

The Carols (I): Of the Father's Love Begotten

Hebrews 1.1-9; 2nd Peter 1.16-19

November 29, 2020

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. ⁵ For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"? ⁶ And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM." ⁷ And of the angels He says, "WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE." ⁸ But of the Son He says, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. ⁹ "YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS."

² *2 Peter 1.12* Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³ I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, ¹⁴ since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. ¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts...

Today begins a new series on the ADVENT or the approach of Jesus Christ into the world ... many churches celebrate this season each year and many Christians use it to prepare themselves for Christmas.

Each year we do something a little different for this season of preparation and this year we'll look at some of the CAROLS the church SINGS in this season.

AND one of the reasons I wanted to do this is a simple illustration I've used for how progress is made in the Christian life (please, forgive the repetition of this illustration but it is one of my go-to illustrations and it **does** sort of summarize our general approach here at Park Road):

One of my earliest jobs (about 16 yrs old) was as a dishwasher at the King's Inn, a seafood buffet in Stuart ... It wasn't the greatest idea to be a dishwasher in a buffet ... because people use multiple dishes. But I was going to impress the chef! So I turned first to the HARD STUFF: **the pots and pans!**

There were these massive pans that held the gigantic ham and the enormous roast beef cooking since the morning... (really cruddy baked-on greasy gunk!) While I struggled and scrubbed, all the dishes were piling up FAST! And convinced that my new boss, Chef Noel, was wowed by my energy

and my intense effort... I was shocked to find him suddenly standing next to me, aggravated ... He bumps me out of the way ... fills the sink with HOT WATER and detergent ... he immerses the pans and says, "Let 'em soak!" (and of course a few hours later the pans were so easy to clean even a cave-man could do it with very little scrubbing at all).

AND... so much of our impressive sweat and effort in the spiritual life does almost nothing to change the baked-on grime, the desires and habits and dispositions in our character ... But if we will ... SOAK in the Gospel – in the truth and grace of what Jesus Christ has accomplished, the Holy Spirit begins dissolve and loosen some of that ingrained, deep-seated stuff and we begin to really change and heal...not just our behavior but our desires and dispositions. The Gospel is the solvent.

SO... the CAROLS provide us a very delightful way to soak our hearts in the TRUTH and GRACE of God's story. As we find new ways to soak in it, we start changing in our character... It's not strictly an automatic thing: we have to not just rinse ourselves with the truth but soak... And it's NOT just reciting THE WORDS/FACTS of the Gospel... we have to engage our imagination and our intellect and our will and emotions...And we have to do it TOGETHER too.

So, the Carols are one way to do that ... IF WE KNOW WHAT WE'RE SINGING... and IF we soak in it ... they can open up new ways for the Gospel to get to us... So that's what we'll do: **make sure we know what we're singing** and soak in the beauty, truth and goodness of the Gospel...as it's lyricized in these hymns. (And we'll have fun in the process...fun to sing!)

The first two carols are less familiar to many people... today's was written in the 4th Century AD by a Roman attorney named Aurelius Clemens Prudentius and then, much later, translated from Latin into English ...

This hymn suggests a number of Scriptures (as the best hymns always do!) we're looking at just two of them and IN THESE passages let's see:

1– The Old Messengers (and the New)

2 – The Dynamic Term (and the alluring truth behind it)

3 – The Ongoing Effect (and how to soak in it)

The first text, the Introduction to the Book of Hebrews, sets up a device that'll be used throughout that book and that is **contrast**... the word "BETTER" is used over and over again in Hebrews.

And the initial contrast is between the OLD MESSENGERS and the NEW... so let's look at:

- **Who ARE these messengers?**
- **What's the POINT in contrasting them?**
- **Where ARE they TODAY?**

Well, the old messengers were prophets and spirits called "angels" (messengers)... In the days of OLD, God used these messengers to speak to the fathers... (our spiritual ancestors)... The prophets are also referenced in the second text, "the prophetic word" (v. 19)

There's also mention of a contrasting messenger called "the SON" ... v.2, "in these last days (He) has spoken to us IN HIS SON". There's a contrast in time as well.

AND the point of the contrast is: the plain superiority of this final Messenger in these final times. THEY are called in the Old Testament, “My servants, the prophets” – that’s a big title! But He is a better Spokesman.

Later on this writer will contrast this, final Messenger, “the Son”, to the great prototype of all prophets, **Moses**, and he’ll say that “His Son” is to Moses as the Builder is to the house – we may admire the design of a house/building but MORE the design-ER of the building. He’s the Mind behind the whole building!

