

Title: “How do You Receive?”

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Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

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Overview:

Who is this baby Jesus and how do we receive him? Do we separate this image of a beautiful baby with the one from Easter, bloodied and hanging from a cross? We see him through the lens of our lives.

Lesson:

We worship Jesus, not because He is God in the flesh, born of a virgin, but as a response for what he has done for us. We worship Jesus because He is God in the flesh, born of a virgin, and died as the propitiation for our sins.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

A girl of ten years went with a group of family and friends to see the Christmas light displays at various locations throughout the city. At one church, they stopped and got out to look more closely at a beautifully done nativity scene. “Isn’t that beautiful?” said the little girl’s grandmother. “Look at all the animals, Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus.” “Yes, Grandma,” replied the granddaughter. “It is really nice. But there is only one thing that bothers me. Isn’t baby Jesus ever going to grow up... he’s the same size he was last year.”

Who is this baby Jesus, the one who never changes and how do we receive him? Do we see him as a subscription that we renew every 12 months? Do we look into the manger every December and gaze upon the smiling face of a perfect baby that we *all* wish we had? Do we separate this image of a beautiful baby with the one from Easter, bloodied and hanging from a cross? How do we receive him? I believe the answer to this is the same for everyone: we see him through the lens of our lives. We see him through the experiences that we have gone through over the past year or the past years. Our view of him, our understanding of who he is, changes as we change and as we grow closer or farther from him every single day. And how we see him impacts how we receive him. Let me give you three examples to better illustrate my point.

A very successful business owner travels the world and is rarely ever home, but he makes up for the enormous amount of time lost with his wife and two young children by ensuring that they lack nothing materially. There is not a house too big or a purchase too extravagant for his family. He loves them dearly and even though he can only spend a few short days each month with them, he ensures that they are well cared for while he is gone. He has no time, and no need for church but at the insistence of his wife, he is always home on Christmas Eve to attend church with them. Many times, he is even able to stay home long enough to watch his children open their gifts the next morning. What does he see when he looks into the manger at the infant Christ child?

A young boy, 14 years old, lives with his younger sister in a broken home. His parents are always yelling and times their anger and physical abuse turn away from each other and fall onto him and even recently, his little sister. Although is tired of making up excuses to his friends and teachers for all of the bruises, cuts, and burns that never seem to heal, he still longs for school days and dreads weekends and breaks, especially long ones like Christmas and Summer. His only other respite is found each Sunday when his whole family attends the local church and even though he gets upset that his parents act so nice and pleasant during that time, he loves the hugs and kind words that he receives from them. What does he see when he looks upon the peaceful stable and into the manger at that quiet, unmarred child?

Until recently a woman has had a normal, good life. She was raised in a family who were very active in church and to this day she rarely misses a Sunday service. For over ten years she and her best friend have attended the Tuesday night Bible Study at their church and frequently talk about how their friendship has grown strong, and their faith, stronger because of their devotion to God's Word. And like I said, until recently this woman has had a normal, good life. But one day in October she received a call from her friend who, in tears, informed her of an illness that was devastating and a prognosis that was grim. The next two weeks were spent in constant companionship, constant prayer, and constant support of each other. The next weeks after that were spent burying her friend and clinging to God's promise of bodily resurrection and life everlasting. What does she see when she looks upon the peaceful face of baby Jesus?

This is probably not the tone of the message that you were expecting to hear this morning, but it underscores the point that I'm trying to make: we receive Jesus through the lens of our lives and our experiences. For most of us, Christmas is a happy, exciting time when we remember Jesus as a loving, perfect baby and we celebrate with the exchange of gifts and the sharing of meals. But if we are not careful, we might get caught up looking upon the perfect manger scene with the perfect baby boy and forget that our joy flows not from the birth but from the death of our Lord. We need to be reminded that the Son of God became man to redeem us, to ransom us, to accomplish for us that which we could not do ourselves. He took on flesh and bore our sin, judgement, and suffering so that we can enjoy an eternal life free from the pain of a broken home, free from the sorrow of a lost loved one, and most of all, free from the separation between us and God. And *this* is what lies in the manger this morning, God's Word who became flesh, who grew and lived a perfect life, who suffered and died for our sake, who rose again, and now sits at the right hand of God, our Father. This is who we celebrate today. And I'll end where I started: how do you receive the baby Jesus?

Let's pray.

In your name we pray. Amen.