

**The Nature of the Incarnation Part 3**

Scripture: Hebrews 1:4-14

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The Nature of the Incarnation, Part 3

In Hebrews chapter 1 we read earlier a great testimony to the person of Jesus Christ. As most of you know, we are studying the gospel of Luke on Sunday mornings and we find ourselves in chapter 2 in the gospel of Luke. And we've just concluded the section on the birth of Jesus Christ. At the conclusion of that section I took a bit of a digression away from Luke's gospel, which we'll return to next Sunday. I wanted to digress to the first chapter of Hebrews for a few weeks because I can't just pass by the birth of Christ without a complete understanding of its significance, and that means a complete understanding of the very nature of the child that was born in Bethlehem.

Of course Luke gives us great insight as the narrative in the gospel of Luke unfolds the history of the birth of Jesus Christ. We are given information that tells us about the parents of Jesus, the earthly parents, Joseph and Mary, the mother, Mary, His actual Father being God the Holy Spirit. We're introduced to the forerunner of Jesus, the last of the Old Testament prophets, John, who will announce His arrival. We're introduced to the parents of John, the wonderful old priest, Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth. And we are introduced to the angel Gabriel and we're actually introduced to a host of angels who celebrate the birth of Christ and announce His birth to shepherds out on the field. And we've gone through all of that. We...we have seen the history of the birth of Christ unfold on earth. We have learned from Luke how it links with Old Testament prophecy and how it links with Old Testament covenants. And we have been blessed by all the richness of Luke's gospel.

But I didn't want to just leave the birth of Christ without a look at Hebrews chapter 1 because here you have what amounts to really a heavenly commentary. Here is looking at the birth of Christ not so much from the earthly side, not from the vantage point of Joseph or Mary or the people who were in Bethlehem, or even from the vantage point of reading Luke's history and getting the scene as it unfolded. I wanted us to look at the birth of Christ a little more deeply in terms of who Jesus Christ is, who that child was that was born because that, of course, as we've been saying, is the essence of the Christian faith, the identity of Jesus Christ the Son of God. And we've gone through the first three verses, as you know, in which God's Son is introduced to us in verse 2 as the one who has been appointed heir of all things, the one through whom God made the worlds, the one who is the brightness of God's glory, who is the exact reproduction of God's person, the one who upholds all things by the word of His power, that is He is not only the creator but He's the sustainer of His creation. He is the one who by Himself purged our sins and He did that by dying on the cross and

rising again. And accomplishing that, sat down by God at His right hand and He sits now on the right hand of the Majesty on High.

Now all of that define the nature of Christ as God. But there's one other element to this definition of the nature of Christ, and it would be very important for us to understand and it really is the main theme in this chapter. As wondrous as it is to identify Jesus Christ, the child born in Bethlehem, as the heir of all things, as the one who made the world, as the brightness of the glory of God, the exact reproduction of His person, as the sustainer of the universe, as the one who purged our sins and is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, there's one other remaining question that would exist in the mind of a Jew and it's to that question that all of that leads up.

You'll notice there's a sort of a single sentence that just sort of flows from verse 1 and doesn't end till you come to the end of verse 4. And the culmination of that sentence is this, having become so much better than the angels. Apart from God the Jewish people would have recognized angels as the highest creatures. If you go any higher than angels, you're God. There are no other created beings than angels and humans. And they would have seen angels, of course, as higher than they because angels dwelt in the presence of God. Angels are immaterial beings who serve the purposes of God. And so they saw angels as the loftiest of all of God's creation. In fact, to be above angels would be to be equal with God, and that's precisely the point the writer of Hebrews wants to make. And so he wants to place Christ in the right...the right location, as it were, in terms of the thinking of people, namely the Jewish people. And so he says this one who is the Son of God is better than the angels, not just better, but so much better...so much better than angels.

Angels are wonderful beings. Angels were created by God, created by God probably at about the same time, although there was no such time in eternity prior to God instituting time in creation, but from a human viewpoint at about the moment of the creation of the rest of the universe, God must have created the angels. We could say they were there for the creation. They might have been created just prior to God actually creating the material universe. They must have been soon before the material verse because...before the material universe because they frankly occupy the heavens which God created in Genesis 1. They, according to Job, could be defined as the morning stars who sang together at the creation, so they may have been around to praise God as He was doing the creation work described in Genesis 1. But they were created by God some time near the occasion of His creating the rest of the universe.

Now they had a very important part to play in God's plan. Holy angels were used by God in many ways. You find throughout Old Testament history that they appear, sometimes the angel of the Lord appears. You remember there was a wrestling with an angel from the Lord indicated in the book of Genesis. The angels of the Lord served the divine purpose of caring for the nation Israel on some occasions. The angel of the Lord served a number of purposes in the Old Testament. An angel was sent by God to assist the prophet Daniel. You remember the angels were seen by Isaiah on the

occasion that he was given a vision of the glory of God and the cherubim came out, the angels who apparently guard the holiness of God and said, "Holy, holy, holy," it's very likely that in the vision of Ezekiel he was allowed to see some angelic beings described there who were very parallel to angelic beings being described in the book of Revelation. So angels played a prominent role and they were viewed as spirits who were righteous and holy and dwell in the presence of God and serve God.

No more important duty ever given to angels from a Jewish viewpoint than the responsibility to aid God in disseminating His holy law which they came to know as the Mosaic Covenant, or the Sinaitic Covenant or the Old Covenant as we call it. Angels were the angels by which God was assisted in the dispensing of His law. And so they were connected then to the law which is holy, righteous and good and which is the wholly expression really of the nature of God because that which expresses His perfect will expresses His perfect nature. And so the Jews saw the angels as very elevated beings...the holy angels. It is then incumbent of the writer of Hebrews in establishing the primacy and the superiority of Jesus to identify how He relates to those angels. And that's precisely what he does in verse 4 when he says that the Son who was born is so much better than the angels. You can only go one step up from there and you arrive at absolute eternal deity and that is an important consideration for the writer to make.

We want to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ as we come to His table and I think as we look at the cross the tendency is to see the humanity of Jesus more than anything else, to see His suffering even through life, the ridicule, the mocking, the rejection that ultimately led to the swelling of the crowd against Him to cry for His blood, His painful humiliation at the hands of the Roman soldiers, the travesty of a trial, a mockery of a trial. I'm going to come out with a new book in a few months called The Murder of Jesus, the trial of Jesus was the greatest travesty of justice in all of the annals of human history because you have the most innocent person ever tried found guilty of the most serious crime. But Jesus Christ is seen so much in His humanity around the events of His death and then the betrayal, the humiliation by Judas, the humiliation by the priest, the humiliation by the Roman soldiers. And then that severest of all humiliations when He's naked and hanging on a cross and literally being executed by God for sins He didn't commit and willingly substituting Himself for sinners. You look at the cross and you see the humanity.

But as you look at Hebrews, we want to balance that out and see who it was that was there. It was one who was much better than the angels, though, as Hebrew 2 says, for a little while He was made lower than the angels. He was for a little while made lower than the angels in His self-emptying when He came down to earth to suffer and to die. But in His nature, in His person, His character, His essence He was so much better than angels because He was God.

This is a very important point to make with Jewish people who have great reverence and respect for angels and so the writer patiently makes the point. And I'll just give you five ways in which he shows the superiority of Jesus to the angels.

In the scene in Bethlehem, Gabriel might appear as a superior to the babe lying in a manger who is wrapped in cloth and the heavenly host appearing in the field announcing His birth to the shepherds might appear as superior to the humble child, not recognizable lying in a feed trough as God, but God nonetheless. It might appear in the birth narrative that the angels sort of occupy the prominent place. But the fact of the matter is, Jesus Christ is so much better than the angels.

First of all, by virtue of His name...first of all, by virtue of His name. In verse 4 it says, "He is so much better than the angels because He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Angel is a good name, angel, angelos in the Greek means messenger, that's essentially what the word means. That's a good name. But He has a better name, a name which He has received by inheritance. That is to say He has a right to it. He has a right to it, He can claim it because of His essential nature. He has a legitimate claim on that name. And it is a more excellent name than angel. What is it? Verse 5, "For to which of the angels did He, God, ever say, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You and again I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to Me a Son,'" to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are My Son?" Answer: none. In the general sense you could say angels are sons of God if by that you mean they were created by God, and they are so designated in Genesis 6, just as you can say of humanity that mankind, men and women, are sons of God by virtue of the fact that He created them. But to no single angel did God ever say...You are My Son who proceeds from Me...I am Your Father, You are My Son, has never been said to an angel.

The reason...because it is a designation of essential nature, it is a designation of essential nature. That's how the Jews understood it. They understood the solidarity of this kind of expression, to say that Jesus is the Son of God who is the Father is to say they share the same essence, they share the same nature. When the Jews would look at a family and they would speak of a son, that would identify that one as sharing the same nature as his father. He possessed the same characteristics, the same like principle, the same essential nature. That's exactly what this indicates.

Furthermore, the Jews understood that the son had the right to all that the father possessed. They understood family. They understood tribes. Families went back a long way. They could trace their genealogy, there were genealogical records. You see them unfold in the Bible as the Bible opens, immediately into the Scriptures in the book of Genesis genealogies appear. And passing down inheritances from generation to generation was a very important part of life. They put a premium on family. Just imagine trying to do that in our modern society. Imagine with all the divorce and all the illegitimate children, and all the chaos that's going on, trying to pass down anything to a...to a succeeding series of generations. But in ancient times, that's how life was lived and people made commitments to marriage and family within the framework of long-standing families. And generation after generation shared the same life, the same character and the same possessions, inheriting from one generation to the next what belonged to the fathers.

When Jesus came along and said He was the Son of God, the Jews interpreted that only one way, they interpreted that to mean that He shared the same nature with God. That's why they said when He claimed that He was blaspheming because He was claiming to be God. It was clear to them what He was saying when He said He was the Son of God. They didn't read it as if He was something that I simply am a servant of God, I am simply one who believes in God. They understood it to mean He was claiming to be equal with God and that's exactly what they said and therefore accused him of the severest kind of blasphemy and therefore violation of the first commandment which is to have no other God but the true and living God.

So, Jesus was, however, in spite of their misinterpretation of who He was, the Son of God. And He is thus given the name "Son" which is a name that expresses His eternal generation from the Father. I don't know how to explain that. There never was a time when the Father brought the Son into existence. The Son is as eternal as the Father. There never was a moment in all of eternity when the Son did not exist, but in some way Father/Son terminology is used to express a shared nature that they both share the same divine essential nature and the right to the same inheritance, that is to possess all that exists in the entire created universe, be it material or immaterial. No angel has that name. Angels are messengers. Jesus is the Son of God.

Secondly, the writer of Hebrews wants it clear that Jesus is superior to angels on the basis of His rank, not just His name. Notice in verse 6. When he again brings the firstborn into the world he says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." Let me just briefly say this. The word "firstborn," prototokos is not a word of chronology, it's a word of preeminence. It really could be translated "the premier one, the prominent one, the highest ranking one, the preeminent one, the highest one." It wouldn't be necessary to identify the Son of God with a number because there aren't any more. It wouldn't be necessary to say He was the firstborn Son of God to distinguish Him from the second or third born son of God since there is only one. The firstborn is not a numeric term. It is not a chronological term to indicate some kind of sequence in birth. It is a term meaning preeminence, prototokos, the premier one, the preeminent one, the most prominent one, the highest of all. And that indicates the rank of Jesus, that He is the ranking one, He is the supreme one.

In Colossians chapter 1 verse 15 it says this, "He is the image of the invisible God, He is the prototokos, the preeminent one over all creation." That is His preeminence is established not within the...not within the trinity, as such. Not that He is the preeminent one within the trinity or that He is the preeminent one of some other...some other elements, or some other deities that have come in procession from God, but rather He is the supreme one of all over all creations. Or it's simply identifying His rank. To prove that, in verse 6, he...and by the way, you'll notice if you have a Bible that identifies quotes, there are seven quotes from Old Testament passages here, I don't have the time to go into those this morning. And you'll see another one in verse 6 because there were two in verse 5. And here it is, verse 6, taken from Psalm 89, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." That

establishes His rank. He is the premier one over all creation. Angels are created beings, therefore He is superior to them and all the angels of God worship Him.

Now, of course, there is to be no worship offered to any created being, all worship is to be offered only to God. This therefore again establishes that He is God. This "let all the angels" actually comes from Deuteronomy 32, the point here being the angels are commanded to worship God. That's what they do as an occupation. That's...that's their primary function, to worship God and part of that worship, obviously, is to serve God. To say "to have to worship Jesus" then is to equate Him with God.

Now there's a third identity here that the writer makes to show the superiority of Jesus to angels with equates Him with God. First, His name...second, His rank...and thirdly, His nature, verse 7, and I won't spend a lot of time on this, just to make a couple of comments makes it very clear what he's saying. "Of the angels he says," and again there's a quote out of Psalm 104, "Who makes His angels spirits," we'll stop at that point. Also says His ministers a flame of fire in that passage. But here the identifying is that angels are spirits...they are spirits, they are immaterial spirits. They are created. It says He makes them spirits, God created angels as spirits. They are seen sort of metaphorically as a flame of fire.

An angel is a spirit, a created spirit made by God. Notice the contrast in verse 8. "But to the Son...He says...Your throne, O God, is forever and ever." Angels are created spirits, the Son is eternal God, that's the distinction. That's the distinction in nature.

The Son of God sits on a throne that is eternal...forever and ever. That's the first distinct difference in the nature of angels and the nature of Christ. Angels are created spirit beings, created immaterial beings. The Son is eternal God.

Furthermore, in verse 8 indicates a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. Verse 9, "You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness." That's an interesting statement drawn from Psalm 45, Isaiah 61. What that's saying is this, it is characteristic of the Son who is eternal God that He is marked by righteousness which means He loves righteousness and hates lawlessness, which are two sides of the same holiness. Now we know that that, sad to say, is not the case with created spirits. God created angels, some of them chose to love righteousness and hate lawlessness. But Lucifer, son of the morning, anointed cherub, one of the originally created angels, chose to hate righteousness and love lawlessness. And he was able to lead a rebellion, including one-third of all the angels who joined him in his mutiny against God. Angels, initially, were not impeccable, that is they had the capacity to sin and some did and were cast out of heaven and they constitute the demons who serve the purposes of Satan in his kingdom of darkness today. But the eternal God, not created, the eternal God is perpetually carrying a scepter of righteousness and forever loves righteousness and hates lawlessness. Because of the difference in nature, angels are

created spirits, He is the eternal God, a difference in character, angels could make the choice to love lawlessness and hate righteousness. But the Son could not. There is a great difference in essential nature. And verse 9 concludes, therefore, God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. They may attend to You, men and angels, but You are far above them by Your nature.

Number four, as the writer endeavors to exalt Jesus Christ above angels and to equate Him with God, he does it by His name, His rank, His nature, number four, and we've already gotten a glimpse of this in verse 8, His eternity...His eternality. Building on the fact that He is God forever and ever which looks to the future, verse 10 says, "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens are the work of Your hands." He views the Son as THE creator who was here before there was anything created because He was the creator. He cannot be a created being, therefore His eternality stretches not only forward, but backward. He is THE creator. And we all know John 1, "Everything that was made was made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." This wonderful testimony here in verse 10 comes from Psalm 102.

"And the creation that He makes, verse 11, will perish but He will remain. The creation will grow old like a garment, like a cloak. You will fold them up, perhaps better, roll them up. They'll be changed but You are the same and Your years will not fail." This is the eternality of the Son. Angels were not eternal, but the Son is eternal. Angels were created, as I said, some time around the creation of everything else. Christ Himself was THE creator. Angels could change and some did. He cannot change. The creation will dissolve. The heavens and the earth will be uncreated. But God will never ever change.

Jesus is God by virtue of His name, by virtue of His rank, by virtue of His nature, by virtue of His eternality, and finally, by virtue of His destiny. In verse 13, the writer says, "But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool?'" To what angel did He ever grant ultimate eternal sovereignty? Answer...none. No angel was ever so promised. The promise of Psalm 110 is to the Son. No angel was ever taken to sit at the right hand of God and have all enemies made his footstool. The destiny of Christ is to rule all, every knee in heaven and earth and under the earth is going to bow to Him. All His enemies are going to come under Him. You see that unfold in the rest of the New Testament, particularly in the book of Revelation where He finally subjects all His enemies to Himself...takes His seat as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. No angel is ever given sovereignty. The angels are not sovereign. Angels don't rule over everything or anything. In fact, verse 14 makes the distinction clear. They aren't sovereign, they are serving. "Are they not all serving spirits, ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"

You know, I know we talk about how angels minister to us and they do. I'm sure they're involved. I'm sure they're involved in protecting cause the Scripture indicates that. I'm sure there are angels unaware, at least we're unaware of them, serving the purposes of God according to Matthew 18, He

uses His angels to care for His own. We don't see them but God dispatches His angels for the protection and the care of His people.

But I think there's something beyond that in this verse that is true. But there's something beyond that because it's talking about these angels being ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation. And the future use of the verb here indicates that this must be looking at the full future inheritance of our salvation which indicates to me, and here's the wonder of wonders, that in the glory of heaven, in the glory of heaven the Son will reign over us and we will give Him homage and adore Him as our King but the angels, even in the glories of eternal heaven, will continue to serve us.

You say, "You sure about that?" Well that's what it says here and there aren't any exceptions and there isn't any limit on it. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul says when we go to heaven and are made like Jesus Christ, we will become joint...what?...heirs with Him. And therefore we will inherit all that He possesses. Not only that, repeatedly in the New Testament it tells us that we will reign with Him, doesn't it? We will reign with Him. We will receive crowns and we will reign with Him. We will sit with Him on His throne on the Father's throne, it says in Revelation. And this is the wonder of wonders, that in the saga of redemption as God plans a redeemed humanity to be given as a bride to His Son, unfolding the purposes of God, He brings that redeemed humanity to glory, gives that redeemed humanity to the Son. The Son embraces that redeemed humanity as His bride. That redeemed humanity then reflects His glory, becomes a joint-heir of all that He possesses and forever and ever worships and honors the Son while reigning with the Son to be served by the angels. So that the angels are created by God not only to serve the bride, as it were, in time but to serve the bride in eternity. Their destiny is service. His destiny is sovereignty.

And so, when you go back to the scene in Bethlehem, you see the angels, they look prominent when compared to the child, but He was so much better than they.

Father, we thank You for the glimpse of the Son in the majesty of the language of this great chapter. We honor Jesus Christ as the Son, the One who eternally...eternally generates from You, the One who is eternally God, whose name is above every name, the One who is the premier, preeminent, prototokos before whom all must bow and worship, the One who is not a spirit created but the creator of spirits, the One who is perfect righteousness and who perfectly hates lawlessness, the One who is eternal before and after creation, and the One whose destiny is sovereignty. What wonder of wonders that we should know You and Your Son and participate in the glory of what You've prepared for Him. What immense privilege that we should sit with Christ in His throne, be identified as His beloved bride, love Him, serve Him and then share His inheritance forever and be served by the holy angels. And for all of this, we worship You, it all being made possible because He, being Christ, purged by Himself, purged our sins by dying on the cross in our place. And so do we worship Him today.

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