

The Beauty of God in Christ

Philippians 2:6-11

December 22, 2024

Please turn in your Bibles to Philippians, second chapter, Philippians chapter 2, which is a most fitting passage for this Christmas season to reflect on the glory of God in Christ.

I suppose it's no secret to say that I am a sucker for all the sappy, sentimental trappings of the season. Don't laugh too hard on that. But gaudy Christmas sweaters? You guys know I love them, Santa hats, curling up with a cup of cocoa in front of a Hallmark Channel Christmas marathon.

Okay, so I'm starting off my sermon not well. I'm starting out by lying, right? In spite of my anti-Disney, anti-Hallmark barbs here and there, it is true that I do enjoy Christmas lights, holiday cheer, Starbucks cups with Christmas stuff on them, and the chance to say "Merry Christmas" in response to

"Happy Holidays," the finding avenues to speak of Christ. I find all kinds of opportunity to do that at times like this.

I enjoy neighborhoods at Christmas time. I like seeing some of the elaborate displays, simple displays and elaborate displays of Christmas lighting. Some people turn their yards into life-size snow globes, big cartoon Christmas scenes.

Melinda and I were riding through a neighborhood just yesterday. We saw a, it was a Penguin with a Santa hat on and a Christmas tree next to it, inflatable, the size of the house. It was like a three-story house. This thing was huge. That's, nothing more American than that. Some use enough electricity to power a third-world country.

And I find myself thinking, how American of us, isn't it, how we waste all this energy, waste all this power for gaudy, impractical Christmas lights. And I think to myself, I wonder how much money we waste and how much time we can never recover in doing the yards up that way.

But then I started thinking, why am I getting so judgy? I've always liked this. Am I turning into a Scrooge in my old age? Invariably, I go back through this mental back-and-forth, and it is not a lie to say that I do this every season. I think about these kinds of things, and it invariably brings me back to something significant and something meaningful about the lights that we put up and enjoy at Christmas time.

Why do my neighbors and yours, why do you, some of you, spend so much time and energy, and I mean power, electricity, doing this year after year? Why do we do that? Why do my neighbors go to the effort? And I say "my neighbors" because you drive through my neighborhood and there are lights, lights, lights, and then you see a hole of darkness. That's our house.

But why do they go to the effort and expense of decorating and celebrating? However deep or shallow their understanding of the season truly is, why do they do this?

There are a number of answers to this, for sure, but at the very least I think it demonstrates an internal desire that we all have to create beauty, to let others experience something beautiful, though we don't all, it's very clear, don't share the same tastes.

We see this in all kinds of ways, but this desire to share, to create and share something beautiful is illustrated whenever people light up the neighborhood. We rejoice in creating beauty. It's instinctive to us or innate to us in one way or another, by various means and in different ways.

We're drawn to that which is beautiful. We're inwardly compelled to create and share beauty with others around us, not because it's practical, not because of some utilitarian purpose that it serves. In fact, so much of this is impractical and serves no utilitarian purpose. You could do more with the money, budget better, all that kind of thing.

Why do we do this? Not because it's practical, but because it evokes in others wonder and pleasure and delight. Opinions of

what is beautiful can be distorted, and I'd say ill-advised. We do commend the impulse of seeking beauty, and the love and enjoyment of beauty as a good, as that which enriches our lives.

And when that which is beautiful is informed by what is true and what is good, what is right, and what is morally upright, we discover that beauty is not merely in the eye of the beholder. Beauty is not merely a subjective, purely subjective thing, but it has objective properties to it.

I benefited recently from a book that I have read and returned to over the past several months called *The Beauty of the Lord* by Jonathan King, and it's a book on theological aesthetics. It's not so much about the theology of art, though that's a thing, but it's actually talking about aesthetics as defined by, demonstrated in, the Trinity itself.

The author, I believe, shares David's longing expressed in Psalm 27:4, that says, where David says, "One thing I have asked from Yahweh, and that shall I seek, that I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life." Why is that, David?



Why do you want to live there? "To behold the beauty of Yahweh and to inquire or meditate in his temple."

He wants to see something beautiful, something that evokes awe and wonder and pleasure and delight. And he finds that in God himself. Sweet Psalmist of Israel longs for the beauty of the Lord. He longs for that which affects him like nothing else in all creation, that which evokes in his soul the sense of wonder and pleasure and delight.

And he is compelled to draw near, first and foremost, one thing, to the living and holy God, to worship him, as the psalmist says in Psalm 96, "to worship him in the beauty of holiness."

Fundamental to any definition of beauty is an idea of fittingness, that which is fitting or appropriate. And that's what we see in God, whose triune glory is what sets the standard for all beauty.



As creatures made in God's image, we have within us the capacity to seek beauty. We have an internal desire to seek it, and we have an ability to inform our understanding about beauty as an objective reality, an objective transcendental, along with goodness, along with truth.

And that's what I hope to help you with this morning, that as you enjoy all of the trappings of the Christmas season and enjoy, drive around enjoying the Christmas lights, other sentimental trimmings of the season, that you're able to look past the colorful lights to see the true light, to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and to worship the God of the incarnation in the beauty, the true beauty of his holiness.

