

*THE CRADLE, CROSS, AND CROWN: A SHORT HISTORY OF JESUS*  
*1 TIMOTHY 1:15-17*

If you didn't know better, it would be pretty easy to be confused about what Christmas is about. When you listen to Christmas music you might think that the heroes of Christmas are:

- ✓ Frosty the snowman
- ✓ Rudolph the Reindeer (and the other reindeer are the villains)
- ✓ Santa
- ✓ The little drummer boy
- ✓ Father Christmas
- ✓ Mary (Ava Maria)
- ✓ The happy elf (or any of his more grumpy friends)
- ✓ Olive, the other reindeer
- ✓ Snow itself (as in "White Christmas")

But of course you do know what Christmas is about. It's about the birth of the infant Jesus Christ.

"Jesus is born!" means Jesus has arrived. He has appeared. This is the NT writer's shorthand way of saying, "the one who has always existed has been revealed." The unseeable is now seen. The untouchable touches and can be touched. But the advent of Christ is far more than that.

There was also a particular reason that Jesus appeared, as we have just read in the account of Christ's birth in Matthew 1 — He appeared to die. Now that's an anomaly! We say that babies are born to live. But not Jesus; He was born to die.

This morning, as we reflect on Christ's advent, we will overview a brief history of the life of Christ. As the New Testament talks about the appearance of Christ it recognizes three periods — Christ's birth, Christ's death, and Christ's enthronement — what other writers have called, "The cradle, the cross, and the crown." We need all three periods to understand the advent and appearance of Christ.

To help you see this progression, I want to take you to a passage that is not a traditional "Christmas" passage. But because it contains an explanation of Christ and His work of salvation, it is a place where we can indeed see the Christmas story through a "brief history of Jesus."

*CHRIST HAS APPEARED IN A CRADLE, ON A CROSS, AND WITH A CROWN.*

*WHAT WILL WE LEARN FROM THESE APPEARANCES?*

“The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man; but a true God-man — one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is [yet without sin]; one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal.” [B. B. Warfield]

- 1. He Appeared in the Cradle: the INCARNATION of Christ (1 Tim. 1:15)**
- 2. He Appeared to Go to the Cross: the CRUCIFIXION of Christ (1 Tim. 1:16)**
- 3. He Appeared to Wear the Crown: the CORONATION of Christ (1 Tim. 1:17)**

CHRIST HAS APPEARED IN A CRADLE, ON A CROSS, AND WITH A CROWN.

WHAT WILL WE LEARN FROM THESE APPEARANCES?

## 1. He Appeared in the Cradle: the INCARNATION of Christ (1:15)

- Christ came not just so we could see Him in a cradle as a baby, but He came so that the greatness of His glory would be manifested/revealed.
- I've seen quite a few babies. When we see babies, we say things like, "Isn't he cute?" and "Isn't she precious." "How adorable." "She's so sweet." It is rare that anyone says of a baby, "He's glorious." But that's exactly what they did with Christ. I suppose some also said, "How cute..." but the responses about Christ recorded in Scripture are very different than what we think about babies and children: Luke 2:8-14ff (esp. vv. 13-14, 30-32, 38); Mt. 2:11 — *fell...worshipped*.
- These passages affirm that when Jesus was born something was vastly different. The process of birth itself was like every other human birth, but something was different about His appearance.
  - ✓ One way the NT writers indicate the difference about Jesus' birth is the way Paul refers to it in v. 15 — *Christ Jesus came into the world*. It's Paul's shorthand way of saying there was something unique about Jesus. It's a way for Paul to indicate that Jesus existed prior to His birth. (And the fact that he calls Him "*Christ* Jesus" also emphasizes and prioritizes His messianic position.) John frequently refers to the same truth to refer to Jesus' advent (John 1:9; 6:14; 9:39; 11:27; 16:28; 18:37). And my favorite reference — Jn. 8:58-59. They understood!
  - ✓ Jesus Christ was a real man who lived fully in this world as a man and worked, ate, grew weary, slept, walked, traveled, talked, wept, was tempted, had relationships (and was both loved and hated), knew anger and joy, and every other normal aspect of human life. And that man was also the one who created the world and sustains the world by the Word of His power (Col. 1:15-17). He is the priority.
  - ✓ We saw this same truth in 1 John 1:1 — from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, He was heard, seen, and touched and it was revealed that He was the *Word of Life*. He was the message that gave eternal life (v. 2) because He Himself was eternal. The baby was eternal. The carpenter was eternal. The teacher was eternal. The miracle worker was eternal. Notice how many times John alludes in those opening verses to the reality of Christ's appearance — *heard, seen, looked at, touched, manifested, seen, manifested, seen, heard* (9 different terms). It's John's way of saying, "we've seen Jesus and He is more than an infant in a manger." He came in a cradle revealing that He was more than a baby.

