

Hebrews 1: 4-7; “The Incarnation of the Firstborn, A Sermon for the Christmas Season, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 23rd, 2018, in the Morning Worship Service.

The entrance of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world was not taken notice of by many people on that night of His birth. Indeed no one knew or understood, except those to whom it was revealed. There were, on that night, certain poor shepherds who were keeping their flocks, and suddenly the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. And the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.” “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” “And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” And what was even more amazing, then, was that there was suddenly a multitude of the heavenly angelic host praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!’ And so, having seen this glorious sight of angels speaking and perhaps even singing the praises of God, these shepherds came in haste and they looked upon the Babe who would forever change the world, and they worshiped Him. It was only Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, it says in the gospel of Luke, who were there. It was the greatest event which the world had ever seen; the entrance of the Son of God into the world; God made manifest in the flesh, and just a few understood.

But then, you and I must understand, that the greatest events which the world has ever seen, have often come with little notice from the majority of the people in the world. This is because the greatest events that are done in this world are all done by God. God the Father is spirit and so we cannot comprehend His greatest of works, for we are mere men and cannot see them until they evidence themselves in relation to ourselves and our world. Therefore it is important that we exercise faith as we study this particular work of God; the bringing forth of His firstborn into the world. For, as it says in Proverbs Chapter 25, verse 2 – “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but it is the glory of kings to search it out.” We may never fully understand what God did at the Incarnation; when the Eternal Son became a man and took on human flesh. But we must study all that the Word of God has revealed to us, so that we might understand it better. Our searching and our studying, will then lead us not only to marvel, but also to worship and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. This morning we want 1st of all to think about the more excellent name which Jesus has. (verses 3 and 4) And then, 2nd – We want to think about the Father’s actually bringing again the firstborn into the world. (verses 5 and 6) It is my hope that each of us will truly see the Person and the Work of our Lord Jesus Christ in a greater way as a result of this message.

1st of all – We want to think about the more excellent name which Jesus has.

Verse 3 says that Christ is, “the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholds all things by the word of His power,” and that “when He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” In my past several sermons to you I have labored to show you that these first three verses are showing us that God the Father spoke the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ as His final word to men, on the subject of the meaning of life and salvation. In speaking Christ in the Incarnation, God was showing all the world that He was intending to save sinners through His great mercy in giving His Son to the world. In His sending Him into the world He was giving us the Good News of Immanuel; the Lord Jesus, being made God with us. God the Father sent Him as the Light of the World; to shine by the manifestation of His truth and grace; so that all men in general might be saved. The physical sun of this world rises every day and it dispels the darkness of night. Even so, the truth about His Son, Jesus Christ, which was revealed to all men in His coming into this world and shining the light of His glory, dispels the darkness in men’s hearts. “And we beheld His glory; glory as of the only-

begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” His living the perfect and sinless life that He did, and His teaching men that He was the way to eternal life; this was the Light shining. “The darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining,” the Apostle John said in 1st John 2: 8.

But we also saw last Sunday that it takes a more particular shining of Christ’s Light to open the way into our hearts in order to dispel the darkness there. For we are spiritual darkness itself before we are saved. Christ is the Radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature. He is pure and perfect Light. Once He opens our eyes to the truth, then He also shows us that He is the One who is upholding all things; that is, He upholds our faith, and our spiritual life of knowing God, as well as His upholding of all of the physical creation, by the word of His power. It is His light and His power working in our life that teaches us how great is His glory. And those who are spiritually taught worship Him. He has come and has given us an understanding of Himself through His truth which we find in the Bible. And then by means of this truth and grace, in connection with the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, He takes away our sins.

The basis of His taking away our sins, it says in verse 3, is that He Himself purged them. This happened when Jesus went to the cross. The whole work of redemption was accomplished by Christ at the cross when He, a sinless sacrifice, went there to suffer for us. When we believe in Christ the application of that work of His purging our sins, is applied to our heart and to our life. I will preach a separate sermon on this subject in a coming week. But all the wonderful work of redemption which the Lord Jesus was to do here upon the earth, was based upon His voluntarily being made for the time of His earthly pilgrimage, “a little lower than the angels”. Yes, I said, a little lower than the angels. The Eternal Son was spirit as God the Word and God the Son, before His Incarnation. But in assuming human flesh; He for a time, in His Person and His humanity, became a little lower than the angels. Psalm 8, verse 3 says, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” “For you have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.”

