

# Hebrews 1 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

## God Has Spoken by His Son

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,<sup>[a]</sup> whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.<sup>3</sup> He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains<sup>[b]</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

# John 1 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

## The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.<sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being<sup>4</sup> in him was life,<sup>[a]</sup> and the life was the light of all people.<sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.<sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.<sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.<sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.<sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own,<sup>[c]</sup> and his own people did not accept him.<sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,<sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,<sup>[d]</sup> full of grace and truth.

"You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve," said Aslan. "And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth. Be content."— C.S. Lewis, Prince Caspian

**December 24, 2016**

**John 1: 1-14; Hebrews 1:1-4**

**Kerra Becker English**

For my December book club, I read the book “Skipping Christmas” by John Grisham. It was also made into the movie, “Christmas with the Kranks.” Now, so I don’t give too much away, I’ll simply read you the plot description that’s already on the back cover of the book:

*Imagine a year without Christmas. No crowded malls, no corny office parties, no fruitcakes, no unwanted presents. That’s just what Luther and Nora Krank have in mind when they decide, that, just this once, they’ll skip the holiday altogether. Theirs will be the only house on Hemlock Street without a rooftop Frosty, they won’t be holding their annual Christmas Eve bash, they aren’t even going to have a tree. They won’t need one, because come December 25 they’re setting sail on a Caribbean cruise.*

It’s hard for me to describe how much I was rooting for this couple every time someone tried to sabotage their plans and make them do something Christmas-y. Though Grisham may have intended to write Luther Krank as just that, a Krank who had too much of a Lutheran penny-pinching personality, I was on his side the whole way. A Christmas without the crowded stores, without some obligatory gift exchange – white elephant or otherwise, without the fruitcakes and extraneous presents none of us really needs sounds heavenly to me. Christmas in the Caribbean – I’m all in.

However, being an American novel, a Grisham novel at that, that’s not quite how it’s going to turn out. Again, quoting the cover jacket only, “...as this weary couple is about to

discover, skipping Christmas brings enormous consequences – and it isn't half as easy as they'd imagined." I do wish it were easier to say "no" to the trappings and keeping up with the craziness that only seems to accelerate with each passing Christmas. But that's what pastors are supposed to do for you, right? Reign it all in. Remind you of what's important. Take you out of the Santa Claus shopping frenzy if only for a moment and guide you gently into the quiet night of Christmas Eve in Bethlehem.

Whether it's officially my job or not, I do want to remind you of how God is speaking to us now, right now, in the middle of wondering why no one sends Christmas cards anymore, and wrapping last minute presents, and stressing about holiday meals. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that: Long ago, God spoke to us in many and various ways through the prophets, but now, in these last days, God has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed as heir of all things, through whom he created the worlds. Or in John's words, in this glory, the glory of a father's only son, we discover the light of the world, a light full of grace and truth.

Tonight, we are called upon to hear that voice amid so many voices clamoring on about so many other things. What does it mean for us to say that a Son has been given to us? What does it tell us when the names and titles bestowed upon Jesus are reminders of his wisdom, his authority, his healing, and his peace? Well, I can tell you it's not the voice of "you haven't bought enough." It's not the voice that says, "Your decorations aren't as awesome as your neighbor's." It's not the voice of the snooty neighborhood socialites from the Grisham book who are horrified that Nora isn't going to be throwing her famous Christmas party this year. Any Christmas tradition that has become solely about measuring up, or fitting in can go in my opinion.

This Christmas story, at least the one we tell here is so completely the opposite of that. Though I dare say that the church can make any holiday just as much about ticking off the obligations as anywhere else, let's agree to stop doing that, to each other, and even more so, let's stop doing it to ourselves. We are our own worst enemies when it comes to presuming that we should perform our traditions or execute our religious duties with utmost precision and predictability in order to get some sort of reward. That has been the religious "hook" for a ridiculously long time, and we've more than overdone that model. Instead, let's see what it means to have a living, breathing baby who will become a teaching, praying, healing human being as God's loving voice in the world.

God's Son was not sent into the world to tell us what to do. God plays no advertising mind games to get you into the stores at least one more time before tomorrow morning. No. Jesus was born in small town Bethlehem, as a child of both royalty and peasantry, to remind us of who we are. The gospel writer John reminds us of this in a way that we have scarcely begun to claim for ourselves. Knowing and receiving who Jesus is, John amplifies Jesus' message of the depth of God's love by saying that in knowing him, we have the power to become children of God ourselves. We may choose not to accept that we are loved that much by constantly comparing ourselves to somebody else, or making distinctions between people as accepted by God or somehow not accepted by God. But it is in knowing that Jesus is God's Son that allows me to have faith that I am God's beloved daughter, and all of you are God's beloved sons and daughters no matter what I know about you and no matter what it is you try to hide. It's a radical notion, an amazing grace to be sure. Jesus knew that he was the very imprint of God, or at least that's what people seemed to recognize about him. And in every nativity ever since, we are drawn to see a baby, a child that God loved, so completely and fully, exactly as he was meant to

be. God is speaking to us now, fulfilling that story through the infant Jesus and through our own child-like human qualities.

So how do we bear witness to the truth that God loves us without expectation in the season of naughty or nice, where Christmas dreams seem to live or die thanks to what our gifts say about us as givers or receivers? One of my favorite suggestions for truly living into this love (Richard Rohr) is to quit taking ourselves so seriously. Our holiday rituals are meant to be meaningful, yes, but also playful and celebratory. I know of one Methodist church in downtown Richmond, about the size of ours, that set up a “Make your own Nativity” selfie station with borrowed props and costumes. And since the kids have been out of school since Monday, I’ve been trying to figure out my work/life balance this week and still have some fun. Therefore, I spent one afternoon this week taking Ryleigh and a friend to open skate at the roller rink. It sounds hokey, hokey pokey in fact, but as I watched kids of a variety of ages and stages of life skating, fast or slow, to the old school disco music or to their own beat – I felt like I could see them as God sees them. In a strange moment of clarity, I felt a universal kind of love for that odd collection of kids who were simply enjoying an afternoon of their winter break. I suspect that’s how God looks on us all the time. God sees us skating to our own inner music, or trying something new, or breaking with tradition to give ourselves a break, and God smiles on us. God loves us exactly as we are – enjoying this human life as simply and as connected as a baby relying on new parents to love him, and care for him, and feed him, and keep him safe.

That’s not to say that all our Christmas moments will be adored or adorable. They won’t. I can be sentimental, but I’m not going fully Hallmark Christmas movie of the week on this message. Loving other people is difficult. Loving even our closest people at this busy time of

year that is full of unrealistic expectations can be downright impossible when we take ourselves too seriously. Skipping the expectations of the season may be what it takes to get to where we truly want to be. It's in the glimpses that come between those things we're checking off the to-do list that we may notice how the story of God's Son lying in a feeding trough reaches us and connects us in those ordinary moments that bring us closer to each other and closer to God.

Amen.