

Hebrews 1:1-9

In the past, God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in many ways. ²In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of the divine nature. He sustains all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

⁴The Son became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵For to which of the angels did God ever say:

You are my Son. Today I have begotten you?

And again:

I will be his Father, and he will be my Son.

⁶And again, when he brought his firstborn into the world, he said:

Let all God's angels worship him.

⁷About the angels he says:

He makes his messengers winds and his ministers flaming fire.

⁸But about the Son he says:

God, your throne is forever and ever,
and the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom.

⁹You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.

Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of joy beyond your companions.

God Speaks

"The Word became flesh" to redeem by his Word what he had created by his Word. When God speaks, things are made. When God speaks, things are redeemed. It is through Jesus, the Word, that God created the world. Jesus is the Word, God in the flesh.

If that is so, we would expect to see Christ before his incarnation in the baby Jesus to be at work in the account of creation in Genesis. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1, NIV84). The very first verse of the Bible is a reference to God the Father. We also hear that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2, NIV84). Obviously, this is the Holy Spirit. So where is Jesus? He is the "God said..." "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good" (Genesis 1:3-4, NIV84). Jesus is the "God said..."

The Gospel for Christmas Day confirms this. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3; EHV).

Remember the pattern in the Creation account in Genesis? God said... it was so... and it was good. Compare that account with what John says in his gospel: "In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind" (John 1:4; EHV). God created the whole universe in six days, including every living thing, and on the seventh day he rested. Life comes from the Father, through the Son, by way of the Holy Spirit.

When God speaks, things are made. When God speaks, things are redeemed. Christmas is about God's gift of life for us—new life—a life given by Jesus. Life is a Christmas gift.

I.

Listen to the way God has been speaking: "In the past, God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in many ways. ²In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2; EHV). The writer to the Hebrews confirms what the Evangelist John also said—Jesus is the Word through whom God created the world.

God could have chosen any way he wished to create the world. He could have shaped and molded things like an artist working with clay, or carving out a sculpture—creating the world over millions and billions of years instead of six days—carefully, slowly, and deliberately forming each item individually. He could have been the eternal clapper—just clap his hands and the lights would come

on, everything would be there and start to work in an instant. Why would he need 6 days, or six-hundred-million years? What God chose to use for creating all that exists is his Word—through speaking. As the Psalmist puts it: “He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Psalm 33:9, NIV84).

God’s way of getting things done is by speaking. That’s the Son—the speaker—the Word.

“In the past, God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in many ways” (Hebrews 1:1; EHV). The pre-incarnate Christ—Jesus before he “took the humanity into God,” as the Athanasian Creed puts it—spoke to our forefathers by the prophets. Moses barely finished recording the creation of the world in his first book—Genesis—before he spoke of Adam and Eve’s fall into sin. After they sinned, Adam and Eve deeply felt shame. They recognized that they had violated the will of their Creator, and did not deserve to stand in his presence and speak to him any longer.

Ever since then, sin has plagued the world. God says we are to speak the truth, but lying is a way of life for many, and a scourge on every human being. God says that a reputation is to be something of great value—that we are not to tear down another person’s reputation scurrilously. Gossip and slander have become so pervasive that people are constantly dropping juicy tidbits of what they heard and saw someone else doing. Celebrity gossip is a vital part of our entertainment, with TV shows dedicated to bringing you the latest. The Fifth Commandment forbids murder, and the Bible shows us this also includes hatred for others, or hurting or harming our own body, or someone else’s, yet we fill our bodies with harmful substances or use excessively things that could be beneficial to us. Murder is something we regularly hear about in the news, but so also are assaults of various kinds, or child abuse or spouse abuse. God says that the proper use of human sexuality is between one man and one woman, united for life in marriage, but society insists that any kind of love that makes you feel good—as long as it isn’t hurting someone else—is completely valid.

I could certainly go on endlessly about how sin has ruined God’s creation. Sin has so permeated our world that we begin to think some of those things God has insisted are horrible sins are not wrong at all.

