



LESSONS IN LIVING

“The Difference Between "Jesus" and "Christ"”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
December 21, 2025

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:15-20 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Christ is the image of the unseen God and the firstborn of all creation, for in Christ were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and invisible, Thrones, Dominations, Sovereignties, Powers—all things were created through Christ and for Christ. Before anything was created, Christ existed, and all things hold together in Christ. The church is the body; Christ is its head. Christ is the Beginning, the firstborn from the dead, and so Christ is first in every way. God wanted all perfection to be found in Christ, and all things to be reconciled to God through Christ—everything in heaven and everything on earth—when Christ made peace by dying on the cross.

Sermon

That's the kind of passage that when I left high school and went to college, I knew my religion was too small. But what I'd been taught sounded very mythical, very comfortable for somebody that lives in the United States. As soon as I got to college, I began to explore other religions. Through the years, they've been my commentary on the Christian texts. In Seminary, the scriptures were presented as though we live in a bulletproof dome. We don't need to talk to anybody. We don't need to learn from anybody else. There's a special revelation to the people at that time. What didn't make sense to me was I was finding many of the same stories in other religions that were older than Christianity. And some of the same sayings.

What I'd like to do today is look at the infancy narrative of the Christian faith within the context of world religions, because I think it makes a whole lot more sense if you realize these are universal themes. They're not telling you about one person who ever lived. I like Jesus. I like my job. (*Laughter*) But I don't see the point if Jesus went to all this trouble to teach about himself. I know that's what I was taught. You have the cross, Jesus died, blood. I don't know. That doesn't feed my soul.

The infancy narratives are unlike any other type of scripture. Because when you think of the sacred manifesting as an infant, it's different than any other image. It can't teach you anything. An infant; that word means you can't speak. They're not going to be able to carry you for a couple of years. If anything, you have to carry *them*. You have to teach *them*. You have to protect *them*. But it's also true that there are certain times in life when an infant can take you deeper within yourself than anything else on the planet. No matter what's happening to you, there are times when you look in the face of an infant and you remember a depth within yourself that may not be attainable any other time. That is the purpose of the infancy heritage.

When we read the Colossians passage it's a strange text.

Jesus, the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation, for in Christ, all things were created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible. Whether thrones, powers, it goes on like that. Christ is before all things. In Christ, all things hold together.

What I've discovered over the years is that's basically quoting from the Sophia passages, which is a mystical form of Judaism. We've looked at it a couple of times. But it's that there's a cosmic wisdom by which everything comes into being. You don't have to be religious. There's some creative principle of the universe that has given us being. Whatever that is, it's got to be the very core of our being.

So later in college, I ran across Hinduism, and I saw the same phrases. Krishna is saying,

I'm the source of all creation. Everything emanates from me. The ones who know this worship me with love. I'm the life in all beings, the strength and the strong, the intelligence of the intelligent. There's no being moving or unmoving that can exist without me.

It seems to me that what's happening is these are human beings who've become so aware that they resonate with that creative ground of their being. They're able to speak and sing and dance in a way that brings that forth in us. It's the ultimate gift. It's the gift of Christmas. Not just that a miracle happened a long time ago to other people, but it's what's happening all the time. The punchline of Christmas is not just that *Jesus* was the *Word made flesh*, it's that we are the *Word made flesh*. Every person in this room is the cosmic wisdom in embodied form.

We're going to look today at that phrase '*Jesus Christ*' in maybe a different way than you've heard before. In the context of world religions, Jesus is the human being, the person, the teacher, whoever that was in history. The archeological evidence is really scarce. We see the *effect* that he had on people. There was some incredible, remarkable person who touched people, but we can't get back to *that*. Christ, I believe, represents the greatness of what he opened up into universal love. That Christ is the tie that binds us all together. You have the personal and the universal. I think that's what this poetry is intended to help us experience.

You ready to get weird? (*Laughter*) What I want to do is look at the infancy narrative in Hinduism, and I think it will feel really familiar to you. Let's look at that first slide.



