

“Very God of Very God”

December 12, 2021

Luke 1:39-56 (read in call to confession)

Isaiah 59 (declaration of Pardon)

Isaiah 60

Psalm 27

John 1

In our declaration of pardon, we heard from Isaiah 59,  
that the LORD looked and saw that there was no man.

There was no one to intercede.

Humanity had failed.

And – to the central point of Isaiah – the house of David had failed!

The story of the OT was that when Adam failed,  
God raised up a holy seed – Seth – Noah – Abraham – Israel –  
and when Israel failed – God raised up David.

But now David has failed!

What next?

And so Isaiah 59 told us that the LORD himself must come to save us!

Isaiah 60 is rejoicing in this –

“Arise, shine, for your *light* has come!”

In the beginning, God said, “Let there be light” and it was so.

But before there was light – he was the true light.

Created light has always been an image and reflection of the true light  
that was with the Father before all things.

*God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God;  
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,  
by whom all things were made.*

And we sing of this in Psalm 27 –

“The LORD is my *light* and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”

Sing Psalm 27

Read John 1

Over the 20 years that I have served at Michiana Covenant,  
I have preached through the whole Bible.  
But just preaching on every text

comes nowhere near to exhausting the riches of God's word.

Because God did not merely inspire every word.  
He also inspired *all the words together*.

This is why in addition to preaching through every text,  
I have also made it a point to preach a catechetical series every four or five years,  
in order to show how the scripture fits together.  
I grew up in a church that taught the *Bible* well –  
but did very poorly at teaching *theology*.

Which, if you think about it, means that they didn't do nearly as well at teaching the Bible!  
Because I learned lots of Bible stories – but I never learned how the Bible fits together!

This is why we are going through the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

And today we come to the central addition that the Nicene Creed added to the Apostles' Creed:

*God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God;  
begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,  
by whom all things were made.*

The Apostles' Creed had simply said,  
"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son, our Lord."

But as we saw in Sunday school this morning,  
there were some who taught that Jesus was a lesser being than God.  
And as we saw last week, if Jesus is a lesser being than God,  
then to put it simply, Jesus is *not God* –  
and therefore, Jesus could not be the Light of the World –  
he could not be the Redeemer that Isaiah had promised!

And so:

**1. When We Say "God" – We Really Mean "God"!**

**a. God of God (1 Cor. 8:6)**

That's why we say "God of God."

We touched on this last week by mentioning 1 Corinthians 8:6, where Paul says:

*<sup>6</sup>yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*

In Deuteronomy 6:4, Moses had clearly affirmed that God is one!

"Hear O Israel the LORD our God, the LORD is one."

Now Paul paraphrases the Shema.

In the Shema “Lord” and “God” are identified as *one*.

And Paul says yes, there is *one God* – the Father.

And there is *one Lord* – Jesus the Messiah.

Paul identifies Jesus Christ as the Yahweh of the Shema.

God the Father is the one *from whom are all things and we are for him*.

God the Father is the one who created all things –

and God the Father is the *goal* of all things

But Jesus Christ is the one *through whom are all things and we are through him*.

In other words, we are *for* the Father –

but the only way that we can get *to* the Father

is *through* Jesus.

The *one God* of Israel’s shema has revealed himself to us in the one Lord, Jesus Christ.

This is the one true God –

the God who has revealed himself in the name (singular)

of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Incidentally, this is why the Christian church has always confessed her faith in a Trinitarian form

The earliest creeds of the church –

of which the Apostles’ Creed is only one of many examples –

always start, “I believe in one God, the Father...

and in one Lord, Jesus Christ...

and in the Holy Spirit”

The Christian church has retained the idea of the Shema in her creeds.

We confess one Lord, Jesus Christ – who is himself “God of God.”

### **b. Light of Light (John 1:4-9/8:12)**

In John 8:12, Jesus called himself “the light of the world.”

Jesus claims to be the “Light” that Isaiah had promised.

“Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

I am the light of the world.

I am the pillar of fire that led Israel through the wilderness.

Follow me!

This echoes John’s statement in 1:4-5

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

The light of the world has come.  
The one who follows him will never walk in darkness,  
because the light of life will shine before his path.

<sup>9</sup> *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*  
The eternal Son of God is the true light who enlightens every man.  
In ourselves, we don't see clearly –  
we don't understand why things happen – or what we are doing here!

