Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

For it was not to the angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of his suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself like-
wise partook of the same things that through death he might destroy
the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all
those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For
surely it is not angels that he helps but he helps the offspring of Abra-
ham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect,
so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the ser-
vice of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For be-
cause he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those
are being tempted.

Introduction — Our focus remains on Jesus’ Incarnation and what
that means for Christian disciples who follow him as their Lord and
Savior. This topic is, of course, at the very heart of Christmas. But it
also points the way forward, as we move into a new year and live lives
that are pleasing to God. For this, we return to the book of Hebrews.
Chapter 2 gives us the second part of the equation begun in the
previous chapter.

I. The Supreme Mediator — As noted last week, first century people
lived in a universe where angels were seen as God’s agents of
communication between him and us. However, the author of Hebrews
wants us to understand that it is Jesus—and only Jesus—who now
mediates this relationship between God and humans.

This is what being High Priest is all about. Jesus, who is God, comes
to us from the presence of God and draws us up into that presence.
He is the only Priest who can do that and the only Priest we need—the
only Mediator between God and us.

In 1:4, we read: Jesus has become “much superior to the angels.”
This is because, unlike angels, he knows what it is like to be God and
what it is like to be human. As John 1:14 tells us, Jesus is the eternal
Word who took on human flesh and dwelt among us.

As we saw last week, the Latin word for “priest” is pontifex. It is an
engineering term and referred to someone who built bridges. A priest
is a spiritual bridge-builder, who understands both sides of the chasm
over which he spans his bridge. Jesus is the great Bridge Builder; the
Mediator between us and God—for he is equal to both sides. Christ is
superior to the angels and any so-called priests because, according to
Hebrews 1 (and other New Testament texts), he is God. He is also
vastly superior to other professed mediators because, in addition to being divine, he is a perfect, sinless man: *the Man*.

**II. Humanity Demonstrated** — Our purpose in Hebrews 2 is to listen as Jesus speaks both about God and to God. To be more specific, let us listen to God the Son, *as one of us*, speak about and to God the Father.

But first, let’s observe how the author of Hebrews, here in chapter 2, demonstrates the genuine humanity of Jesus. It is a passage which takes us deep into the mysteries of the Gospel.

First, there is the matter of God’s design for humanity. The author begins by quoting Psalm 8: “What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?” (*Psa. 8:4*).

In Psalm 8 we are given a biblical theology of God’s original design for the human race. The phrase, “a little lower than the angels” is literally, “a little lower than God (*Eloheim*).” The Greek translation, from which the writer of Hebrews is quoting, renders “elohim” as angels. But either way, the text points to the greatness of mankind in the Lord’s scheme of things.

“Crowned with glory and honor,” we were meant to reflect the nature and character of our Creator. This should be the the life focus for each of us—and shape the dignity we bestow on one another.

Then, in verse 8, the author writes: “Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.” That’s great news but, right now, it’s not the whole story. This leads the author to then say: “At present, we do not see everything in subjection to him.” In other words, conditions here on earth and among the human family are not what they should be, nor what they will be. Something has gone very wrong.

I hardly need to list the details: disease, poverty, corruption, war, crime, addictions, strife, dishonesty…. You know how it goes. Which led Blaise Pascal, the Christian mathematician and philosopher to declare: “All the miseries of man prove his grandeur; they are…the miseries of a dethroned monarch.” However...
The author writes: “But we see him.” Who? Jesus! In the midst of what one writer calls this “Garden that has become a Cemetery,” we see one human being who is, indeed, crowned with glory and honor.

This is where reading Hebrews 1 and 2 together comes into play. According to Hebrews 1, this human of Hebrews 2 is God Himself! The One we see in the midst of all the devastation is God. Remember: “You shall call his name Immanuel, God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

In this chapter, the author includes a number of key phrases which explain what the Incarnation of Christ involved:

* “A little lower than the angels” (v. 9) means that the One who originally made the angels and the stars is now in some ways beneath them!

* “Share in flesh and blood” (v. 14) and “like his brothers in every respect” (v. 17) mean that Jesus is not an ethereal phantom of some sort, but a physical human being.

* “Suffered when tempted” (v. 18; cf. 4:15) means that Jesus went from the omnipotence of being God, in which he was the total master of all forces and situations, to the human vulnerability of being attracted to wrong decisions and actions—such as taking the easy way out so as to avoid suffering.

By the way, biblical scholar Oscar Cullmann writes that this little phrase (v. 18) is “the boldest assertion of the complete humanity, the human character of Jesus, in the New Testament.”

* “Taste death for everyone” is, of course, the ultimate jump from deity to humanity, as well as being Christ’s great gift to us! Dorothy Sayers brings this out in her Christmas play, He That Should Come. She has the three Magi express their hopes as they seek the newborn King. One of them, Balthazar, voices the feeling of countless humans:

All I ask is the assurance that I am not alone,
    some courage, some comfort against the burden
    of fear and pain.
About my palaces the jungle creeps and winds.
Famine and plagues are my fireside companions
    and beyond the circle of the fire, the glare of human eyes.
Fear in east, fear in the west,
armies and banners marching and garments rolled in blood.
Yet this is nothing if only God will not be indifferent.
If He is beside me, bearing the weight of His own creation,
if I may hear His voice among the voices of the vanquished,
if I may feel His hand touch mine in the darkness,
if I may look upon the hidden face of God
and read in the eyes of God
that He is acquainted with grief.

