

State of Humiliation

THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Psalms 8 Hebrews 2:5-13 Luke 1:26-38, 46-56

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In Martin Luther's Small Catechism, we believe, teach and confess Jesus' "State of Humiliation" like this:

As man, Christ did not always or fully use or manifest the divine powers and majesty that were communicated to His human nature.

Jesus' State of Humiliation began when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. As God Incarnate (= *in flesh*) Jesus had full divine power and authority, but He didn't always use His divine power during His earthly life¹.

Jesus humbled Himself and became a man, born in Bethlehem, to share our human life, feelings, and struggles. He was just like us in every way, *except without sin*. He experienced joy and friendship; He laughed and He wept. He endured opposition, grief, and betrayal. He worked; He worshipped; and He prayed. The Lord Jesus understands your life, and the things that you go through. He is sympathetic, and He cares: He promises to help you in your time of need. In every way, *except for sin*, He is our human Brother, Who was born in Bethlehem, and Who is also Christ the Lord²!

¹ Jesus did, however, choose to use His divine power and authority at times when it suited Him for His purpose and work, He worked miracles and demonstrated omniscience which reflected His divine nature, power and authority. The greatest example of Jesus choosing to use His divine power was at the Transfiguration, where He shined like light and His clothes were as bright as the sun. But most of the time, He chose **not** to use His divine power, and that is described as His "State of Humiliation." After His Resurrection, He now **fully uses** His divine power for the benefit of His People, and that is called His "State of Exaltation."

² Remember Hebrews 1:1-4, and TEN divine names, titles, and descriptions of Jesus in those four verses! Jesus really is "Christ the Lord!" See last week's sermon, "Our Great Salvation" for some Advent thoughts on those verses. Hebrews chapter 1 is all about Jesus' Divinity; Hebrews chapter 2 is all about His Humanity!

The book of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8 to help us understand Jesus' State of Humiliation³.

There is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet." Hebrews 2:6-8

Jesus was made *a little lower than the angels* when He was *conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary*. For roughly 33 years, during His lifetime on earth, Jesus was "*a little lower than the angels*" according to His human nature. Although He was still the Almighty Son of God, He chose to humble Himself during His life on earth. He chose not to use His full divine power and authority. And we learn that the reason that Jesus did this was so that He would suffer death for all men. Jesus was born in Bethlehem in order that *He might taste death for everyone*.

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:9

The Book of Hebrews teaches us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in order to die in Jerusalem for the sins of the world. Jesus *tasted death* for you so that you will never have to *taste death*. This term "tasting death" does not just refer to dying; but more so it means facing the **Wrath of God** and being **punished** for our sins. Our sins are a heavy burden; our guilt is a terrible weight; but Jesus took it all for you. Every act of disobedience; every immoral thought, word, or deed --> it all fell on Him. Jesus took your place under the **Wrath of God**, He was **punished** for your sins, and you are now *set free*! You are *forgiven*! You have a *new life* to live! You will not die in your sin; but you will live because Jesus humbled Himself, *being made a little lower than the angels*, so that He could die on a cross for you. That is how much the

³ Psalm 8 is wholly Messianic as it teaches us about the deep humiliation and ultimate exaltation of the Lord Jesus. In addition to the book of Hebrews, Jesus teaches with Psalm 8 in Matthew 21:15-16; and St. Paul refers to it in 1 Corinthians 15:24-27. In an implied comparison with Adam, Christ is greater than Adam and has been given ultimate authority over all things because He is the Messiah: to One Who saves all men by His death and resurrection. {The reason we know that Psalm 8 is Messianic is because the Holy Spirit uses it that way in the New Testament by quoting it and applying it to Jesus: the Messiah!}

Father loves you; that is how much the Son cares about you! This is why Jesus was born in Bethlehem!

The book of Hebrews even goes further, and helps us to understand what this means using *another* word picture! This time Jesus is seen as the **Pioneer of our salvation!**

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the Pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.
Hebrews 2:10

The idea a **Pioneer** is that Jesus has made the way safe for us through His suffering. **JESUS HAS GONE FIRST**; He died, He was buried, He rose from the dead and He entered the glory of heaven! **The way is open now; and the way is safe for you!** Jesus is the **trailblazer** through death, burial, resurrection, and into glory! You will be safe when it is your time to go through death and burial, because on the other side is resurrection and glory! Jesus, who was made *a little lower than the angels*, has **Pioneered the trail** of our salvation for us!

This is why He came into the world!

This is why He was born in Bethlehem!

He tasted death for all of us; and He makes safe the way through death and into life!

Jesus, the **Pioneer** of our salvation, the One who **tasted death** for us and all people, also sets us free from the devil and the fear of death!

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hebrews 2:14-15

When Jesus **tasted death** for you by dying on the cross and rising from the dead, He also **destroyed** the power of the devil. *Satan has no power over you whatsoever.* All he can do is *tempt* you, *suggest* that you do evil, *lure* you into

shame and vice. But he has **NO** actual power over you; he cannot make you do anything. There is no such thing as “*the devil made me do it.*”

Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection on the Third Day has destroyed the devil. **Whenever you are tempted, you have to remember this!** You are not a helpless victim! Christ has defeated him! *The devil and his demons have no power over you whatsoever!*

In addition, you have been *set free from the fear of death*. We do not live our lives in guilt, fear, nor the dread of death. That kind of terror and dread of dying is described as “*lifelong slavery.*” The fear of death can cripple you; it can paralyze your life; it can affect how you live your life. It’s a terrible slavery of fear, dread, and nonstop worry⁴. You have been set free from fear through the death and resurrection of Christ. Death is not the end, Jesus has promised you the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. He is the *Pioneer* who has made the way safe for you!

Although none of us are looking forward to death and dying; we don’t live in dread and fear of it. We live in hope, and peace, and conviction of eternal life because of the Lord Jesus Christ! We live lives of freedom and joy in Christ – holy lives of loving God and serving others!

The Christmas story reminds us that Jesus **humbled** Himself, making Himself a “*little lower than the angels*”, in order to be the *Pioneer* of your salvation. He *tasted death* for you and all people, He has *destroyed any power the devil had over you*; and He has *set you free* from the dread and fear of dying! *Jesus humbled Himself so that you will be exalted to eternal life in Heaven!* This is why Jesus was born in Bethlehem: this is the work He came to do for you!

Amen!

⁴ Covid has demonstrated this. It has forced all of us to examine ourselves and our trust in Christ when it comes to the possibility of death and dying. Living in the fear of death can imprison you in your own home. Much of the “politics of Covid” is driven by the unbelieving world’s fear of death. Be sure to examine your heart, and make sure you are not living in the fear of death --> that is EXACTLY what Christ has set you free from!