

"THE STORY OF JESUS"
1 TIMOTHY 3:16

Christmas is full of surprises. But one of the surprises about Christmas in Scripture is the brevity of the NT narrative of Christ's first advent. For instance, the four gospels tell the story of Jesus Christ, yet two of the four gospels do not mention the events of Christ's birth. Mark and John both introduce Jesus at his baptism, skipping the first 30 years of His life, including the account of His arrival. And while Matthew and Luke both speak of the birth of Christ, the combined number of verses they give to His birth is less than 100 and most of what Matthew says centers on the genealogy of Jesus (17 vv.) and the Magi (12 vv.) and the flight from Israel to Egypt because of Herod's angry response (11 vv.).

In spite of this, Christmas is still about Christ. The world suppresses that truth (Rom. 1:18) through various preoccupations: shopping sprees, parties and family gatherings, Santa and wish lists for children, blockbuster movie releases, and loads of tinsel and lights.

But Christmas is about Christ. It was that way the first Christmas (Mt. 1:18-25; Lk. 2:1-14). And it has been every Christmas since. Christmas is a time to reflect on the appearance of Christ into this world. He existed as God for all eternity, and He came to earth as a man (thus, He appeared — but was not created) to live a life of righteousness that fulfilled the law of God and that would ultimately be imputed to those of us who believe in Him and His death and resurrection for our sin.

Despite the brevity of the account of His arrival in the Gospels, *there is much that can be said about Christ*. John says that if all the works of Christ's earthly ministry were written in detail and fulness, the whole earth could not contain the vastness of the books that would be penned (Jn. 21:25). So can we condense the advent of ministry of Christ to any particular set of truths? We can. In fact, a hymn from the early church has done just that, in the one verse that we want to examine this morning — **1 Timothy 3:16**.

We are unsure if this verse is a creed that was written as a condensation of Christological truth for the early church or if it was part of an early hymn. My tendency is to think it is the latter; regardless, it is known that this set of six brief stanzas serves to give us a concise theology of Christ.

THE REVEALED JESUS CHRIST IS THE CORE OF TRUTH THAT PRODUCES GODLINESS.

In the story of Jesus, there are three primary actions that reveal His identity and ability:

- 1. The APPEARANCE of Christ**
- 2. The PROCLAMATION of Christ**
- 3. The RESPONSE to Christ**

1. The **APPEARANCE** of Christ

- Verses 14-16 are in the middle of 1 Timothy and serve as a summary of Paul's letter to Timothy and the Ephesian church, and also serve as a summary of the purpose and intent of the church:
 - ✓ The **conduct** of the believer (v. 15a) is to be fitting of being part of the **household** (family) **of God** and His **church** (He being the **living God**, which emphasizes His sovereign authority over and provision for the church — we belong to Him and He is over us).
 - ✓ The church is **the pillar and support of the truth** (v. 15b). What the church is and what the church does serves as the basis on which the truth of God stands. It holds up the truth of God to the world and maintains and protects the truth against all attacks of the world.
 - The church doesn't invent the truth; it holds it up and defends it and loves it and obeys it.
 - The Temple of Artemis (Diana) was in Ephesus (Acts 19:26-28); it was built with 127 pillars of marble, overlaid with gold, and ornamented with precious jewels. It was a declaration of Artemis' "greatness;" Paul seems to be implying a contrast to that false religion by saying that the church (and individuals in the church) serve as even greater and more precious pillars to the truth of the one and only living God.
- And that seems to lead Paul to the remembrance of a foundational truth the church upholds: the nature of Christ. And he says that this truth is a **common confession**.
- The word **confession** has both a positive and negative connotation:
 - ✓ Positively it means, "agreement among all people (believers)." They are "most certainly" agreed.
 - ✓ Negatively it means, "beyond denial...unquestioned...undeniable."
 - ✓ Together they mean the same thing — there is unity about the **mystery of godliness**.
- Remember that as he mentions **godliness** he has been talking about the behavior of believers in the church (v. 15a; 1:5, 10, 16; 2:1, 9-10; 3:1ff, 8ff). And the means to godliness is a **mystery** — that is, it is something that has been hidden in the past but is now revealed. This common confession is the great "secret" that produces godliness.
- And what is this great secret?
 - ✓ The secret is not a "what" — it's not something to do (which is what men have almost always taught and believed).
 - ✓ The secret to godliness is not a "what," but a "who:" notice the pronoun in the next line — **who**.
 - ✓ And while Christ is not named in the following six lines, it is obvious that Paul is speaking of Christ. As He will say in Colossians 3 — Christ is our life. Christ is the means to godliness; Christ is the truth that the church upholds and defends and declares. Everything is about Him.
 - ✓ Godliness is not from obedience to a moral creed but from a Person who is loved and believed.
- What is it that the church particularly confesses (agrees) about Christ? Six truths that can be aligned in three pairs — and the first is about Christmas — it is the appearance (advent) of Christ.

