



The Festival of the Presentation of Our Lord  
February 2, 2014  
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Hebrews 2:14-18  
**OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST**

Why did Jesus come to earth? That's really a question that our text sets out to answer, and it's fitting for us to think about that question a mere 40 days after Christmas on the Presentation of Our Lord. Why did Jesus come to earth? Why did God become a man? The answer can seem so simple for us because of our background and our education in Scripture. Very simply, he came to take our place. He came to die and to rise again, right? That's what Christmas is all about isn't it? It's about God taking our place as a man with a view towards his perfect life, death, and resurrection. The answer is simple, yet we so often struggle to remember it, don't we? So many people through so many different periods of history have gotten this answer wrong. And it can be easy for us to get it wrong too.

Think of the Jews who lived while Jesus was on earth. Many of the Jews in Jesus' day were expecting an earthly king. They weren't looking for a Savior from sin. Instead they wanted someone to overthrow Rome and reestablish their kingdom. They didn't expect someone who *was God* sharing in their humanity, they weren't thinking about that. They were thinking about setting up the line of David again. They were so engrained in their sacrificial religion that they failed to recognize what those sacrifices represented, or more accurately, *who* they represented. Then when the one who would be sacrificed once for all came to do his Father's work, they rejected him because they expected him as an earthly king instead of as the heavenly King that he was. Even the disciples wrestled with these concepts throughout Jesus' earthly ministry! Remember the question that they asked just before Jesus ascended into heaven, even after he died and rose again? "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" With that question they may very well have still been expecting an earthly king to defeat Rome and set up an earthly kingdom. They failed to have an eternal perspective. They had an earthly perspective. So, when faced with Jesus' death their hopes for an earthly kingdom died too.

Do we ever have such an earthly perspective? We don't struggle, I don't think, as much as those first century believers with the concept of Jesus, true God,

dying on the cross. Sure it's hard to wrap our minds around the fact that God died, but we take it for what it is because Scripture says so. I don't know if that's the earthly perspective that we struggle with as much. However, isn't it true that we would prefer to think of the risen and triumphant Christ rather than the suffering on the cross Christ? We often would prefer an empty cross rather than a cross with a corpus hanging on it because it reminds us of the gruesome nature of his death. We would prefer to think about him as ruling for our good, sitting at God's right hand, all things placed under his feet, relaying our prayers directly to God.

As we have that picture firmly and vividly in our minds, however, don't we often wonder about what Paul says in the last verse of our text? "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Don't we often wonder, "How can God really relate to me? Can he really understand what I'm going through? Jesus never had \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank!)" Don't we often think of Jesus' temptations as specific to what he went through so as to exclude him from our exact situation? How can he relate to me as a parent if he never had any children? How can he relate to women? How can he relate to husbands if he never had a wife? How can he sympathize with those who are dealing with this disease or that sickness if he never faced it himself? Does God, does Jesus really know how I feel? If he does he sure isn't doing much to make it easier, or to make me feel better, or to make my life simpler, or to take away my suffering. But do you see how our focus, just like those Jews of Jesus' day, turns to our earthly life? We struggle, just like they struggled, to have a truly eternal perspective. We struggle to see the value of Jesus who came as a man and to die as a man even though he was God. It's often hard to grab hold of heaven when we're here on earth and focused on this life. And if we're focused on this life, if we're focused on the Almighty God making this life easier for us, then our hopes, in a sense, die with Jesus on the cross, just like those Jews' hopes for Jesus as an earthly king died with him on the cross.

But, you see, that's the part that just doesn't add

up. Why did Jesus come? If it's for earthly reasons, then his death meant disaster, not triumph. But remember the simple answer to that question. Why did Jesus come? He came to take our place, to die and rise again. It wasn't to restore an earthly kingdom. It wasn't just to make my life easier here on earth. It was to destroy death itself by dying. It was to take away Satan's power by destroying death. And that's exactly what Jesus did with his death on the cross. That's the real comfort for us as believers, and it's something that only believers understand. Jesus' death meant the end of death and the end of Satan's power.

So what does that entail to take our place and die and rise? It meant becoming just like us in flesh and blood. "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."

Think of those Old Testament believers, faithfully fulfilling all those sacrifices day after day—and for what? They always had to make more sacrifices, didn't they? That old system just wasn't good enough to cleanse them completely, to make them worthy to stand in God's presence. They needed a high priest to represent them, but even the Old Testament high priest had to cleanse himself and then cleanse the people, and he had to do it repeatedly. That old system wasn't enough to cleanse sin for eternity. It was a shadow of the one who was coming. You see, they needed a different high priest, one who had no sin. That's why Jesus, the great High Priest, had to be true God, to be without sin in order to make his sacrifice, not just in a temple, but before God. Yet a high priest who was only true God wouldn't be much of a high priest because he couldn't really represent the people. He wouldn't be able to relate to them. That's why God came down and became a man. That's who Jesus Christ is. That's what makes him so unique and such a wonderful and comforting high priest! He is the one who takes hold of us and never lets us go so that he could take our place completely.

"For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." You see, Jesus is the perfect high priest because he was made like us in every way. He was able to take our place under the law and was able to fulfill the law completely. He fulfills it even in the

smallest ways. We see that in the Gospel account this morning. Every firstborn male of Israel was required to go to the temple to be presented to the Lord and redeemed with a sacrifice. Jesus was certainly no exception. Of course, Jesus was the very Son of God, so he came to his own temple. And there he found believers faithfully waiting for him. Those believers, Simeon and Anna, weren't waiting for an earthly king, but for the heavenly king who would destroy death. And he did just that.

When Jesus grew into a man he became the perfect high priest who would present not the sacrifice of an animal to God in the temple, but would sacrifice himself, the Son of God, as the perfect sacrifice directly before God in heaven, as Hebrews tells us later. How unnatural it must have been for God himself to die and become obedient to death itself! If he were just a man, then there wouldn't be anything strange about that. Everyone must die, and if that were the case for Jesus, then all hopes of his earthly rule would have faded with his death. But he came as the heavenly king who by his death he destroyed death itself. We no longer have to fear death because Jesus rose triumphantly from the dead, and that ensures that we will rise too and he will take us to be with him in heaven forever.



But there's more. Remember, Jesus is the great High Priest, the perfect High Priest who can relate perfectly to us. "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Jesus didn't come just to make our earthly lives easier. But as true man he does know exactly what we are going through. He doesn't need to have been in our exact situation to relate to us and to comfort us. He was true man. He faced the very same temptations. He faced the temptation to become frustrated, to become angry without cause, to be lazy, to be worried, to be greedy. He knows what these temptations are like. And he does help us. He isn't just another man who can be a good friend and relate to us. He is also true God and gives us strength through his Word. Plus, he's the great High Priest who appeals to God the Father on our behalf, relaying our prayers and always keeping us as the Father's number one priority. He directs history just for us to make sure that we will be counted as those with him in heaven at the end of time.

Why did Jesus come? The answer is so simple—he came to take our place. And yet that answer has so much to it! He is our perfect High Priest, perfectly able to comfort us as a brother, and perfectly able to bring us safely to heaven as true God. Amen.