

“WHEN YOU LOOK AT JESUS... ?”

Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve, 2008

What do you see when you look at Jesus? It is an important question. Herod saw a threat that he tried to eliminate as quickly as possible. The magi saw a new and powerful ruler to whom they would offer expensive and exotic gifts; before whom they would bow down to show honor and respect. And the shepherds saw a Savior, the anointed child of God. But what do you see?

Jesus asked the disciples, “What are the people saying about me? Who do they say that I am?” When most religious leaders looked at Jesus they saw a charlatan, a con man, a crook. But the common folk knew he was sent by God. When they looked at him they saw a prophet, like John the Baptist. Or maybe he was Elijah, the one the Lord would send to prepare the way for the messiah. When the Baptist looked at Jesus he saw the Lamb of God. And Peter saw the Christ. But when you look at Jesus, what do you see?

Some people only see Jesus as this helpless newborn baby lying in a manger in a stable. They come rejoicing over this birth, but then they also know that this child is no threat to their way of life. When we see an infant we often wonder what will become of this child. We rarely ask how a child, especially one who is not our own, will affect or alter our lifestyle. We ask, “What will he do when he grows up? Who will he become?” Mary did that. She pondered all these things in her heart. But Mary could not know that this child would grow up to walk on water, or calm the stormy seas. She could not know that he would give sight to the blind and unstop the ears of the deaf. She could not know that this child who she delivered would soon deliver her. When she looked at that baby cuddled in her arms she saw her son, who was born of God, and she looked on him with awe, with wonder and love. And she probably looked on him the exact same way when she held him again just after he had been taken down from the cross. For this was still her baby, her first born son, who was born of God. But when you look at Jesus, what do you see?

Sometimes we will hear of a parent who has planned the life of their child. They have trained that baby to be something, to be someone that the child may not wish to become. They seek to mold the child in their own image. And many parents were broken, were disappointed when that child chose their own way in life, or failed to achieve their parent’s expectations. When they looked at that child they saw

themselves. They try to force that child to live the life they dreamed of, as though the child had no say in the matter. And when they look at Jesus, they see themselves as well. They try to mold him into their image, as though Jesus had no say in the matter, instead of allowing themselves to be transformed into the image of Christ.

Understand that God left the heavens to take on human form so he could experience the same trials and temptations that we do in life. He came to identify with us, but not to become us. He showed us love and compassion, service and sacrifice. He came to teach that we might understand. He came to heal that we might be made whole. He came to show us a perfect life that we might imitate him. He died and rose again that we might live in him.

A couple of year ago in the Harrisburg Patriot News I read a letter to the editor suggesting that Christmas become a floating holiday. The author of the letter made some good points in that the date of Christ's birth was never mentioned in the Bible. Some suggest that Jesus might have been born in the Spring, around the time of the Passover. At that time the flocks would have naturally been out in the fields with their young. But the date is not mentioned in the Bible. And the early church did not celebrate his birth at all. The resurrection, though, that they celebrated every week. That is why we worship on Sunday, because Jesus arose on the first day of the week. So if we do not know when he was born, why not just celebrate it on the fourth Monday of December, or whatever day we choose?

That letter made some sense but it also irritated me. It made me angry. For once again we have an attempt by humanity to move God, to change Christ for our convenience, and that is just not right. God sacrificed himself when he left the glories of heaven to come to live among us. God sacrificed himself when he died for our sins on the cross of Calvary. And now so many people cry out, "Can't you make it easier on us God?" So many try to change Jesus into someone just like us so we don't have to alter our life, or our lifestyle. It is as if we take this child and sacrifice him once more on the altar of convenience, on the altar of pride, greed, and ego. But when you look at Jesus, what do you see?

When I look at Jesus, I see perfect love who has come from heaven to restore the earth and all that is in it to the world that God created and called “very good.” I see the divine vine that will restore and hold together all the harmonious relationships that

existed in the beginning, relationships between humanity and God; between earth and man; even between male and female. When I look at Jesus I see the Lion of Judah who will defend and protect me; the fierce warrior who can defeat any foe. I see the good shepherd who has come to search for the lost and the hurting, the sad and the lonely; the shepherd who calls us home where soul and spirit can be refreshed and renewed; where we can dwell in peace. When I look at Jesus I see the light that shines on a people, on all who are living in darkness; the light that chases away all fear, worry and despair; the light through whom I am encouraged and enlightened; the light who offers the hope of a new beginning.

When I look at Jesus, I see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who poured out his life for me, and for you, and for all creation. It is only the Lamb who was slain who is worthy of honor and glory and praise. For it is only in him and through him that hope can be born, that grace can be found, that life can be lived in joy and peace and love.

When I look at Jesus, I see the person I want to be. And tonight, when I look upon this babe, this holy infant, I do not wonder how this child can be like me. In truth, Jesus already made the choice to experience our life, to know our trials and temptations. He did that when he left the heavens to be born in a stable. He has already become like us. But even tonight, when I look at him lying in a manger I wonder how I can be like him. So when I reach out to hold him in my arms, to accept him, to bring him into my life, I am also stretching out my arms as though I am with him on that cross; that sin and fear and death will no longer be a part of me; that he might help me and heal me; that he might lift me to the wonders and glory, to the peace and joy that life was meant to be. Then shall my heart be strengthened. Then will my spirit be filled with joy. Then will my life be transformed in hope and peace, in grace and love. Then shall every fiber within me rejoice in the Lord, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to all on earth. For unto us a son is given. A child is born. God is with us. The Savior has come. And his name is Jesus.” May you see him. May you be like him, now and forever. Amen.