

We Believe: Truly God

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that as we've just read in these last days, you've spoken to us by your Son. We thank you for him who is the radiance of your glory and the exact imprint of your nature.

And we pray as we come to your word that by your Spirit you would draw us to him. Lord, that we would not merely read about him and hear about him today, but that we would hear him and know him and come to him and worship him.

All this we pray and ask in his name. Amen. Well, when I was growing up, this time of year, my mum used to read to my brother and sister and I a book called What's the Best Thing About Christmas?

Perhaps you have it at home. It's quite an old book. But it went through all the kind of lovely things that happened at this time of year.

Lots of family time, sweet treats, beautiful lights. But after every kind of page of nice things, there was a repeated line.

[1 : 19] We'd all kind of shout as children. But that's not the best thing about Christmas. That's not the best thing about Christmas. So, what is the best thing about Christmas?

Christmas. Well, you'll be delighted to hear that's what we'll be thinking about the next three Sundays together. In two weeks, billions of people, some of us among them, will be celebrating a baby being born.

But what makes this baby so special? What is worth celebrating? Well, down through the ages, Christians have recognized that this was no ordinary baby.

And he came in no ordinary way. He was special. And so, they gave his coming a special name, the incarnation.

Incarnation. Incarnation. Because they recognized the truth at the heart of this birth. It's that the baby who was born was at one and the same time truly, properly, perfectly God.

[2 : 32] And truly, properly, perfectly human. So that Jesus is, they said, God in the flesh. God incarnate.

God incarnate. So, what is the best thing about Christmas? Well, I hope we will see, or see afresh maybe, that it is this. That God came down at Christmas to live with us as a man.

On the day he was born, Jesus Christ could not have been more God. And he could not have been more us.

Forever, truly God. He became truly man. And he did that for us. So, that is what we're going to reflect on, the wonder of the incarnation. And I hope what we see over the next few Sundays, okay, is that that is not only the best thing about Christmas.

It is the best thing about life. It is the best thing we could ever celebrate. So, where do we begin with that great thing?

[3 : 44] Well, we begin at the beginning and before the beginning. Because to really understand Jesus, we have to recognize, firstly, that he has no beginning.

Jesus did not begin. Let that sink in. He has no origin. He has forever simply been.

In him was life, says John. Who gave him life? Well, no one gave him life.

He has, as he himself put it, life in himself. He simply is. I am who I am. And if this is just beginning to sort of stretch us, then that is good.

Okay, if we are not stretched this morning by this truth, then we are thinking about it all wrong. Back in the 300s AD, there was a man, he was a clever man, but he was ultimately very wrong.

[4 : 55] His name was Arius. And he said, okay, Jesus didn't kind of begin in time, but he said, there was when he was not.

God must have begun him. He said at some point before the beginning of time. But the church straight away said very strongly, no, there was never when he was not.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Okay, in fact, there's quite a famous painting of a scene that happened at a church meeting called the Council of Nicaea around this time that shows a certain saint, a Saint Nicholas, better known to us as Father Christmas, slapping a follower of Arius in the face.

Now, that definitely puts him on the naughty list. Okay, church fathers were not always nice guys, but it illustrates just how strongly the church felt on this point, that to say that the son was ever not there, that he had a beginning, is to deny his identity as truly God, and therefore to deny him his rightful worship, which is surely the point of this for us this morning.

Okay, it has to stretch our heads. It can't do anything else, can it? We are finite creatures of dust, thinking about infinite things of God.

[6 : 44] It's going to stretch us. But more than that, let it fill up our hearts to overflowing, so that it's not just our heads that are bursting, but our hearts that are bursting, so that when we think of Jesus and his birth, we don't just say, that's lovely, how nice, but in our hearts, we fall before him.

We recognize him, who he is. We give him the worship he deserves as the one true living God, the uncreated creator, the king of the cosmos.

The very thought of Jesus and his birth, we would be as full of awe and wonder as the angels were on the day when he was born and sung over him.

The angels, who shield their eyes from the radiance of his glory, who worship him night and day. That is, by the way, why I love some of the songs we sing at Christmas time, because they help us, don't they, to worship Jesus better than we really understand.

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity, word of the Father, now in flesh appearing, very God, begotten, not created.

[8 : 17] You know, in some ways, we learn this truth best, don't we, by doing it. The glory of Jesus comes into focus for us best, his majesty and beauty and glory, when we are worshipping him rightly for who he is.

And so this morning, my aim isn't really to convince you, okay, that Jesus is truly God, but simply to help us to reflect on who he is so that we worship him rightly this Christmas time.

And the first thing we're going to reflect on then is that Jesus is the son of the Father. Just look again with me, if you would, at the first two verses of Hebrews. It says, in the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

No way there's two verses sum up the whole book of Hebrews. It's written to tell us that Jesus is better than whatever came before him.

