

**Monday, December 12 – Read Hebrews 2:14-15.** Our passage today is worth more than two minutes in a devotional. These verses connect the beginning and the end of Jesus’s earthly life. They make clear why he came. They would be great to use with an unbelieving friend or family member to take them step by step through your Christian view of Christmas. The term “children” is taken from verse 13 and refers to spiritual offspring of Christ, the Messiah. These are also the “children of God.” In other words, in sending Christ, God has the salvation of his “children” especially in view. John 11:52 tells of God especially “gathering the children of God who are scattered abroad.” God’s design was to offer Christ to the world, and to affect the salvation of his “children.” Christ existed before Mary became pregnant. He was spirit. He was the eternal Word and was with God and was God. But he took on flesh and blood and clothed his deity with humanity. He became fully man and remained fully God. The reason he became man was to die. As God – he couldn’t die. As man – he could – for sinners. He was born to die. Good Friday is the reason for Christmas. We do not need to fear death. We can be free. Free for joy. Free for others.

**Tuesday, December 13 – Read Hebrews 8:1-2.** The point of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ, God’s son, has not just come to fit into the earthly system of priestly ministry as the best and final priest, but he has come to fulfill and put an end to that system and to orient all our attention on himself ministering for us in heaven. The Old Testament tabernacle and priests and sacrifices were shadows. Now the reality has come and the shadows pass away. Use this illustration for children (and the rest of us too!) Suppose you and your mom get separated in the grocery store, and you start to get scared and panic and don’t know which way to go, and you run to the end of an aisle, and just before you start to cry, you see a shadow on the floor at the end of the aisle that looks just like your mom. It makes you really happy and you feel hope. But which is better? The happiness of seeing the shadow, or having your mom step around the corner and it’s really her? That’s the way it is when Jesus comes to be our High Priest. That’s what Christmas is. Christmas is the replacement of shadows with the real thing.

**Wednesday, December 14 – Read Hebrews 8:1-2.** Our passage is kind of a summary statement. The point is that the one priest who goes between us and God, and makes us right with God, and prays for us to God is not an ordinary, weak, sinful, dying, priest like in the Old Testament days. He is the Son of God – strong, sinless, with an indestructible life. Not only that, he is not ministering in an earthly tabernacle with all its limitations of place and size and wearing out and being moth-eaten and being soaked and burned and torn and stolen. Verse 2 says that Christ is ministering for us in a “true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.” This is the real thing in heaven. This is what cast on Mount Sinai a shadow that Moses copied. According to verse 1, our High Priest is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Jesus deals directly with God the Father. He has a place of honor beside God. So here we see – God and his Son interacting in love and holiness for our eternal salvation.

**Thursday, December 15 – Read Hebrews 8:6.** Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant. What does this mean? It means that his blood –the blood of the covenant (Luke 22:20, Hebrews 13:20) – purchased the fulfillment of God’s promises for us. It means that God brings about our inner transformation by the Spirit of Christ. And it means that God works all his transformation in us through faith in all that God is for us in Christ. The new covenant is purchased by the blood of Christ, affected by the Spirit of Christ, and appropriated by faith in Christ. The best place to see Christ working as the Mediator the new Covenant is in **Hebrews 13:20-21**. Read it now. The words “working in us that which is pleasing in his sight” describe what happens when God writes the law on our hearts in the new covenant. And the words “through Jesus Christ” describe Jesus as the Mediator of this glorious work of sovereign grace. So the meaning of Christmas is not only that God replaces shadows with Reality, but also that he takes the reality and makes it real to his people. He writes it on our hearts. He does not lay his Christmas gift of salvation and transformation down for you to pick up on your own strength. He picks it up and puts in your heart and in your mind, and seals to that that you are a child of God.

**Friday, December 16 – Read Philippians 2:9-11.** Christmas was God's most successful setback. He has always delighted to show his power through apparent defeat. He makes tactical retreats in order to win strategic victories. Joseph was promised glory and power in his dream (Genesis 37:5-11). But to achieve that victory he had to become a slave in Egypt. And how to go through many ups and downs to get to where God wanted him. That is God's way – even for his Son. He emptied himself and took the form of a slave. Worse than a slave – a prisoner – and was executed. But like Joseph, he kept his integrity. Read our passage again. This is God's way for us. We are promised glory – if we will suffer with him (Romans 8:17). The way up is down. The way forward is backward. The way to success is through divinely appointed setbacks. They will always look and feel like failure. But if Joseph and Jesus teach us anything this Christmas it is this: “God meant it for good!” (Genesis 50:20).