

*“We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.” –Nicene Creed*

As we prepare our hearts for the celebration of Jesus’ birth, it is natural for our attention to focus on his becoming human in the incarnation: the poor mother Mary bringing the Savior of the world into the world in ill-fitting surroundings; the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes; sharing his nursery with animals; the visit by awestruck shepherds who pierce the quiet of the Bethlehem night with babbling about a star and angels; and the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. Yet our hymn this Christmas Eve, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” reminds us that what makes this story of a baby, “no room in the inn,” and shepherds a moment “into which angels long to look” is the fact that this baby, the incarnate Son of God, is, as the Creed says, the one through whom all things were made.

This hymn, dating back to the Fourth Century, is a quintessential song of praise. Worship was the appropriate response by the angels that first Christmas, and in this season marked by busyness, travel, family, gifts, food, and marketing, we are wise to remember that worship is our appropriate response this Christmas as well.

Worship is the heart’s orientation towards what it values the most. It can be an experience or object that promises fulfillment. It may be a sense of significance derived from achievement or a mark of security that we believe will finally bring our hearts to rest. However, the truth is nothing created fulfills that desire. As Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, said, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” We are hard-wired to worship. It is not optional. The only question we have is what or who we will worship, and how will we do it.

What do we do in this season when everything around us will distract us from orienting our hearts to Jesus, the incarnate Son of God and our heart’s source of true satisfaction? Each of us will have to stir up the true worship for the One who made us and resist the temptation to make what is created the object of our worship. We would be wise to follow examples of saints before us, and for this we can be thankful for “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” and the praise of those first messengers of the *good news* of Jesus’ birth, the angels (Luke 2:10-14). As we direct our hearts in worship to God, may their words renew our vision for who Jesus is, was, and will be this Christmas and every Christmas to follow until He returns again.

### **Read John 3:16-21**

1. Do the above commentary, verses in the Gospel of John, or verses in the hymn evoke thoughts, emotions, insights for you? Discuss.
2. The word “condemned” is written several times. Discuss this word in our current culture. When people think of Christianity do you think they know God’s heart and desire not to condemn?
3. Tim Keller says that “our hearts are idol-making factories.” How does this manifest in Houston, your workplace? Your own life?
4. How do we do what Jonathan mentioned above: “stir up the true worship for the One who made us and resist the temptation to make what is created the object of our worship”? Discuss practically what this can look like.

**Lyrics to  
"Of the Father's Love Begotten"**

Of the Father's love begotten  
Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is the Alpha and Omega,  
He is the Source, the Ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see  
Evermore and evermore

Oh, that birth forever blessed  
When the Virgin, full of grace,  
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,  
Bare the Savior of our race,  
And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,  
First revealed His sacred face  
Evermore and evermore.

O ye heights of heaven, adore Him;  
Angel hosts, His praises sing;  
Powers, dominions, bow before Him  
And extol our God and King.  
Let no tongue on earth be silent,  
Every voice in concert ring  
Evermore and evermore.

This is He whom Heaven-taught singers  
Sang of old with one accord;  
Whom the Scriptures of the prophets  
Promised in their faithful word.  
Now He shines, the Long-expected;  
Let creation praise its Lord  
Evermore and evermore.

Christ, to Thee, with God the Father,  
And, O Holy Ghost, to Thee  
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving  
And unending praises be,  
Honor, glory, and dominion,  
And eternal victory  
Evermore and evermore.