That’s how high above the prophets this final Messenger IS... and when it comes to the angels, a similar comparison: HE HAS THE NAME OF SON... They are servants and messengers... but HE, this final Messenger, is MORE, is BETTER, is somehow related to God UNIQUELY... As a Son is related to His Father, He is the same in substance with God Himself. It’s not even that He is the Messenger but the actual Message Himself!

The writer thinks not only of “My servants the prophets”, the stars of the show, the highest ranking of God’s officers in the Hebrew Scriptures **but also the angels**. These mighty, mysterious spirits respond instantly to DO God’s bidding ... but this SON ... even the angels are commanded to bow down and worship Him (Rev 4).

AND that brings up a point: if this SON is so superior to all the other messengers ...what are we to do with all those past **messages**... all that God said by the prophets before the coming of Christ?

AND here the second passage speaks. It’s written by the Apostle Peter; he’s recounting that moment when he saw THIS very Messenger, the Son, **revealed**.

In the days of His physical ministry, Jesus Christ took three disciples up on a mountain, and there God revealed that this Man, Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the One about whom all the prophets wrote... And when Peter, James and John saw Moses and Elijah standing on that high mountain with this Jesus of Nazareth and then heard heaven speak and say “This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”...And when they looked up again, the prophets were gone but the SON remained...and He was radiant and royal. Somehow, they were in the very Presence of the One described by the angels as “Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6).

PETER looks back on that experience and says, “Now, we have the prophetic word established – “This is He whom heav’n-taught singers/sang of old with one accord/whom the Scriptures of the prophets/promised in their faithful word.” The prophets were RIGHT! Their word is confirmed. We were there! We saw it (three witnesses): we saw the DAWN of the NEW DAY when God would speak, not by a messenger but would come IN PERSON... the day the prophets and angels LONGED FOR...

THIS isn’t something we invented in a spiritual laboratory ... God came to earth in time and space (just as the Prophets said) and we actually saw it... saw HIM!

2nd: The DYNAMIC Term... (and the *alluring truth* behind it) and that term/word is “*BEGOTTEN*” ... not a word we use very often ... but used BOTH in our Scripture texts and in the carol itself...

It means conceived or to be given birth or given being... And in the first text...Jesus Christ, the Son, is said to be begotten: v.5: “*Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee.*”

AND the mystery behind it **is a QUESTION**: In what way is this final Messenger, (“the Son”), how is He said to be, “*begotten*”?

It’s a quote from the Second Psalm, where God crowns His Messiah as King of the nations ... And **at** the coronation, God the Father, announces, “This is My Son, let all the earth *see* that and recognize Him! Today - on the day of His resurrection and the day of His exaltation to My right hand... HE IS DECLARED THE SON.”

Peter’s looking back to a similar moment when God *applauds* this Person and declares *WHO HE IS* – “*this IS My Beloved Son*” – HE’S FATHERED in the sense that He, like no other human, animal or angel – HE IS OWNED, acknowledged, claimed, declared by GOD to be uniquely related to God – made of what God is made of... Apples beget apples... Horses beget horses... God begets God.

But theologians speak and our hymn-writer sings and these passages write of the SON EXALTED, the SON INCARNATE and the SON PRE-EXISTENT – HE IS “of the Father’s love begotten before the worlds began to be.”

He’s begotten... eternally... i.e. His beginning began with God who has no beginning ... God the Father was never without God the Son... as long as God the Father WAS ...so there with Him was His perfect image and likeness reflected back to Him in the mirror of *HIS ETERNALLY BEGOTTEN SON*...

AND about this Son, the writer of Hebrews says (v.3) “And HE is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature...”. HERE’S THE MYSTERY: this Person is in every way God... and thus without beginning and also, somehow distinct from the One who says, “I have begotten Thee” ...

He is clearly called in this text, v. 8, “God”: “Thy throne O God is forever and ever.”

God the Father, seeing His reflection in God the Son and in closest communion through God the Spirit ... and from all eternity w/o ever beginning: NO WONDER one Christian thinker said, “At the center of the universe there is an eternal community”.

So, as we move toward the celebration of Christmas... move through the season of Advent ... we are reminded here: the ONE WHO IS BORN IS GOD HIMSELF, GOD IS BEING INCARNATED IN THE WOMB OF THE VIRGIN...

Somehow these eternal Persons, equal to ONE ANOTHER and ONE GOD... one of the Persons takes to Himself a human soul and body and enters into this world as a Baby...