Baby Krishna and the mother you see there. If I were very philosophical and I use the word *love*, you can't really necessarily *feel* that. What mythology does is help you *feel*. It puts these invisible principles in tangible form. That's what Colossians is talking about. Jesus is the visible image of something that's really invisible.

Now, my understanding is the reason baby Krishna is blue is because he comes from the sky. He's a star child. Somebody has accused him of eating mud, which is outlandish. (*Laughter*) So the mother's looking in there to see if he ate the mud. When she looks inside, what she sees is the Milky Way galaxy. That's the backdrop thing that you see.

You could look at yourself as a pitiful little grub worm, born for reasons you don't know, living for reasons you don't know, dying for reasons you don't know. *Or* you can just as easily say, you are the universe in personal form. I don't know where else you came from, if not from that.

The symbol “God” can either be a person, an invisible person that you just have to believe in, or it can be a symbol of being itself. *That's* my understanding of mysticism, that we're really talking about something that's true for everybody, everywhere, all the time. That's my litmus test. Being in college and saying whatever I'm looking for must be in theory true for everybody, everywhere, all the time. If it's only true for Christians, I'm not interested. Can you imagine spending eternity in a worship service? (*Laughter*) To me, that would be the other place. (*Laughter*)

Christmas tells the story of three wise persons following a star, which is a universal story. You see it all over the world. We are the children of the stars. And an atheist can believe that just as fully and completely as a theist. It's helpful to have both the personal and the universal.

I quoted this guy, and I didn't remember his name, but I'll remember it for you. His name is Barry Taylor. Former road manager for AC/DC. (*Laughter*) Probably even being quoted in every

Presbyterian pulpit. (*Laughter*) But he became an Episcopal priest, and he said a phrase I really like. He said,

God is the name of the blanket we put over the mystery to give it a shape.

“God is the name of the blanket we put over the mystery to give it a shape.” It can be very powerful to put a face on this cosmic process as long as we remember that our image is something we came up with.

In the ancient Jewish tradition, there was cosmic wisdom. Everything was created through cosmic wisdom. It was a woman. It was Sophia. Jesus was quoting her all through his ministry. When people say women shouldn't preach, they don't really know what they're talking about. Jesus is quoting women throughout his ministry.

In “O come, Emmanuel,” which is like Zen, as Zen as it gets. Emmanuel means “God is with us.” When you say, “Oh, come, Emmanuel,” you have that paradox. It's already here, but you have to ask for it because we get afraid, we get tired, we get selfish, and we need that personal image that opens us up to the universal.

That's the first idea, that the Christmas story reminds us that we are cosmic. Think if you put your problems in that context, when you couldn't explain in any other way what was happening to you, it was so unfair, or you felt so powerless, so helpless, and you realized you are offspring of the cosmos itself. There's no higher status than that. I think that's part of the gift of the Christmas story.

Second thing.



In this slide, the cosmic stuff is still being played on. When you see the halos, a lot of times that's a cosmic symbol. If it's gold, it's the sun. If it's silver, it's the moon. You see the moon up there. You see mama there, a solar image.

Again, if I said the word *love*, that would not have anywhere near the power of a mother holding a child. The parents of Krishna are born in a prison. There's an evil uncle who plays the role of

Herod in India. The baby Krishna is going to crush the walls, destroy the bars, free the enslaved. But this gift comes to those who are captive, those who are in bondage. Think about what puts you in bondage. I mean, there are habits that do that, there are addictions that do that. There's religion that does that. There's religion that can put you in emergency mode so much of the time that you never step back to question what the preacher is saying.

Now, if you come here, you question it all the time. (*Laughter*) This guy doesn't know what he's talking about. He puts Krishna on the wall. (*Laughter*) The greatest captivity, the very smallest prison you can find yourself in is the Ego. All of these mystical teachings are trying to get us to step outside of what seems like the commonsense interpretation of things. *"This is all happening to me. I'm at the center of things. You're all the bit players in my drama, and you're doing the same thing to me. I'm a bit player."* What happens is there's a love that outgrows the self, then the family, then the community, then the nation, then the religion. If we don't, then what feels like love to us becomes hate to somebody somewhere. We have to outgrow the earlier visions of love.

