

+ Hebrews 2:14-18 + He Looks Just Like Me! + 1st Sunday after Christmas + 30 December 2012 +

A child is born. At the beginning, all babies look alike. People always say, “He looks like him” or “She looks like her”, but really it’s hard to tell early on. Then the chubber cheeks and the pudgy baby fat start to give way to more defined faces and leaner muscles as the child starts to roll then crawl then stand then walk then run. As the child gets older, you start to see more defined physical features. She has her mother’s eyes. He has his father’s head. She looks like her grandmother. He looks like you.

Since Monday, we’ve rejoiced because a child was born—a poor infant come into this world. Joseph had to play father, midwife, and maternity nurse all at the same time, but the delivery went well in spite of the circumstances. Birthing a child on the unclean floor of a stable is not the first place a mother would want to have a baby, but that’s all they could find.

As Mary rested from her delivery, Joseph checked over his adopted son. Ten fingers. Ten toes. Two beautiful eyes. Two ears. One nose. One hungry mouth uttering a loud cry. Joseph gently swaddled the infant in soft, homemade cloths. Perhaps he sang a simple Hebrew lullaby that he recalled his mother singing from years long gone. Joseph placed the newborn in his mother’s arms to nurse so he could clean out a feeding trough and make a “bed” of fresh hay. Later Mary lovingly laid her son there and all they could do was stare in wonder. “Who does he look like? Could this really be the Son of God? Are we really looking at the face of God himself? He looks like any other baby. He even looks like me!”

Over time the chubber cheeks and the pudgy baby fat gave way to more defined features and leaner muscles as the boy rolled then crawled then stood then walked then ran. Like any other boy, there were bumps and bruises and scrapes along the way, but Jesus was different than his siblings and his friends. It was clear he looked like his mother and really like any other boy running around the streets of Nazareth, but there were times when all Mary and Joseph could do was stare in wonder as they had in Bethlehem. “Could this really be the Son of God out there playing with his friends? He looks like any other kid. He even looks like you, Mary, but yet he is our God!”

There’s some reason to believe that the Lord blessed Mary and Joseph with other children after Jesus. They, too, came into this world in the natural way and looked like any other cute, pudgy baby. Over time, they grew and you could tell who had her mother’s eyes and who had his father’s hands. Surely like any other parent, Mary and Joseph looked on their children with pride and joy, but yet there was always a little sadness too.

You see, as a parent, you might feel a little pride in seeing something in a son or daughter that looks strikingly like you, whether that’s some expression or physical feature or the way they talk or walk or act—very much like yourself. You’re proud because that’s your child. That’s your gift from God, but yet for parents, there’s also a little sadness.

Perhaps you have a physical feature you don’t appreciate, but then you see it in your child. You have a personality trait that you’re not proud of, yet it becomes even more pronounced as the child gets older and starts acting or talking like you. The child glares like his father or criticizes like her mother. You see mimicked in your child the selfish way you act or the hurtful way you speak. While you’re proud of the positive ways you see yourself in your child, you’re saddened to see your own loveless, sinful ways in that same child.

When Mary and Joseph looked at their children, they saw what made them proud, but they also saw their own likeness, their own sins, their own failings reflected, but it was different with Jesus. With Jesus, joy filled Mary and Joseph’s hearts and a little sadness was always there too, but that sadness was different. Even as the memory lingered of the angel telling Mary that this boy would be **“the Son of God”** (Luke 1:35), they could never forget why the Lord commanded Joseph to name the baby Jesus—**“because he will save his people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21) They knew the price God demanded for sin. They knew it would cost the life of God’s beloved Son, their Son. The darkness of death would come one day to their beloved child, so he could save them and all people from their sins. When they looked at Jesus, yes, they saw their human son, but they also saw their God and Savior.

When you come to the manger-bed of your Savior, who do you expect to see? Do you expect to see a cherubic little child with beams of light radiating out from his head like so many depictions of Jesus in countless crèches? Do you expect to see God in all his bare holiness peering into your soul and judging where you’ll spend eternity? Do you have no expectation of what you’re going to see, because God seems faceless and distant and out-of-touch with what’s going on in your life? Or do you expect to see on that bed of hay the greatest wonder of all, the miracle of miracles—a baby swaddled warmly in cloths and sleeping peacefully? I hope that’s what you expect, because that’s what you’re going to find there!

