

Philippians 2:5-11

Summary: Paul quotes an early Christian creed to link the two themes of the early part of this letter. This poem may be one of the earliest preserved writings about Jesus and it carries interesting indications about early Christian belief.

⁵ *This is how you should think among yourselves—with the mind that you have because you belong to the Messiah, Jesus:*

⁶ *Who, though in God's form, did not
Regard his equality with God*

As something he ought to exploit.

⁷ *Instead, he emptied himself,*

And received the form of a slave,

Being born in the likeness of humans.

And then, having human appearance,

⁸ *He humbled himself, and became*

Obedient even to death,

Yes, even the death of the cross.

⁹ *And so God has greatly exalted him,*

And to him in his favour has given

The name which is over all names:

¹⁰ *That now at the name of Jesus*

Every knee under heaven shall bow—

On earth, too, and under the earth;

¹¹ *And every tongue shall confess*

That Jesus, Messiah, is Lord,

To the glory of God, the father.

Why would Paul recite a poem/hymn here?

We already know from the psalms that poetry and music were already a major part of Israelite liturgy and practice. Part of the appeal of this method is that it allows for information to be communicated and memorized easily. This is part of what makes this passage interesting, as it is possible (though not certain) that this is from an earlier source in the church. Paul in this context wants the church to look at the life of Christ, going from equality with God to a peasant, as the ultimate expression of humility. You may recognize parts of this from the Nicene/Apostles' Creeds, such as Jesus being crucified, dying, and then being raised to a position of honor with God.

Adam was also created in God's form although he lacked equality. How do the motivations of Adam & Eve contrast with those of Jesus?

Adam and Eve were in the image of God, but sought to elevate themselves by eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good & evil. Jesus, on the other hand, starts at a more elevated position yet instead humbles himself to the level of a slave, willing to obey God even when it means a gruesome death. This role of Jesus as a “second Adam” is a favorite theme of Paul in other epistles.

In verse 10, the hymn directly quotes Isaiah 45 (vv. 22-23 "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.""). This is one of the most plainly-stated appeals to monotheism in the Old Testament. Why would this be included in the hymn?

From the very beginning, the idea of Jesus being equal to God would have been problematic in a religion that considered God to be a singular deity. In

this passage, we can see some early indications of a developing theology that eventually leads to the trinity. For the reciter of this hymn, there is no conceptual difference between knees bowing to Jesus and knees bowing to God.

How can we learn from the perfect example of humility in Jesus?