AND HE COMES... to be NOT only the Prophet to end all prophets – but the Priest to end all priests – “When He had made purification of sins HE SAT DOWN”

In other words He entered into a new dimension of His experience of SON, and the eternally LOVED ONE...who had never known anything but perfect unity with His Beloved Father...undergoes the infinite, unspeakable horror of being estranged from Him.

And after the life that deserved accolades and acclaim, HE IS INSTEAD SACRIFICED in the name of justice and HE, THE infinitely loved SON is forsaken... HE MAKES PURIFICATION for sins by becoming a sacrifice for crimes He did not commit and then He sits down... the TASK is complete ... and He's enthroned, above prophet and angel and every living thing ("All dominions bow before Him...") THIS IS THE WAY THE BIBLE UNDERSTANDS THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS.

Now let's close with just a few of the ongoing implications, how to SOAK in this for your spiritual benefit: SIX helps

#1- The prophets tell us that the SON is coming... and Peter says (v. 19) "we do well to pay attention to their testimony as to a lamp shining in a dark place"... In a world where every spiritual approach and version of self-help and spirituality are all presented as equally valid ("One is as good as the other... if it works for you than who am I to judge?...") but Christianity says "No... this is the way GOD HIMSELF told us He was going to make ... the prophets told us so!" and now, that WAY is made known ... It's not a kind of human invention or innovation... It's **promise and fulfillment** and that's what makes it different ... SO, SEE WHAT THE PROPHETS SAY... when you have to make spiritual decisions ... they'll point you to the ONE.. the final Messenger... the only Begotten God.

#2 – One of our elders sent me the results of a recent survey commissioned by Ligonier ministries. Over 3,000 evangelicals were asked this True or False question: "Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God." And 30% said TRUE. And 38% said Jesus was the first being created by God. That's a capital "H" heresy. It's a denial of the most important teaching in Christianity, the Holy Trinity. That's why we offer classes with actual content here at Park Road. Non-Trinitarian Christianity is NON-Christianity.

#3 – He is the ONLY Begotten Son but in Him we can become adopted Sons... He is well pleasing to the Father because He's pure and PERFECT in love and when we believe we're instantaneously COUNTED as pleasing and as delightful to the Father as well ... and the Christian life is then the process of believing who we are declared to be and GOD RE-MAKING US and changing us into that destiny.

#4 – Let all the angels of God worship Him! Today we said some heavy things about what Scripture teaches about this Person but we haven't even begun to scratch the surface ... there's enough here to keep you fascinated and full of the deepest kind of wonder and admiration for all eternity ... So stand in awe, sing about it ... about HIM and worship ... it's one important way we soak in it. (BTW: Buy a hymnal!)

#5 – He sat down. To me that's one of the best phrases in all of the Bible...and when I get really down with my own faults and that stubborn baked-on JUNK in my character I really need to soak in THAT – the incarnate God made the perfect sacrifice – it was accepted and it is FINISHED – HE SAT DOWN...(it's not my sweat but HIS purifying work that will change me at last... **It's the solvent**).

#6 AN interesting phrase at the end of the reading, “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” a great hope that also keeps us humble NOW... It’s dawned on me, but I’m still not seeing everything clearly (Mark 8.24: “people walking like trees”) I know, but I don’t know... I believe but help my unbelief... I see but am in many ways blind... It’s why Peter says, “It’s no trouble for me to remind you of this” – it requires repeated application... regular reminders. Like the ocean, it’s shallow enough for a child to play near the shore and deep enough for us to explore and celebrate for all eternity.

If you’re exploring Christianity, it’s ok to have a gradual dawning and OK to pray for and hope for a greater dawning ... but not ok to say “Oh well ...who can really know?”

So maybe today you could begin to pray, “Lord there is definitely something real here, something rational and spiritual and TRUE ...LORD, make my heart discerning and engaged and GIVE ME FAITH TO BELIEVE...”

1) Of the Father's love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are and have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore.

2) This is He whom they in old time
Chanted of with one accord,
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word;
Now He shines, the long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord,
Evermore and evermore.

3) O ye heights of heav'n, adore Him;
Angel hosts, His praises sing;
All dominions, bow before Him,
And extol our Lord and King.
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Every voice in concert ring,
Evermore and evermore.

4) Christ, to Thee, with God the Father,
And, with Holy Ghost, to Thee,
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving,
And unwearied praises be;
Honor, glory, and dominion,
And eternal victory,
Evermore and evermore.