

# Christmas Eve Worship Service

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

jesus, god, reconciled, birth, christmas, created, hear, gospel, nativity scene, world, passage, big, promises, stories, big picture, view, word, display, scripture, firstborn

## SPEAKERS

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How can we portray what took place this night? Nativity scenes are a classic way of trying to do that and attempt to show what it is that happened this night when Jesus was born. And the way in which nativity scenes go about depicting Jesus birth can be pretty wildly different in their styles. You may know that just down the road at the Carnegie Museum, they annually display their Neapolitan *percepio*. That's a very ornate style of nativity scene, it was popular in Italy from the 16th to the 18th centuries, and the one that they display every year, the Carnegie is one of the largest examples in the world, it's almost 30 feet long, and its display it has well over 100 individually handmade figures. So that's a very ornate way of doing it. At the other end of the aesthetic spectrum, are some of the minimalists sets that have become popular in recent years, you can get these on Etsy, where you can make them yourself if you have some wood and a little bit of paint, I suppose. Right? Very different ways of attempting to depict the same thing, isn't it? What do we see, when we look at the events of this evening? Even more specifically, who do we see? When we turn our gaze to this baby that was born in Bethlehem? Just how big is the picture? How much of it do we have in view? What do you see, when you turn your gaze to that baby that was first born there in Bethlehem. Maybe your view is obscured by something perhaps you're not sure why everyone is so excited, you're not clear on why this is such a big deal. You don't see anything special. Maybe that's because you've simply just never heard about it. Or been told what exactly this is, or, or maybe there's some trauma from past pain that's blocking your view in some way. Sometimes our view is obscured. Sometimes our view is very reductionistic. We see a baby that was born this evening, maybe there were some interesting circumstances surrounding his birth ones that weren't true of every child. But in the end, it's just the birth of a child, really nothing all that special Other than that, or maybe you have a very customized view of this, you've taken some of the things that you've heard about Jesus, maybe some of the things that you've read about Jesus made sure to keep the parts that you like, made sure to get rid of the parts that you don't. And so you end up with this caricature in a way of Jesus that just conveniently perfectly aligns with whatever other social or political or ideological convictions that you have. Maybe it's a very customized view of Jesus. But if we want to understand that we are understanding Christmas properly, if we want to ensure that we are understanding Christ properly, then we have to see what Scripture says about the Savior. Now, we've heard a lot of very familiar readings tonight. And that's a great place to start. The birth narratives that we find in the gospels, even the prophecies that we see of Jesus, those are a wonderful place to start in helping us understand this and see the picture that's before us. And on one hand, please don't miss the obvious

things that are true that we see in the birth narratives. This was the birth of a child, Jesus, like any newborn infant was subjected to just the frailties of the human condition, he would have needed to be fed and clothed. Despite what the song says there was a lot of crying that he probably made that night. He was a child come into this world and the gospel show us that as he grew, he lived. They tell us that he was hungry that he was thirsty, that there were times he grew tired. He went to funerals, he went to wedding receptions, he wept when one of his friends died. The gospels show us in every way, that the humanity of Jesus, the full humanity of Jesus is a central part of his identity. So we can't miss the obvious. But on the other hand, we can't miss the incredible. Even in the birth stories, we start to hear echoes melodies of a bigger thing that is happening. If you read Matthew's Gospel, for example, he's begins with his genealogies making clear that Jesus is the royal descendant from David, the one who would be promised an Eternal Throne. And he is also Emmanuel, God with us. You read Luke's Gospel accounts, and he includes a lot of Old Testament passages showing us that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of these prophecies, all of these promises. That's why the heavenly choirs gathered to sing at his birth. He's the fulfillment of everything that God has said he would do for his people. If you read Mark's gospel, he doesn't include any of the birth stories, perhaps you know that but as soon as Jesus arrives on the scene and begins his ministry, we're told that the kingdom of God is now here. And then you read John's Gospel and he begins on a big stage. He says that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. So we start to get oriented to a much bigger picture that's here. And what I want to do now in this particular passage and Colossians, is to even pull back the curtain a little for further and show you if we can just how big this picture really is just how expansive our view of Jesus ought to be. I want you to listen to this you can follow along this again is the word of the Lord. This is Colossians chapter one, verses 15, through 20, this is talking about this same Jesus. It says He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through Him, and for Him. And He is before all things and in Him, all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything, he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through Him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth, or in heaven, making peace, by the blood of his cross, he started to hear something a little bigger going on, don't you, we started to see that the portrait is a lot bigger than we maybe first realized when we are focusing only on the birth of this child. And that is at the heart of this. There's a big picture that Scripture gives to us. I want to point out just a couple of passages in there, every one of these is incredibly rich, incredibly deep. You could spend a lifetime meditating and reflecting upon these things. And I hope, I hope that you will. But I just want to offer a couple of these thoughts to hear at the beginning of this passage. Scripture says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Now, in the Old Testament, the very second command that God gave to His people was that they were not allowed to make any graven images, they were not allowed to create a sculpture, or fashion, something to represent God. And the reason is that there is a true image. And that's Jesus. He is the one who represents God to us, not just represents God to us. But in John's Gospel, Jesus Himself said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. He doesn't mean that in a physical sense. He doesn't mean God, the Father happens to look like a young Palestinian Jewish carpenter. But he's speaking about a qualitative and ethical spiritual sense. Not only is Jesus really and truly and fully human, he is really, and truly, and fully God in the flesh. He is the image of the invisible God, the One in whom all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell faster than also says that he is the one through whom, for whom, and by whom all things were created, and the one in whom all things hold together. There's just kind of a parade of prepositions, right? They're showing us the majesty of the Messiah, if you will, and saying that Jesus Himself is the one through whom, for whom and by whom all things were created. So there is a cosmic an eternal scope, to the work of Jesus that we can miss. If we think that is only restricted to a 30, some year period in and around the region of Jerusalem. He's the one who created everything. He's the one for whom everything was created. He's the One in whom everything holds