And the argument goes, he must be better because he is best. Jesus is best. Jesus is best because he is God's one and only son.

[9 : 39] That word rings through this chapter, doesn't it? See, in verse five, to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my son? Or again, I will be his father.

He will be my son. Jesus is the son of the father. Now, perhaps you're wondering, if Jesus didn't have a beginning, how then can he be the son of God?

It doesn't, being a son imply that you began at some point. I have a son who turns one this week. I have another son on the way.

And I know that there was a time when they were not here because I was here and they were not here. But friends, we need to understand that God is not like me and my family.

God is not like you and your family. He's not just a bigger version of us. He is completely unique. There is none like him.

[10 : 47] And so God's son is not like our children. He is completely unique. You just look at what kind of son God has in verse two.

His son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. Okay, is that a normal Saturday in your house?

Creating the cosmos? In the beginning, God created everything by his son and for his son. Air and stars and planets and rocks and trees and earth and water.

People. And so if that all happened in the beginning, what was there before the beginning? Who was there? Only the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

One God in three persons, completely enraptured in one another, in eternal, unbreakable love. You see, this is where Arius got it so wrong.

[11 : 57] There are not degrees of being God. God is not on a sliding scale. You either are God or you are not God. There is no kind of time lapse in eternity.

Either you are eternal or you are not. God is not on a sliding scale. But, and the Bible so clearly puts Jesus on the side of eternity, before the beginning, and therefore, God, the Son was there in the beginning, so how could he have a beginning?

God created all things, and he was creating, so how could he have been created? He is eternal God. God. And so, in what sense then, is he the Son of God?

The church found the best way to put it was to say that the Son is the Son in the sense of his being eternally begotten of the Father. He was not born in some distant past.

He just has forever been the Son of the Father in a way that is completely mysterious to us. Okay, I'm not asking you to understand it. How can we?

[13 : 12] The being of God, the Trinity, we might not understand it, but we do sing it, don't we? Very God, begotten, not created.

We worship him for this, that he is the Son of the Father, and we hold to it because it has life-changing implications to me and you.

Okay, why does it matter that Jesus is the Son of the Father? Well, because being the Son means he can reveal God perfectly to us.

Now, we get that, don't we, at a human level. Has someone, I wonder if it's said to you, or maybe you've said to someone, like Father, like Son, we know that sometimes we see something of a human father and a human son, don't we?

Well, here's how God is different, because with God, we see all of the Father in his Son. In him, all the fullness of deity dwells bodily.

[14 : 21] There is no bit of Jesus that is not like his Father. There is no bit of Jesus that is not God. And so, there is no better way, is there, for us to see and to know God than through his Son, because the Son is not only like his Father, he is one with the Father.

He is truly, perfectly God, God with us. and if we struggle to get our heads around that, Hebrews gives us two great illustrations in verse 3 to help us think about that.

When he came down in his incarnation, what is it like to look at Jesus? The Son is the radiance of God's glory, like the light that blazes from the Son and shines through the cosmos and radiates the earth, through the sun is the radiance of God's glory.

He's not a mirror or a window that reflects something of God's glory. He shines directly from God in dazzling clearness and brightness.

And so, when he shone into the darkness, when he was born into our world, what people saw in him was the glory of the one true God.

[15 : 46] God's glory and glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Or think of it another way, he says, verse 3, he is the exact representation of his being. I don't know if you've ever done that, printing with a stamp with ink.

Sometimes it doesn't quite come out properly, does it? But Jesus is, he says, like a perfect print made by a perfect stamp, the exact imprint of God's nature.

Or we could imagine a statue being cast in metal, God himself being cast in weak humanity. That was the Son when he came into the world, the image of the invisible God.

God. So that when people saw him, they saw God. No one has ever seen God, said John, but the one and only Son who is himself God and in the closest relationship with the Father, he has made him known.

[17 : 03] And so, brothers and sisters, those words have never been truer for us to say, have they, than of God and Jesus, like Father, like Son.

Whoever has seen me, he says, has seen the Father. And what an incredible thing that is for us, that nobody has ever laid eyes, have they, on God. How can we know him?

How can we see him? This is how, he says, I have given you my Son. I think it's much more of an American thing than something that happens here, but I don't know if you've ever seen videos of gender reveal parties.

Often the reason why they're on the internet is because they've gone wrong. The idea, if you don't know, is the expecting couple gets a cake made or a balloon kind of filled with glitter. And when the cake is cut or the balloon is burst, it reveals the gender of their new baby in the form of blue or pink kind of colors.

And inevitably in these videos, okay, the cake gets dropped or the balloon gets popped at the wrong time. Well, the birth of Jesus is like a God reveal party.

[18 : 22] And it happened perfectly. A perfect revelation of the invisible God in his life. The world got to see who God is for the first time.