I had a dream, this is going to sound negative at first. I had a dream where I died. This was before the heart surgery. It was blissful. I was sitting there watching it happen. I've been worried about something during the day. I was having trouble sleeping because I was worried about something. I see myself as a carbon, a carbon chain reaction. I laugh. How could carbon have a problem? Then I see my breath going into the wind, and I see the moisture from my body going into a stream, and I see deer drinking it. Love can grow so much that we can say yes to the transformation in the new forms. The more we love, the more that becomes okay. We can let go of the smaller loves and trust in the larger love.

Here's the last little bit here.



As soon as the Christmas story is over for the Hindu stuff, the wicked uncle comes after baby Krishna. So, he has to escape. In our story it's Herod. Old forms do not die gracefully. Capitalism is not going to die gracefully. Nationalism is not going to die gracefully. Sectarian Christianity is not going to die gracefully, but they're already dead. The problem is they're like chickens with their heads cut off, and they're more dangerous as they're dying than they ever were when they were healthy.

To trust that something is guiding us, we don't have to win. All we have to do is be faithful to the love that's within us. Then what happens is even the trouble we get into becomes a teachable moment for love.

In this story, I can't remember. I think that's maybe Daddy there. But they put baby Krishna in a wicker basket like Moses, hiding him out. In Asia, the snake was not seen as evil. That was a symbol of the life force. That's a cobra that's protecting as they're doing it. Baby Krishna, he'll put his foot out and calm the storm.

The stories are very similar. But one of my favorite things about Hinduism is that gesture there. *[Points out Baby Krishna's raised hand.]* “*Don't worry, everything's okay.*” When Krishna reveals himself in the story in the Bhagavad Gita, and the hero of the story begs him to reveal himself in his natural form, he morphs into all these heads and arms and all these things because it's being itself. So, when you see all those arms in a Hindu statue, every finger means something. Every gesture means something. And that little symbol there in the midst of the storm is a promise that there's a depth within each one of us that the storm cannot touch.

We need that *now*. This is a *brutal* time. Our President is murdering Venezuelans, murdering them, killing them without due process. He said it was because of fentanyl. But we know he's lying because that's not where fentanyl comes from. He's lying, and we know that now because he seizes an oil tanker. *Now* we're being truthful. Making America Great means making it a colonizer again. Making Confederacy again.

The President says that Venezuela has stolen our land and oil. It just happens to be within their boundaries. But that's the way a colonizer thinks. That's *our* oil under *their* ground. England thought like that for centuries.

Remember when we invaded Iraq under these pretended purposes? And called them the insurrection? Remember that? Love calls us beyond those sorts of allegiances. You can still love your family, yourself, your nation. But you have to love the stranger as yourself. You have to recognize that every human being on the face of the Earth is your family. Every animal and plant is your extended family. And that's your love blossoming from *Jesus*, somebody who was born in a certain place, certain time, who's right-handed, left-handed. He spoke a certain language. He had a certain color hair. And *Christ*, which is the universal. It's a cosmic identity.

These infancy narratives are a treasure, in my opinion, because when we look at the fully grown Buddha or Krishna or Jesus, we have a tendency to want them to save us. That's what most preachers say. But a baby can't do that. A baby touches you so deeply and profoundly within yourself that you become the hero or shero of your own story. You become the hero or shero of love and bring it into the world. Then even when you get in terrible, terrible trouble, it's a trouble that teaches the world what it means to love.

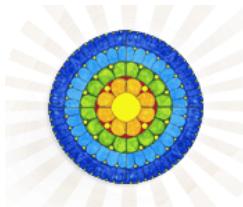
Well, that's the best I can do with the passage. We're going to take a minute now for you to think how you would understand it.

Benediction

Rev. Babs Miller

I would remind you once again that each of you is a child of that spirit of love that some folks call God. Some folks may call it Krishna. But that spirit knows when you skin your knee or your heart. That spirit knows when you admire a butterfly or cry in the darkness. So go out in this wonderful creation and tell the whole world that they are loved just exactly as they are. Go and kiss the hurts of this world. Go and laugh and play in the fields of grace and love. Go in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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