*"It is more significant that God walked on earth than that man walked on the moon." [Robert Frost]*

- Paul reiterates the importance of this truth by saying, ***this is a trustworthy statement***. It's faithful and true statement that Christ entered the world to accomplish God's particular purpose for Him.
  - ✓ And what is significant about the incarnation of Christ is the purpose of His coming: ***to save sinners*** (the word ***that*** tells us that this was His purpose).
  - ✓ Jesus did not come to tell stories, or heal the sick, or provide meals, or comfort the grieving, or overthrow the Roman government. His singular purpose was to save sinners from the coming wrath of God. Jesus came so that the wrath of God would not come on those who believed in Him. That was even the meaning of His earthly name, Jesus (Mt. 1:21). Cf. also,

- *Mark 2:17 And hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*
- *Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*
- *1 Cor. 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,*

- ✓ When Paul says that Jesus came to ***save sinners***, there are two things we must recognize:
  - All mankind fits into the category of ***sinner***. Not all men recognize that (some think they are righteous and not in need of saving by Christ, as the Pharisees thought). But all men are sinners. No one escapes that reality (Rom. 3:10ff; Titus 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:1ff). What is interesting about this word ***sinners*** is that the Jews used it to refer to Gentiles (Gal. 2:15), but Christ uses it of all men (Mt. 9:13 // Mk. 2:17). The word means that in himself man is utterly incapable of pleasing God. We must see ourselves as Christ does.
  - When someone is ***saved*** by Christ, he no longer fits into the category of sinner. Perhaps the most clear statements of this reality are **1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17**. When someone trusts in Christ, something fundamentally changes. Yes, he still has the flesh and yes he still sins, but his identity is no longer "sinner." His identity is now, "in Christ," and "new man," and "redeemed." He no longer has to fear the condemnation of God (**Rom. 8:1-3**).
- ✓ And when Paul considered this reality of Christ's work, he says, ***among whom I am foremost of all***. He doesn't say, "I was the worst," but "I *am* the chief (worst) among all sinners."
  - Paul lived in a continual state of amazement at the magnitude of God's mercy to him. He is overwhelmed that someone so undeserving has received so much of God's kindness.
  - This statement is a "humble recognition of the grossness of sin and of the awesomeness that God's mercy and grace would extend to someone like him." [Mounce, 57]

✓ So I have two questions:

- Do you recognize the sin in your life? Do you recognize that apart from Christ, your identity is “sinner?” Do you affirm that you have nothing good to offer Christ (Mt. 5:3ff)? If you are not a Christian, this is where you must start — by recognizing how evil you are.
- If you have trusted Christ do you recognize that you are *saved*? Do you rest in the fact that you are not under judgment and condemnation but under grace and freedom? Do you have joy, knowing that you have been liberated from sin and that you *can* now do righteousness? The one who is a Christian recognizes that he still sins, but that daily reminder isn’t given to make him weary, but to make him rejoice in the magnificence of God’s grace to continue to save and redeem and keep him to the ultimate day of redemption and glorification.
- This is why Christ came. He came to save sinners. And He didn’t just *hope* (wish/desire) to save sinners. He *really did* save them; and if you are trusting in Him for your salvation, then you are among those who have been saved.

“Honesty about who I am is essential to my appreciation of what Christ has done for me.”