Jonathan King lays down a definition for beauty which really sets a foundation for understanding the true beauty of Christmas in the incarnation of Christ. And he says this: "Beauty is an intrinsic quality of things which, when perceived, pleases the mind by displaying a certain kind of fittingness.

"That is to say, beauty is discerned via objective properties such as proportion, unity, variety, symmetry, harmony, intricacy, delicacy, simplicity, or suggestiveness." I'd repeat that definition if it weren't so long. I'll just let you listen to it later online.

But I hope you heard some of that: that there are objective properties to beauty, that objective properties or markers of beauty truly exist, that it's not just some subjective thing that we can form and shape according to our own, let's just say dull, understanding; but actually, the more that we're informed by truth and goodness, we see what's truly beautiful, and we find the beautiful in our God.

We see God glorified, visibly displayed to us in the incarnation of the Son of God, in the fittingness of what God has done in and through Christ, what he has done, what he is doing, what he continues to do and will do for all of eternity.

We have the privilege as Christians to enjoy this God forever and ever, to gaze on the beauty of his holiness for all

of eternity. This is our reward, and we've got to start now.
We've got to start even now.

To this end, we'll look at the Carmen Christi, what I introduced last week in Philippians 2:6-11. Carmen Christi, Latin for "Song of Christ" or "Christ's hymn." It is a hymn about the glory, or we could say the beauty of the Lord in the incarnate Christ.

And what this hymn describes and how it describes it in particular, is the beauty of Christ in his, first, in his condescension, and then secondly in his vindication.

Sometimes you'll see in your Bibles a little notation at the head of Philippians, chapter 2. It talks about the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ. That's one way to describe it.

I prefer the terms condescension and vindication.
Condescension and vindication because there was no humiliation

of Christ to take on flesh. That was not humiliating him. He took on what was created and called by God in the very beginning, "good" and "very good." He took on flesh. There's nothing humiliating about that.

The humiliation does come in his crucifixion, his shame, which we'll come to. But just him being incarnate is not an example of humiliation, but it is an example of his condescension, his condescension to become man, to be with us. And then we see that in verses 6-8, and then in 9-11, we see his vindication, his exaltation, yes, but it's really his vindication as God vindicates his Son.

Paul summarizes the symmetry that we see in this hymn, which is about the incarnate Christ. He summarizes this symmetry in Ephesians 4:9-10, where he says how Christ had "descended into the lower parts of the earth, and he who descended is himself also he who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things."

There's the symmetry, a condescension, a condescension like no one has ever known, like no one has ever seen, and then an exaltation beyond what anybody could ever imagine. But what both are fitting, both appropriate. And so you see the symmetry and the proportionality, which is an evidence of beauty.

So in the first half of the hymn, verses 6-8, Christ condescends to become a man, being made like us. But then he descended even further, taking the form of a slave, and then even further to embrace the humiliation of death on a cross. And so we're going to call that point the beauty of Christ's condescension.

In the second half of the hymn, verses 9-11, God rewards him for obedience, and in proportion to his humiliation, God elevates Christ above all things. God gives his Son the name above all names that all rational creatures should worship him. And this is the beauty of Christ's vindication. That'll be our second point. So the beauty of Christ's condescension, and then his vindication.

So we start, Philippians 2:6-8, first point: the beauty of Christ's condescension. And we know that Paul introduces this in Philippians 2:5 when he says, "Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus." Christian, pay attention. We're to have this attitude or this mind or this way of thinking. We're to have this mindset in ourselves. So pay close attention to the mentality, to the mindset that our Lord has.

In verse 6 it says, "...who, although existing in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

In that section we see three objective markers of the beauty of Christ as he descended from pre-incarnate glory, condescending to take on flesh and taking the form of a slave, and then embracing the humiliation and the shame of the cross.

Notice, first, the beauty of Christ's essential nature in verse 6. The beauty of Christ's essential nature in verse 6.

"Although existing in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped."

If I could just summarize that section in these few words, it simply says Christ is God and yet he did not need to prove it. Christ is God, but he didn't need to prove it.

First, Christ is God. Paul says, "he is existing." That's a present-tense verb. So it's a continuous aspect. He is existing in the form of God; *en morphē theos* is how it's said in the Greek. So it's existing in the form of God and existing not just in his pre-incarnate glory, but presently, all through his incarnation to this very moment, existing in the form of God. So we need to carry that idea forward, "existing in the form of God."

The word *morphe* is the word "form." The word *morphe* can refer to an external shape of something. When that something is a physical object, it refers to its external shape or form. But

when that something is non-physical, when it's non-corporeal, when it's spiritual, as God is, the Greek word *morphe* refers to the nature of something.

So Christ is existing, continuously existing, in the nature of God, possessing divine attributes always. In other words, what Paul is saying is that Christ existing in the form of God is the very glory of God. It's how God is glorified.

Peter T. O'Brien, O'Brien, who says this, "The expression 'in the form of God' corresponds completely with John 17:5: 'the glory that I had with you before the world began.' The description reminds us of Hebrews 1:3, 'the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.' And it reminds us of the title *logos*." End quote from O'Brien.