Jesus, the Son of God, had the highest of positions before His Incarnation. But in assuming our nature, except without sin, He the firstborn of the New Creation, took the position of a servant. He was already the firstborn in the sense that He was the only-begotten of the Father; of like essence with Him; of the same essence with Him. The angels are sons of God, and they are servants of God. But they are not sons in the same exalted way that the Logos, the eternal Word of God was, before His Incarnation. They were created; He was uncreated. He was brought forth from the Father in eternity past; He was united to human nature in Mary’s womb in a special work of the creation of His human nature. And then Mary brought forth her first-born son and laid Him in the manger. These are distinctions which we need to make and to understand in relation to angels and men.

Turn with me over to Colossians Chapter 1, verse 13. There were certain people at the church in Colosse who apparently could not sufficiently distinguish between the greatness and glory of God the Son, and the greatness and glory of angels. The first, we need to understand, is infinitely greater than the second. Some persons thought that worship belonged to angels, when it is only to God that worship belongs. Listen to how Paul puts this. “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” “He (that is Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.” “All things were created through Him and for Him.” “And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” The Lord Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate state was “the firstborn of all creation.” Verse 18 goes further. “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.”

So, I hope that you can see that the Lord Jesus Christ is not only the firstborn of all creation. He is also the firstborn from the dead; the firstborn of all the redeemed; in that it is in Him and

through His resurrection from the dead, that we as His redeemed people, find our glorious resurrection. These are 2 different descriptions of Christ as the firstborn, here in Colossians. And we will need to remember them when we come to our next point. But look now, at Paul's application of this truth, in relation to angels. Chapter 2, verse 18. "Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God." Yes, Jesus Christ was made for a little while lower than the angels.

Let me ask you now, if you are holding fast to the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ? Does He have the pre-eminence in your life? Do you see Him as more excellent and more desirable than any other thing or any other person in your life? Do you put Him on the same level as angels; a spiritual being whom you think you might be interested in meeting, but you think that you would not want to be taught by Him, or ruled by Him? Do you think that it is just as valid an idea to worship angels as well as God? No, these verses completely refute that false idea. Jesus Christ has the preeminence over angels because of His superiority of Being; He is God the Son. He now has the preeminence in honor over the angels, because He humbled Himself to take upon Himself a human nature; to actually become for a little while lower than the angels, that He might redeem fallen sinful men to God His Father. And now, He has the preeminence over the angels because He has by this means obtained a more excellent name in the sight of God than they.

Angels are God's servants, but Christ became the ultimate servant. He is Lord of lords and King of kings and King of angels as well. But He has, by inheritance, obtained a more excellent name than the angels. This inheritance He has by the Father's appointment to it, in His being brought forth as the only-begotten of the Father from all eternity. And then it is His inheritance, also, by the right of redemption which He has in relation to His being the Redeemer of all of God's elect people; all those for whom He came into the world to save; all those whom He suffered and died for, to bring them to eternal glory.

This leads us 2nd – To think more about the Father's actually bringing again the firstborn into the world. (verses 5 and 6)

"For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You?' "And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?'" "But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'" Commentators differ widely over what this "bringing the firstborn into the world" relates to. Many think that it relates to the time of Christ's resurrection from the dead, or even His return in judgment at the end of the world. But I believe we have every warrant for believing that it refers first and foremostly to the Father's bringing Christ into the world in His Incarnation. The real reason for the confusion over this verse is the use of the word "again" by the Apostle. "When He again brings the firstborn into the world"....

If this refers to Christ's first coming into the world; then why does the Apostle say that there was another time before that, when the "firstborn" came into the world? I believe that the Father's again bringing the firstborn into the world in verse 6 relates to all that we have already studied concerning verses 1-5. Let's begin with the first 3 verses. God spoke the Incarnation when He and the Holy Spirit placed the Son of God; fully God and fully man, in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He then became the Son of Man at that point, in His Incarnation. But we have seen in our previous studies that He was "brought forth", or "begotten", as God the Son long before that. Surely at His birth, the Lord Jesus was the "brightness of His Father's glory". But I am not sure, that at this point in the analysis of the text, whether we remember that God the Son was begotten by the Father before time began. Even before His incarnation He was "the Brightness of His Father's Glory". He was "brought forth" as "the Son" from all eternity. He was even then, the One "through whom the worlds were made."

