

THE PREEXISTENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

Text: ¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the *firstborn* over all creation. ¹⁶ For **in him** all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created **through him and for him**. ¹⁷ *He is before all things*, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17)

The keyword here is “prototokos” which literally translates as “born before”. Not because he is a created being; it clearly states that he was not created, but *prototokos* points to the thought that Jesus is eternal. He preexisted even before the creation of the world and will always be before the beginning of this universe. Gerard Friedrich says that *prototokos* does not mean to give birth as firstborn, but as a literal chief or head. The very superior person above all things.

“For Christianity, the doctrine of Christ’s preexistence affects the Christian understanding of God, the Trinity, Christology, creation, salvation, and anthropology. It explains who Jesus Christ is, where he came from, and what it means to call him Savior.” Douglas McCready

This parallels to Hebrews 1:2, “*But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*” Christ even said that He is the same “Great I AM” whom Moses met at the burning bush event. Christ said, “Before Abraham was, I AM,” in John 8:58. That gap of years is almost 2, 000 years from Abraham to Jesus. And Jesus is claiming that He preexists even before Abraham.

Truly, just as what I have told you last Sunday that we will explore three solid doctrines about Christ for this Christmas season. Powerful narratives that will captivate our hearts and minds that Jesus’ birth is worth celebrating. First was the significance of the Virgin birth of Christ which we have surveyed throughout centuries. We saw that this virgin birth of Mary was important to our core beliefs. Today, we will explore Christ’s preexistence; then, next Sunday is His Lordship.

A primary point for today is that The Preexistence of Jesus Christ—or His eternity—is foundational to His Divinity. That our understanding of who Jesus is as God is important to how we have understood His preexistence.

Background:

Paul wrote this apologetic letter to the church at Colossae to clarify the doctrines about Christ. This church in Colossae was planted by one of Paul’s students or disciples. But why? What is happening here, remember that the place of the church is no longer in Jerusalem or Near-East, but already surrounded by Greco-Roman cities; Colossae was greatly influenced by Greek philosophy and mythology. To give some examples, they were familiar that Zeus is the One that rules over all gods and goddesses. Also, the Diaspora Jewish Philosopher named Philo—to whom we got the term Philosophy meaning lover of wisdom—was also prominent as a teacher in the said place.

Thus, Paul was telling the church that Jesus Christ is superior to the man-made god named Zeus and the teachings about Jesus Christ should not be mixed up with Philo’s compromised philosophies. Today, we still have this form of philosophy that denies the preexistence of Christ. Like the Jehovah’s Witnesses that declares that Jesus had a beginning, likewise, the Iglesia Ni Cristo.

Hence, it is vital for us as a church to understand if Jesus is truly preexistent. Before exposing our main passage, let us survey the Old Testament verses. Let us start with this question, “Is Jesus present in the Old Testament?” If Jesus preexisted before the nativity story, then He should be there in the Old

Testament. Of course, we are familiar with the Creation narrative where God was talking to the Triune-head before creating Adam and Eve, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*” (Gen 1:26).

- Genesis 16 – Hagar meeting the Lord
- Genesis 18:1-33 – One day, Abraham had some visitors: two angels and God Himself. He invited them to come to his home, and he and Sarah entertained them. Many commentators believe this could also be a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.
- Genesis 32:22-30 – Jacob wrestled with what appeared to be a man, but was actually God (vv. 28-30). This may also have been a Christophany.

One thing is for sure that all these theophanies were foreshadowing the coming of Jesus Christ as the Incarnated God. The first Christophany recognized as such by scholars is the appearance of God walking in the garden with Adam and Eve. This is seen as a Christophany because of Christ's role in creation (John 1:1–5; Genesis 3:8) as the Word.

- Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.
- John 1:1. The word "was" in the phrase, "In the beginning was the Word," is the Greek *hen*, the imperfect tense that stresses continual existence in past time. The phrase could thus be translated, "In the beginning the Word was continually existing." John's beginning probably goes back to the origin of the universe; John indicates that however far back one goes, the Word was continuously existing.'
- John 12:41, “Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (cf. Isaiah 6:10).

