

Jesus – The Backstory

On Sunday, we launched a new sermon series called “Experiencing Jesus at a Deeper Level.” We began by exploring three stories about Jesus before his birth.

1. Warm up question: Different people delight in different things. On Sunday, Jeff told how David delights in cats. What’s something you delight in?
2. Some Christians believe the existence of Jesus began with his birth at Christmas. That is a respectable view. We don’t all have to think alike. But it is not the traditional view. Most Christians throughout the ages have believed that Jesus existed in heaven before being born. Take a look at the following verses.
 - a. Colossians 1:15-17. What do these verses tell us about Jesus?
 - b. John 8:54-59. When Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” what did he mean? What was he claiming?
 - c. Revelation 22:13. What does this verse tell us about Jesus?
 - d. Verses like the foregoing gave rise to the idea that Jesus existed as the Son of God in heaven before his birth. Theologians refer to this as the “pre-existence of Christ.” As noted, most Christians embrace this belief, but some don’t. Those who don’t often believe that Jesus was adopted as the Son of God at his baptism. Do you believe in the pre-existence of Christ? Does it matter? Why or why not?
3. On Sunday, we walked through three stories about Jesus’ pre-existence. The first is drawn from a passage in Proverbs that refers to someone called “Wisdom” who partners with God in creation. John’s Gospel later describes Jesus as the Logos (i.e., wisdom) of God and says Jesus served as God’s primary agent in creation. As a result, the Proverbs passage has often been viewed as a description of Jesus’ role in creation. Read Proverbs 8:12, and 22-31.
 - a. Verse 30 describes Jesus as being “beside God, like a master worker” during creation of planet earth. Verse 31 describes Jesus as “rejoicing in [the] inhabited world and delighting in the human race.” What does verse 31 tell us about how Jesus feels about us human beings?
 - b. It’s possible to care for, or even love, someone without delighting in them. What does it mean to “delight” in someone or something? How would you define it?
 - c. Jeff reminded us how David delights in cats. Lots of people tolerate or even love cats, but David is crazy about them. Picture Jesus feeling that way about you. How does that feel? Do you believe it? Why or why not?
4. A second story about Jesus before his birth is found in the familiar Old Testament passage about the fiery furnace. There, King Nebuchadnezzar sets up a golden statue as a tribute to his greatness and commands all his government officials to bow down and worship. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse and are thrown into a superheated furnace. Read Daniel 3:19-25.

- a. What does the fiery furnace represent in your life right now?
 - b. Although only three were thrown into the fire, Nebuchadnezzar sees a fourth person whom he describes as having “the appearance of a god.” This passage was written in ancient Aramaic. The Aramaic phrase used by Nebuchadnezzar literally means one who looks like “a son of the gods.” From this we draw the inference that this was an early appearance of Jesus prior to his birth and an example of how Jesus is always with us in times of trial. In your own life, when have you sensed the special presence of Christ in a time of trial?
 - c. After his death and resurrection, right before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20. What do you think he meant? With us in what way?
5. A third story about Jesus before his birth is found in the New Testament book of Philippians. Read Philippians 2:5-11. In Sunday’s sermon we focused on verses 6 and 7, which speak of the pre-existence of Jesus.
- a. Verse 6 says that Jesus was in the form of God and equal with God. What do you think that means? When you think of Jesus in heaven before his birth, what form do you picture him being in? How do you picture his relationship with God the Father/Parent?
 - b. Verse 7 says Jesus “emptied himself” to be “born in human likeness.” What did Jesus “empty himself” of in order to be born human? What powers or privileges did Jesus have to temporarily surrender while here on earth in human form?
 - c. Try to imagine the mental, emotional, and psychological process Jesus went through to decide to empty himself and become a human. If you were staging a movie scene where Jesus announces his decision to the angels, how would the scene unfold? What thoughts and feelings would Jesus (and the angels) express?
 - d. To help us better imagine what Jesus experienced, Jeff shared the story of Father Damien, who decided to move into a leper colony in Hawaii, live among the lepers, and minister to them as one of them. Eventually, Father Damien himself contracted leprosy and died of the disease. What do you think prompted this extraordinary behavior by Father Damien, and how does his story help us better understand Jesus and his feelings for us?
 - e. We’ve talked about three stories of the pre-existent Christ – Jesus at creation delighting in us humans, Jesus with us in our fiery trials, and Jesus emptying himself to become one of us. Which of these stories most speaks to you – and why?