- Christ was ***revealed in the flesh***.
 - ✓ For something to be revealed means that it is made visible. It does not mean, “created.” In fact, it means that it already is in existence, but unknown, and it is now revealed to be in existence.
 - ✓ So Paul is affirming the pre-existence of the eternal Christ in a similar way to other NT writers:
 - 2 Tim. 1:10; Tt. 1:3; 1 Pt. 1:20; Heb. 9:26; 1 Jn. 1:2; 3:5, 8; Rom. 1:3-4; Jn. 1:1-2, 14.
 - This is an affirmation of the deity of Christ, which is a key doctrine that is hated by many. Jesus is acceptable as a helpless baby; Jesus is acceptable as an inspiring speaker; Jesus is acceptable as a benevolent social worker; Jesus is acceptable as a religious leader. But Jesus is unacceptable (to the world) as the God of the universe who demands allegiance and submission. And that is exactly what His incarnation revealed.
 - ✓ And not only was Christ, the second member of the Trinity, revealed to mankind, but He also revealed God the Father to mankind (Jn. 1:18; 3:31-32; 5:19-20; 6:46-47; 8:38; 10:32; 12:44-46; 14:7-9; 15:24).
 - ✓ Mankind’s problem has always been, “How can we know the unknowable, since God is inconceivable and incomprehensible (Is. 40:18; 1 Tim. 6:15-16)?” God’s two-fold solution is to send Christ so that we can see God, but also so that we can know the Father.
 - He who was unknowable is now knowable because of the advent of Christ.
 - While we cannot know everything about the Godhead, because of Christ (and His Word) we know can know something of Him.
 - ✓ And Paul also notes that He is revealed ***in the flesh***. He doesn’t mean that Christ is “fleshly” (sinful), but that He has a genuine human body. He is not fleshly, but “in the flesh” (human; Phil. 2:7-8; Heb. 2:11, 14). And He had to have humanity to be our substitute on the cross.
 - ✓ The identity of Christ — the Messiah and God incarnate — was revealed in the incarnation.
- Christ was ***vindicated in the Spirit***.
 - ✓ The word translated ***vindicated*** is the same word, “to justify” (Rom. 3:4, 20). Here Paul is using it to affirm that Christ is being proved right — it is being demonstrated that He is God incarnate.
 - ✓ How was Christ vindicated? He was vindicated by or ***in the Spirit***. Paul means that the Holy Spirit testified to Christ and His deity and work throughout Christ’s ministry:
 - The Spirit was manifested at the baptism of Jesus: Mt. 3:15-17
 - The Spirit directed and empowered Christ in the temptation: Lk. 4:1-2
 - The Spirit empowered Christ in His ministry: Mt. 12:28
 - The Spirit was the power of the resurrection of Jesus: Rom. 1:4; 8:11; 1 Pt. 3:18
 - The Spirit vindicated Christ’s claims after His ascension: Jn. 16:7
 - The Spirit did all this in unity with the Father, who also testified to and vindicated the work of the Son (Mt. 3:17; 17:5; Jn. 5:37-38; 12:28; 17:1ff).
 - The Spirit did all this for Christ — all things that He would not do for a sinner (Jn. 9:31).

