

Then and Now
Hebrews 1:1-12
December 25, 2010

I.

Merry Christmas! Today's the day. It comes whether we're ready or not, and now we can breathe a sigh of relief. But as we unwind from our efforts to make this the best Christmas yet, let us also remember that we could never top the first one.

And therein lies the difference between two ways of understanding Christmas. One is the worldly setting of shopping, and decorating, and parties, and all of the other activities that we plan and put on our schedules.

The other is something we cannot plan or schedule because it's always there. God's love for all humanity was made known through Jesus Christ, and it has endured and prevailed without interruption since that momentous event we celebrate today. We either accept it or ignore it, but we cannot schedule it, or decorate it, or manage it to suit our purposes.

And certainly we can enjoy the excitement of the worldly part of Christmas so long as it does not diminish the priority of the spiritual part. The difficulty can be in recognizing the subtle ways in which the world creeps into our worship.

This reminds me of the fellow who told a friend that he had gotten his wife a beautiful diamond ring for Christmas. The friend said "I thought she wanted one of those sporty four-wheel drive vehicles." "That is what she wanted" the fellow said, and then he added, "But where could I find a fake Jeep?"

That can be the question we face in many of life's circumstances. What is real and what is not? It can be challenging to continue in the eternal truth of God's love if we are caught up in the immediacy of temporal things.

II.

We might think about this in the context of today's second reading, which consists of the first several verses of the first chapter of the letter to the Hebrews. Let me read some of them again.

"Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs."

That grabs our attention, doesn't it? Last night we talked about baby Jesus sleeping in a manger. That's a common Christmas image. Now, however, a reading for Christmas day portrays Jesus the ascended Savior, the Son of God, sitting on his throne in heaven. That's an entirely different Christmas idea, isn't it?

In the same sense, we hear a lot of Christmas carols about the manger, and several of our Advent hymns proclaim the second coming, but not much of our music tells of today's reading.

And we don't see much of it in the malls either, do we? Retailers have not yet figured out how to market the idea that Jesus is ruling in heaven with God. As a matter of fact, some churches don't do a very good job with it either.

But this reading does help explain God's will in Christ. It helps us to remember that the Christmas story does not end with the message we heard last night. Today's reading truly is appropriate for Christmas because it goes right to truth of who that baby in the manger is and what he was going to do to carry out God's purposes.

And for us, believers who trust in the Christian hope, this Christmas day message is just as reassuring as the more gentle message we heard on Christmas Eve. The entire story is true, from beginning to end. The entire story, from Jesus' birth, to his death and resurrection, to his ascension to heaven and his reign their right now, to his coming again at a time unknown, is a reality in which we trust.

And so, as we celebrate Christmas with Jesus quietly coming into the world two thousand years ago, it is equally appropriate to celebrate Christmas with Jesus sitting in power at the right hand of the Father, right now.

As we continue with our Christmas celebrations over the next twelve days, I pray that we always look to and seek what is true and what is real about our Lord and Savior, and what it means to us in every way. The beginning of Jesus' life leads to new life for us as well. *Amen.*