

# HERO WORSHIP

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Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

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Well, a very merry and blessed Christmas to you all and your families—a joyful time to rest, to renew our relationships with family and friends. Few things are as heart-warming as the squeals of delight from your children and grandchildren on Christmas eve and morn as the little ones open their presents, or the anticipation for a dinner with many of their favorite foods. Many of you grandparents will relate to the scripture which says: “Grandchildren are the crown of the aged...” (Proverbs 17:6), and “Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. / Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one’s youth. / Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them!” (Psalms 127:2-5) – of course, we knowing in our day that daughters are just as great blessings in today’s lesser patriarchally-centered culture.

But, of course, for Christians, this is a special time of the year to refocus on the eternal and contemplate the love of God for us as we remember His coming as a child two millennia ago. After all, the name “Jesus” means “God saves,” and “Emmanuel” is “God with us.”

“God. With. Us.” Remarkable, really, and the reason for our celebration. For the child is not only Man, but also divine, and thus truly Son of God while yet also “Son of Man” by His virgin mother’s humanity.

Of course, this second person of the divine Trinity did not come into being at the Incarnation; the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the one God in three persons—has ever existed and will ever exist—the source of all being/existence, and necessarily the one self-existent being.

How three persons exist in one God is far beyond our understanding—each one of the persons not part of God, but wholly God. A legend of St. Augustine relates him contemplating the Trinity and coming upon a child emptying ocean water into a hole in the beach. “You cannot possibly empty the ocean into that hole.” The boy replied: “I can sooner empty the ocean into this hole than you can understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity.” Then the child vanished.

A (very) limping analogy I use to try to explain God as Trinity is to think of any person. One might see the body and will as the Father, the intellect as the Son, and the person’s love as the Holy Spirit. All three of these go into making up that one person, mutually existing—but each is essential to making up that person. Can Bob or Betsy be who they are, their characteristic intellect, their will, or their love? All go into making the one being.

Now, one question often asked is: “But WHY did God create us?” The only answer is much like that of parents toward their children: To have those upon whom, made in His image, that He can bestow His infinite love and who can reciprocate with love, however unequally. Like a parent cherishes the little drawings their children give to them, so does God cherish our acts of love done for love of Him and each other.

Yet we sin against and offend one another. Again, as do parents, God sorrows when His children harm one another. But ... how can we very finite beings possibly make amends to an infinite God? Since nobody is, or can be, equal to God, Jesus—one of the Holy Trinity and thus God Himself—comes to make amends in our place.

God’s love is like that of a parent who accepts righteous punishment upon himself in order to save his child; this is like Jesus’s—God’s—love for us. Because God IS justice as well as love, the balance of justice must always be restored. Man offended, so Man must make restitution. But, since the infinite God IS offended, only infinite restitution would balance justice once again.

And so, God in the second person of the Trinity becomes both—God and Man—to make mortal, yet infinite, restitution—all out of love. Thus, the meaning of Jesus’ name: “God saves.”

This is why we go to church on Christmas, Easter and every Sunday, and every day that we can: to thank God for His wonderful gift. God’s coming to us in Jesus out of absolute and complete and total love.

Jesus is like the fireman who runs into a burning building to save you ... and even risks—perhaps give—his life to make sure you are safe. And only He shows the way out of the flames and to safety—a safety which is eternal life with God. He is our hero whom we quite literally worship.

And so, all the people and events and stories of Christmas in the Bible are for one purpose: to bring us to eternal happiness with God forever. For that is God’s one wish for us, that we be with Him and Mary and Joseph and all the saints, to be enfolded in the arms of love which is the Holy Spirit—now, always and forever.

So, thank Jesus before you go to sleep tonight and every night, knowing that the greatest gift received is not clothes, the newest electronic thingamajig, money or anything material, but rather the love of family and friends ... but, most of all, the love of God Himself. Have the most joyful Christmas season and new year ... and, to quote Dickens’ Tiny Tim: “God bless us, every one!”