

## Hebrews 1:1-6

Christmas Day • December 25, 2007  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho  
Pastor Tim Pauls  
"The Perfect Gift"

The Word of the Lord from Hebrews 1: <sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

This is the Word of the Lord.

About four months ago, I got a new phone. Gadget-guy that I am, I researched carefully and made my pick. I've got this slick little silver and gray model that I carry today. I was happy with the result: the phone does what I need it to do, and more. However, the initial joy lasted a short time: four days later, the new-and-improved version of the phone hit the market. Now, the new-and-improved version has all the same features as mine. It doesn't do anything new. But—and this is important—it now comes in blue. Blue! I don't have the newest model anymore.

I bring this to your attention because my cell phone teaches something about Christmas: every gift under the tree preaches the Law to you. It preaches especially two facets. For one thing, there's always something better out there. If you buy the sweater, there's always cashmere; buy the cashmere, and there's always a thicker ply. Buy the 42-inch plasma TV, and there's always the 60-inch model for a lot more money. Get the new laptop, and next week's model will have a better chip. Buy the puppy, and the one down the street will eat fewer important documents. Get the new cell phone, and next week it will come in better colors. Thus the first point of the Law: there's always something better out there.

The other point is this: everything under the tree eventually falls apart. Sweaters pill. Technology breaks. Puppies don't remain puppies very long, and dogs don't live forever.

Now, I'm not trying to spoil your Christmas morning, and I'm all for giving gifts. I hope that any gift exchanges you've had have been enjoyable. But there's more to Christmas than this, and there had better be: see, the Law isn't just about the things you give and receive. The Law is about you, too, and the same principles apply. There will always be better than you—you will not live up to what you were supposed to be. And you're going to fall apart, too. That's an undeniable truth in a sinful world.

So while gift-giving is a part of Christmas, it still ends up preaching the Law. On this day, as on every other, you need to hear some Gospel. Thus we arrive at the proclamation in our epistle for this Christmas Day. It proclaims Jesus. It proclaims to you the Infant whom Mary bears, wraps in swaddling clothes and lays in a manger. But this is no ordinary Baby whose birth you celebrate. Hear this:

He has been appointed heir of all things, and through Him was the world created. First and foremost, this Day is not about things. It is about *Him*. It is about the Creator and Ruler of all things. That's a good start: there's more to life than possessions—you are in the hands of the one who created all things and still rules over you. Please ponder that truth, and as you do, wonder at this: the Baby doesn't grow up to be the Ruler of all things. In the manger, swaddled and immobile, He already is the Ruler and Creator of all things. He has been from eternity. As Mary cares for that fragile flesh and blood, He is sustaining all creation.

There's more: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power." He's not just a ruler, and He's not just a man. He's God. He's the Son of God become flesh for you. He is no less God than His Father in heaven. Those tiny fingers are the all-powerful right hand of God. Those newborn eyes, still closed from birth, roam to and fro across the earth. The mouth that has yet to speak His first words upholds the universe by the Word of His power.

Here's your greatest cause for joy: He has made purification for sins. Jesus does not become flesh for a joyride through creation. He becomes flesh for your purification, at a great price. He has become flesh to take your place and suffer for your sin. He is born with a face to be struck, a back to be scourged, hands and feet to be nailed. He doesn't have to become man to uphold the universe or create or sustain or provide daily bread—He's been doing all of that since the foundation of the world. He becomes flesh for one reason only—to purify you by taking your sins away on the cross. That's the Gospel.

Here's the follow-up: risen again, He sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He sits at the right hand of His Father—why? For you. He sits at the right hand of His Father to say of you, "Father, I've died for that one. I've taken that one's sins away. That one is forgiven." And the Father delights to add His amen and say, "For Your sake, My Son, let it be so."