- ✓ So the Father sent the Son and the Son later gave the Spirit to believers, and the Father and Spirit both testified to the truth of Christ.
- SUMMARY: Christ came to earth. Christ appeared. And in Him we see the Godhead. In Him we see the Father. Through Him we receive the inward working of the Spirit, when we believe in Him. He has appeared as the incarnated God. Fully God and fully man, able to bear our sins and unite us to the Father (Jn. 17:22-24). The story of Jesus is the story of His appearing. And the importance of His appearing is not that a baby arrived, but that God came.

2. The PROCLAMATION of Christ

- Christ was *seen by angels*:
 - ✓ Angels ministered to Christ throughout His ministry —
 - The angels declared Christ at His birth: Lk. 2:13.
 - The angels ministered to Christ at the temptation: Mk. 1:13; Mt. 4:11.
 - Angels served Christ in the Garden: Lk. 22:43.
 - Angels announced the victory of Christ at His resurrection: Mt. 28:2, 5; Mk. 16:6-7; Lk. 24:23.
 - Angels appeared at the ascension of Christ: Acts 1:10-11.
 - And the angels welcomed Jesus back to Heaven: Rev. 5:11-12.
 - ✓ The significance of this statement is two-fold:
 - Christ had a higher position than the angels (Heb. 1:4-7). There is no equality between Christ and the angels. They are created beings and He is the eternal Creator and uncreated.
 - Christ was declared and announced and proclaimed by the angels. They, too, testified to His personhood and deity — and they worshipped Him (He did not worship them). He is the triumphant, exalted Christ and not simply another great man.
- He was *proclaimed among the nations*.
 - ✓ The word *proclaimed* is the word for “preach.” He was heralded and people were compelled and called to repent and believe in Him.
 - ✓ This proclamation began immediately after the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:8; 4:1-2, 12, 18; 8:4; 9:19-20; 11:1, 19-21; 13:5, 38, 44; 14:1; 18:28).
 - ✓ Notice also that the proclamation was *among the nations* — in the various ethnic groups (people groups) of the world. There was no limit to where the early church was willing to take the gospel (cf. Phil. 2:11; Rom. 15:8-9; 16:26). This was the intent of the first church in Jerusalem — to go to the nations. It is appropriate to go to every people group with the gospel. No exceptions.
 - When Paul and Barnabas were sent out, their destination was indefinite (Acts 13:1-3).

- When the Jews rejected the message of Christ, they joyfully and immediately turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:45-47).
- And the Gentiles rejoiced (Acts 13:48), and so did the Jerusalem church when she received the report (Acts 15:3-4, 12).
- Justification through Christ is the message for all people; that was the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) and it was true in the NT (Rom. 4), and it is true today.
- ✓ The believers had one compelling desire in the early church, and that was to make Christ known to the nations. And they were not preaching a theory or philosophy or even a theological statement, but they were preaching a Person, Jesus Christ.
- ✓ There is no life without Christ, there is no message without Christ, there is no hope without Christ. We are Christ's people and we point the nations and our neighbors to Christ.
- ✓ The advent of Christ is not only a truth to enjoy, but it is a truth to proclaim. The proclamation of Christ was prominent at His first advent (Gabriel to Mary and Joseph, and the angels, and the shepherds, and the wise men, and Simeon, and Anna...). Everyone who came in contact with Jesus at His advent proclaimed His coming — because the only natural response to Christ's advent is the declaration of Him.
- ✓ Christ's advent is the greatest evangelistic endeavor ever undertaken on earth; it was all about evangelism and the declaration of how men can be saved. We preserve the intent and purpose of His advent when we also engage in evangelistic proclamation.
- ✓ And since that is true, if you are here this morning and not a believer in Christ, let me tell you about Him:
 - He is both God and man (God in the flesh).
 - He is sinless and fully obeyed all God's commands (Mt. 5:17).
 - He died on the cross to absorb the wrath of God against sin — my sin and your sin — so that we could be forgiven of sin and be restored to God.
 - All who believe in Him (next phrase) will be justified, forgiven, cleansed of sin and sanctified.
 - But you must believe in Him (Rom. 4:5) and you must want Him (want to be like Him).
 - You must repent and I call you to repent of sin and turn to Christ today — Acts 13:30-31.

