

Palm Sunday
March 28, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Philippians 2:5-11
Our Humble and Exalted Savior

Dear Friends in Christ,

Who is Jesus? A young child can tell you that Jesus is the Savior. We teach our Sunday School and catechism students to know that Jesus is true God and true Man in one person. Luther said, “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.” Theologians before and after Martin Luther studied the two natures of Christ and came up with fancy theological terms to try and understand how God and man are in the one person of Jesus Christ. They used terms like *genus idiomaticum*, *genus maiestaticum* and *genus apotelesmaticum*. Part of the reason theologians use terms like this is because they are theologians and like to use big terms. But the other reason is that they were trying to understand why the Son of God would need to sleep or why the Son of Man would be able to walk on water and how Jesus being both God and man works for our salvation.

Maybe the theological terms are not for you. However, we also want to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. A child like faith in Christ is praised in the Bible. Therefore we hold to the simple explanation of who Jesus is, true God and true man in one person. We do not go beyond. Instead we build on it as we learn more and more about what that means through the Scriptures. A deep knowledge and appreciation for the two natures of Christ leads to a life of faith and having the same attitude as Christ. Today’s appointed reading from God’s Word takes us into the deep end as we consider our humble and exalted Savior.

Philippians 2:5–11

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul is writing to the believers in Philippi and encouraging them to have the same humble attitude as Christ. If Paul stopped after the first phase of verse 5, the believers might have just ignored the encouragement. We don’t really like being told what to do. If we are told to be humble, our sinful nature rebels and asks, “Why, what is in it for me?” “Why should I let someone else get their way?” “Why should I give up my rights for someone else?” Just think about the natural response to asking a child to let their sibling go first. “But they went first last time! But they will take the best piece!” Of course, this selfishness is not limited to children.

So how is Paul going to convince a bunch of self-serving sinners to humbly serve each other. He tells them about Christ. He tells them about the Savior who humbled himself for them. Let’s look at who this Savior is.

Jesus Christ is “*in very nature God*.” Paul doesn’t leave much room for objections. Jesus did not one day become God. He was always God. Jesus did not at some point give up being God. He is

the God who existed before the universe and he was still God when he was born of the virgin Mary. He is still God when he was hungry and thirsty and when the crown of thorns pierced his brow. He was still God when he died and when he rose. And Jesus Christ is still God as he sits at the right hand of his Father and will remain God forever. When Mary wrapped her son in swaddling cloths, she held God in her arms. When the disciples talked with Jesus, they talked with God. For Jesus is in very nature God.

However, Jesus *“did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”* In other words, Jesus did not use his divine power and glory to show off. He did not perform miracles for personal gain. He would not entertain King Herod with miracles. When Jesus used his power as true God it was for a specific purpose. It was a sign for people to believe that he is the promised Savior so that people would believe in him and be saved. The displays of his power were for the temporal and eternal benefit of sinners, not for himself.

Paul next explains that Jesus *“made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”* Jesus did not get rid of his divine power and glory as God. He did not cease to be true God when he was conceived and born. And yet it looked like he did. The Son of God goes from true God with unlimited power and eternal glory to a weak human baby who needs parents to care for him. He goes from being worshiped by the saints and angels in heaven to being worshiped by a handful of dirty shepherds and then hunted down by murderous King Herod.

Jesus did not even take on the form of an average human being. He became a human being in humble circumstances. Though the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, Jesus did not own property or possessions while he walked the earth. Though he created the universe, he grew up in a lower, working class family. He wasn't the most handsome man in the area. His friends were fishermen and tax collectors and those considered sinners and outcasts by much of society. No one looked at Jesus for the first time and thought, “That has to be the Son of God.”

This is the humiliation of Christ. He was and is and always will be true God. But from the time of his conception and birth to the time of his crucifixion and burial, he did not make full use of his divine power and glory. His humiliation is show most clearly in the events of Good Friday.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Here is where the theologians begin to come up with fancy terms to try and understand these marvelous mysteries. God cannot die. Jesus is God. Jesus dies. This truth is almost impossible for our limited human minds to comprehend. Yet it is true and marvelous. In Christ, we can be certain that the Son of God died on the cross. This means that the payment for sins was more than enough to cover all our sins. For the innocent blood shed on the cross was not only that of a perfect man, but that of the holy Son of God. How can God die for you? Only in Christ!

What humility Jesus shows to save us! Not only does he die, but he dies by crucifixion. This form of execution was reserved for the worst criminals. Crucifixions were for murderers and those who rebellion against the Roman government. It was a terrible way to die and could take days so that all who walked by would learn not to do what that person did. Jesus humbled himself to this shameful death to forgive us.

Paul has taken us to Good Friday and then he takes us to Easter Sunday and beyond.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The crowds on Palm Sunday saw through the humble appearance of Christ as he rode the colt into Jerusalem. They praised him just as all will do in the end. They had what they heard and saw of Jesus in the three years leading up to Palm Sunday. We have so much more revealed to us in the Scriptures. Christ is our humble and exalted Savior.

Therefore we also praise him, though we do not see him now. But the more we learn of our Savior, the more we desire to have his attitude. Therefore we will also humble ourselves to serve others. We do so because we know that Christ will also exalt us and bring us into his glorious presence in heaven.

You don't need to be a theologian and use big theological terms to describe the person of Jesus Christ. But we can have the same zeal as those theologians in learning about the person of Christ. As we go through this most Holy Week, focus on the two natures of your Savior. Focus on his humility that accomplished your forgiveness. Focus on his exaltation that shows his victory and proves that we will also have eternal victory in heaven. And Paul tells us that when we focus on Christ, our attitude in life will change to be like Christ's.

Amen.