

December 25, 2024
Christmas Day

“Like God”

John 1:1-18

There are a lot of ironies in Judeo-Christian history. It's ironic that when God gives ancient Israel what they want, the Promised Land with all of its abundance, they immediately forsake the true God who blessed them for false gods that do nothing. It's ironic that only after God allows the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians that the Jews finally manage to get somewhat serious and focused about worshipping only Yahweh. It's ironic that the temple sacrificial system that is to point forward toward the Christ morphs into a cult of works righteousness where its fiercest adherents don't think they need the forgiveness the Christ brings. It's ironic that the Messiah the Jews had anticipated for centuries finally arrives...and hardly anyone notices.

But perhaps the grandest irony in all of Holy Scripture is that in the cosmic act of divine grace that is Jesus Christ come to us in human flesh, God actually gives us the very thing that got us into this whole fallen world mess in the first place.

If you go all the way back to Genesis three when that serpent is talking to Eve in the garden, what is it he says? *“You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* Adam and Eve are tempted to be like God, so they defy God's command and eat the fruit. It doesn't work out so well. The entire creation is cursed into sin, death and darkness. Yet, a promise of a Savior is made.

Millenia later Jesus arrives and guess what? Ironically, in this blessed event, we are like God! *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”* as fully a human being; our brother in the flesh. Okay, maybe that is better said “God became like us,” but the irony is that in Christ a divine sameness is begun, and in that, the restoration of our human race.

Back in the garden we were created in the image of God. Theologians struggle with what that phrase exactly means, but one thing is for sure—we lost that image, that sameness, when Adam rebelled against God and brought down that curse. But the incarnation of Christ changes things. The divine image—the divine itself—now dwells in a human being, and this is the reality Jesus came to restore for mankind.

“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

So you see what this Christ child means? The eternal Son of God...a child of God...takes on human flesh so that we children of the flesh who have lost the image of God...can become children of God...regaining what was lost! The greedy sinful desire to be like God that condemned us got turned on its head! God came to us; *“glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth”* not only to remove the stain of sin and reconcile us to the Father, but to bring us into that divine glory! In a manner, Jesus makes us like God!

But to what kind of a life are we called to in this ironic miracle?

This is where our sinful nature wants to jump the gun. Just like in Eden, it wishes to be like god, as in answerable to nobody and calling all the shots. But He is the Creator, we are the

created. We must remember our place, and how blessed we are to have been restored and reconciled in Christ. Jesus shows us the proper way to do that.

He is born a humble little child of God. He lives in subjugation to the Heavenly Father always. He is love incarnate. He serves. He sacrifices. He loves all. He does not seize divine power and majesty; He forgoes it in order to save the lost. His birth signals how a human child of God lives—not for earthly glory, but in service to the glory of the loving Father above.

In the garden humanity was in the image of God, but in being unsatisfied with living as God's perfect created creatures, we chose the image of man to be god, and suffered the cursed consequences. In the manger the Father sends the divine image in a man, His Son, and in that gift we receive a slice of that divine—not as gods, but as the objects of our Creator's love; as His children adopted by grace.

God has baptized us into this Christ. He feeds us this Christ in the Holy Supper. He proclaims this Christ in the Word and by the Holy Spirit enables us to receive and believe it all unto forgiveness and life everlasting.

Now every day, many times a day, continually, we face a choice of which image we shall embrace. Do I seek the glory of man, namely myself and that dark image of a god, or do I seek to live in that gift given in the manger and seek to live to the glory of God...something I can only do because of Christ? We don't always choose rightly...that's an understatement. But take heart: *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

The light shines in the darkness continually. The baby in the manger now reigns for all eternity as the Victor, the Savior, the King. Embrace Him not only as true God, but as the true man bearing the image of God and embrace His brotherhood, His life of humility and love as your own. Embrace the ironic truth that the glory we would seize by our own power is given us in the weakness of a little child lying in the manger.

In this life that image may not yet be fully restored, but in Christ it is absolutely yours, and it is the greatest gift ever given. Hold it fast. Repent of your failures and turn again to His light. Your darkness cannot overcome His light, and His light shines His perfect image onto your soul. Receive it every day until His image upon you is made complete.

Amen.