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity...” Peer into that manger and see that the child looks like you. Count his fingers. Count his toes. See two eyes, two ears, two hands, two feet, a nose, a mouth, a belly button, a human being just like you. In fact, he looks so much like your average human being that it would be easy to dismiss him as anything more than another baby. Yet the writer of Hebrews reminds you. **“Since**

the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” No, this isn’t an ordinary human being that you see sleeping there, but he’s just as human as you are. He had to be if he was going to ***“save his people from their sins”***.

Peer into that manger-bed and gaze on that chubby little face swaddled so warmly and see there the face of God. Yes, you see a cute, little face, but you also see a conqueror, a deliverer, a helper. You see why God became a human being, and it fills you with both joy and sadness. There’s sadness because as Mary and Joseph knew so well, this child had to grow up in a sinful world, had to suffer through hell, and had to endure the darkness of death. At the same time, you’re also filled with great joy, because this child shares in your ***“humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”***

There’s so much to fear in this world—a country hurtling towards the precipice of a fiscal cliff, violent people attacking the innocent, terrorism and war and hatred and crime and immorality, but even for the most fearless, there’s one thing that enslaves all hearts in fear—death. You might not be afraid to die, but death is a fearful, terrifying, unknown, unnatural thing. It was never meant for human beings, but yet because we all sin, we all die.

Stare again with Mary and Joseph at the newborn lying in the manger or the little boy playing with his friends or the teen going to school or the adult walking the dusty paths of Judea and Samaria and Galilee, and see the answer to fear, your fear, the answer to death, your death. In Jesus, there is no reason to be afraid. Why do you think Jesus’ first words to his followers whenever he appeared to them were always ***“Don’t be afraid”***? Because he died and then conquered death by his own resurrection, Jesus grabs the chains of the fear of death wrapped around your heart and shatters them forever. What’s left to fear when he makes death a harmless sleep?

Peer into the manger and see a Savior who looks like you—a real human being, one who’s suffered through temptations of all kinds, one who’s been where you’ve been, one who knows what it’s like to be in your shoes, one who understands your weaknesses, yet see also the very real God who never gave in to temptation, who turned away God’s wrath forever by perfectly carrying out his Father’s holy will, who paid in full the payment for all that fills you with fear in the middle of the night. ***“For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants.”*** He comes to help you!

Peer into the manger and see your Brother. See the One who goes before the throne of his heavenly Father and intercedes for you, who serves as your holy, divine go-between. See him grow up and face temptation after temptation until that dark day when he willingly bears a cross for you. Sin and hell and Satan and the world roar and rave because they think they have the victory, but then see your Brother burst from his tomb on Easter morning. See Satan and death weep and wail because they’ve lost their power over you. See your Brother walk by your side as you go through each and every day of your life. See your Brother help you and hold you up when you stumble and fall. See your Brother help you when temptation attacks, and when you fail, see your Brother forgive you with the forgiveness he earned by enduring the death you deserve. ***“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help [you] who are being tempted.”*** See your Brother open the way to heaven for you when it’s time to close your eyes in death and then bring you safely there. See your Brother sit on the throne of God and rule all for your good. See your Brother return in glory to judge all people and raise you to eternal life.

Could that baby in the manger really be the Son of God? He looks so much like you and me. Could that child toddling around on the dirt floor of his home really be the Holy One of Israel? He looks so much like you and me. Could that boy running off to school with his friends really be the Savior of the world? He looks so much like you and me. Could that adult enduring hunger and thirst and loneliness and weariness and everything else this world throws at you really be both true God and true man? Could that man be your Brother and yet your Lord and Savior? Yes, that baby, that child, that boy, that adult is your God, and one day you will see him face-to-face. You will see that he is and always will be your conqueror, your hero, your deliverer, your Savior, and above all, he is your Brother too! Amen.