

Heaven's King In A Manger

We've have spent this Advent season looking at the main characters of the Christmas story. We've talked about Mary and Joseph and the Shepherds. We could spend some time this morning talking about Herod or Caesar Augustus, who both played a role in this story. The wise men, who came some time after the birth of Jesus and Simeon and Anna all offer us some interesting insight into the Christmas story. But of course there is only one real focus to this story and that is the baby that was born on this celebrated day. Of course, most babies become the star of the show don't they? Everyone else fades into the background as the focus turns to the newborn. But on this night and for this child, it wasn't just the parents and family that looked on with joy and amazement, instead the heaven's were filled with wonder and singing on this night as the focus turned toward a feeding trough outside the little town of Bethlehem where angels and shepherds beheld Heaven's king in a manger. I spent this week thinking about the wonder of this one who came to earth as a baby, to live his life destined to die as the sacrifice that would atone for my sins and your sins. How can I begin to describe him and the sacrifice he made?

There is an understated beauty in Luke's description of this incredible moment. He has already given us detailed background concerning this child to be born. Luke tells of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, telling her she would have a child, conceived of the Holy Spirit and this child would be called the Son of God. Luke explains that it would be possible only because God the Holy Spirit would make it so, but then there is nothing miraculous about his record of the birth. So matter of fact: **"While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn."** So simple, so natural, so matter of fact. But there is so much more to the story, isn't there?

Paul gives us a glimpse of the behind the scenes activity of heaven. You probably don't think of the New Testament book of Philippians as contributing much insight to the Christmas story, but turn to Philippians 2:5 and listen as Paul tells us about the nature of this baby that was lying in that manger in Bethlehem. **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature**

God... [This was no ordinary baby. This was not some anointed king or extraordinary prophet or teacher. This was God in flesh coming to live among us. In very nature God.] **...did not consider equality with God something to be grasped...** [he wasn't grasping to hold onto this divine nature but was willing to lay aside the splendor and glory of heaven in order to save us] **...but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself...** [Welcome to Bethlehem and the manger. Talk about humbling yourself. From the brilliance of heaven's glory to the darkness of a manger in what was most likely a cave-like shelter, in a sin cursed and broken world. This is what was happening when Luke says "she gave birth to her firstborn, a son and wrapped him in cloths." Heaven's king took upon himself the very nature of a slave, a servant – earth's Creator humbled himself to become a creature, found in appearance as one of us. And look at the extent to which he humbled himself, not just in becoming one of us, but he humbled himself] **...and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!**

Here is the purpose for which he came. He came to save us from our sins and this was heaven's plan all along. That he would be the once and for all sacrifice to atone for all of our sins. It was there from the beginning. He was born to die and it was death upon a cross – death as a criminal, executed in the most inhumane fashion ever devised by man.

Have you wondered about those gifts the wise men brought – gold, frankincense and myrrh? It was fitting that they brought gold. It was the metal of kings. Frankincense was a sweet fragrance used in the temple worship in Israel. "It was mixed with the oil used to anoint the priests of Israel and it was blended into the meal offerings that were presented to the priests by the people to be offered as thanksgiving and praise gifts to God. Incense gave an offering its pleasant odor." Whether the wise men intended it or not, the gold pointed to Christ as our king and frankincense pointed to Christ as our great High Priest. But what about myrrh? It was an important item of commerce in the ancient world but the reason is because it was used for embalming. John's gospel tells us that when Jesus was crucified, Nicodemus used over 75 pounds of myrrh and aloe to prepare Jesus' body for burial. What a strange gift to bring to a

newborn. Myrrh for embalming, but the truth was, whether they knew it or not, the wise men had brought a gift that looked forward in faith to that moment when this baby in the manger would be the lamb of God slain for us. His birth was the first step of obedience that lead to the final act of obedience, “even death on a cross!”

...Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name... [That’s who we’re talking about this morning. That is the baby that lies in the manger on that first Christmas morning. He is Heaven’s exalted king. And God has given him the name that is above every name] **...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

The world has forgotten but this is what the Christmas message is all about. Peace on earth to men of goodwill, yes, but Paul reminds us of the sacrifice involved that would make that peace possible for all who would come to the Savior in repentance and faith. Oh what a Savior that gave himself for us. At the mention of his name may our hearts and our will bow before him and may our tongue and every action of our life declare that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Simple and matter of fact, Luke’s statement of his birth. **“And so it was that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” Luke 2:6-7**

Luke tells of the birth, but John’s gospel gives us a deeper look at what happened that night. John declared, **“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” John 1:9.** That’s what was happening as Mary brought forth her firstborn son and laid him in a manger. The true light was coming into the darkness of our world. That’s why the prophet Isaiah declared so many centuries before, **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” Isaiah 9:2.** The light has come into the world and we don’t have to be afraid anymore.

John called him the true light but more importantly he called him God. **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”**

John 1:1 The Word was God! He is talking about Jesus as the Word of God.

John 1:14 says **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”**

John 1:14. The Word becoming flesh is the self-revelation of God. Think about that. If I could accurately and completely say who and what I am and then become it, flesh it out, that would be my word becoming flesh. But knowing me it wouldn't be a truthful or honest word about me because I would say I am 6'4" and weight 240. But God is perfect and the last part of that verse says that Jesus came from the Father, full of grace and truth. He is full of truth so what he says he is, that is exactly what he is. There is no deviation or distortion or half-truth in him. He is what he says so his word made flesh exactly portrays God to us. In fact, the writer of Hebrews says Jesus is the exact representation of the Father. The Word that John speaks of is the full self-expression of God.

“The Word was with God and the Word was God.” This baby in the manger was with God from the beginning and this baby is God. It is a profound mystery, but one the bible teaches and the church has embraced, that the Lord our God is one God but eternally existent and revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ancient church in the Nicene Creed expressed it like this: **“We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.”**

Understand the Scripture uses the phrase begotten of God but it cannot be understood in the same way that we are begotten of our earthly fathers. There is no instant when the Heavenly Father was without the Son or the Son without the Father. The church fathers stated that if indeed God is the Eternal Father then by nature and definition there must be an eternal Son. “Always God, always Son.” We mentioned the passage in Hebrews 1. It declares Jesus to be the radiance of God's glory. One of the church Fathers, Athanasius asked, “Was he, who is light, without radiance?God is, eternally, then since the Father always is, his brightness exists eternally.” Jesus is the eternal brightness of the glory of God so he has always been with the Father.

Jesus, the image of the invisible God, the radiance of God's glory, the exact

representation of his being. He is God appearing in flesh among us. He is Immanuel, God with us. James Montgomery Boice wrote, “everything that can be said about God the Father can be said about God the Son. In Jesus dwells all the wisdom, glory, power, love, holiness, justice, goodness and truth of the Father. In him, God the Father is known....Apart from Jesus Christ we do not know what God is like. But if Jesus Christ is God, then we do know, because to know the Lord Jesus Christ is to know God.”

It matters to know and believe that this baby born of a virgin in Bethlehem was more than just a man or a prophet. He was God in the flesh. And if he was God in the flesh, that means we can know the truth about God. We can know what he is like. And if we know what God is like by knowing Jesus, that means apart from knowing Jesus we cannot know God. In him was light and life and apart from Jesus there is no light or life. It matters that Jesus was God in the flesh. It matters that he was born of a virgin, conceived without sin and lived a sinless life. It matters because it means that Jesus Christ is God the Son.

The fact that Jesus Christ is God also means that his death on the cross has eternal significance. You see, if I died for someone, if I took their place and was executed, it wouldn't make any difference with regard to their sins or mine. The truth is, if I died, the only sins I would be dying for would be my own. But Jesus was God and therefore he had no sin. When he died, he died for the sins of others – he died for your sins and for my sins. He died in our place so we could be forever freed from the burden and bondage of sin.

Mary “brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger.” It sounds so simple but oh what a miracle was happening that night. Heaven's King became flesh that night and made his dwelling among us. The light of the world shined into the darkness of our existence and an amazing invitation was made to all of us. John wrote, **“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, not of human decision or a husband's will, but born**

of God.” John 1: 10-13

Mary brought forth her firstborn son and laid him in a manger and we received him and believed in his name and now we are children of God, children born of God. Jesus, the light of the world. Jesus the bread of heaven. Jesus, heaven’s king and our savior has come.