And so, friends, if you want to know this morning what God is like, where do you need to look? You need to look at his son, Jesus. That is God's gift to you this Christmas that a baby was born who could show us once and for all what God is like because he is himself God.

Okay, we cannot get a clearer or closer view of God than by gazing at and listening to the Lord Jesus. And that is just what God wanted when he sent him into the world.

We worship a God who wants to be known. So, he sent his son that we might know him. Okay, if you want to know God this morning, how do you do it?

Spend time with his son Jesus. Okay, read the accounts of his birth and carry on into his life and death and resurrection. Get to know him.

[19 : 37] Trust in him. Follow him. Pray to him. Praise him. And you will know God because he is the father's son.

Secondly, Hebrews tells us then Jesus is the creator. The creator. Now, we've touched on this already.

How Jesus was there in the beginning, creating all things with God. John really presses that verse. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

That's pretty comprehensive, isn't it? And if we were in any doubt, verses 10 to 12 in Hebrews chapter 1, quoting from Psalm 102, they tell us very clearly that Jesus himself made the universe.

Do you see those verses? Here's what God says about his son, says Hebrews. In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

[20 : 46] They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe. Like a garment, they will be changed, but you remain the same, and your years will never end.

Did you realize when we sung those words earlier in our service, we were singing about the Lord Jesus Christ? You let that sink in. It's quite incredible, isn't it?

The writer of this book reads those words from Psalm 102, written so long before, praising God for his work of creation, and thinks very naturally, of course, that is speaking about Jesus.

Of course it is. In fact, he reads all of those Old Testament passages and knows that they are speaking of Jesus. You don't miss what's going on here.

He's saying what? That the whole Old Testament, every page in our Bibles, has Jesus at the heart of it. And so simply want us to reflect on the implications of that.

[21 : 53] For us, Jesus is our creator. The way that Hebrews helps us do that is to compare Jesus to angels. Now, I don't know what you think of angels, how often you think of angels, probably at Christmas time, probably very few other times.

Angels feel a little bit remote to us, I guess, our human lives. But most of this chapter in Hebrews is saying that Jesus is better than angels. Now, how can that help us get a grasp on Jesus' deity?

Well, the Bible teaches us that angels are the highest created beings. They are spirits, they live in heaven, their natural habitat, if I can put it like that, is the immediate presence of God.

They live in his glory, and they worship God and serve God. So sometimes God will send out an angel from his presence with a message for someone.

I guess the obvious example that we might think of at this time of year is the angel Gabriel coming to visit Mary, sent to bring news that she will carry the child from God.

[23 : 06] And how did Mary feel about that visit? Not warm and fuzzy. She was terrified. And we struggle, I think, to get our heads around that in our 21st century context.

How could somebody be terrified of a wee gal in a tutu and a tinsel halo and fluffy wings? Well, because angels are just nothing like that, are they?

They are, verse 7, what? Flames of fire. Verse 14, spirits sent to serve God's people. And so Mary knew, didn't she, what we have long forgotten, which is that angels are fearful creatures of incredible power and glory.

So why is it worth us knowing that Jesus is better than angels? Well, because the only thing better than angels is the very best.

The only thing higher than the angels is the one who made the angels. angels. Have you ever wondered why there are so many angels in the story when Jesus is born?

[24 : 22] You can go pages and pages, can't you, of the Bible, and there's not an angel in sight. And then in just a few pages, it's as if all of them appear at once. Why is that?

Because the one who is being born is the one that they have worshipped before time began. heaven. You know, I wonder, has that wonder of their proclamation of his birth worn off us a wee bit?

You today in the town of David is born to you a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Well, the wonder of that night has not worn off in heaven.

For what happened that night? A multitude of the heavenly host appeared, the sky filled with angels, and sang praises. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests.

The angels knew who it was that had been born that night, the Lord God Almighty, their creator. So, verse six, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, let all God's angels worship him.

[25 : 37] And, friends, if that is true of the angels, then what about us? If Jesus is rightly worshipped in heaven, surely he should be rightly worshipped on earth?

Yes, in our songs, in our prayers, but also, surely, with our lives, our words, our very being. To think that the baby who was born is the one who knit me and you together in the womb, the one who laid the very foundation of the earth, the one who spread out the stars in the sky, and he sustains it all, verse three, by his powerful word.

Friends, do you realize that it is Jesus who holds you together as you sit in your chair, even now, that he binds your cells together, that he keeps your heart beating, that he gives you breath.

breath. And here's a mystery, that did not change when he was born, or when he grew up, or when he died, or when he rose again.

He was born a creature without ever stopping being the creator, and he still is. So how do we worship him?

[27 : 01] Surely, surely, with our whole lives, with our whole hearts, with every breath that he gives us. Perhaps you're not a Christian here today.

