

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **CHRISTMAS, 2023, MESSAGE #1**

#### **God's Whisper**

(Hebrews 1:1-3)

#### **Introduction: Communication 101...**

As is obvious from Hector's ministry as my Spanish interpreter today, communication can be tough.

Communicating is easier when we know the language, but even then, there are challenges.

Ask any husband. Ask any wife. They love each other and know each other - and will still have problems with communication. One speaks when it would be better to listen. The other listens, but not really.

Friendships suffer from the same thing.

Many times, I have walked away from a conversation with a good friend and wished that I could take words back.

My attempts at communication often fall flat. My attempts to fix the communication breakdown makes things worse.

Can you relate? Well, today, we can rejoice that God is a perfect Communicator.

As we'll see, He communicated something profound at the first Christmas.

## **A Communicating God**

### **Communication via Nature**

God has many ways of communicating. For one thing, He has spoken in the beauty of the natural world.

In recent years, I've spent a good bit of time camping in the West Texas deserts. The desert shows off God's grandeur with its sunsets and star shows.

I love the desert's austere beauty, its hardy plants and animals, its priceless watering holes. and its sunsets and star shows.

Deserts, mountains, and oceans communicate God's love of beauty, His creativity, and His power.

God has communicated much more specifically, though, in the Bible.

### **B. Communication via Scripture**

If we didn't have the Bible, there is so much about His character we wouldn't know.

- God's dealings with Abraham and Sarah, with Moses, and with Ruth reveal His holiness and His love.
- The Proverbs point us to His wisdom.
- His dealings with His people tell us of His faithfulness.

God has spoken, and for this we are so grateful.

*What if...?*

But what if God had not spoken?

What if there were no clues in the natural world pointing us to a Creator?

What if we had no Bible to tell us that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son?

Well, thankfully, God *has* spoken!

And the author of the book of Hebrews starts his book by affirming this.

### **God's Communications in the Past (Hebrews 1:1)**

#### **God Spoke "in many ways"**

***[1] God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many...WAYS***

*God spoke in visions and dreams*

Look through the Old Testament and you will see that God spoke to people through visions of the night and through dreams.

God gave Abraham a vision of descendants who would live in Canaan.

God gave Joseph a dream about his family's future.

*God spoke through miracles*

At other times, God communicated by miracles.

He "spoke" by the ten plagues against Egypt and by the parting of the Red Sea. Those miracles all shouted, "POWER!"

Throughout the Bible, God's miracles are exclamation marks, pointing to His ability to do whatever He wants to do whenever He wants to do it.

And then, sometimes, God spoke by speaking.

*God spoke directly*

- He spoke judgment and then grace to Adam and to Eve.
- He spoke deliverance to Noah.
- He spoke a commission to Moses from a burning bush.
- He thundered commands from Mount Sinai.

God certainly has spoken to people. If nothing else, all of the modes of expression that God has used convince us that He wants to communicate with us.

But, as Hebrews 1:1 also tells us, in God's communications in the ancient past, something was always missing.

#### **God Spoke "in portions"**

***[1] God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in many PORTIONS.***

God's communication in the past was always true - and partial.

It was never complete because GOD always spoke as GOD to PEOPLE.

The gap that existed between people and God was never bridged - until Jesus.

Now you see how I want to tie all of this into Christmas.

As the author continues in Hebrews 1, we read this: ***[2] in these last days, He has spoken to us in His Son.***

When God sent Jesus, His communication to us was not partial. It was complete because in Jesus, GOD has spoken to us as one of us.

Listen to these rapid-fire remarks about Jesus, each one of them prompting worship.

## God Has NOW Spoken to Us in His Son (Hebrews 1:2-3a)

### God Speaks Through His Son

- FIRST, as God's eternal Son, Jesus is the rightful heir of God's riches. Everything that belongs to God, belongs to Jesus, **[2]...whom [God] appointed heir of all things...**
- SECOND, Jesus is the active agent of creation. **[2]...through whom also He made the world.**
- THIRD, Jesus is the power controlling the universe. He keeps the whole thing going by His Word. He **[3]...upholds all things by the word of His power.**
- FOURTH, Jesus brought forgiveness of sins by His death on the cross. **[3]...He made purification of sins.**
- FIFTH, having finished the work He came to earth to accomplish, Jesus has now **[3]...sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**

That last statement is so profound. Jesus didn't sit down at God's right hand because He got tired.

No, the image of Jesus sitting down takes us back to the Old Testament place of worship - the temple.

In the temple, there were a few pieces of furniture. A table. A lampstand. An altar. The ark of the covenant.

But there was no chair.

That's because the work of the priest was never done. There was always one more offering, one more sacrifice to make.

Now that Jesus has finished His work (Remember that He said, **"It is finished!"**), there is nothing else left for Him to do.

