

Introduction

- Who are you expecting at Christmas?
 - Christmas tree image
 - all decorations ready for having everyone round?
 - party people slide
 - getting all our arrangements for meals and family and parties etc sorted out...
 - but what is our image of God coming?
- A mere baby?
 - slide, baby, manger
 - for many that is their Christmas expectation of what God is like!
 - (and perhaps at other times in the year, the invisible man!)
 - (slide, invisible man!)
- Baby:
 - slide, first baby closeup
 - image of powerlessness, of weakness, helplessness
 - slide, second baby closeup
 - image of innocence
 - slide, third baby closeup
 - image of lack of experience, lack of history, of new beginnings
 - slide, baby tower
 - image of cuteness, sweetness
- But the Biblical picture of who it is that arrived in Bethlehem that first Christmas is completely different!

Exposition

(v.15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

- Visible likeness - making God clear and knowable.
 - image, nativity scene with Col 1:15
- Firstborn -> superior, literally "before all things", in sense of time and most importantly of status.

(v.16) For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

- (through this section and on v.17, there are 6 images of space)
- Jesus here declared the agent of creation; eg "let US made man in our image..." (Gen 1:26); or "Through him all things were made" (John 1:3).
- Creator also implies superiority to created order; to have created spiritual powers, for instance, implies the possession of greater power.
 - for these things were not created by the harnessing of latent forces (compare man and the atom bomb), but directly by the Son of God himself.

(v.17) He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

- "Before all things" suggests pre-eminence, though it carries a time sense too.
- Only in proper relation to the Christ do all things have their proper place.
 - so we look out on the world and all its pain, and see that - at its deepest root - all of that arises because sin has broken that proper union with him.
 - so we also look out on the world and realise that we possess the only thing that will bring ultimate healing, long term relief: relationship with the Saviour and Redeemer!

(v.18) And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

- "Head of the body" image

Colossians 1:15-23 Who is coming for Christmas? Fintry, 14/12/2008, pm

- Not just head of universe, but head of church - Jesus is pre-eminent, in first place.
 - like a family firm - without the MD, life and direction disappears (cf DJ Clarks?)
 - of like someone who is brain dead - body seems alive, heart pumping, lungs moving, but there is no consciousness, no purpose
- Without a living relationship with Christ, without him as the source of our life, the setter of priorities, the director of operations, we are dead - whatever the external appearance may lead you to believe.

(v.19) For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

- creator's hand image...

- Whole redemption history has been decided by God - not an accident, and therefore:
 - dependable, trustworthy;
 - truly the only way to God - there is no other, this is it, God has invested everything in Jesus, for he has poured his full nature into Jesus, nothing left over for any other approach.

(v.20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

- cross slide

- Wideness to God's plan, a bigness - remember this was written by a Jew from one small corner of an empire with still fairly small horizons!
 - whole universe is affected by what Jesus has done - not limited to some kind of spiritual experience, internal belief in the believer - but a relationship with Jesus Christ changes every aspect of life (Wilberforce and slavery; Tearfund etc and poverty).
- Backdrop: union with Christ was broken by sin - war had broken out.
 - peace can only come as the reason for the conflict is eliminated;
 - peace could only come as sin is carried away;
 - sin is carried away by the perfect sacrificial lamb of God.

(v.21) Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

- hands old and young slide

- Covered this ground already:
 - note that thought ("in your minds") as much as action make us evil;
 - do we harbour a grudge? are we resentful? envious? selfishly ambitious? seething inside, though sweet on the outside?
 - proof, if we needed convincing, that we are in our natural selves evil to the core!

(v.22) But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation

- hands old and young slide, with "now he has reconciled you"

- Peace comes only through Jesus' physical death and resurrection.
- The consequence is that we come into the Father's presence holy, pure, spotless.
 - another picture we have in the Scripture is "clothed in Christ's righteousness" - suggests posh clothes put on for a wedding or royal garden party, which we are desperately uncomfortable in!
 - but its not like that: holy and pure is now our true nature, in Christ, and the sin we are left with is more like the scab tissue of a healing cut.

(v.23) if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

- road slide (cf Road to Maturity)

- God has provided for us a glorious salvation in his Son, supreme over everyone and everything.
 - a salvation that we celebrate as we remember his death in the Lord's Supper.
 - but a salvation that we need to respond to!

Colossians 1:15-23 Who is coming for Christmas? Fintry, 14/12/2008, pm

- Summarise "*turn round and see the light sketch*" from student days!
 - folk with their backs defiantly turned on God, refusing to turn and see...!

Conclusion

- slide, people/crowd
- Colossians problem was that they'd drunk from the world view of those around them, and as a consequence reduced Christ to less than he was:
 - they were on the edge of worshipping angels and spiritual powers, because Christ was so spiritual, so impossible to know, so invisible he could have nothing to do with sinful matter - the angels were meant to mediate between God and man;
 - and they sought to win their salvation by doing things, by circumcision, by sabbath observance, by avoiding ritually unclean food, on top of accepting Christ as Saviour.
- So Paul points them back to the true Christ:
 - and as he does so calls them to respond in humble faithful service, dependent fully and only on the Lord.
- Have we drunk from the world view of those around us?
 - baby manger slide
 - do we have in our minds a weak, powerless Christ, a mere baby in a stable?
 - creation/space slide
 - as we approach Christmas, lets remember that the one who took on frail flesh was the one who created this universe, in all its wonder, with all his power...
 - cross slide
 - and the the one who took on frail flesh was also the one who died in our place, reconciling us to himself on the cross!
- Will we recognise the Christ-child for who he truly is?
 - and worship Him?