Perhaps you don't know Jesus Christ yourself. Maybe someone's invited you along. Maybe you've popped in just to see what we do. Christmas is a really easy time to come to church.

I'm so glad that you're here. But let me say that if Jesus is the creator, if he created you, then Jesus cannot only be for Christmas.

Okay? You cannot leave him at the door when you leave from here this morning. The best you can do is to get to know him. He's the one person you cannot walk away from because your life depends upon him.

So what do you do? If you came with someone, ask them to read the story of his life with you. Ask them if they would read the gospel with you.

[28 : 06] Come back to be with us on a Sunday. And when you know him, give your life to him. Worship him because he is your creator.

And if we're Christians here, we need to see this too, don't we? That Jesus is not just for a season. He's not just for a Sunday. But that Jesus is for life.

Because he gave us life. And he gives us life. And he gives us new life. And so it is right for us to give him our lives in worship, in adoration, for all of our days.

He is our creator. And for our final reflection this morning, Hebrews gives us, we are reminded that he is our king.

When Jesus finished his work on earth, he sat down on his throne in heaven to reign over all things forever. See that there in verse 3, after he provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

[29 : 18] And so many of the parts of the Bible, these quotes come from a God promising his son, he would be the forever king. So Psalm 2, there in verse 5, he said to me, you are my son, today I have become your father.

Ask me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. Just ask and I'll give you the world, he said.

And also verse 5, a quote from 2 Samuel chapter 7, God promises King David, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, I will establish his kingdom.

He is the one who will build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, he shall be my son.

Forever kingdom for God's son. Or perhaps most obviously in verse 8, they're quoting Psalm 45, your throne, O God, will last forever and ever.

[30 : 21] Your throne will last forever. There you go, my son, a forever king. Are we getting the picture? This is quite a collage, isn't it, of scripture that is building up to help us see that Jesus is God's forever king over his forever kingdom.

That is what he promised his son before the beginning of time. In fact, here is the mind-blowing thing. That is why he created the world at all.

To give his son a gift of love, a kingdom over which he would rule perfectly and gloriously forever. He is the heir of all things.

He is to inherit the universe. It is all for him. Which is why when he came to earth, he came as a newborn king.

God's kingdom on earth had been broken and shattered by human rebellion. The very first people turned against his rule.

[31 : 27] Their descendants followed in their footsteps. We all to this day have been hostile to God and his king. But the wonderful good news, okay, at the heart of the incarnation is that God sent his one and only son, the rightful king of all the world, the one it was all for.

He sent him into the world to reclaim his kingdom, to bring his enemies back under his good and loving rule, to re-establish God's perfect reign on earth.

That's why some of Jesus' first words we have recorded are these. The time has come, he said. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news.

See, it's because he is the king of all the world, the king of the cosmos, but only he has the right to bring us back into the kingdom of God.

Only he can forgive us for having turned against him. Only he holds the keys to let us back in. So when he says that God's kingdom is here now because he is here, we need to listen, don't we, to how we need to come back to him.

[32 : 49] Repent, he says. Believe the good news. Turn around and drop your weapons. Drop your hostility, your sin, and instead put your trust in this king from God.

Come to him. Put your faith in him. Rest the whole weight of your life upon him. See, friends, to rebel against this king is foolish because our rebellion will be crushed.

It is doomed. Your sin does not make Jesus any less king, does it? I wonder if you noticed that very final quote there in verse 13, quoting from Psalm 110.

To which of the angels did God ever say, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. God said that to none of the angels, but yes, he said it to Jesus Christ, his king.

Our rebellion is doomed. It will be crushed. He will punish our sin unless we stop now and turn to him and trust in his promise of forgiveness, his death on the cross on which he was crushed for our sin.

[34 : 05] And he was pierced for our rebellion. Unless we trust him to bring us rightly to God back into his kingdom where we must live all our days.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is the son. He is the creator. He is the king. And he is the only savior for sinners like me and me.

So come, let us adore him. Let us worship him as we pray to him together now. Let's pray. Lord Jesus Christ, we are awestruck by you.

You have forever been. You made yourself low. You was born in time. You united yourself with humanity in your birth.

Father, how we praise you for your son. He who is the radiance of your glory. That we can look at him and see your very heart. Father, we pray that you would enable us to give him the worship that he deserves.

[35 : 34] Father, keep us, we pray, from ever putting him in a box, from ever forgetting who he truly is, that he is God, he is creator, he is king.

Lord, help us to bow before him today. We pray, our Father, for those whom we know and love, who do not worship him and do not know him.

And Father, we pray at this time of year, especially, you would open doors for your gospel, that our friends, our families, our colleagues, our neighbors, too, might recognize him and worship him.

Lord, grant faith, we pray. Open doors. Bring people into your kingdom. For this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.