By that title, *logos*, many of you may be familiar with this, some of you may not, but he's referring to John 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word," and the word there is *ha logos*. *Logos* is the idea. "The Word was with God, the Word was God, and he was in the beginning with God, and all things came into being

by him, and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being."

So if there's anything that's come into being, and it's a created thing and it exists beyond, he did it. Christ the *Logos*, he is the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity and thus creator of all things. That's what John 1:3 says.

Paul says something very similar, expanding on that thought in Colossians 1:15-16. He says, "He," Christ, "is the image of the invisible God. He's the first-born of all creation. By him all things were created both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things have been created by him and for him."

Paul's opening statement, here in Philippians 2:6, is saying much the same thing. It's saying it very briefly and succinctly, but he is really, here, setting a foundation for, for us understanding who Christ really is in his essence, in his deity.

He existing, is existing in the form of God. A mere four words in the Greek, but it has some massive implications. To say that Christ is God incarnate means, as Herman Bavinck says, "the incarnation is the unity of being and becoming."

Philosophically, that is a massive, massive, seems to be on the surface of it, a contradiction. How can you have the unity of being and becoming in one thing? And yet here in Christ that is exactly what we see.

It's what Bret alluded to when he used the word "hypostatic union," the two stases, the two substances, a divine and a human, but in union, in one person, in Christ.

"Being" refers to what God is in his essence. Theologians and philosophers will say God is pure act, as God is perfect in his being, perfect in all his perfections, or what some call attributes, all of his perfections, he is perfect. And that is to say that any change in God, if he were to change, would

always be a change for the worse, because he's already perfect, perfect. He is perfection.

And so the Latin form of pure act, *actus purus*, refers to God as pure actuality. That is to say that in God, in his being, there is no potentiality, there is no possibility for change, since any change in God would be for either the better, which is to say he didn't have perfection, or for the worse, which is to say he's descended from perfection. There can be no change in God.

"Becoming," though, that's language that benefits what a man is, what a human being is in his or her essence. We are, aren't we, potentiality. There's a movement today to talk about kids realizing their full potential. I know that I've never realized my full potential. So kids, get ready for disappointment.

We are to realize our potential, and God is going to help us realize our full potential in glorification. Isn't that a

settling thought, that any imperfection you have now, worry not, God is going to glorify you in Christ?

Everything that he has designed you to be will be perfectly realized in his time, in his way, and you will realize then what you cannot understand now, all that he has for you in Christ.

To be becoming as we are as human beings, to change, to have potentiality that we move toward, it's not a bad thing. It's just a creaturely thing to have potential, to change, to be able to mature. In fact, we long for maturity in some, don't we? Our kids, some adults.

The incarnation of God in Christ reveals, then, the unity of being, that is God: infinite, eternal, invisible God. He is non-corporeal, that is to say he doesn't have a body. He's non-composite. That means he's not composed of different things in different parts.

He's immutable; that is, he doesn't change. He's impassable; he is unaffected. He's omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. That is to say, he can do all things, knows all things, and he is everywhere at the same time. This is God, and that divine being is united hereafter in Christ with humanity, a man who is always becoming.

So infinite God joined to finite man; eternal God joined to time-bound man; invisible God made visible in man; non-corporeal, non-composite, immutable, impassable God, as the Confession says, "without body parts or passions."

That is in Christ and joined to a human being composed of spirit and flesh, who is mutable, who changes. He has passions, he has emotions, he is affected, he is acted upon. That comes together in one person in Christ.

Christ has always been, is now, always will be unto eternity, existing in the form of God. And with this truth as a given, the foundational reality Paul wants us to see, here, he wants us to take this forward into everything else he says,

everything else he's writing, and everything else he's revealing here, so we trace the contours of Christ's thinking.

We have two natures in Christ: a divine and a human. That means the exercise of two wills, one per nature, a human will and a divine will. And yet these two natures and these two wills are without confusion, without change, without division, without separation. They are in perfect union, perfect harmony in one person who is Christ. Incredible truth.

Now looking again at verse 6, "Although existing in the form of God, Christ did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." That is to say, he never felt the need to prove it. He was not, if you'll excuse the expression here, he was not insecure as to his equality with God.

He possesses the nature of God, perfectly equal, sharing in the divine essence, but never concerned to grasp that thing and to hold on to it and clutch onto it for dear life. It's his.

The word *harpagmos* refers to something valuable that was seized, like by a thief, seized and grabbed and now held onto tightly. Imagine like a jewel thief going to great lengths to steal the 45-carat Hope Diamond. And once he has it, oh man, he is not letting it go, is he?

Truth is, that thief is, he thinks he has something very precious and valuable. What he, what he sacrifices and forfeits in, in having this valuable thing is, he sacrifices his peace, doesn't he? He, he is forever insecure, ill at ease, not at rest. He's always concerned about getting caught. He's got his hands on it. He's holds on to it tightly, doesn't he? But he's always insecure.

