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West Valley Presbyterian Church

A Year of Testimony & Praise

AKA: Son

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I came across this king sized bed slide the other day. Do you like it? (It is a picture of a trough containing hay) At Christmas we celebrate our Lord being born, our King, in the person of Jesus...in a manger like this – anyone know what a manger was? ...a feeding trough for animals – the humblest possible of births.

So as we continue on with our series on names of God today we are focusing on the name “**Son of God**” out of the (about 256 in the scripture)...

Now *Everyone try to find Luke 2* (**OR IF IT IS UP ON THE SCREENS Great**) Luke 2 is where the traditional Christmas story is located.... This is where the shepherds come, the magi show up, there is a Mary and Joseph and all that good stuff we will see in the pageant after worship. BUT... Notice how it starts out....

***In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree***...Luke starts out with a historical figure in Rome who was considered to be the human KING of Rome at the time. Make no doubt about it... this is intentional on the part of Luke. When we talk about our King being born in a manger...Luke juxtaposes this with Caesar who was very powerful and generally well liked by the Romans.

Caesar was known by many names...

**Caesar Augustus was the good news**...the gospel...and **the peace bringer**. He had brought peace to Rome and stopped all of the civil wars that had been ripping the empire apart. So **he was also called "Savior"**. He was called **Lord**. And guess what?

**Caesar is also called "the son of God"**. You can see it on ancient Roman coins. (**IMAGE?**) His image is etched in there and underneath the inscription the words "son of god"... meaning son of Julius Caesar (who died, but who had adopted him) – and because emperors were considered divine...one of the gods...so was Caesar a "son of god" or son of the gods.

People back then would have known the language associated with Caesar. They would have known that he was

considered to be a Savior, the bringer of peace, the good news, lord, and the son of god. He is referred to in all those ways.

This why Luke strategically places it in that same chapter (Luke 2) that starts out with the great Roman ruler Caesar... the visitation of the angels coming and declaring to the shepherds (the lowliest ones) that Jesus is born, **using many of the same words and names for Jesus that the Romans used for Caesar** The angels say...

**"I bring you good news...gospel"**

**"A Savior is born to you"**

**"On earth peace to those on whom his favor rests"**

**"A Savior who is ...the Lord"**

**(Todd – I don't know if you can highlight these by showing the Biblical text as it would appear in Scripture...if not OK)**

Its all rather subversive and dangerous; not Caesar, the angels are saying...it is Jesus who is King.

If Jesus were born today it would be as if the angels would say to us instead of "YES WE CAN" (the Obama campaign slogan)...rather..."YES HE CAN"...or "YES GOD CAN" that sort of thing...

The title "son of God" is not used here in the angel proclamation, but elsewhere to refer to Jesus. Each time it was used it was a constant reminder to the people that Jesus was divine and the King of all...not Caesar. That was the juxtaposition. For the early Christians "son of God" was a statement of faith that meant that Jesus was God in the flesh.

When someone is a child of a biological parent it means that they share the same gene pool right? It means that often they look like the parent, they act like the parent (even if they don't want to) and there are certain traits that are handed down to them from the parent.

I was over at Earl and Grace Johns house the other day and Earl and Grace have six sons. I can't imagine what that must have been like – seems like another world. It boggles my mind that anyone could have that many sons and survive so well. They showed me great pictures of their family altogether. What a great group! And there is a definite family resemblance.

They all look like each other, and in the pictures you can tell they are related even though each of them is unique – there is a definite resemblance. They belong together.

Now when people would say Jesus was God's Son it was a confession of his divinity – his sameness with God. He was God in the flesh...not an exact parallel with our biological kids because they are their own people...but similar in the sense that Jesus looked like God and acted like God and showed us what God was like. The statement Jesus is the Son of God means that **Jesus had the same essence as God.** He was God, at the same time that he was a human being. He was God in the flesh. That's what claiming that Jesus is the Son of God for the early Christians meant and the Jews understood this as well.

He wasn't just "a god" like the Romans thought their emperors were...one of many gods.

Jesus was rather one with Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The powerful, awesome God of Israel who created all things... In scripture it is very clear that Jesus sees himself in this way ....

**"Truly, truly, I say to you before Abraham was born, I am." (John 8:58)**

**"I and the Father are one." (John 10:30)**

**And they all said, “Are You the Son of God then?” and He said to them “Yes, I am” (Luke 22:70)**

When Jesus said, I am the son of God, the Jews knew what he was saying – and it was outrageous for them! No one said they were one with the God of Israel!!

They were going to stone Jesus and the reason they gave was: **“for blasphemy; and because You being a man make Yourself out to be God.”**

Almighty God, as far as the Jews were concerned was far too Holy and Magnificent to ever stoop so low as to be a human being. Blasphemy! The religious leaders cried out, and tore their robes in distress....This is the charge that eventually made them crucify Jesus.

