

Contemplating Christ

Jonathan K. Dodson | Heb 1:1-4 | December 22, 2019

A recent SNL skit depicted three families praying at Christmas dinner. One prayed, Dear Gender Neutral Spirit; another Dear Original American Jesus; and Dear Historically Correct Black Jesus. We laugh at the absurdity of political issues using prayer for one-upmanship. But it's interesting each issue is being religious, even the secular Gender Neutral family, reaching beyond politics for something. The Greek philosophers who laid the foundations for Western politics *believed a life organized by politics could never be the best or highest life?* John Baskin points out: ["it was the philosopher's attraction to thinking as its own reward, sometimes known as contemplation often correlated with the experience of wonder, that distinguished him.](#) This passage invites us to think, to enter the *experience of wonder by contemplating* not our pet issues but *Christ*. Why Christ? Passage gives us three reasons: Christ as Creator, Catharsis, and King.

Christ as Creator

The chapter opens, [Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.](#) What does it tell us about Jesus? First, *God the Father created the world through Jesus*. The Father did not create as a free agent, but as a member of an interdependent team. No one rides the bench in the Trinity. What one person of the Godhead does is interrelated to what other persons do. Take the incarnation. The Father sent the Son, the Son was conceived by the Spirit. Or the act of creation. The Father speaks, Let there be light. The Word, Jesus, is the one through whom he creates, and the Spirit hovers over the deep to create. Father/Son/Spirit. St. Irenaeus described this as the Father creating the world through the "two hands" the Spirit and the Son. [God is in touch with creation; it is sacred activity.](#) What we learn about Jesus is that he *mediates* creation. All things were made *through* him. How might this refresh our approach to the Christmas story. [As we consider the Christ child, we must remember Jesus isn't a mere baby, a creature in a manger; he is the Creator, the maker of babies, bones, cells, and DNA.](#) He is Lord of the flowers and the trees, the stars and the seas. This means we shouldn't make too little or too much of presents. The cotton used to fashion our clothing,

aluminum used in our tech, the flesh and bone of that annoying family member all made *through Jesus*. As the wrapping paper crinkles, as you slip on that new sweater, play with that new tech, look across the room at family, remember all made through Jesus. The material world is sacred, but it is also subservient. Verse 3 tells us Jesus also *sustains the universe*. The two hands that made the universe, sustain the universe. Were Jesus to cease upholding the cosmos it would collapse. Which means the order behind the universe is not an inert law or a principle but a grand *Person*. Even the winds and the waves obey him. It's why we marvel when we see newborn child, look down the Grand Canyon, up at spiral galaxies. We don't just agree; we *wonder*. Behind the material order of things is Jesus.

Christ as Catharsis

Christ is creator, and Christ is catharsis, *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high* (3-4). The Greek word for purification is the word Καθαρισμός, we get catharsis. We typically think of catharsis as something we do to deal with strong negative emotions: reboot, get a fresh start, a vacation, retreat. Attempts to deal with negative emotions associated with toxic relationships, messy divorce, bad boss. But *true catharsis* goes deeper than negative emotions. How? It gets to their source, which requires admitting that not only our acts need cleansing, our moral outer shell, but our inner self, our soul needs cleansing. We need *cleansing from inward pollution, what the Greek word means*. This is not something we do over Christmas break or in getting away from work. This is something that has to be done to us. Our chief issue is not that we have transgressed ourselves, or that others have transgressed us, but that we have transgressed God. The way we sinfully respond to difficult relationships and circumstances puts us at odds not just with one another but with the Majesty on high. We fail to enjoy his presence and peace. *Until* the creator becomes creature, the high comes low, lower than the manger, to the cross, where Jesus achieves true catharsis. He makes inner cleansing possible by paying the penalty for our pollution, our contaminated motives. He cleanses us inside and out by dying and rises to the right hand of the Father where he forever pleads our innocence with nail-scarred hands. When we consider this Christ, creator and catharsis, wonder starts to creep in. If you confess to him, he will cleanse your inner corruption, true peace. If you doubt it, look where Christ is: symbolically seated next to the Father

whispering in his hear *I forgive them. I've made them clean.* Catharsis is not something we do but something Christ has done for us.

Christ the King

Christ as Creator, Catharsis, and finally as King. His place at the right hand of the Majesty on high also signifies his royalty. Picture a cosmic temple, enter through the grand oak doors, and there in the center of the throne room sits Jesus Christ sharing in his Father's rule over all things. Around him is *radiance*. The word means brightness, [the brightness of the glory of God](#). *Beauty*. We also see *strength*. He upholds the universe *by the power of his word*, sits on a cosmic throne. In Jesus, we discover that rare combination of beauty *and* strength. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Fellowship makes their way through the mines of Moria, where they are attacked by orcs and Frodo is stabbed in the chest by troll. Miraculously, he survives. It turns out under his shirt he's wearing a chainmail made of *mithril*. Mithril was mined by the dwarfs for its unique properties of beauty and strength. It is lighter and stronger than steel but more beautiful than silver, never tarnishing or growing dim. Beauty and Strength. Gandalf says of the piece, "*It was worth ten times that of gold, and now it is beyond price...its worth was greater than the value of the whole Shire and everything in it.*" Is not *Christ* worth the whole *universe* and everything in it? A King strong enough to create and sustain all things and humble, beautiful enough to enter a manger, lay on a cross. Christ is our mithril. Creator and Catharsis. Sustainer and Purifier. God and man. Beauty and Strength. Surely he is worthy of our wonder.