

Fully Human, Fully God
A Message by Rev. Dr. Richard Lapehn
First Presbyterian Church of Barberton: December 24, 2018

Scripture: Hebrews 2:1-7; Philippians 2:6-11

I. Have you ever met someone is full of themselves? By that I mean the type of person who looks in the mirror each morning and says to their reflection: “you got it goin’ on. There’s no one quite as talented, brilliant, and good-looking as you.”

Perhaps, you can picture someone in your mind who fits that description. But even the most vain and proud person we know cannot compare to the claims of some persons who have gone before us.

The pages of history are crowded with men (and I really cannot think of a single woman who fits this description) who claimed to be divine, who claimed to be gods.

Think of the despots and dictators who claimed divinity: Alexander the Great, Tutankhamun, Julius Caesar, Adolph Hitler, Mao Tse Tung, etc.

Regarding Hitler’s claim to divinity, many people may not remember a letter that Pope Pius XI wrote in opposition to Hitler in 1937. The Pope’s letter was called, “With Burning Heart,” and in that public letter the Pope scorned Hitler for his claims to godhood.

Not only did many German citizens describe Hitler as their savior, but Hitler on occasion compared himself favorably to Jesus Christ. History tells us that Hitler died in a bunker in Germany and was never heard from again.

Alexander the Great considered himself to be divine. He referred to his biological father, Philip II, as “my so-called father.” Alexander promoted the idea that he was instead the divine son of Zeus himself.

While still in his early thirties, Alexander died and was never heard from again. He, like all the others who claimed divinity, was not divine. History is crowded with men who would be gods, but there is only one God who would be a man.

That is the essential fact about Jesus of Nazareth that we celebrate this evening. “Fully human, fully God,” is the way we describe the dual nature of Christ. In the earliest creed in the Christian church, the Nicene Creed, the earliest disciples spoke of Jesus as “very God of very God.”

Jesus was not partially human, partially God, as some may be tempted to say. He was not a human who worked harder at being good than the rest of us. Jesus was not a human who received heavenly enlightenment and was granted divinity because he was smarter than the rest of us. Jesus was fully human, fully divine.

II. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we’re reminded that Jesus was in the very nature God, but made himself nothing, taking the appearance of a man. He humbled himself.

The almighty became vulnerable and weak as an infant for your sake and mine. The omnipotent one became a tiny newborn, receiving the nurturing love of Mary and Joseph as he lay in the manger.

There are many sources of power in our world: wind, water, and the combustion engine are all powerful.

I remember one day when I found out the power of a simple riding mower. As a pre-teen and teenager, I mowed the lawn for my home. We had a small, red Toro riding mower for the big parts of the lawn and a green lawn-boy push mower to use around the trees and the small side yard.

Early that spring, my parents went to a local nursery and bought a tree for the middle of the yard. My Mom loved big trees and

she imagined it providing shade to the back porch in years to come.

One day I am on the riding mower and my Dad comes outside with his new camera to test some of the features. He takes some photos of the trees and lawn, then calls my name. As you make your next pass, turn to me so I can try an action photo.

The only problem was my next pass was right in line with the precious sapling that had been lovingly planted in the middle of the yard. You guessed it: mower 1, sapling 0. The power of the mower is greater than the strength of a newly planted sapling.

Perhaps, the greatest source we can measure is the power we find in creation, in our solar system and on earth.

One-hundred thirty-five years ago, an example of great power was felt. The most powerful explosion in recorded human history took place in 1883. A volcano erupted on an island in Indonesia called Krakatoa.

The sound from the blast was heard 3,000 miles away. Can you imagine a sound in Seattle that is heard in Jacksonville, Florida? That's the radius this sound carried.

The surface temperature of the Earth was measurably lower for a few months after the eruption because of the amount of ash hurled 120,000 feet into the atmosphere that blotted out the sun. The shock wave from the blast circled the earth's crust seven times, and sea surges were detected in the English Channel.

The entire island of Krakatoa disappeared that day along with over 30,000 residents of that and nearby islands.

The power of the volcanic explosion on Krakatoa was so great that the horrific nuclear explosion at Hiroshima pales in comparison. Krakatoa was 13,000 times greater power than the nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Six cubic miles of rock were ejected from the volcanic cone. Unimaginable power!

Yet, the power of Krakatoa can never be compared to the power of God.

And it is that power that Jesus emptied himself of in order to enter our world as an infant in Bethlehem.

III. When Jesus was born into the Middle Eastern world filled with Greek thought, the idea that God could take a body was crazy. To the Greeks, the body was akin to a prison. The spirit was good, but the body was evil, filled with disease, frailties, and weakness.

The Greek philosopher, Plutarch, believed, “it was nothing less than blasphemy to involve God in the affairs of the world.” Why would God care about the simple lives of creatures, human or otherwise?

If the whole body is corrupt as they thought then why would God ever become like us, taking on human likeness, fully God, fully human?

God would and did take on human form in order to fulfill the ancient promise spoken by God’s prophets.

In the book of Hebrews, we read, “For surely it is not angels that Jesus was sent to help, but Abraham’s descendants (you and me!). For this reason, Jesus had to be made like us in every way in order to make proper and eternal atonement for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:16,17).

In Christ, the ruler of eternal time appears in a specific time and place, not out there and up there, but right here among us in a humble stall.

God with us means that the human body is not corrupt. For our human body is home to our eternal spirit, just as Jesus’ physical self was filled with the very nature and person of God the Son.

History is littered with the claims of fallible, inept people who wanted to be perceived as gods.

Tonight, we worship the only true God who would become human. In order to know you and me, in order to suffer for you and me, in order to save you and me, God the Son is born in Bethlehem.

Merry Christmas. Amen.