Many folks today are content to just take Jesus’ teaching as good moral lessons. They consider Jesus to be a good person, a great teacher but not necessarily Divine – not the Son of God. If we can just learn what this good teacher taught about love and life we will be helped, people think But this is not what Christianity is about at all. C.S. Lewis argues against this perspective by putting it this way,

**“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said (claiming to be divine) would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. . . let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about him being a great human teacher. He did not leave that option open to us. He did not intend to.”**

What Lewis is saying is that a) **either Jesus made a deliberate misrepresentation and is a deceiver and foolish for lying about his identity.**

**Or worse –b) he didn’t know those claims were false so he was deluded and a mental case**

Make no mistake about it; there is no ignoring that Jesus claimed to be God. That is all through scripture. You cannot get around it.

So if we conclude that Jesus was God’s son – Divine, **“of one substance with the Father”** as the Nicene Creed puts it quite well, I think– then the whole concept of Christmas ought to be very moving for you today.

Because the Son of God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who was here in the beginning...that one SO LOVED THE WORLD in its tattered sinful state...that he was born to peasant teenagers, in a crude feeding trough for animals – in a cold cave in the Bethlehem Hills...That one who existed before time began, who created you and me, comes to us in weakness and in poverty, and enters our hostility with no defense. Nothing about him makes him at all noticeable or special. Nothing about him has any earthly glory.

So opposite from the pomp of the emperors, so unlike their obsession with themselves, and their desire to flaunt their power and might. To oppress, to control through fear..

**Brennan Manning states:**

**The God we encounter in Jesus, born for us as an infant, is completely free from preoccupation with his own glory, free to be for us, free to be gracious, free to love without holding back.**

Its almost like we *have to* respond to this outpouring of Divine grace; We can hardly help but smile at an infant, right?

When you see the pageant after this service, try to watch it

without responding...dont smile...don't chuckle..try **not to** clap for the children...I bet you won't be able to do it.

There's something about infants and young children that love the world best, and remind even the most cynical, the most doubting among us, the most hurting, of grace and unconditional love. I often tell parents that God will more times than not choose to love us through our young children.

And that's how God chose to reveal himself on that first Christmas. In a way it would be hard for us to reject. The son of God...Divine life itself...given willingly, joyfully, generously, for you.

I know about a family who lived in this area and they were driving back on Christmas day from visiting relatives., They stopped in a restaurant for lunch. It was an old place, pretty empty and they were the only ones with kids– a six year old and a little son who was one year old. His name was Erik.

The Mom recalls that toward the end of their meal, all of a sudden Erik was unexpectedly filled with delight. He began to squeal, "Hi there. HI there." Pounding his fat baby hands – whack, whack – on the metal highchair tray. He wriggled, and chirped and giggled.

The Mom looked around and saw then that the source of his delight was an old man in a tattered and worn coat that was smeared with grease. The man was wearing baggy pants, belted up over a spindly body, a shirt that was discolored and toes poking out of supposed shoes.

This man was responding to Erik, and he was shouting across the room much too loudly; echoing every thing the baby said. "Hi there..." the man responded. "Hi Buster". "Do you know Patty Cake? Do you? Huh?" The Mom was embarrassed. Scooping up Erik she told her husband to meet her at the car. In order to get to the car, she had to side step this man. She tried to get around him by turning her back to him, but Erik had his eyes riveted on his new found friend.

As she turned, Erik leaned far over her arm reaching out with both hands in a baby's "pick me up" position. In a split second of balancing the baby and turning to counter his weight she came eye to eye with the old man. Erik was lunging for him, arms spread wide.

The old man's eyes implored, "Would you let me hold your baby?"

Before she could respond, Erik propelled himself from her arms into the old man's. She let him go reluctantly. Erik laid

his tiny head upon the man's ragged shoulder. The old man held him and his eyes closed, tears hovering beneath his lashes. His aged hands full of grime and pain gently cradled the child, rocking him gently.

Thank you, he said finally prying Erik loose from his tattered coat and handing him back, tears streaming down his wrinkled cheeks.... You've given me my Christmas present.

The Son of God gave us the gift of himself by leaping into our tattered stained and pain-filled world on that first Christmas. He did so willingly, joyfully and without restraint....wanting to befriend the least of us...in all of our brokenness. He jumped into our filth, aware of the shadow of the cross before him (SHADOW OVER MANGER IMAGE) – and our desperate need for him to go through that agony.

Only someone who was a true King, a true Ruler, an all powerful God...someone who was not frightened by our pain could come in that kind of humility and bring salvation.

Only someone who was truly secure in their mastery over the world, and the universe, would not need to flaunt their power. On Christmas, the true Son of God – who still reigns today long after Rome and its Caesars have collapsed - leaps towards us and into our filthy world with joy, arms wide open. When we receive him, when we cradle him in

our human sin-stained hands, we find out, that his presence is enough to cleanse our deepest grime & pain. To heal our hurts; to heal our world.

Surely this was the Son of God! Amen