

# Christmas Eve 2008

Mix the singing of Christmas Carols and the reading of the two passages: NLT probably would be nice.

- Matthew 2:1-12
- Luke 2:8-20

Tonight we are celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus. We sing about the stories, we read the stories, we depict the stories, and we preach the stories year after year. They are beautiful stories.

But I don't think that I have ever thought so much about an often-overlooked aspect of the whole story as I have this year. Let's just review the story quickly. Angels appeared to both Mary and Joseph telling them that Mary would become pregnant by God the Holy Spirit. They traveled to Bethlehem to register for the Roman Census declared by the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus. When they arrived at Bethlehem, they couldn't find a hotel to stay in. But a gracious inn-keeper allowed them to stay in the stable that housed the domestic animals. At that time, Mary gave birth to Jesus. They made a crib out of a feed trough, padded it with hay, and wrapped the Baby Jesus in a blanket and laid Him down to sleep.

Meanwhile, angels appeared to shepherds while they were out in the pasturelands with their herds. During the night, these angels appeared to the shepherds and told them that the Jewish Messiah was born. The shepherds went to Bethlehem to find and worship Jesus.

In the Far East, wise men saw the star of Jesus appearing to the west of them. They followed the star and found Jesus in Bethlehem. Both the shepherds and the wise men came to pay homage to this newly born king. They brought gifts, and worshiped. The shepherds returned to their flocks and the wise men returned home. Mary continued to treasure these moments and ponder them throughout her life.

And perhaps not quite accurate, the modern day manger scenes do capture the essence of the birth of Jesus. The manger scene usually pictures Mary and Joseph with the Christ child sleeping in the manger. Animals are gathered around and surrounding the Holy Family are shepherds and wise men with their gifts.

I wonder how Mary and Joseph viewed Jesus. I wonder what the Shepherds and wise men thought about Who Jesus was. I wonder what we think about when we celebrate Christmas.

Mary and Joseph saw a child who was designated the Messiah and future king, someone very special that they would be responsible to care for and protect. The wise men asked where the newborn king of the Jews was. The Shepherds were looking for the Messiah, the king of the Jews. We see the Baby Jesus as One Who will grow up someday to die for our sins.

What I don't think the wise men, the angels, King Herod, Jewish leaders, Mary and Joseph didn't understand was that this little Baby was actually the God of the universe. I also tend to forget that as I study through the Christmas story. Yes Jesus was fully human, but He is also fully God. There is never a time in which Jesus was not God. The people in the story seem to look at Jesus as a future king of the Jews who will deliver them from the hand of the enemies. He was going to grow up to be a holy and righteous leader. He would be a greater king than even King David.

But I don't think any of them realized that this little one was God in the flesh. I think that I tend to overlook that fact each Christmas as well. How does that change how we view the events? For example, when Herod sends soldiers to kill all the infants in Bethlehem, is Jesus' life ever really in danger? When Mary and Joseph lose Jesus in the temple, is Jesus really in danger?

When people in the Bible come in contact with angels, they are so overcome with fear; the angels have to reassure them they will be okay and always tell them not to be afraid. Let's just think for a moment how big and powerful God is. If I say He created and occupies the entire universe; that is so big our minds cannot even understand it. God is so big that when we try and think of Him it is so overwhelming that it becomes meaningless. Let's think in terms of something we can understand. We have all seen the pictures of an atomic bomb exploding and the following mushroom cloud that wells up from it. We have seen the devastation it causes. Can you imagine the baby Jesus with all this power inside of Him? Here is what we tend to forget. Jesus was fully God at birth. He didn't grow up to be God. He was God from eternity past and the fullness of the Godhead resided in Him at conception and at birth. He was fully God at birth.

I think one of the biggest miracles of the Christmas story is how did God manage to hide the majesty and power of God in this little baby that seemed so helpless? If Jesus manifested His Godhood physically, no one would be able to stand it. Mary and Joseph would have fell down as dead people and worshiped Him as would the shepherds, Wise men, and all the rulers of the world. There was one time Jesus flashed it. When the soldiers came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked them who they were looking for. They said they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus simply responded, "I am He." The Bible records the soldiers' response like this, "When Jesus said, 'I am He,' they drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:6 / NIV).

If Jesus had ever fully displayed His Godhood, no one could have stood it. What a beautiful gift and what a miracle that God could hide His Godhood in this little seemingly helpless baby. How could people ignore Jesus? How could they plot to kill Him? How could they humiliate Him, spit on Him, torture Him, and kill Him if through humility, love, and self-control He didn't restrain Himself and hide His Godhood?

Sometimes I think that we forget that Jesus is not some helpless baby or tragic hero who was martyred. This Babe Whose birthday we celebrate now was and is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

I want to just read the words from Mark Lowrey's song, "Mary Did You Know" and I want us to think about if this is our view of Jesus even now:

*"Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy will one day walk on water?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy has come to make you new?  
This child that you've delivered  
Will soon deliver you  
Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy has walked where angels trod?  
And when you kiss your little boy  
You've kissed the face of God  
Mary, did you know?"*

*The blind will see  
The deaf will hear  
And the dead will live again  
The lame will leap  
The dumb will speak  
The praises of the lamb  
Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy is lord of all creation?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy will one day rules the nations?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy is heaven's perfect lamb?  
This sleeping child you're holding  
Is the great I am"*

This Jesus that we worship is indeed the One Who will come to judge the living and the dead. People who have spit on Him, ignored Him, reviled Him, and denied Him will one day have to face Him as the One Who sends people to hell for an eternity. I have no idea what your view of Jesus is, but the Bible's view of Jesus is absolutely clear. He was eternity past, through the present, through eternity future, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He has made it clear from the beginning that the only way to be right with God is to be in a personal and intimate faith relationship with Him as laid out in the Bible. That means that all who have made up their own religion and philosophy will be sent to hell for rejecting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

That indeed is miraculous. But what is even more miraculous if you are a believer is this. Not only did God hide the majesty and power of God in a baby, He has put that same Jesus in you and me.

Please listen to how the Apostle Paul explained this miracle:

*"<sup>9</sup>For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup>and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:9-10 / NIV). ...*

*"<sup>1</sup>Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power.*

*<sup>2</sup>Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth.*

*<sup>3</sup>For you died when Christ died, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory" (Colossians 3:1-4 / NLT).*

I'm not sure if we really understand that the fullness of God was in Jesus as a baby and I'm not sure that the fullness of God lives in us through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ this season, we are reminded that He perfectly obeyed God's will and accomplished our salvation through perfect submission to the will and plan. His person and His life revealed the heart of God.

Given the fact that the fullness of God dwells in us, could we say that the way we live our lives demonstrate the nature and heart of God?

Here is what I'm asking us to ponder this Christmas. The fullness of God was in Jesus and Jesus brings that fullness into our lives through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit when we receive Him in faith. If that's the case then let's start thinking about what kind of responsibility that carries with it. We know how Jesus lived His life. Here is what the Apostle Paul suggests for us:

*<sup>5</sup>So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for that is idolatry. <sup>6</sup>God's terrible anger will come upon those who do such things. <sup>7</sup>You used to do them when your life was still part of this world. <sup>8</sup>But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. <sup>9</sup>Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds. <sup>10</sup>In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you. <sup>11</sup>In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, <sup>□</sup> circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.*

*<sup>12</sup>Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. <sup>14</sup>And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

*<sup>16</sup>Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:5-17 / NLT).*

Merry Christmas!