This is the Good News of Christmas: the fragile Baby in the manger is almighty God in human flesh, born to die for your sins and raised to be your Mediator forever. What does this mean? Simply this: He's destroyed the curse of the Law. Because of sin, you could never be what you were intended to be—there would always be better. By the grace of God, He sees you as pure and holy; and on the Last Day, you will be raised up in perfection—you will be more and better you than you ever have been, ever could be in this sinful world. Furthermore, that Last Day lasts forever. Because of sin, you are falling apart in this world as all things fall apart, because the wages of sin is death. By the grace of God, you have eternal life. Jesus became human like you to die and to rise again for you—therefore, by His grace, He will raise you up again for eternal life.

That's why Christmas matters. That is why, far beyond gifts and family get-togethers, we celebrate the birth of the Son of God become flesh.

That is also why the world will have none of it.

See, sinful man will do anything to make Jesus anything but the Son of God made man. It's okay with the world if Jesus is just a nice guy, a symbol of charity and how good man can be: because, you see, if Jesus shows us that mankind can be good, then we don't have to admit how sinful and alien to God we really are. Thus many religions, and even some churches that deceive themselves into believing they're Christian, are happy to label Jesus as a prophet, a wise teacher, but only human—nothing more. If that is the case, then your future is no rosier than that of my cell phone—there's an alarming thought. You're going to wear out, stop functioning and be tossed and lost forever. Others are okay with saying Jesus is child of God, but no different from you: therefore, it's up to you to follow in His footsteps and be good enough to earn eternal life. There's no hope there: you can never be as "better" as you need to be. Mankind is even okay with saying that Jesus is divine, as long as He wasn't also man: that way, there's no real comparison. There's no close connection between God and man, so we're left to do whatever we think is best.

In the end, all the different active attacks and passive detractions on Christmas by the world are because of this: they reject the Incarnation. They don't believe that Jesus became flesh for

your salvation. And if they reject it, why celebrate it? Might as well turn the holiday into something else.

You'll be tempted to that, too. With the frantic schedule that always comes in December, the shopping and the eating, you're bombarded with all sorts of stimuli and messages. To get up and come here on Christmas Day to hear that the big news is that the Son of God is born to Mary seems so passé and anti-climactic, what with parties and gifts and ribbons and things.

But parties end. Gifts wear out and ribbons are going out in the trash. Remember, all of these things—enjoyable things, to be sure—preach the Law to you. They preach that there's always something better, and they preach that everything eventually breaks. They proclaim that you can always be better than you are, and they declare that you'll eventually break...if you're not breaking already.

Jesus will not get better. He can't. He's already perfect. He's already perfectly all-powerful and holy. He's already the perfect Savior for you, the Son of God who was born to Mary to save you from your sins. He became human just like you, but with perfect sinless flesh and blood, to deliver you from death. Jesus will not wear out. There will not be a time when His almighty power flickers and wanes. There will not be a time when His atonement does not cover your sins. There will never be a time where His grace is not sufficient for you. When He says, "I forgive you for all of your sins," it will never mean "I forgive you for some of your sins, because I'm not the strong Savior I once was." "I baptize you" will never mean, "You're baptized as long as I was powerful enough that day." "This is My body" will never mean "This might be My body." Jesus is never less than perfect, never less than powerful, and His grace is never less than fully sufficient for you.

And because this perfect Word-become-flesh is your Savior, this is certain. Though now you struggle with sin and decay in a sinful world, it will not always be so. Jesus came into this world to get you out of it. He became flesh to redeem your flesh. He lived a perfect, better life to give you the credit for it. He died the worst death to spare you, to take away your sin and guilt. Even now, because of Jesus, God doesn't see you as a sinner who should be doing oh-so-much better. He sees you as His beloved child, pure and holy—as holy as the Infant in Mary's arms, because that Infant is born to make you pure and holy like Him.

Rejoice then, dear friends, in these Christmas tidings: Christ is born for you. He is, in more ways than one, the perfect Gift. For now, you will have trouble because you still have sinful flesh in a sinful world. But because Jesus came into this sinful world with sinless flesh and blood, this is true of you forever: forever in heaven, you'll be perfect, as in Christ you already are. You'll never be less than pure and holy. You'll never wear out. You'll never break. Because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen