

Theme: Christ - Supreme and Sufficient in Creation

Text: Colossians 1:15-17

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How much help can you expect from a baby? Babies are the epitome of helplessness. They can coo and cry, drink and poop, wiggle their arms and legs, grab a finger, and with considerable coaxing even manage something that resembles a smile. But they can do nothing for themselves. So we rock them, feed them, change them, dress them and fuss over them. But they can do nothing for themselves, much less do anything for others, except to make us feel useful as we take care of them.

And yet, just two months ago we were all excited about the birth of a baby, just as helpless as any other baby. But this baby was called "Jesus," because "Jesus" means "Savior," and this baby was going to save his people from their sins.

Other babies have grown up to be saviors. What a celebration there would have been over the birth of Moses if the Israelites had known that he would some day lead them out of slavery to freedom in the Promised Land! But, of course, there was no celebration, only frantic efforts to save the baby from Pharaoh's death sentence. There might have been a similar celebration if people had known that Martin Luther King, Jr., would lead a Civil Rights Movement that would put an end to legalized segregation. But, of course, no one knew that Pastor King's baby would lead that march for freedom.

And history records the accomplishments of other saviors, saviors from political oppression, saviors from disease and poverty, even saviors from flood and famines. But the baby Jesus, the helpless baby Jesus, was born to save his people from their sins

Now there have been other babies who have grown up to save people from their sins. Teachers have intervened to save some young people from a life of crime. Counselors have helped some people to escape a self-destructive life-style. Doctors have healed people whose livers have been damaged by heavy drinking. In that sense, there are many who have "saved people from their sins." And some would put Jesus into the same category. He helped to popularize the principles of love and forgiveness, and thus enabled people to adopt principles that allowed them to avoid the sins of selfishness and retaliation. And some of those blessing did result from Jesus' ministry. But God's angel had something far different in mind when he told Joseph to call his stepson "Jesus," because he would save his people from their sins.

The angel was talking about the sins that offend God and demand his punishment. For God hates sin and punishes sinners. That was apparent already in the Garden of Eden when just one sin cost Adam and Eve the unending happiness that God had planned for them. God's anger over sin resulted in the catastrophic flood that destroyed the human race except for Noah and his family.

Jesus was born into a world of sinners who faced eternal damnation because of

their sins. Somehow, in some way, this newborn baby would save his people from the punishment they deserved for their sins. But how would he ever manage that? Would he lead a reform movement that would somehow persuade people to stop sinning? Would he somehow negotiate with God and win a lesser penalty for the sinners who had tried to earn God's favor?

We know very well how this baby would save his people from their sins. He would assume the guilt of every human sin and would carry that guilt to the cross, where God would punish him in place of the sinner. He would offer his perfect life as an atoning sacrifice that would pay for the sins of the world. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, God would declare that sinners are not guilty and therefore eligible for eternal life in heaven.

But where is the justice in that? How can the sacrifice of one man atone for a whole world of sinners? Every single sin that I have committed today must be paid for. Now add to that every other sin that I have committed during my life, and my debt to God becomes incredibly huge. But the guilt of every other sinner, yours included, must be added to that debt, from the first sin of Adam and Eve to the sins that are still happening on Judgment Day, from all wartime atrocities to simple everyday sins of lust and greed.

The beach at Grand Anse in Grenada is fifty feet wide and a mile long. That's a lot of sand. But if each grain of sand were to represent one human sin, the Grand Anse beach would be only a small fraction of the total.

Now look at the baby in the manger again. Can you expect this newborn Jesus to save his people from those tons and tons of condemning sins? Well, of course, you can, because that's what the Bible says, and God's Word does not lie! But his ability to do this becomes clearer when we hear what St. Paul has to say about him in the opening chapter of his letter to the Colossians, verses 15-17.

"He is the image of the invisible God." God is a spirit. He does not have a physical body. Besides that, he is magnificent beyond our imagination. If God could be seen, it would be something like looking directly at the sun. You can't do that without injuring your eyes, perhaps permanently. When we want to observe a solar eclipse, we punch a little hole in a piece of cardboard, and then let the sun shine through the hole onto a piece of paper. And there we see the sun partially blotted out by the moon. We see an image of the sun, because we can't look at it directly. In Jesus we seen an image of the God whom we cannot see.

God cannot be seen. And yet he is known by the universe he has created. Common sense tells us that things do not create themselves. The existence of a house declares beyond any doubt that there were builders. In the same way the existence of the universe declares the existence of God. And Paul declares that Jesus is "the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created."

It is somewhat puzzling that Paul refers to Jesus as the firstborn, as if God the Father somehow gave birth to Jesus. But Paul's words cannot be understood in that way. For Scripture proclaims that Jesus is eternal with the Father and the Spirit. He was not the first thing that God created. Rather he is firstborn in the sense that he is supreme over all created things, because he is their creator.

We generally think of God the Father when it comes to creation. "We believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." But Jesus was not a passive bystander during the six days of creation. In the mystery of the Trinity, Jesus was also active in producing the universe out of nothing. And he participated in all of it. For Paul also says, "he created all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities" And since human authorities did not exist at the time of creation, this refers to the thrones and powers and rulers and authorities in heaven. Among all the angels that God created, none were equal to Jesus, because they all owe their existence to him. "They were created by him and for him." They all turned out just the way he wanted them, so that they could serve the purpose for which he designed them.

And therefore "Jesus is before all things." He was there before creation began "And in him all things hold together." That means that the power of Jesus is still functioning in the world. The processes of nature that we take for granted, from the force of gravity to the conception of human life, do not proceed independently on their own. But Jesus uses gravity to keep the moon from sailing off into space. And every human child is a gift from him, because he causes the fertilized ovum to come to life.

We still honor God the Father as the creator of heaven and earth. But equal honor belongs to God the Son, for together with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus created the heavens and the earth.

At that first Christmas, this Jesus, God the Son, became a human being through the womb of a virgin named Mary. Jesus did not just show up for the first time in Bethlehem. He has always been there. But the incredible miracle of the incarnation is that God became human. He laid aside his heavenly glory to join the human race. But at the same time he was still God, the God who created heaven and earth.

Martin Luther never tired of marveling over that amazing miracle. He imagined the baby Jesus staring up from his manger into the night sky and seeing the stars which were exactly where he had placed them at creation. To all outward appearances Mary's son was just another helpless human child. But we know that this baby was also God, the same God who created heaven and earth and everything that is in them.

But why am I talking about Christmas when we are already two and a half weeks into Lent? A good question. A very good question! Let me remind you of the challenge that lay before this child. Guilt that outweighs by far all the sand on Grand Anse beach. How can the sacrifice of one man wipe out that humongous debt to God? The answer is that this man was also the infinite God who created heaven and earth. As a mere man

Jesus could not have survived even a portion of that guilt. It would have turned his brain to jelly. But as true God he was big enough to take on all the sin that we are capable of producing. And so we can be confident that on that first Good Friday, Jesus paid all our guilt in full.

I bring my guilt to Jesus to wash away my stains.
He from then all releases 'til not a spot,
Yes, not a spot remains.

Thank you, dear Holy Spirit, for revealing to us through the Apostle Paul that Jesus was more than capable of paying for the sins of the world, including every one of our own sins. Grant us faith to accept this truth as you intend it to be accepted, that we may be at peace with you and with ourselves. We ask it in the name of Jesus, who created the heavens and the earth. Amen