## 2. He Appeared to Go to the Cross: the CRUCIFIXION of Christ (1:16)

- We have a sin problem and God would be completely just to send us to Hell. God’s justice does not require Him to provide a substitute. He does not cease to be just when He sends people to Hell. In fact, we know He is just *because* He *does* send people to Hell.
- Paul affirms the grace that is in Christ by saying, *yet*. The word is a strong contrastive — “I really am the first among the sinners, *BUT* there is something more...” God is not only interested in demonstrating His wrath by sending people to Hell, but He also delights to *demonstrate* His glory through our salvation. And here Paul identifies two attributes of God’s glory:
  - ✓ *I found mercy*. God is merciful. God is more than just. He is also compassionate. He looks on us and sees our pitiful condition and He is grieved and sorrowful for our state. So He extends mercy to us. And His mercy is what He does when He withholds His wrath from us (which is why everyone who is born does not immediately go to Hell, or why each of us didn’t go to Hell after committing our first sin). And notice that Paul says that mercy is demonstrated *in me*. This is not an abstract or distant demonstration. It’s personal, intimate, and known by Paul (and all redeemed sinners).
  - ✓ *His perfect patience*. God is a patient God. He suffers the sins and affronts and hatred of sinners for a long time before He carries out His justice against them. He has endured the rebellion of His creation for centuries and millennia before enacting final judgment.

- Paul identifies God's patience as *perfect* — it is immense; it is to the utmost, unsurpassed. No one is more patient than God is with those who rebel against Him. He is patient so that His people will come to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pt. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:24-25). And He is patient to demonstrate the reality of His wrath and the extent of His grace (Rom. 9:22).
- Hear this: you may have a growing awareness of your own sin (and the more mature you grow in Christ, the more that will happen). But however much your awareness of your sin grows, your awareness of Christ's mercy and patience must also grow correspondingly. Your sin cannot surpass His mercy and patience. His mercy and patience overwhelm and surpass the depth of your sin.
- And the way that God's mercy and patience are demonstrated is through Christ on the cross. Now Paul doesn't directly refer to the cross in this verse, but he does say, *to those who believe in Him for eternal life*. And to believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life doesn't mean, "thinking or believing that He was a good man and a good teacher." *Believing in Him* means trusting that He alone is the means by which our sins can be cleansed and removed. And the way that He does that is not through a verbal absolution but by a literal death on the cross.
  - ✓ In 2:6, Paul says that Jesus *gave Himself as a ransom for all*. Christ's essential work was not in coming to earth, but in going to the cross. Now if you are not a Christian and you aren't used to "Christian" talk, you might wonder what a "ransom" is. It is similar to the way we use it: a ransom is a price that is paid for the debt of another.
    - We spent quite a while talking about the incarnation of Christ already this morning; Christ came as a man, but He also came as the perfect God, who never sinned and could not sin. So He did not have to die and in fact, no one could put Him to death; He could not be killed (and there are numerous examples in the Gospel accounts of His life where that is evidenced, e.g., Lk. 4:28-30; Jn. 8:59; 10:31, 39).
    - We on the other hand, deserve death because of our sins and we can do nothing to avoid death. Jesus did not have to die, and we *do* have to die. We all have a death sentence (a sentence that is both physical and spiritual, because God will judge us for our sins).
    - But Jesus did die — He allowed Himself to be put on a cross and while on that cross, God judged Him with His infinite wrath against sin and Christ took that wrath and *willingly* (volitionally and by choice) died. The Bible says that He died *for us*, as our substitute (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:21). When Jesus died, He paid for the debt of our sin that God held against us.
    - So now, if we believe in Him — believe and trust that He died for us so that we no longer have to be bound by that sin, then we have *eternal life* (life with Him forever).
    - And Paul says all that Christ did in saving him by mercy and patience was done *as an example* — it wasn't just done for Paul, but "This is how God deals with [all] sinners."

