one hand and angels on the other.
- Those are the two ways. In other words, God has spoken by humans and spirits, or what we used to call ghosts. The prophets and angels were messengers, analogous to letter carriers, less the envelopes.

[3 : 40] So God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. Prophets like Moses and Elijah, the most notable, but some less notable ones as well, but just as significant. Angels as well as like Gabriel and Michael, but nameless ones also were messengers of God.

In either case, whether listening or not, God did all that he could to get through to us words by messengers. This is how God makes himself known to us, because that's how beings disclose themselves to others.

Some think, if you want to know someone, just look at their behavior. Others think, listen to someone's words, strung into sentences, with plots that make a story.

Today's reading tells us that God speaks. The knowledge of him came to us, originally by second-hand knowledge, but finally by first-hand knowledge.

In the past, knowledge of God came by prophets and angels. The knowledge of God came by these beings, creatures. But this was second-hand knowledge.

[5 : 04] The knowledge was of rules and religion. Adequate, but not sufficient. Now the knowledge of God came not by others, but through himself.

Since the coming of Jesus Christ, the knowledge is from the uncreated, begotten, incarnate one. And this is first-hand knowledge.

The knowledge was autobiographical, reliable, and relational. Where before it was just adequate, though sufficient.

And this knowledge, no longer delivered by messengers, it comes by a man born of flesh and blood, like every one of us.

But just as human, and at the same time, completely divine. Not half one and half another, like a demigod, such as Achilles or Perseus or Percy Jackson or Annabeth.

[6 : 06] Fully human, fully divine, or what we call incarnate. This God-man delivers knowledge of God with perfect and personal relationship because he is God.

And Jesus Christ reveals God with total sufficiency. We've just come through a work stoppage, as you know, with Canada Post. And the Canada Post letter carriers are messengers, and we're really grateful for them.

But we know the system isn't completely sufficient. But the carriers are mere messengers for which we're thankful. But Jesus Christ is the perfect messenger of the knowledge of God.

Because he is the message of the knowledge of God. So God has spoken by his Son of himself and in Jesus Christ.

And this is the way he gets to us. God, yet man and flesh, giving us knowledge of himself. And so God wants to know this, wants us to know this about him.

[7 : 19] And God meets our greatest need. But as perfect as this knowledge delivered is, we have a problem. God doesn't have a need to be known because he's fully known in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Yet he knows that we have a need to know him. And the need to know him then maps perfectly with the knowledge of the one who spoke through the Son.

So the second point, our need. And the God who meets our greatest need. Now you would think that this meets our greatest need, just the knowledge of God.

But we have lots of needs. We also have lots of threats. And sometimes we try to assess our needs by the threats that we face. And we perceive lots of threats, don't we?

Is it climate change or brain change? Is it the global elite or the regional politicians? Is it biochemical disease or viruses?

[8 : 22] Or is it spiritual toxicity which makes us deaf to the God who has spoken through Jesus at the Bethlehem barn? Years ago, I read a book while in graduate school about systems that are supposed to support life.

These thought systems kind of put us in a bind. It keeps us from receiving what it is that we actually need. And I'll never forget some of the wisdom that came from a Jewish proverb that read like this.

When I was 20, I wanted to save the world. When I was 30, I wanted to save my country. When I was 40, I wanted to save my family.

When I was 50, I wanted to save my marriage. When I was 60, I just wanted to save myself. And only if I'd started there when I was 20, I'd learned that I needed someone else.

There is a spiritual toxicity that we carry which requires a remedy that we don't possess. Our greatest need is to know what the knowledge of the speaking God does for us.

[9 : 39] And the speaking God through his son, wrapped in swaddling clothes and humility, identifies and addresses our greatest need in verses 2 and 3. Look down with me where it reads, whom God appointed the heir of all things.

This is about his son, Jesus. Through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

After making purification for sins. So there is the reason for God's coming and speaking to us. Making himself known by word to us.

And the word made flesh and developed among us. In the flesh, up close and personal, firsthand. The one who was appointed, created, radiates the glory of God.

The one whom is the exact imprint and upholds all. This one shows the character and the nature of God through purification for sins.

[10 : 52] And this is our greatest need. This is why we celebrate the coming of Christ, the Son of God, at Christmas. And how does this speaking God make purification for sins?

Nestled in the traits and attributes of this speaking God is the Son. We are told he is the radiance of the glory of God. How often this Christmas, last night or today, do we sing about this glory?

The glory of God is how he makes purification for sin. Now, I used to think that the glory of God was like the glory of man. But the glory of man is like fame, you know, for those who follow people like Taylor Swift.

But the glory of God is not about fame, but the favor of God. And there is earthly glory and there is heavenly glory. And God came to make purification for sins by radiating the glory of God.

And the radiation of God's glory is like treating cancer with radiation, except medical radiation will make you sick before healing you, if it even does that.

[12 : 07] But the radiation of God's glory targets the impurity which infects our createdness. And this radiation of God's glory makes us then perfect and pure, clear and clean, filtered and faithful.

And that's what the radiation of God's glory does. How the speaking God does this comes later in the book of Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9.

You can turn there if you want. But there's a little bit of a surprise, a little bit of a shock in this. As we read, but we see him who is for a little while has made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is why he was born. This radiating glory of God through the death of Jesus makes purification for sins. So the God who spoke, speaks, keeps speaking through his Son and his Spirit, enunciating and articulating, animating and announcing glory to God in the highest.

And not only peace to his people on earth, but purification. So that is why the angels sung glory to God in the highest.

[13 : 34] Christ. And by comparison, the speaking God said about his Son wrapped in swaddling clothes the rest of the verses that follow in Hebrews chapter 1.

And so let me read these for you as we bring this to a close. These words about this Son who came that morning. I will be to him a father and he shall be my son.

Let all God's angels worship him. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever the scepter of uprightness and the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

Therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. And you, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning and the heavens are the work of your hands.

They will perish, but you remain. They will wear out like a garment, like a robe. You will roll them up like a garment. They will be changed. But you are the same and your years will have no end.

[14 : 48] And this is the word of the Lord. And God has spoken and spoken to our greatest need. And so, yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning.

Jesus, to thee be glory given. Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing. Amen. Amen. Amen.