As we look carefully at the sinful world around us, we begin to realize more and more that we need a Savior. As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, God gave the first promise of the Savior he would send into the world. From then on, for thousands of years, believers clung to the promises of God spoken to them through the prophets.

The Apostle Peter wrote: “Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21, NIV84). We have *God’s* words, not the words of men. The prophets faithfully recorded them on scrolls. These words were carefully preserved and transmitted over thousands of years, until they came down to us. The things the prophets told us about in the Old Testament are sure and certain—we can cling to their message.

But now, since Christmas has come, Jesus has the last word—a word that redeems from sin and death. The angel Gabriel said to Mary: “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus” (Luke 1:31, NIV84). The angel made a promise about Mary to Joseph, too: “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21, NIV84).

The angel’s promise came true. God’s word is *always* true. Just as God spoke and the world came to be, so also Jesus said to the storm, “Quiet, be still,” and it was so. Jesus told the paralytic, “Get up and walk,” and it happened. Jesus shouted at a quiet tomb, “Lazarus, come out,” and he did. On the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished,” and our salvation was completed.

Isn’t *all* of that what you hear when you listen to the Christmas angel say: “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11, NIV84).

II.

Look at what God’s speaking has given us! “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of the divine nature” (Hebrews 1:3; EHV). When we confess the Nicene Creed on communion Sundays, we say: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the

Father.” Jesus is eternally begotten of the Father. Stretching into infinity before the world came to be, Jesus is always the eternally begotten Son. Jesus possesses and reveals to us all that is of God. Jesus says: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, NIV84). This is the Jesus who “sustains all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3; EHV). Can you see all that in the face of the baby in the manger?

But wait...there’s more. “After he had provided purification for sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. “The Son became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” (Hebrews 1:3-4; EHV). Jesus is the Word of God which accomplished our salvation. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV84). Can you see in the face of the baby in the manger the face of the God-man, hanging on the cross to purify us from all sins and give us salvation?

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11, NIV84). Can you see in the face of that seemingly helpless baby lying in the manger the God of that future day—the God to whom all creation will bow in humble submission?

“In the past, God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in many ways.² In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Hebrews 1:1-2; EHV). These last days began with Jesus’ incarnation. Christmas is our celebration of the beginning of the Last Days.

God has not stopped speaking through his Son. The Evangelists and Apostles recorded the words and works of Jesus so that generations to follow would be able to hear from God’s Son. “These [words] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31, NIV84). Pastors and teachers are called and sent out by Christ’s Church to this day to share the message of what Jesus says. Peter says to all believers: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV84). Every Christian speaks the Christmas message to friends and family, proclaiming Christ the Savior is born.

Isaiah said in today’s Old Testament Lesson: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of a herald, who announces peace and preaches good news. He announces salvation and says to Zion, ‘Your God is king!’” (Isaiah 52:7; EHV). God is our king, reigning among us, through the proclamation of his Word.

In Holy Baptism God speaks to us. We receive his Name and everything that belongs to our Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit hovers over the waters of baptism creating us anew, just as he hovered over the waters of creation. In baptism, he gives us new life in Christ.

God speaks forgiveness in Jesus’ Name through the priesthood of all believers and through pastors. Jesus said: “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (John 20:23, NIV84). Every believer has the power of the Keys of the Kingdom. When someone is repentant, we are to announce forgiveness in Jesus’ Name. When a person refuses to repent of their sins, we are to refuse forgiveness, again in Jesus’ Name.

When Jesus says: “This is my body...this is my blood,” the incarnate Word’s body and blood are truly present, in, with, and under the bread and the wine in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus then says through the pastor: “the peace of the Lord be with you always,” and there is peace, because his favor rests on you. This is the peace the angels proclaimed at Jesus’ birth.

In this way we have seen what John said in today’s Gospel: “We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14; EHV). There is no greater gift at Christmas. Amen.