Not so with Christ. It's interesting, Christ created the Hope Diamond. He created every diamond. He created every precious thing. He created every created thing, visible or invisible, and therefore he possesses the greatest, the most valuable, the most beautiful, powerful, majestic thing of all.

He possesses in himself divine nature, very God of very God, and he is at the same time in perfect ease and at rest and secure, being equal with God. He knows that's never going to change.

As Jonathan King says, the issue is, quote, "not whether Christ gains equality or keeps it. He already has equality with God. He's always had it. He never lost it. He will always remain equal with God."

And so the issue, here, is not whether Christ gains equality or keeps it. Rather, as King says, "It pertains to that which characterizes his essential nature, namely quintessential selflessness." Selflessness. What we're about to see is the most selfless being, the most selfless of humanity, who's ever been or ever will be.

Whatever advantage this equality with God could provide for Jesus in his humanity, we know from the testimony of the pages of Scripture in the Gospels, Christ chose to forgo all advantage for himself. Any, anything, he deprived himself of any personal

advantage. He, he, he, he relinquished all self-centered benefit, all for the sake of his mission.

When he came into the world, he was not born into wealth or privilege. He was not born as a child of the palace of the priesthood. He was born into humble means, as we've been singing about, as we read in the Scripture. He was born to blue-collar parents, a carpenter father. He was from the poor village of Nazareth. He was laid in a manger.

When he was driven by the Spirit right after his baptism, entrance into ministries, driven by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil in the wilderness, he fasted for forty days, forgoing food, and he was hungry at the end of that time, and that's when the devil visited him. He refused the devil's suggestion to use his divine power to turn stones to bread.

Just one of so many examples where he is not going to use his equality with God for his own advantage. Yes, he does miracles, but notice, when he does his miracles, it's for the sake of others.

His divine power always used in perfect submission to the perfect will and the perfect timing of God. Never for his own personal benefit. Always for the healing of the sick. Always for the relief of the suffering. Always to show the mercy and compassion of God. Always to illustrate and validate the truth he was teaching.

This is the beauty of Christ, who possesses continuous, constant reality, the essential nature of God. And just as God is never receiving anything he does not have, but he is always giving, so also it is with Christ.

This brings us to another objective mark of the beauty of Christ in his condescension. Second, the beauty of Christ is the quintessential picture of God's glory, quintessential picture of God's glory. If you want to shorten that, put the number "five" and write "essential." "Five essential." "Quintessential."

It's referring to that which is the quintessence, the, the, the very, the thing that binds all things together and is exemplary in the highest form. Quintessential. "Though existing in the form of God," verse 7, it says, "he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave." "Emptied himself."

Ever since the mid-19th century. The so-called "kenotic theories" are confused on this point, and they have confused this point. "Kenotic" comes from the Greek verb *kenoo* in verse 7, which is translated, here, "to make empty."

And according to these kenotic theories, they say Christ divested himself of his divinity for part or the whole time of his earthly life and ministry. There's one kenotic theorist, a Frenchman named La Touche; he calls this "incarnation by divine suicide," claiming that "Christ literally ceased from his cosmic functions and his eternal consciousness during the years of his earthly life." End quote.

Berkhof, he speaks of another of these kenotic theorists who said, "The eternal Son gave up the form of eternity." Can

this be? To divest yourself of the deity that you possess constantly?

It's not only a severe deviation from orthodoxy. When you stop and think about it, it's an utterly ludicrous idea that would result in the total annihilation of everything because if the Son of God emptied himself of anything divine in his incarnation, change in an unchanging God, that's describing change to an unchanging God, is to deny the biblical God.

And if that biblical God does not exist, you know what? Neither do you and I. This sermon's going to come to an abrupt, short ending right now because we'll all go "poof!" into nothing.

You cannot deny these essential attributes like the unchangingness of God. You can't deny these essential attributes and be left with the true biblical God. So if Christ didn't empty himself of something like his divine attributes, what's going on here?

Here's how to see this. Christ emptied himself into something. He poured himself into something. There's a metaphor here. He's poured the form of God into, as it says here, "the form of a slave." He poured the form of God into a form of a slave. Nothing lost, it's just revealed differently.

Remember the term *morphe*, here, doesn't mean external shape; it refers to the nature of something. So the form of God, the nature of God, possessing divine attributes, and likewise the form of a slave, the word *morphe*.

Again, he took the nature of a slave. He took on flesh. He emptied or poured his glory, the glory of the divine, into the form of a slave, and thus the divine glory took the form of a human slave.

This is what is revealed in Christ. This is intentional on God's part. We know from the Gospels that Jesus is not a literal slave. He was not sold into slavery. His family were not slaves.

Voluntarily, though, he took the form of a slave; that is to say, he acted with the nature of a slave. Even though he didn't have the social status of a slave, was never in servitude or in a slave-master relationship, still he acted that way.

The picture of slavery in Christ shows us God's purpose in the incarnation. As the *morphe* of God, possessing a divine nature, Christ glorified God in this way, in the form of a slave.