The confusion is furthered by verse 5, where it says, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” This seems definitely to refer back to Christ’s having finished the work of our redemption at the cross, and His having by Himself purged our sins. He was then raised from the dead and ascended to heaven where He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He was declared at that time to be “the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1, verse 4) So it might seem natural then, to conclude that verse 6 refers to the resurrection of our Lord instead of His Incarnation. Indeed this seems to be confirmed also by Acts Chapter 13, verse 32, where the Apostle Paul is preaching to the people at Antioch Pisidia and he says to them, “And we declare to you glad tidings—that the promise which was made to the fathers.” “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus.” “As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’”

This, to some, appears to be decisive in how we should view verse 6 of our study this morning. There is here the linking of the word quoted by the Apostle in our text, in verse 5, with Christ’s resurrection directly. But I am not convinced that this is the final word on the subject. We need to remember that Christ’s resurrection was the culmination of all that God the Father intended to do through Christ in the matter of redemption. But it was not where it all began. It began at the Incarnation, and yes, even before that, in the transaction of the Covenant of Redemption, in eternity, between the Father and the Son in relation to the eternal decrees of God. The Apostle Paul’s whole point here in Hebrews 1 is to set forth to the Hebrew people the superiority of Christ to the angels. Their law had been mediated to them by the agency of angels which God employed. They might be tempted to hold on to the law and not go on to find Christ by faith, or to hold to Him as their only Savior and Lord. They might be tempted to think that eternal Son was only one of the greatest of the created angels.

And so, the Apostle in verses 1-4 speaks of how it was, that the Father spoke the Incarnation, and how the One who had been begotten of the Father in eternity past, became flesh and purged our sins by the sacrifice of Himself as a Man. He shows them then that Christ was raised from the dead and He is now at the right hand of God. But he establishes the superiority of Christ over the angels, not primarily from His work in purging us from our sins, and His resurrection from the dead, but from His nature and His Person, as God Himself. It is not as though the resurrection and session of Christ can be separated from all that we are speaking of. It is another proof that the Apostle is using. But, as we think about verses 4 and 5, we need to remember that it was not the angels in heaven that God the Father assigned this work of redeeming His Elect to. It was to His only-begotten Son, who was begotten in eternity past.

And so, the Apostle is saying that God’s purpose was declared concerning Christ, before the foundation of the world. He was predestined as God’s Son to this work of redeeming men. He would not redeem them through angels, but through His own dear Son. “For, to which of the angels did God ever say: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’” He was as it says in Revelation 13: 8, “the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.” I think that it would be good if could turn back now, to Psalm 2, and look where the quote in verse 5, from our text in Hebrews, comes from. Psalm 2 is a Psalm prophetic of our Lord Jesus Christ receiving the great opposition that He did from the Jews, the Roman Gentiles, and king Herod, and others rulers of that day. Verses 1-6 are intended to show everyone that this plotting and opposition of God’s plans and purposes was a vain thing. Verse 4 says, “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.” “Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.” Watch this now – “I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’” “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.”

Having read this to you, I hope that now, you can see the truth of the matter. Christ was declaring the decree; that declaration by the Father, which had been made in eternity past, when God spoke and said to Him as God the Son, “Today I have begotten You.” That was in the “day” of

eternity past. However, the more immediate references to the events related to the crucifixion, the resurrection, and God the Father's establishing His Christ on His holy hill of Zion, the Church. All of these show us the outworking and the final result of God's having spoken this decree. Acts Chapter 13 declares the outcome of Christ's being brought into the world in His Incarnation. He finished the work which the Father had assigned Him to do; to fulfill the law and to accomplish the work of redeeming a people. He suffered, bled, and died. He was raised from the dead. And then having finished the work, Christ has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and has seen the fulfillment of these words in Psalm 2 of His being able to ask His Father for the nations as His inheritance. His asking this was indeed the culmination of all the Father's plans which were made in eternity past before the foundation of the world, as regards Christ the Son Himself. The rest of the Psalm speaks of how Christ would rule over the nations and how His rule would come to be established over kings of nations. Perhaps it is true, then, that the Father commanded that all the angels of God in heaven worship Him then; when the Lord Jesus came into heaven to sit where He now is, at the right hand of the Father. That conclusion should not seem out of place to us at all.

Let's think about this in terms of the term "firstborn"; "when He brings the firstborn into the world". The firstborn is a title of privilege and dignity which in this particular case only belongs to God's Son, who was the only One begotten by Him in eternity past. When the angels were created, God the Son was the One whom they were created by, and for. In Job Chapter 38, when the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, He said to Job in verse 4 – "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" "Tell Me, if you have understanding." "Who determined its measurements?" "Surely you know!" "Or who stretched the line upon it?" "To what were its foundations fastened?" "Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" Here the angels are called "morning stars" and "the sons of God"; but they are none of them to be confused with the Son of God. They were there at the creation of the world when God the Father, through His Son, created this world and all things in it. The angels rejoiced at this first "bringing of the firstborn into the world; the only-begotten Son of God." He was their King even then. He was there for them to see and to worship and to adore in the spiritual realm where the angels dwell on high.