Jesus' redemptive work is done. The Lamb of God paid the price for the sin of the world. So, He sat down.

Through Jesus, God speaks more completely than He ever had since the world began.

### Jesus is the Best Communication We Have from God about God

**[3b] And He is the radiance of His glory, and is the exact representation of His nature**

Whatever we might have wanted to know about God, we discover by looking at Jesus.

*God speaks through Jesus' miracles and teachings*

His miracles shout, **"God!"**

He turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

He gave sight to a man born blind, healed the lame, cast out demons, walked on water, calmed storms, fed multitudes, cleansed lepers, and raised the dead.

And His teachings shout, **"God!"**

At the end of His Sermon on the Mount, people were amazed. They had never heard anyone teach like THAT before!

*God speaks through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection*

But then, at the end of His life, King Jesus was *not* seated on a throne. He was nailed to a cross.

That shouts, **"God is love!"**

Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate communication of love.

And then, those who came to embalm His body on Sunday found the tomb empty, because He had been raised from the dead.

Death couldn't hold Jesus. He conquered death. By the resurrection of Jesus, God spoke of His awesome power.

Look at any phase or aspect of Jesus' life and you are seeing God's communication of Himself.

So, what about the event we celebrate every December 25? What is God saying to us through the birth of Jesus?

Jesus' birth is God using a unique mode of speech. It's different than the way He has ever spoken.

It's quiet, un-flashy. It's divine shyness.

Here's Christmas.

### **God's Special Communication through His Son's Birth**

#### **The Uglies of Christmas**

Matthew and Luke tell us about a young couple who live in Nazareth, a small out-of-the-way place in Galilee. They were promised to each other, but they didn't live together as husband and wife.

She was pregnant.

Like most first-century Jews, they were dirt poor.

We know that they were poor because of the sacrifice Joseph and Mary offered (Luke 2:24) when they dedicated Jesus in the temple on the eighth day of His life.

Two turtledoves. Even the poorest of the poor could afford to small birds.

They traveled one hundred miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem through rugged territory in the winter.

They were traveling to Bethlehem to register for Caesar's census and to pay taxes. Enough said.

Mary was on the verge of giving birth.

(My heart goes out to Mary. My own daughter is at exactly this point in her fourth pregnancy. I wouldn't want her on a one hundred mile donkey ride right now.)

Jesus' first crib was a feeding trough. His nursery was nothing like the nurseries of any of my grandchildren.

That's Christmas. On the face of it, the story is sad, sobering, and ugly.

We would have thought that God's Son would have arrived on earth in majesty, would have been honored, would have been protected.

So, what is God saying by orchestrating the birth of His Son in such a way?

The uglies of the birth of Jesus let us hear God speaking in a voice He had never used before.

And if Jesus had entered the world in some grandiose, kingly way, we would have never known THIS about our God.

#### **The Beauty of Christmas' Uglies**

*God's way is to work in the shadows*

Jesus' birth says something about how God works, generally.

Of course, God sometimes works through blinding lights from heaven, by impressive displays of power, and by spectacular manifestations of omnipotence.

More normally, though, He works silently, in the shadows, and by the power of weakness.

Christmas celebrates that sovereign weakness. At Christmas, Jesus comes to us in the form of a helpless newborn - vulnerability in its purest form.

Notice how uncoercive that Baby lying in the manger is. He has no power to speak of.

And yet, at the moment of His greatest vulnerability, Jesus was at His most compelling.

Then, there is this.

*God meets us in our sufferings*

Without the humble birth, we would never have known how deeply God longed to connect with us.

With the humble birth, we know that God understands hardship and suffering, humiliation and loss.

In Jesus, God related to us as one of us.

You're going through tough times now. OK.

Jesus went through tough times, too. He knows. He's walking with you through your valley.

His woundedness began at Bethlehem and ended on a cross.

So, by His humble birth and His loving life, He says, *"I am uniquely qualified to come to your aid when life is unspeakably hard."*<sup>1</sup>

Go to Jesus with your pain and sadness. He has walked the road of pain and sadness and He's walking with you now.

*God gave everything to bring us to Himself*

Without the humble birth, we would not have known the lengths God was willing to go to save us and to give us eternal life.

With the humble birth, we know ***[Ephesians 3:18] the width and length and height and depth*** of the love of God for us in Christ.

To rescue us from condemnation, Jesus didn't resort to half measures.

He gave His all. ***[2 Corinthians 8:9] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.***

No, King Jesus didn't enter the world He created as most kings would have.

Bethlehem is God speaking in a different language. Bethlehem is God whispering, not shouting.

It is, I believe, His most persuasive invitation to us to worship.

So, yes. Let us adore Him.

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<sup>1</sup> ***[Hebrews 2:18] For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. And also, [Hebrews 4:14] Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let's hold firmly to our confession. [15] For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. [16] Therefore let's approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of our need.***