It is only as the true light illumines our lives that we see ourselves aright!

He is Light of Light.

And he is:

**c. Very God of Very God (John 1:9/1 John 5:20)**

You might wonder – we just said “God of God” –  
why is it necessary to say “true God of true God”?!

Because there are lots of “gods” out there.  
Paul says that there are many gods and many lords.  
But there is only *one* true God.  
There is only *one* “very God.”

John uses this phrase “very God” (in Greek it's the same words that the Creed uses).  
It's found in 1 John 5:20

<sup>20</sup> *And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*

Notice that John says that we are *in him who is true* – in his Son (so therefore the first “him who is true” refers to the Father).

But then John goes on to say that Jesus Christ *is the true God and eternal life*.

*We know that the Son of God has come –*  
highlighting the centrality of the incarnation –

*and has given us understanding –*  
here John reminds us of the importance of truth,  
both the historical-doctrinal truth of the incarnation itself,  
but also the ethical and relational truth  
because true understanding/wisdom results in obedience and love –

*so that we may know him who is true;  
and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.*  
Knowing him and being “in him” go together.  
This is why “effectual calling” and “union with Christ”  
are inseparably linked in our catechism:  
Our catechism asks, “what is effectual calling?”  
“Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby,  
convincing us of our sin and misery,  
enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ  
and renewing our wills,  
he does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ  
freely offered to us in the gospel.”

That involves every bit of the whole person – body and soul –  
intellect and emotion – willing, doing, everything

John had told us that the world is “in the evil one”  
We are “in him who is true”

These are parallel constructions that communicate the basic options in life.  
There are no third options.  
You are either “in the evil one”  
or you are “in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.”

*He is the true God and eternal life.*  
this is where the Nicene Creed found the phrase “very God of very God.”

The life that is in you is nothing less than the life of God himself.  
When you grasp that,  
then pretty much everything else in the Christian life will follow!

## **2. “Homoousios” – Why One Substance Matters**

### **a. Begotten, Not Made (John 1:14)**

We looked a bit last week at what it means for the Son to be eternally begotten of the Father.

The basic point is that the Father has always been Father –  
and the Son has always been Son.

From all eternity, the Triune God has loved and communicated –  
because the Father loves the Son – and the Son loves the Father –  
and the Spirit loves and is loved by both.

But John says in 1:18

<sup>18</sup> *No one has ever seen God; the only[-begotten] God,<sup>[ff]</sup> who is at the Father's side,<sup>[g]</sup> he has made him known.*

In verse 18, John says, “No one has ever seen God.”

You might wonder about our OT reading – when Moses saw God!!

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah saw the Lord.

There are several other theophanies in the OT where people “see God” and live.

But God is very clear to Moses that Moses will not see God’s face.

He will only see his back.

In other words, Moses does not see God in all his fullness.

He sees only the afterglow of the glory of God!

Isaiah, likewise, only sees the hem of God’s garment – and fears for his life!

So John is correct in saying that “No one has ever seen God”

If you would see God, look at Jesus.

(As Jesus will say later in John’s gospel –

“he who has seen me has seen the Father”)

The only-begotten God, who is at the Father’s side –

he has made him known.

You can only know God aright through knowing Jesus.

Because Jesus is the only-begotten God.

Jesus is the only-begotten of the Father –

he is the unique Son – the only one who was begotten of God  
before all ages.

We were not children of God.

We were children of wrath.

We were children of disobedience.

But we are born again *in time* – we *become* children of God –

How can children of disobedience become children of God?

This was the point that we saw back in verses 12-13 –

“but to all who did receive him – who believed in his name –  
he became the right to become children of God”  
born through the will of God (not man).

How can children of disobedience become children of God?

Only if the one who was God – and who was *with* God – comes in our flesh.

This is why we confess that Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

He is God from all eternity.

And he is *with* God from all eternity.

The Father has always been Father –

because he has always been the Father of his eternal Son.

The Son has always been Son –

because he has always been the Son of his eternal Father!

Marvel at the great love and mercy of God!  
That he would make us partakers of the divine nature!  
That he would include us in his divine life –  
making us heirs with his only-begotten Son!

But we also must say that the Son is:

**b. Being of One Substance with the Father (Heb 1:3)**

And for this we need to look back at the passage in Hebrews 1 that we looked at last week.

We see the eternal sonship of Christ in verses 2-3.

Who is this Son by whom God has spoken to us?