Daniel Whedon, the commentator says that Christ was the firstborn, the First-Begotten – Because *He was* eternally begotten." He says – "For even if God has been eternally engaged in creating, still the Son is in order of nature first." "And when it says, the Son is called First-Begotten, it is implied both that His being begotten is prior in order and superior in nature; for creation and formation are in a lower sense figured as generation." "And it is as First-Begotten that He is, by the divine primogeniture, (that He is made by the Father) heir." (Hebrews 1: 1)" So He is Firstborn of every creature (Colossians 1: 18 and Revelation 1: 5) "Here the term stands alone, and it alludes to the this day, that "day" primordially, (in order from before the foundation of the world), it is said – "Today have I begotten Thee", as God manifest, prior to and above all created things." (end of quote)

But you will say to me, "How is the pre-incarnate Son brought into the world at this time of the creation of the world?" Well, I think that He was brought into the world, both in relation to His work at the creation, as I have said, and also in relation to the first man Adam's sin and fall from his original righteousness. It says in Genesis Chapter 3, verse 8 – "And they (Adam and Eve after they ate of the fruit and sinned) heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." This was a physical appearance because they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden. This, I believe, was the Father bringing Him forth, or sending Him into the world in the form a Theophany, in order that He would be introduced to mankind, introduced to Adam and Eve, as the parents of all mankind, so that they would see the Second Person of the Divine Trinity personally seeking them as sinners. This Theophany was none other than God the

Son temporarily assuming human form, “walking in the garden in the cool of the day, coming to deal firmly but gently with them over the sins which they had committed. Yes, He did come to render judgments, and He did render them. But He also came to give Adam and Eve the promise of His own Incarnation. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

John Owen says, “It is therefore most probable, that in the great alteration which was now coming upon the whole creation of God, — mankind being to be cast out of covenant, the serpent and the earth being to be cursed, and a way of recovery for the elect of God to be revealed, — He by whom all things were made, and by whom all were to be renewed that were to be brought again unto God, did in an especial and glorious manner appear unto our first parents, as He in whom this whole dispensation centered, and unto whom it was committed.” “And as, after the promise was given, He appeared “in a human shape,” to instruct the church in the mystery of his future Incarnation, and under the name of Angel, to shadow out His office as sent unto it and employed in it by the Father; so here, before the promise, He discovered His distinct glorious person, as the eternal Voice or Word of the Father.” (John Owen, from his *Exercitations in the Book of Hebrews*, Vol. 1, Pages 219 and 220)

I think that this is very well said. It was the Logos, the very Word of God that was walking in the cool of the day in the garden. It was actually “the voice of the Lord God” that was walking there. And this is what the “again” relates to, looking back, as the apostle relates in Hebrews 1: 6: “But when He again brings the firstborn into the world....” It relates to the Father who brought (or sent) the firstborn into the world. He sent Him into the garden in this pre-incarnate form to bring to our first parents the promise of His future first Coming and Incarnation. And in Micah chapter 5, verse 2 Micah speaks of His coming forth — “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose going forth are from old, from everlasting.” And so, this then, was when the Father actually did bring His firstborn into the world in the Incarnation, He says, “Let all the angels of God worship Him.”

To conclude, this was exactly what happened on the night in which Jesus was born. Luke 2: 13 — “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace goodwill toward men!” God the Father, on the night in which the Lord Jesus came into this world, commanded that all the angels of God worship Him. It was commanded of them because they surely did not understand this; the greatest of mysteries — How God could take on human flesh and become a man? How could He grow up to redeem the fallen race of men? When Lucifer had rebelled and taken so many angels with him, to oppose God and His purposes of salvation, God did not spare them. Lucifer’s fellow angels were “cast down to hell”, and God delivered them to chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”

Why should men be any different the holy angels thought? The Apostle Peter writes differently of the holy angels in 1st Peter 1: 10. “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” “To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.” “These are things which the angels long to look into.” God made his angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire. Their burning spirits are designed to burn for the glory of their great King — our Lord Jesus Christ. They do not seek after their own glory, but Christ’s. They are zealous to worship Him and to do His bidding. We must ask ourselves this day, if this is what we are zealous to do as well.