Just a footnote: "Glorify," biblically speaking, "glorify" means to make something known. And when we speak of glorifying God, we're not talking about a Cadillac is a glorified Buick or a Lexus is a glorified Toyota. That's not what we're saying.

"Glorify," biblically, means to make something known as it truly is, to reveal God for who he truly is. And that means in Christ, the glory of God has been revealed in a lifetime of serving and serving to the nth degree, serving to the uttermost.

And that's what we see Jesus doing always in his ministry. He, as he said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve." He's always serving, always giving. When he was feeding the multitudes, we know and love him as the bread of life, the bread who's come down from heaven to give life to men.

But the role he played on those occasions, feeding the 5,000, feeding the 4,000, cooking breakfast for the disciples on the beach, the role he played was the cook in the kitchen, the slave, the servant handing out pieces of bread and fish to the multitude of hungry people, his twelve apostles taking the role of waiters to carry from him, from the cook in the kitchen, to take what he provided out to feed the hungry.

When healing the multitudes, we know and love him as the Great Physician. You need to understand, though, that for first-century people, contrary to the, the vaunted status of medical professionals today, many doctors in that day, they were just well-trained slaves owned by their masters.

They served whoever owned them, they, whoever funded their training. Whoever did that employed them in their own personal service. And that's how Jesus served the multitudes, healing all their diseases.

I love the pictures and the Gospels where he gets down, there's a, they bring to him all their sick and diseased and ailing and he gets down, and the language is very specific, there. It shows that he goes from person to person to person, touching them, touching them, touching them.

Remember when the leper comes, the leper who was supposed to shout out, "Leprosy! Leprosy!" as he walks, walks past people, everybody avoiding him, everybody keeping their distance lest they contract leprosy for themselves.

When the leper comes to him, "Would you heal me if you're willing to heal me?" And Jesus reaches out and touches him to show his willingness to heal. He touches him first; then he says, "You're healed. Now go yourself, show yourself to the priests," the health inspectors, "show yourself to them and let

them reintroduce you and reintegrate you into society.” Not just healing of leprosy, but healing of the social stigma, healing of the ostracization. He healed.

When teaching the multitudes, when preaching the Gospel, he exhausted himself in public ministry. He took no thought for himself. Always the slave, always serving the people, every sermon delivering up an exquisite banquet of truth, a display of God's beauty to evoke from people. Like your neighbors with their Christmas lights, Jesus evoking from people the wonder, pleasure, delight in the God whom he preaches.

We noted this last week, didn't we, that it was in the upper room that the Lord Jesus rose up from the Passover meal, and “he laid aside his garments,” John 13:4. “Taking a towel, he girded himself about.”

What was he doing? He was taking the form of a slave. He was showing the nature of a slave. He was performing a slave's duty, doing what only slaves do, washing his disciples' dirty feet.

That is the very picture of what Jesus has done in the incarnation, what Christ has done in the incarnation. He laid aside garments of pre-incarnate glory, garments that always remain his, which he never forsook. But he glorified God by taking the form of a slave. He loved his own, emptying himself into the form of a slave to reveal an always-giving God.

Just as F. F. Bruce said, "It's not that Christ exchanged the form of a God for the form of a slave, but rather that he manifested the form of God in the form of a slave." End quote.

This brings us to a third objective mark of the beauty of Christ in the incarnation, in the extent to which he humbled himself. He robed himself in human flesh, became a man, not to hide the glory of God, but to show the glory of God in God's love for sinners.

This is finally the third mark of objective beauty in Christ. The beauty of Christ is the quintessential gesture of

God's glory, the gesture of God's glory. End of verse 7, Paul tells us, "Being made in the likeness of men and being a found in appearances of man." We'll stop there for a second.

Remember when the shepherds came? They found Jesus to be just as the angel had told him. He was a babe. He was swaddled in cloths. Why did they swaddle him in cloths? So that he didn't, like little babies are prone to do with little fingernails coming out of the womb, they can no, have no control over arms. They can scratch themselves and hurt themselves. And so we have to protect themselves from themselves by swaddling them tightly in cloths.

There's a sense of a feeling of being still in the womb. They left the security of the womb. They come into the world and it's cold and it's bright and it's scary and it's loud, and the mother tenderly wraps that insecure child into the security of those swaddling cloths, laying him in a manger.

That's what the shepherds saw when they came. Wise men, too. When they came, they saw a baby, and not one of them looked

at the baby Jesus and said, "Hey, what's with the aura? Why is he glowing?" He was a baby. He was human in every way.

Isaiah said it this way in Isaiah 53:2: "He had no stately form or majesty" that anyone should see anything other than a human being. He appears to be just a man, nothing out of the ordinary, no superhuman features that anybody should be drawn to him by appearance, be attracted to him, no desire to follow him.

As an infant lying in a manger, swaddled in cloths, he grew from that stage. He developed from baby to toddler to boy to man. Luke says in Luke 2:40 that "the child continued to grow and become strong." What is that but becoming, changing, maturing? He was increasing in wisdom.