That's not my message — it's God's message. And when you turn to Him, then you will have joy and satisfaction and peace (Lk. 2:13-14).
- If you are a believer in Christ, we praise God for that; but notice from this ancient (God-breathed) hymn, that belief also compels us to proclaim Him.
 - ✓ And that's one reason that we are going to keep emphasizing and talking about evangelism in 2018 — the task is not completed!
 - ✓ Evangelism is not just something we do; evangelists is something that we are.
- There is a third component to the story of Jesus, and that is the response to Christ —

3. The **RESPONSE** to Christ

- Christ was **believed on in the world**.
 - ✓ Throughout the world, those who were in the world and part of the world system, believed in Christ (Rom. 6:16ff).
 - ✓ Not only was Jesus proclaimed, but Jesus was also believed — throughout His world. We see that throughout Acts (2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:1; 8:6-8, 35-36; 9:31; 10:44ff; 11:1, 19-21; 12:24; 13:48-49; 16:5, 30-33; 17:4, 34; 18:8; 19:17-20; 28:30-31).
 - ✓ Virtually every chapter in the first 2/3 of Acts gives demonstration of the power of the gospel to save people and transform their lives. And this is an encouragement to us! Will everyone to whom we testify about Christ believe? No. But will some believe? Yes. And can they believe and can the gospel transform lives? Yes!
 - ✓ There is only one appropriate response to Christ — belief. (If you don't believe, you must!)
- All people groups have the truth of the gospel proclaimed and all people groups will be represented in Glory — **Rev. 5:9-10**. Throughout the world people believe in Christ so that throughout eternity there will be a diverse, unified body of believers to declare the glory of Christ.
- Christ was finally **taken up in glory**.
 - ✓ Notice that He is not only taken up *to* Glory (the place), but He is taken up **in glory** (the means). He is the glorious King who has returned to His rightful place in Heaven. In the incarnation He laid aside all the privileges of His position as the second member of the Trinity; in the ascension He picks back up all those privileges and honor and is in Heaven fully enjoyed as the Glorious One.
 - ✓ So this is a reference to the ascension of Christ (**Acts 1:9; Eph. 4:10**).
 - ✓ It also affirms the acceptance of the Father of Christ's work. Notice that the hymn says that He was **taken up** — that is, the Father brought Him back to Heaven. He is satisfied with Christ's work; the plan of redemption has been fulfilled and the Father accepts that work and restores the Son to His rightful position in Heaven (answering Jesus' prayer in **Ln. 17:1-5**). Acts (1:9) also emphasizes this when it says He was **lifted up** (He didn't lift Himself up), and a **cloud received Him** (indicating the reception of the Father as well). And the songs sung in Heaven over Him (Rev. 4-5) further reveal that He is being glorified in Heaven in His restored position.
 - ✓ So here we have the completion of all Christ's work — in the first stanza Christ appears in the Advent and here He departs in the ascension. The opening and closing stanzas of this hymn serve as a summary of the entire earthly work and ministry of Christ. He left Glory to redeem mankind and having accomplished that work, He then returns in glory to Glory.
 - ✓ So in the final two stanzas we have the earthly verdict on Christ, followed by the even greater verdict and response of Heaven — He is who He says He is and He is accepted.

- Notice in all these pairs there is a heavenly and earthly element:
 - ✓ Christ appeared ***in the flesh*** (on earth) and was vindicated ***by the Spirit*** (heavenly realm).
 - ✓ Christ was ***seen by angels*** (heavenly realm) and ***proclaimed among the nations*** (earth).
 - ✓ Christ was ***believed on in the world*** (earth) and ***taken up in glory*** (Heaven).
 - ✓ His “story” began on earth and ended in Glory. Christ is sufficient for our earthly needs and He is sufficient for our eternal, heavenly needs and desires. He is always adequate and enough.
 - ✓ And when we think of Christmas, we embrace this entire story of Christ. We love the appearing of Christ in His humanity and deity and we love His ascension in affirmation of His deity and humanity. All of Christ in all He does is exactly what we need.
 - ✓ And this is the mystery that has been revealed that leads to godliness; if you want the shackles of sin removed, then you must embrace the whole Christ — the God-Man Christ who appeared, the crucified Christ who is proclaimed, and the ascended Christ who is accepted.
 - ✓ This is the story of Jesus.

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25