In Hebrews 2, we find that the God of Hebrews 1 is acquainted with our grief. As one of us, he actually tastes death! And because of that, he is somehow “perfected” through his suffering (v. 10)...a great and deep mystery, indeed!

Think of it this way: A seed may be perfect as a seed, but it is not yet what it is intended to be until it grows out of its “seedness.” It grows by dying, by giving up its life to the soil. Likewise, God the Son, is so completely human that he becomes what he is intended to be, our risen Savior, through suffering unto death.

III. Why? — Why did “He who is God” become an actual human being? We are given the answer in three phrases.

The first is that “he might destroy the one who has the power of death” (v. 14). The Son enters into death; the devil’s realm. He experienced death in order to defeat it. The old Welsh preacher Peter Joshua put it this way: “When death stung Jesus Christ it stung itself to death.”

The second answer to the question Why? is this: to “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (v. 15). By conquering death through dying our death, Christ sets us free from “the emotion that distorts our existence.” As a result, death no longer has the finality it once had.

All of this is made possible because God the Son, as one of us, deals with the problem of sin which brought death to us in the first place. He becomes fully human to atone for sin, to give himself as the final sacrifice that removes the barrier sin had erected between us and God. He becomes the merciful and faithful High Priest who is simultaneously the One who offers the sacrifice and the sacrifice itself.
The third reason for Christ’s Incarnation is to bring “many sons [and daughters] to glory” (v. 10). He is the Pioneer of our salvation, clearing the way and leading us into the fullness of our salvation which is our “glory.” We were originally created to reflect the nature and character of God. And, as one of us, God’s Son is bringing us back into that original design. Which is why he is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters (v. 11).

How’s that for granting dignity? The most perfect human who ever lived, God in human flesh, is not ashamed to stand up and point to us and say: “They are my brothers and sisters.”

In Luke 15:2, the Pharisees say of Christ: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” The word “welcome” means “as members of one’s family.” And that’s precisely what Jesus does to those who embrace him as their Savior-brother. His redemptive work cleanses us of our sin and draws us into the family of God.

IV. Jesus Weighs-in — Beginning with verse 12, we now hear God the Son speak about and to God the Father.

He says, “I will tell of your name to my brothers.” This is the driving force of Jesus’s earthly ministry. He lives and dies to reveal the name of his Father. In Scripture, “name” equals character. If you knew someone’s name, you knew something about that person’s true nature. Jesus came here to make his Father’s nature and character known to the world. He lives and dies to show us who the Father is and what he is like. As Christ prays in John 17, “I have made your name known and I will continue to make it known.”

Likewise, we read in verse 12, “in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” Given what the Son knows about the Father, it’s only natural for him to shout it from the housetops, so to speak.

Think of the mystery here. When we sing our praises to God, we are not singing alone. Yes, we are singing with one another. But the real mystery is that we are also singing with Jesus. He is the great Worshiper in the middle of all truly Christian congregations. The Father exhorts both the angels and us to worship his Son. The Son also invites us to join him as he worships his Father. All of this is enabled by the Spirit who indwells each of us.
Then, in verse 13, Jesus declares, “I will put my trust in him.” To trust God is the greatest worship of all—the greatest response you and I can give to the revelation of the Father. Given who he is, the Father deserves our ultimate trust: at every moment and in every circumstance. I can’t think of a more basic reality for us to cultivate and practice at the beginning of a new year. And what better way to begin than with our participation in the Lord’s Supper.

Consider this statement from Kevin Vanhoozer, which takes note of Jesus as our Mediator and how that is reflected in Holy Communion:

The Lord’s Supper is all about what is in Christ, for what there is in the Lord’s Supper is both a summary of Christ’s story and a taste of his reality. Jesus himself instituted this practice at the Last Supper, when he told his disciples, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me…. This cup…is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:19-20). When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). When we remember Jesus atoning death on the cross by sharing the bread and wine, thereby recalling Israel’s Passover meal as well, we act out a verbal, visual, and altogether visceral summary of the whole drama of redemption. Celebrating the Lord’s Supper is a present activity that looks back to a past saving event and to the future coming of the Lord.

To celebrate the Lord’s Supper is consequently to obtain a precious taste of ultimate reality. For what is in Christ, what is ultimately real, is communion, with God and with one another. In celebrating the Lord’s Supper, the church is not playing charades but participating in this reality, in both its vertical and horizontal dimensions. In celebrating the Lord’s Supper, we participate bodily, in word and deed, in the fellowship that Christ has established between God and the people of God and within the people itself. In a word, what there is in Christ is peace with God and our fellow Christians. [The Pastor As Public Theologian; 2015; pp. 171-172]