He lived in subjection to his parents. After a little incident at the temple of him staying behind while the whole caravan moves on. He stays at the temple. The parents are worried and they're concerned. They come back and his mother kind of scolds him. He didn't put her in her place. He just

gently says, "Did you not know that I must be at my Father's house?" Real glimpse of who he is in his divine nature.

And yet from that point on he lived in subjection to his parents. Never worried them again. Luke 2:52 says, "He kept increasing in wisdom and stature." He kept "increasing in favor with God and men."

And so Christ, being made in the likeness of man and being found in appearance as a man, verse 8, says, "He humbled himself even further by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is the quintessential gesture of the glory of God in Christ: that he loved us. Ephesians 5:2 says, "He gave himself up for us, an offering to atone for our sins and a propitiatory sacrifice to please God with a," as Paul says there in Ephesians 5:2, "as a fragrant aroma pleasing to God." His sacrifice pleased God. His sacrifice satisfied the wrath of God due for our sins, and he pleased God.

This is the beauty that's depicted here, and it's depicted in the horror and the shame of the cross of Christ. The cross symbolized the shame of sin. And in that day it was used and fitting for only the worst of the worst and the vilest of the vile of all humanity.

As I mentioned last week, it was never polite even to bring up crucifixion in polite company. You never would do that. It was a thing you didn't talk about. It was a thing for the, for, it was gutter talk. It was alley talk. It was, it was what people joked about in bars. It's not something you shared in polite company.

And yet God has made this the center point of the entire Christian message. This shameful, vile thing he's elevated and put front-and-center and said, "This is God incarnate. This is the glory of God revealed in my hatred of sin and my love for you."

God is desiring to show in the cross not only the depths of sin's offense to him, but also in this, in the very same act to show us the depth of his love for sinners, that "God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," Romans 8:3, "and as an offering for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."

And why did God do this? Why did he offer up his own Son to die as a vile, condemned criminal? Paul says in Romans 5:7, "God demonstrates," what, "his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

God sent his only beloved Son to become a man, to take the form of a slave, in order that he would be qualified to become a mediator for us, representing God with his divine nature, representing man with his human nature.

And that comes together in one person, qualifies him to become the substitute for us, the Lamb of God, who can take away the sins of the world. He took on our sins upon himself, and died the death that we deserve, that we might inherit the life that only he deserves to live, and indeed that he does live.

"Surely our griefs he himself bore," Isaiah 53:4, "and our sorrows he carried, and yet we esteemed him stricken. We esteemed him smitten of God, afflicted, but he was pierced through for our transgressions."

We made a mistake, we misjudged him, we, we've thought of him poorly. "He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastising for our peace fell upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." That's the point. And humbling himself in this way, God's, Christ glorified God's love. As the lowest of slaves, he gave his life for sinners. He died for them on a cross.

Walter Hanson captures it vividly when he says this: "The first three stanzas of Paul's hymn, here, the first three stanzas do not lift up our eyes to the heavens to see the wonders of creation. They do not even lift up our hearts by showing us wonderful miracles of healing and deliverance.

"They take us down, down, down to the deepest, darkest hell-hole in human history to see the horrific torture, unspeakable abuse, and bloody execution of a slave on a cross.

"This hymn celebrates the death of a slave on a cross because although he is forever the one existing in the form of God, he is on that cross by his own deliberate choice to empty himself and to humble himself." End quote.

Christian, do you see the point? This is the mindset we're to have about ourselves. Jesus said Matthew 28:20, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This glorified God, didn't it? It made him known as he really is. It showed his giving nature, a giving that would give to the uttermost. When God the Father gave his only Son, he gave to the uttermost. When Christ gave of his life, he gave to the uttermost.

Again, it's Jonathan King who says, "The identity of God, who God is, is revealed as much in self-abasement and service as it is in exaltation and rule. The God who is high can also be low because God is God, not in seeking his own advantage, but in self-giving. His self-giving in abasement and service ensures that his sovereignty over all things is also a form of his self-giving." End quote.

What political ruler, what business leader, what high-powered executive, what supervisor, anybody in charge in retail or in any other field, when do you see them not taking any advantage by their own title or position or authority? When do you see them, instead, using their title, their position, their authority always to serve, always to give?

This is the model. This is the model of all service. This is the model of all leadership, and this is the model of every single Christian. This is the beauty in Christ's condescension, the radiance of divine glory and self-giving love. And that, dear Christian, is the mind of Christ that Paul says in verse 5 "we should have in ourselves."

Second, number two, the beauty of Christ's vindication. The beauty of Christ's vindication. I'll just go back and remind you of Jonathan King's definition of beauty. He said, "Beauty is an intrinsic quality of things which when perceived pleases the mind by displaying a certain kind of fittingness." It, it's discerned via objective properties: proportion, unity, symmetry, harmony, etc. etc. Remember that?

So in the story of God's redemption outlined for us in the *Carmen Christi*, here, in this hymn of Christ, in this hymn about his messianic vocation, his calling, his ministry, consider what is the most fitting, the most appropriate, the most proportionate, symmetrical way for God to honor Christ.