Main Idea:

What then is the significance of Christ’s preexistence? **First, it displays the fullness of Christ’s divinity; meaning that Jesus is God.** In Colossians 2:9, “*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.*” Verse 15 is inseparable from verses 16 and 17. It shows that Jesus the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, is the image of the invisible God. In Hebrews 1:1-3, it states as well that Jesus is the exact imprint, the very representation of God. Meaning, if we want to know God, there is no other way for us to *truly* know Him apart from Christ. To know Jesus Christ is to know God the Creator.

This is even related to our topic last Sunday. The virgin birth of Christ in Isaiah 7 did not just allude to the birth of Christ in the New Testament, but we have seen that in the next chapter, in chapter 8, that Maher-shalal-hash-baz was the said child. Yet, following in the next chapter in Isaiah 9:6-7, the Prophet is declaring that there will be someone greater, someone, more supreme and sovereign than the former child.

This child is eternal, “*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*”⁷ *Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*” This is Jesus as eternally divine.

Second, it denotes the authority of Christ. Jesus being preexistent and being the firstborn signifies his power to rule over all things. Remember that in the Ancient Near-East culture (explain ANE if needed) being a firstborn child is important. You have the privilege to be the inheritor of all things, the blessing of the Father or the head of the family, and the authority among all possessions.

Christ here is the firstborn of all creation. He has the authority; even in Hebrews 1:3, he sits at the right hand of God which also pertains to authority as being the right hand. This power includes being in

control of what is happening in the universe. The One who sustains the world. Just think about it, the genius design and placement of each planet in our solar system, who is sustaining that? Jesus.

Authority of Christ is no mere political power but it signifies sovereignty. By sovereignty means that He is above all things (.

Lastly, **the third point, the preexistence of Christ proclaims His preeminence and Lordship.** Christ's kingship as the One who fulfilled the covenantal promise with David amplifies that truly Jesus is Lord. I will not be able to exhaust the Lordship of Christ today because this will be the topic next Sunday.

What I want to focus is on Christ's preeminence as being the FIRST and the very top of everything. First, Jesus as being the Head of the Church. Second, Jesus being the first in our lives. This thought also applies to our families, relationships, work, and other aspects of life. Third, Jesus as your priority in this life. Remember this, verse 16, the world was created not only through Jesus but FOR JESUS. Back in my missionary days, in Polomolok, South Cotabato, Marinduque Island, Baggaio, Cagayan, Javier, Ormoc, and Tacloban Leyte, and other remote places in the Philippines, plus the tribal communities in Myanmar and Thailand, I always have one answer to people who ask me, "aren't you tired pastor JP?" My answer is "For Jesus" or in Tagalog, "para kay Jesus."

Sometimes, we dream about our death. How will you die? Or How will I die? I would always ponder upon Job's description after he died, 42:17, "And so Job died, an old man and full of years." Full of years means that he died serving and glorifying God. Our lives are not just for us, but as said in our passage, for Christ. All created things and beings are for Christ, not for yourselves, not for your partners, spouse, but for Christ. Even the postmodern thought of self-love, you cannot truly love yourself if you have not embraced God's love first personified in Christ.

Conclusion:

Learning from these three things about Christ's preexistence, first, His Divinity; second, His authority; third, His Lordship or preeminence. Christmas is worth celebrating because first, Jesus is God. It is worth celebrating, second, because Jesus rules. Finally, Christmas is worth celebrating because Jesus is Lord.

As said, is Jesus truly number one in our lives? Let us reflect. If Jesus is truly number one in your life, do you:

- Seek God in the first moments of the day. (Family Worship)
- Seek God on the first day of the week. (Sunday Services)
- Seek God in the first tenth of our income. (Finances and Giving)

May we have this understanding in our mind that Jesus is eternally God, no beginning and no end, He is God, He is Lord, and He is personal to His creation. Indeed, this Christmas, may we have a more Christocentric approach in celebrating our Christmas holiday season. More than just giving gifts, eating, partying, forgiving, and fellowship. Let us be more conscious and aware that Jesus is indeed the very core of our celebration. He is FIRST all in all.

Ptr. John Paul Arceno

UCBC New Jersey
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