together. John's Gospel says the same thing without Him was not anything made that has been made in the book of Hebrews in the first couple verses, so that he upholds the universe by the Word of His power. Never been quite able to get that into one of our little kid Christmas pageants. That's a that's a bigger picture than you can try to portray in the things that we are able to do, isn't it? Jesus, we're told is the head of the church, the firstborn from the dead. He's a lot more than just an inspirational mascot. He's far more than some quaint archaic sage. He is the resurrected Lord, the one who lives forevermore. And he alone, we're told is the head of the church. He is the Lord and the leader of believers in every time in every place in every nation, all of those who call upon Him in faith. And then we're told that he's the one who reconciles to himself, all things. Reconciliation is what you need, when relationships are broken. When a relationship is broken, you need reconciliation. So our relationship to God is broken, because of our rebellion, because of the sin that exists in every single human heart and the sin that exists in this world. And that's not something that any of us can overcome just through our determined efforts. I don't care what New Year's resolution you make this year that won't solve that problem. Somebody's got to do that for us. He's the one who reconciles to himself all things. So the only way we can be made right with God is if God makes us right with God. And Jesus we are told does that taking away our sin, giving us his righteousness and because we have been reconciled to God, that gives us the only real true foundation we have for seeking reconciliation with one another. We're told here that he's reconciled all things to himself things on earth things in heaven. That's because all things were created by and for Jesus. So he is the only one who was able to reconcile all things. And he couldn't do that. If he wasn't one who was able to die and rise again. And he couldn't be someone who was able to die and rise again, if he wasn't with us, among us, as one of us. So this passage is tying all of those things together. The incarnation, the birth of Jesus, the Word made flesh, Emmanuel, God with us. All of that is the formal launch of this work that God has done, and is doing to reconcile all things to himself in Jesus, this passage starts to show us just how big this picture is that we should try to have in view, we can never fully get our minds around this. But we should try to have this in view. So if we ask, or if you're thinking, why does this day really matter? How does the day like Christmas really impact my life? How is it possible that a day like Christmas could speak a meaningful word into the chaos of this world? Well, if Christmas is simply the birth of a baby boy from 2000 years ago, then any meaning that we draw from it comes only from the traditions that we've given to it. If Christmas is only about the birth of a baby, some 2000 years ago, than any impact that it has on your life will be limited to the way in which you experienced those things that you have attached to the day. If Christmas is only about the birth of a baby, some 2000 years ago, then it can't offer a word, a meaningful word, a decisive word into the chaos and the unrest of this world. But if Christmas, is about the time that the image of the invisible God took on flesh and entered into this world that he created, then we see that not only was all of history building up to this event, but all of history is anchored in this event. And if Christmas is about the story of how the Son of God has come to seek and to save the last, to give eternal life to all who call upon Him in faith and the impact that it can have on your life is eternal. Because Jesus has broken open the grave itself. And a Christmas is the story about the one who is preeminent over all things reconciled all things to himself through his death and resurrection, then we know that that is the only word that can be spoken into the chaos of this world because it announces the arrival of a new king, who brings with him a new creation, in which there is no sorrow, or suffering, or pain or death, because the old things have passed away, and the one who is seated on the throne says Behold, I am making all things new. That's why it matters. That's the impact it can have. That's the word that Christmas has to speak into this world. We can only see that if we understand and see Jesus for who he is. Our family really enjoys watching movies during the holiday season. I'm sure we're not the only family like that. And all the classics come out, of course. But the broader season of November through January is when a lot of new movies are released. So you probably had a similar experience. You're watching something and you see someone you say i i recognize them, What else were they in? And then we all have a little game to see who can come up with it first. And you get more points if you don't grab your phone, and open IMDb if you can actually do it on your own. Right? Give me a fun little thing to do. Perhaps

you're here this evening, or perhaps you simply are going through the Christmas season. And you hear these stories of Jesus, you're giving these portraits of him. You say, Yeah, I think I recognize him. But what else was he in? Well, if you turn to Scripture, you see that Jesus role was not just confined to the Christmas story, not even just confined to the accounts of Matthew or Mark or Luke, or John, when you turn to Scripture, you see that Jesus is the main character in all of it. Because he's the main character in everything. This passage from Colossians, I offer that one to you. And I want to encourage you to do this next time. Maybe your next maybe the next time that you hear the birth stories of Jesus read maybe even the next time you look at a Nativity scene. Have these verses going as a kind of voiceover narration in the back of your mind. And if you want to imagine Morgan Freeman or Liam Neeson doing it to give it a little more significance, you can go ahead and do something like that. Have these verses going in the back of your mind when you consider the baby in the manger? Think that this one is the image of the invisible God in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell on When you see him think that this one is the one through whom and for whom, and by whom all things were created, in whom all things are held together, and to whom all things will be reconciled because of what he has done. Now, some of you may be uncomfortable with the magnitude of these claims, I understand that they are not flippant or empty claims. They're astounding. Mind blowing heart rending soul stirring claims that ought to humble us and invigorate us to challenge us and encourage us to convict us and equip us. It's a big picture. It may be hard at first to embrace a picture that big because it's one that changes everything. But that's the point of Christmas, isn't it? Let's pray together. Almighty God, we thank you for this time that you have given us here this evening, a time where we can hear once again, the good news that you have come to be with us and to be for us. Thank you for what it is that Jesus Christ has done. Lord give us an ability to see him for who he is, and ability to trust Him for what He has done. And then ability to know that in him we do have all of your promises, fully, imperfectly realized. Thank you for this time we committed to you pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.