If he's humbled himself from such high heights to such low lows, well, then what should God do to show the fittingness of what would be exalting to him? In light of the depth of loving condescension, what befits the depths of his self-giving love? Nothing but full and total vindication. God vindicates his Son.

By all human perception and by universal judgment in the first century, the mission of Christ in his first advent was a total failure. It's an utter embarrassment. It looks like absolute folly and absolute weakness that God would allow his Son to be crucified on a cross? "Are you kidding me? You're going to worship? You're going to worship that? You Christians are idiots."

Remember Isaiah 53:4? By Jewish opinion, written from the perspective of a redeemed Jew, back to his people, in Isaiah 53 he says, "We ourselves, we esteemed him stricken. We, we thought of him as smitten by God, afflicted. We, we thought God abandoned him, handed him over because God had rejected him."

Nothing could be further from the truth. Look at verse 9. "Therefore God," "therefore also," verse 9, "God highly exalted him, and he bestowed on him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Beauty is this: that every point of Christ's condescension in verses 6-8, every point is answered by God's vindication of Christ in verses 9-11. In fact, we see what could be called a chiastic symmetry in this hymn, a chiastic symmetry in how God vindicates Christ. Each point of vindication in a fitting and a proportionate way corresponds to each point of the condescension of Christ.

And so the hymn itself portrays the beauty of Christ's vindication, and portrays it beautifully. It evokes a sense of wonder and pleasure and delight, which is really most fitting, isn't it, for Christmas?

I used the word "chiastic," "chiasm." It's, it comes that, that, it comes from the Greek letter *chi*, which looks like an X, *chi*. And the *chi*, the X, picture that X, it pictures the structure that an author can use in poetry, or in this case in a hymn.

So the top and the bottom of the X, the top and the bottom of the X are parallel to each other. Middle points that move toward the center are also parallel to each other, and they drive to the very center of the X, two points that are also parallel with one another.

So if you picture an X, since we have six main points in the hymn, three of them in Christ's humiliation and three more in Christ's exaltation, or three more, three in his condescension, three in his vindication, according to this chiastic or X-like structure, the first point in Christ's condescension parallels the last point of Christ's vindication, point six overall.

The second point in his condescension parallel to the second or the last point in the vindication, which is the fifth point overall. And then the third point and the fourth point are right there in the center of the X.

If you're not following any of that, don't worry about it. If you will follow the points that come next, you're doing just

fine. All you have to do is follow along as we see how it is that God vindicates Christ.

First, God vindicates Christ's true honor. God vindicates Christ's true honor. The gesture of divine love in verse 8, of Christ's offering himself on the shameful cross, is answered by the gesture of God's love in honoring his Son in verse 9. "Therefore also God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name."

God vindicated Christ. He demonstrated his love for his Son by bestowing upon him supreme honor. The beauty is in the parallel. The beauty is in the symmetry, this fitting vindication of Christ.

Whereas Christ humbled himself, it says, "God highly exalted him." That verb means to raise far beyond all measure, raise to the highest degree, put up to the highest, most important position of status and honor and authority and power.

That's exactly what Jesus said, didn't he, after his resurrection, prior to his ascension? "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." That's what he said.

Whereas Christ gave himself in the greatest act of self-giving, offering the ultimate sacrifice, God bestowed on Christ something in return. The verb, here, "bestow" is *charizomai*. You have *charis*, that word for "grace" or "grace gift" is at its root. He bestowed on him, he gave him, he rewarded, placed upon him the greatest thing.

Whereas Christ loved sinners, giving himself for them; and in loving sinners, he loved God, too, didn't he? He loved God's justice and God's mercy. He performed the only act that would ever bring divine justice and divine mercy together in one act of the cross.

And God loved his Son, too. The name "Jesus," chosen by God, revealed to Mary by the angel Gabriel, given by Joseph after she gave birth to her son, sealed at his circumcision at the temple on the eighth day, "Jesus" means "Yahweh saves."

Most fitting, then, that “the name above all names” is the name that says, “Yahweh saves.” It captures the quintessential gesture of God's glory, the means of our salvation in the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

So, first, God vindicates Christ's true honor, giving him the name above all names. Second, God vindicates Christ's true stature. He vindicates Christ's true stature. The picture of Christ, we said in verse 7, is that he took the form of a slave. That's the picture that he wanted to glorify God with, is this picture of being a slave.

And that's answered, though, in the way God vindicated him, showing the true picture of Christ in verse 10 as king, “so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

No longer is he to be overlooked and disregarded as a slave. God vindicates his Son by glorifying and revealing to all

his true nature, his true status, his true stature. He's King of kings, Lord of Lords.

He is the one before whom all will bow and serve. Every rational creature, whether angelic or human, no matter who they are, where they are, every knee will bow.

So whether holy angels in heaven, every glorified saint, whether those who are on the earth alive at his coming, whether the spirits of the netherworld, whether fallen angels that are confined to the abyss, or the, those who are in the abode of the unrighteous dead, what ancients called Sheol or Hades or Abaddon, held there awaiting final judgment, whoever they are, wherever they are, in whatever state they occupy, even those who are in Hell, whatever condition they may be in, every rational creature will bow the knee.