He is the Son –

*whom he appointed the heir of all things,  
through whom also he created the world.*

He is the last Word, because he was the first Word.

The heir of all things is the one through whom God created the ages.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

John tells us that God made all things *through* his Word –  
and without him was not anything made that was made.

Hebrews now says the same thing.

Back then his name was not yet Jesus.

He had not yet come in our flesh – but he was with the Father –  
and the Father created the world *through him*.

Long before the incarnation, he was the Son of God.

A son looks like his father.

Adam, created in the image of God, is called “the Son of God” by Luke,  
and Hebrews uses the same language of the “Son.”

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

Isaiah had said that God would not share his glory with another (Is 42:8).

But the Son is said to be the very “shining” of the glory of God.

What does it mean for the Son to be the “radiance” of the glory of God?

What do you see when you see the radiance of God’s glory?

You see the Son.

How can you tell what God’s nature is?

Look at the Son.

The shining of God’s glory *is* the Son of God –

whatever it is that is visible in God is seen in the Son.

And he is the exact imprint of his nature.

The word used here in Greek is the exact imprint of his *substance*.  
“hupostasis”

The book of Hebrews was written  
long before the Trinitarian controversies of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

But it is worth noting that the word used for “exact imprint”  
was used primarily for the instrument used for engraving or carving –  
*not* the result.

He is the precise image of his Father –  
not something *other*.

When you see the Son you see the Father –  
as Jesus said, whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

Colossians 1:15-20 says the same sort of thing:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation.  
For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...  
He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,  
that in everything he might be preeminent.”

The word choice is different,  
but the basic idea is identical.

The Son was the one through whom God created the world.

The Son is the member of the Trinity who makes God visible to us.  
And when we see the Son, we see God.

And as Hebrews will say shortly in chapter 2 –  
we do not yet see everything under his feet –  
but we see Jesus!

By faith, we see Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father!

### **3. Only the Creator Can Be the Redeemer**

#### **a. By Whom All Things Were Made (Heb 1:2/Col 1:15-20/1 Cor 8:6)**

At the heart of the Christian faith is that the Creator of the world  
is also its Redeemer.

And the Son is the one through whom God has redeemed the world.

Paul had said in Colossians, “in him all things hold together.”

Hebrews says, “he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

The Son of God is involved in creation and in providence.



As John tells us, “in the beginning was the Word.  
And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.” (John 1:1)  
Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

So when Hebrews says that he has spoken to us by his Son,  
it means that God has spoken to us by his eternal Son.  
Through all those ages  
God spoke by the prophets.  
He spoke through mediators who only reflected his glory.  
Remember Moses—the greatest of the OT prophets?  
He came down the mountain with the glory of God shining in his face.  
But that was a fading glory—a reflected glory.  
But the Son does not have a “reflected” glory,  
he is the very “shiningness” of the glory of God.  
He is the radiance itself!

It is only because Jesus is the eternal Son  
that he can successfully become the eschatological Son.

Why is this so important?

John Calvin said this beautifully:

“it was also imperative that he who was to become our Redeemer be true God and true man.

It was his task to swallow up death.

Who but the Life could do this?

It was his task to conquer sin.

Who but very Righteousness could do this?

It was his task to rout the powers of world and air.

Who but a power higher than world and air could do this?

Now where does life or righteousness,

or lordship and authority of heaven lie but with God alone?

Therefore our most merciful God,

when he willed that we be redeemed,

made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son.”

(Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.12.2)

Why do we confess that Jesus Christ is

*God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God;*

*begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father,*

*by whom all things were made.?*

Because it is only way to confess what the apostles taught us!

I once thought that there might be another way to say it.

So I explored other options –

and realized that pretty much every option imaginable

was attempted during the Fourth Century.  
And none of them worked.  
None of them could hold together what Scripture teaches.

God is One.

So if Jesus is *not* God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God –  
being of one substance with the Father –  
then Jesus is something other than the Father.  
Which means that Jesus is not God.  
But we are commanded to worship Jesus as God.  
And so you wind up with multiple gods.

Oh, you can go through every text and pick it apart,  
and come up with reasons why it doesn't *really* mean what it says!

Or, you can say with the church of all ages –  
that this is a profound mystery!

We do not pretend to *comprehend* the Holy Trinity.

We believe the Triune God!

We worship and adore the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit –  
one God, world without end. Amen.