Hear John’s version of Christ’s birth again. **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14** Mary’s baby boy, the glory of the One and Only.

Can I tell you about Mary’s baby boy? The prophet said his name would be called Immanuel, God with us. The angel told Joseph to call his name Jesus because he would save his people from their sins. He is Heaven’s King wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. He is the One of whom the angels sang “Glory to God in the highest... for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Christ the Lord.” He is the perfect, sinless Lamb of God who has come to take away the sins of the world. He is Very God of Very God. He is One with the Father, the eternally existent second person of the trinity. He is the only begotten of God with whom God is well pleased.

He is the anointed of God. The One who came to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve. He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace.

He is the offspring of Eve who crushed the serpent’s head. He is our high priest and our perfect sacrifice. He is our righteous judge and our kinsman Redeemer. He is prophet, priest and king. He is the suffering servant wounded for our transgressions, the One who was bruised for our iniquities, chastised to secure our peace and by his stripes we are healed. In the gospels He is the miracle worker, the healer, the only hope of a widowed mother and two grieving sisters. He is the door by which everyone must enter. He is the creator of the universe, the first born of creation, the light that shined into darkness. He is the living word of God. He is my Savior, healer, comforter,

redeemer, my baptizer in the Holy Ghost and he is my coming King. He is the resurrection and the life. The way, the truth and the life. He is the joy of my desire, the fulfillment of my every dream. He is the one who supplies me with every blessing according to his grace. He is my refuge and my strength, my deliverer, my fortress, my God in whom I trust. He is the one who leads me in a triumphant procession. He is the one who became poor so I could become rich. He is the one who knew no sin, yet became sin for me so I could become the righteousness of God in Him. He is the one who humbled himself and became a slave so I could become a son. He made me a partaker of his divine nature. He took me when I was nothing and nobody and made me a child of God and a joint heir along with him. He has seated me in heavenly places and filled my life with every good and perfect gift. He anointed my head with oil and causes my cup to run over. He has gone to heaven before me and is preparing a place for me. He ever lives to make intercession for me. He is the one who has promised to come again and receive me unto himself. He is the one I am listening for, expecting to hear a trumpet sound and an angel's shout. He is the one at whose name the demon's tremble, from whom sickness has to flee and death runs and hides. He is the one who speaks and the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk and the dead live again. He is the one who looks upon the heart and judges the motives of all men and women. He is a friend to the friendless, the father to the orphan and a companion to the widowed. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the way, the truth and the life.

This baby that Mary placed in the manger is heaven's king. Do you get it? Did I mention he is the head of the body, the lord of peace, the righteous judge, the brightness of God's glory, the express image of God the Father, our high priest, the mediator of a better covenant, the propitiation for our sins, the Savior of the world, the One true God, the faithful witness, the hidden manna, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley, the bright and morning star, the chief cornerstone, the Holy one of God, the lifter up of my head. Did I forget to tell you he is the dayspring from on high, the consolation of Israel, the hope of glory, the branch, the rock of my salvation, the wisdom of God, the true vine, the deliverer, the author of eternal salvation, the good shepherd, the word of God and the author and finisher of our faith. He is the bread of

heaven, the light of the world, the living water that if you drink from him you will never thirst again.

I could keep going, and someday when time is no more, I will. Praising him and thanking him eternally for what he did when God became man and dwelt among us. Like Dr. Samuel Lockridge said in his message “that’s my king”, I wish I could describe him to you, but he’s indescribable. He is my Savior, my Lord, my everything.

So when you hear Luke’s Christmas account read this year, that Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and when you see baby Jesus in that manger in your nativity scene, you stop and remember who he is and why he came. Remember what he left and the extent of his sacrifice and that it was for you. Remember that it’s heaven’s king that humbled himself, not just as a baby in a manger but as a dying sacrifice upon a cross that we could have eternal life. Remember that and rejoice.

Joy to the world the Lord has come, let earth receive her king. Earth hasn’t received him yet, but we have. Give thanks. Heaven’s king in a manger has become our Savior and Lord!