This genuflection, this bowing before, doing obeisance, all rational creatures vindicate Christ as the Lord, exactly as God says.

Which brings us right back to where we started in verse 6, with the essential nature of Christ. Here in verse 11, we see, third, that God vindicates not just his true honor or his true stature, but it's, he vindicates Christ's true nature, his true nature, in that "every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Some English translations have a way of indicating that the language, there, "every knee will bow" and then "every tongue will confess," that those are quotes from the Old Testament. Actually comes from Isaiah 45:23, where Yahweh says, "There is no other God besides me, a righteous God and a Savior. There is none except me."

It's a call to his, his, this strict monotheism, this unity of God as God, his exclusivity. "You bow the knee to no other. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth." Not just the Jews; Gentiles, too. "Turn to me and be saved, for I am God, and there is no other. I've sworn by myself. The word has gone forth from my mouth in righteousness. It will not turn back."

And what's that word? "That to me every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear allegiance."

Is this not a powerful affirmation of the deity of Christ in Philippians chapter 2, verse 11, connected to Isaiah 45:23? That it's Yahweh who says, "Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess to me." And then of Jesus it said that "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess to him."

Remember where we started? Philippians 2:6, "that although existing in the form of God, he didn't regard equality with God a thing to be grasped."

Christ is God, and yet he didn't need to prove it. And so Yahweh himself steps in. Yahweh himself speaks up for his Son. Yahweh himself takes up the cause of Christ's vindication, as if to say, "He won't regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but I myself will declare who he truly is."



So bow the knee, all creatures. Confess him as he truly is.
What is he? A righteous God and a Savior.

This is the beauty of God, isn't it, in vindicating a Son,
declaring his eternal love, honoring him, showing his true
status, calling all creatures to worship him for who he really
is, what he's really like.

God testifies to his true nature, that Christ is, by the
testimony of Yahweh, very God of very God, and very man of very
man. Christ, who condescended to save sinners starting way back
2,000 years ago in that little manger, in a little town of
Bethlehem, is the Christ whom God has vindicated fully, the
Christ whom God calls us to bow before and confess as Lord and
worship him.

This is the beauty that God shines forth in the light, not
only at Christmas, but shines forth all through the year.

My friend, if you are here and you do not yet know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, if you're here and you've, this is new to you, you're brand new to this, this is something that's, you kind of know from the religious environment that we live in that there's something about Christ and Christmas. Obviously, it's in the name "Christmas."

But if this is new to you, the call, here, is for you to honor the Son, to love him, to bow before him, to obey him, confess him as Lord. And you know what it says there in verses 9-11? That just as God vindicated his Son and exalted him, he would not let him stay low, marginalized, rejected; instead, he will have him to be glorified and honored and worshipped.

Keep this in mind: "God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble." Humble yourself now before God. Acknowledge Christ as Savior and Lord, and live like you acknowledge that. And he will lift you up. He will lift you up in Christ. And where Christ is for us as Christians, that's where we truly are: seated with Christ at the right hand of God the Father.

Christian, let the vindication of the Son, as God vindicates his Son, as he honors him, shows his true stature, shows his true nature, know that in the same way, none of your service, sacrifice, none of your giving, even though it may be overlooked, none of your serving, none of your loving, none of your worship, none of your self-sacrifice, none of your self-effacing, none of your self-abasement, none of the humiliation and ostracization that you have to endure, none of that matters in the end, because God will do what is just and right, and he will raise you up in Christ.

It's something to share around the Christmas table this year, is it not? Let's bow before him now.

Our Father, what beauty you've demonstrated in the redemption story as you have sent your Son, who condescended to become man and then take the form of a slave and then become obedient to the point of death, even death in the cross.

What, what beauty we see in that incredible condescension of Christ, coming from the very highest of highs, going to the lowest of lows and being made like us and yet even worse than us, being made a slave of all, and even being treated like a vile criminal, though he never deserved that.

Oh, but we deserve it. Every single one of us deserves to be treated with great vileness and disrespect, disregard and shame because of our sins. We've all committed sins before you, and we deserve eternal punishment, to be sent away from you forever because we've violated your holiness. We've ignored your honor. We've not honored you as God. We've not given thanks. You've, you're so good to us every single day of our lives, with every breath we take. It's, it's because you favor us.

And so, Father, we confess before you our sinfulness, and we see in Christ that he took our sin upon himself, and you punished him instead of us. But having poured out your holy wrath upon him, there is no wrath left for all those who trust in him, for all those who put their faith in Christ, who confess him as Lord and Savior, who follow him in obedience with the

rest of their lives, giving over what they actually don't own, which is their life.

They give that over to you to serve and follow Christ and honor him and speak of him and, and uphold him before the, before the entire world, and confess Jesus as Lord. You will not let any of that go. You reward us in a way that's fitting only Christ. You reward us.

Father, let us learn even more how fitting it is for us to see your beauty portrayed in Christ, the incarnate Son. Let us see him, understand him, and know him and worship him, that we may bring full honor and glory to you in his name. Help us to do that by the Spirit, we pray. Amen.