- If you want to see the fullness of Christ, don't just go to the manger. Oh, you'll see the real God-Man in the manger, that's true. But the importance of Christ's appearance is demonstrated in the purpose of His coming. If you want to see the fullness of Christ, go to the cross.
- The writers of Christmas hymns have historically understood the significance of Christ's cross-work. Consider these:
  - ✓ "O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel..."
  - ✓ "Come though long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free; from our fears and sins release us...Born They people to deliver...Born to reign in us forever..."
  - ✓ "Thou camest, O Lord, with the living word that should set Thy people free; but with mocking scorn and with crown of thorn, they bore Thee to Calvary..."
  - ✓ "Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace...Born that man no more may die..."
  - ✓ "Then let us all with one accord sing praises to our heavenly Lord, that hath made heaven and earth of naught and with His blood mankind hath bought."
  - ✓ "I wonder, as I wander out under the sky, how Jesus the Savior did come for to die, for poor, ornery people like you and like I..."
  - ✓ "Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till He appeared and the soul felt its worth..."
  - ✓ "Who is He in yonder stall, at whose feet the shepherds fall?...Lo! at midnight, who is He that prays in dark Gethsemane? Who is He on yonder tree that dies in grief and agony?...It is the Lord..."
  - ✓ "Good Christian men, rejoice with heart and soul and voice; now ye need not fear the grave: Peace! Peace! Jesus Christ was born to save..."
- Yes, Jesus Christ appeared. He is the incarnate God. But He appeared to die for us.

### 3. He Appeared to Wear the Crown: the CORONATION of Christ (1:17)

- If the story would end with the death and resurrection of Christ, that would be sufficient, but it would also be somewhat lacking. But there is more to the story of Jesus coming to earth. He is also King.
- Having spoken of God's great grace to save Him, Paul breaks out in v. 17 in a great benediction — *to the King eternal...*
  - ✓ There is a question about who Paul is referencing with the term **King**. His benedictions are almost always given to God the Father and **King** in 6:15 seems to be a reference to the Father. However, the only member of the godhead in 1:12-17 is Christ, so it seems more likely that Paul is referring to Jesus as the enthroned King (e.g., Mt. 22:44ff; Heb. 1:8; 8:1; 12:2; Rev. 1:4; 3:21).
  - ✓ And since Christ and the Father are One, we can speak of them both as King (and Scripture does).

- How does John speak of this King?
  - ✓ He is the **eternal** King. He is without beginning and without end. He always exists in every age and before and after every age. He exists outside of and beyond time. He is sovereign over all the affairs of human history.
  - ✓ He is the **immortal** King. He is incorruptible, indestructible, and immune from decay; He never changes; He's always the same.
  - ✓ He is the **invisible** King. God cannot be seen by any man and live (which is why Isaiah was terrified when he had his vision). No one has ever seen God, except Christ, who has explained Him (Jn. 1:18; 1 Jn. 4:12). We only know of God because He has revealed Himself to us.
  - ✓ He is **only God**. He is the unique God. There is no other God like Him and there is no one else who can compete with or compare with Him.
  - ✓ And because all these things are true, He is worthy of all **honor** and **glory**. Only the King of all is worth receiving our respect and worship and our praise. He is worth our worship in glory and He is worth our worship now — the Father would have us always desire Him (Phil. 1:21; Col. 18b; Rom. 8:29b; 1 Cor. 15:9, 15). He is King and He is first.
- The King is Christ. And that is what is so objectionable about Christ to so many. They don't mind a baby Jesus; they don't mind a crucified Christ; but they will not have Christ the King who is Lord of their lives. But that is just who He is. He is a King who will eternally receive our worship and adoration for who He is and what He's done. He is King and we who believe in Him are going to Him to be with the King in all His glory for all eternity.
- That's the history of Jesus in three words: cradle, cross, and crown — He came as God, He died as God-Man, He reigns as King.

**CONCLUSION:** In his book, *Letters to an American Lady* (12/29/58), C. S. Lewis wrote,

“Just a hurried line...to tell a story which puts the contrast between OUR feast of the Nativity and all this ghastly ‘Xmas’ racket at its lowest. My brother heard a woman on the bus say, as the bus passed a church with a Crib outside it, ‘Oh Lord! They bring religion into everything. Look — they’re dragging it even into Christmas now!’”

Indeed we are. Of all the so-called “heroes” of Christmas, there is only one real hero. And that is Christ. All of Christmas and all of life is about Him. He came. He died. He's King.