

Rev. Dan Welch "Celebrate the Greatness of Jesus" Christmas 2024 John 1:1-14

As our country gets ready for another transfer of power from one president to another next month, I'd like to share what one contemporary of the famous President Franklin Roosevelt, once said about listening to the famous orator FDR speak. He said: "You were never sure afterward what had taken place but, whatever it was, it was **great**."

That exact same thing can be said about Christmas. Christmas Is about Jesus' Greatness. We might not be sure what took place, but whatever it was, it was great! Appearing to a country miss perhaps as young as 13 or 14 years old, the angel Gabriel announces that she will be with child and will give birth to a son. "This Son of yours will be great," he says. So, on this, Jesus' birthday, it is very fitting that we celebrate His greatness.

First, let's Celebrate Jesus' greatness as a **person**. Jesus is like no other. He is in a class all by himself. In Dr. Dale Meyer's Advent devotional book, *Come, Desire of Nations, Come*, there is a surprising statement about the Muslim religion: "Jesus is given more honorable titles in the Koran (the Muslim holy book) than any other figure in the past. He is always spoken of in reverence and there is no breath of criticism . . . Muslims accept Jesus as a great prophet."

Which, of course, He is. But the Bible says that He is **much** greater than a prophet. Jesus is true God. "He was with God in the beginning," the Bible emphasizes. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn 1:2-3). He is also true man, born of the Virgin Mary.

So, does this mean that Jesus was God with some human traits or was He a man with some characteristics of God? Neither! When we confess our faith during the creeds what we are saying is that Jesus is **fully** God. **And**, at the **same time**, He is perfectly and **completely** a **human** being. True God. True man. One person.

Now, let's celebrate some of Jesus' great titles. Among Jesus' **many** great titles are Prophet, Priest, King, Savior, Sacrifice, Substitute, Our Head, Our Friend, Our Lord, Our All.

Another of His titles is Sin-bearer. God laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The name still applies. Jesus carried your sin away from you to His cross, and there made an end of them. Never for all eternity will any sin you have laid on Jesus be mentioned against you. Then Jesus left the cross, went down to death to tear away the bars of the grave. He left death dead and opened heaven for you. He continues to be your Sin-bearer. So, He fulfills every title He has been given.

Now, let's celebrate Jesus' great humiliation. Do you know of any other religion besides Christianity that is so bold as to admit that God is vulnerable, that God puts Himself at the mercy of others? Nothing is so helpless, so dependent, so fragile, so frail as a baby. God's Son came as a baby!

Years ago, a TV newscaster, by the name of Harry Reasoner wrote these words about Jesus' vulnerability: "It is so revolutionary a thought that it could come only from a God who is beyond logic and beyond theology. It has a magnificent appeal. Almost nobody has seen God, and almost nobody has any idea of what He is like. . . . But everybody has seen babies, and most people *like* them. 😊 If God wanted to be *loved* as well as feared, He moved correctly here. If He wanted to *know* His people as well as rule them, He moved correctly here, for a baby growing up learns all about people. If God wanted to be intimately a *part* of men, He moved correctly here, for the experience of birth and familyhood is our most intimate and precious experience" (*The Denver Post*, December 25, 1972, p 58).

Christmas is the story of the great *innocence* of God—God the baby, God at the mercy of man. Because of Jesus' great vulnerability, there is no place too dark, too small, too ordinary or too troubled, or no life too insignificant where Jesus will not come.

Finally, let's celebrate Jesus' hidden greatness, soon to be revealed. I once heard a story credited to American author Walter Wangerin, Jr. His daughter played the part of Mary in the church's Christmas pageant. Moments before a multitude of the *childish* host descended on the manger, "Mary" picked up the doll portraying the baby Jesus by a toe and walked out of church. She returned empty-handed and knelt beside the empty manger.

After the pageant, his daughter supposedly said, "Dad, Jesus wasn't in the manger. That wasn't Jesus. That was a doll." After a moment of silence, she continued, "Jesus doesn't have to be in a manger, does He? He goes back and forth, doesn't He? He came from heaven, and He was borned here; but when He was done, He went back to heaven again, and because He came and went, He can be coming and going *all* the time, right?"

Yes, that's how it is. Sometimes Jesus seems far away, eclipsed by people who, in His name, peddle lies. He can be hidden behind people who hate and hurt others. But don't be fooled. The great one is here, always. Today, He is in this bread and wine. Today, He is among us—in us, even. Hidden in us. And, one day soon, He will come for the last time—revealed in His greatness. Amen.