

THE PASTORS' PEN

articles from the elders of BBC

A few years ago, Sovereign Grace Music released a Christmas album titled *Prepare Him Room*. It is a mixture of traditional Christmas songs and Sovereign Grace originals. One of my favourite tracks is an older classic—"O Holy Night"—but with new lyrics for the second and third verses. The third verse begins this way: "Come, then, to him who lies within the manger: with joyful shepherds proclaim him as Lord." The song recognises that the baby who lay within that manger on the first Christmas morning was no ordinary baby, but Lord of all. The final prophecy we will consider in the ancient Christmas series develops this theme of the lordship of Christ.

Psalm 110 is one of David's, written about a thousand years before Christ. It is one of the most frequently quoted or referenced psalms in the New Testament (see Matthew 22:44; Acts 2:34; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13), and the New Testament writers clearly considered it to be messianic.

What does this psalm teach us about Messiah—the baby born in a manger, who grew to become Lord of all?

First, it teaches us that he would be God's anointed king: "The LORD says to my Lord; 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool'" (v. 1). The all-caps "LORD" translates the Hebrew name Yahweh, which is God's personal, covenant name. The lower case "Lord" translates the Hebrew word *adonai*, a word commonly used of God, but also sometimes used of human lords. We see here the Father (Yahweh) addressing another person (*adonai*) and promising him a place of prominence. The right hand in ancient times was a place of favour and royalty. *Adonai* is promised a place of rule and authority at the right hand of Yahweh. The New Testament confirms that it was the Father speaking to the Son, promising him a place at his right hand, which was fulfilled at the ascension when Jesus sat at the right hand of the Father.

Second, the psalm teaches universal submission to the anointed king. This would happen in one of two ways. Some—the Lord's enemies—would be subjugated into submission: "The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty sceptre. Rule in the midst of your enemies!" (v. 2). His enemies would be shattered on the day of his wrath (v. 5) as he executed judgement

among the nations, filling them with the corpses of his enemies (v. 6). Others—the Lord's subjects—would bow willingly to him: "Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the

morning, the dew of your youth will be yours" (v. 3).

Jesus knew that this psalm was written of him. One day, as recorded in Luke 20, the chief priests and scribes challenged his authority (vv. 1–2). Refusing to directly answer their accusatory question, he responded with a biting parable (vv. 3–18). Angered, but afraid to directly assault him, they sought to catch him out in his teaching on taxes, but again Jesus proved too wise for them (vv. 19–26). Next, they tried to stump him with a tricky theological question, but he was again up to the task (vv. 27–40). He then turned tables and asked them a question.



But he said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?"

(Luke 20: 41–44)

Here, Jesus confirmed that the psalm was indeed messianic. It was written about the greater son of David, who would come to rule his people. But if the one of whom David wrote was his descendant, why would he call him "Lord"? The Sadducees evidently could not answer, but Jesus could: because the descendant was greater than David. The descendant was no mere man, but was God in the flesh.

Jesus claimed to be Messiah—to be Christ, in New Testament parlance. And here he showed that Christ—Messiah—was Lord of all. This is a truth that is affirmed by Paul in Philippians 2:5–11. The anointed King, who would crush his enemies, and whose subjects would willingly bow to him, was none other than Jesus Christ—the baby born in Bethlehem's manger.

Charles Wesley wrote a song titled "Let Heaven and Earth Combine." In it, he sings of "our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man." A "span" is the distance from the elbow to the tip of the fingers. Perhaps you've seen a father resting his newborn child on the inside of his forearm. That is Wesley's picture: the incomprehensible God of the universe contracted to the size of a human baby. He was carried by a father and nursed by a mother whom he created. We should never lose our wonder at the miracle of the Lord of the universe being contracted to a span when he took on human flesh to save us from sin and reconcile us to God.

J. I. Packer hit the nail on the head when, speaking of the incarnation, he wrote, "It is no wonder that thoughtful people find the gospel of Jesus Christ hard to believe, for the realities with which it deals pass our understanding. But it is sad that so many make faith harder than it need be, by finding difficulties in the wrong places."

The "wrong places" to find "difficulties," says Packer, are the doctrines of atonement, or resurrection, or miracles. "With these and similar problems many minds on the fringes of faith are deeply perplexed today." But the incarnation is a more incredible mystery:

But in fact the real difficulty, the supreme mystery with which the gospel confronts us, does not lie here at all. It lies, not in the Good Friday message of atonement, nor in the Easter message of resurrection, but in the Christmas message of incarnation. The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man—that the second person of the Godhead became the "second man," determining human destiny, ... that he took humanity without loss of deity, so that Jesus of Nazareth was truly divine as he was human. Here are two mysteries for the price of one—the plurality of persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus. It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie.... The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is the truth of the incarnation.

We started this series by noting that a vocal minority of Christians vociferously object to the celebration of Christmas because 25 December was a day of pagan worship before it was the day to celebrate the birth of Jesus. But we have also seen that the birth of Jesus—and his subsequent work in ministry and at the cross—were prophesied long before anyone thought to worship Saturn or celebrate the birth of Mithras. Christmas was promised from the dawn of human history as the moment that the Lord of all would enter humanity in the form of a manger-born baby to live a perfect life and die a sacrificial death for those he came to save. Doing so, he would prove his authority to crush his enemies and to save those who would believe in him by faith.

How will you think of your Saviour this Christmas? Will your thoughts be distracted by the passing pleasures of the world, or will you bow in reverent worship the offspring of the woman, born of a virgin as a chosen child, an unremarkable servant, appointed by God as the eternal ruler and shepherd of his people? Will you one day face his judgement or willingly bow to him, in reverent worship making Christ your adored?

