

# What Does the Manger Mean to You?

## Christmas Day Meditations on Luke 2:1-20

### God Has Come to You (Luke 2:1-7)

We know the story. We understand the details which Luke so memorably conveys to us. Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem because the Roman emperor wanted to know how many people were in his empire and with that counting came a tax. When they got there to fulfill this obligation to the governing authorities, there was nowhere for them to stay except in a stable. While they were there in what seemed to be bad timing, the perfect time came for Mary's baby to be born. The little baby Jesus was wrapped in strips of cloth and there he lay in that manger, a feeding trough for the animals, as his royal crib. "What a nice story", the world would say - right next to Santa Claus, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, or whatever Christmas movie you are watching.

However, you and I both know that this is more than just a nice cute story to read year after year, to hear perhaps from the mouths of children, or to sing about in our carols at this time of year. That manger, and more importantly, that baby lying in the manger, means so much more than the Grinch whose heart grew three times its size or Rudolph whose nose lit the way for Santa's sleigh. Those are cute stories with cute endings, but the manger carries with it meaning not just for Christmas, but for our whole life. Today on this Christmas morning, as we dig deeper into this familiar story, we will draw out what that manger means for you and for me.

First of all let's consider the reality of that baby lying in the manger. It means what Matthew tells us in his account of Jesus' birth. **"All this happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. And they name him Immanuel,' which means 'God with us'. (1:22)** As Mary laid that child in that manger, within that makeshift crib we see God who so loved the world has come to the world. God who so loved you has come to you. Think about that! Jesus, the Son of God, was born. He who is the creator of the heavens and earth took upon himself the flesh and blood of his creations, flesh just like you and I. Yet in his humanity he remains true God. God has come to you. God is not distant from you. He is with you right there wrapped in cloths and lying in that manger. We are not alone. Because he came to you wrapped in flesh and blood, he remains with you even today as he lies in the manger of our heart. What does the manger mean to you? God has come to you clothed in flesh, wrapped in cloths and lies in that manger because there was no room in the inn.

### The Savior Was Born for You (Luke 2:8-14)

Usually people don't go somewhere just because. When was the last time you went somewhere and didn't have some reason for going. The angel had a reason to go to the shepherds in the fields who were keeping watch over their flocks that night. His reason: God came into the world. God had come to them. God has come to you. If God has come to you wrapped in flesh and blood then he must have had a reason to come.

In that glorious sight, the shepherds heard that reason from the angel. Yet the news of a perfect and holy God coming to sinners doesn't automatically spark happy feelings. Think back to the Garden of Eden. When God came to Adam and Eve after they fell into sin, they hid in fear. At Mount Sinai, when God came to give the people his commandments, they trembled. A holy angel of God standing in front of sinful shepherds certainly sparked that feeling of fear. Yet this angel, like Gabriel to Mary who came with news of God coming into the world through her, had good news which would calm all fears. That fear would be replaced with great joy in the hearts of these sinful shepherds. "Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people. Today in the town of David, a Savior was born *for you*. He is Christ the Lord."

Then if seeing that angel wasn't enough, the sight of night being turned to brighter than bright of day was even more fantastic. The whole sky lit up as praise to God resounded from the heavenly hosts, praise because God had come to be exactly what the angel said in his message - a Savior for you, a Savior that would give peace to sinful hearts. "Glory to God to the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind." It's a sight and sound we can hardly imagine.

God has come to you. A Savior was born for you. God in love so great came to the world to save the world, to save me, to save you from our sins. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot help ourselves. We needed God to come to us and do the saving for us so that the very thought of standing before the throne of a holy God does not spark fear, but feelings of peace. What does the manger mean to you? A Savior was born to you and to me. He is Christ the Lord. Hearing that news we join the angels in praising our God who has come to dwell among us for the purpose of being our Savior.

### **You Have a Treasure to Ponder (Luke 2:15-19)**

I've often wondered when all was quiet once again how long the shepherds stood there looking up at the sky. After the echo of the angels' song ceased and the night sky returned to its darkness, how long did they have to ponder what they just heard. How long before they finally said to themselves, "Okay guys this is too important for us to wait until morning or to find someone to watch our sheep. Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us"? Ultimately it makes no difference. Whether it was instantaneous or it took a few minutes to process everything they just heard and seen, they knew they had a Savior to go and find. What they saw was exactly as they were told. Lying in that manger was the greatest treasure of all - a Savior, their Savior.

Then there's that little comment regarding what Mary was thinking. No doubt the shepherds told her about the angels. She had seen one herself nine months earlier. Yet when she looked into that manger she treasured that little baby whom she had so carefully wrapped in cloths and laid there. It wasn't just how a mother values her child. Her son was also her Savior. She treasured him and pondered everything in her heart, tucking it away thinking about what it all meant. Would you have done any differently than Mary or the shepherds?

When you look there with the shepherds and with Mary and Joseph, you see the greatest treasure you could ever have been given. God has come to you. He is wrapped in flesh and lying in a manger born to be your Savior from sin. That has a value that far outweighs the wealth of this world or anything else this world could offer. Just as the shepherds treasured that good news of this child's birth over the earthly value of their sheep, so we keep that baby lying in the manger as the treasure of our hearts. What does the manger mean to you? It means you have a priceless treasure to ponder every day in your heart.

### **You Have News to Share (Luke 2:20)**

How quiet do you think Bethlehem was that night? The shepherds heard the good news. They had seen Jesus, their Savior wrapped in cloths and lying in the manger just as they had been told. They treasured that child so much that they had to go tell others what they had seen. Such joy filled their hearts that his praises were on their lips as they walked, praise declaring God's glorious grace, maybe even the same song of praise the angels sang. I imagine Bethlehem that night was not very quiet. And even the days that followed for the rest of their lives, did they keep quiet? I don't think so. They had news to share, praise to declare, and that is what they did.

After standing at the manger, how can we keep quiet? In the manger we find God has come to us. In the manger we see a Savior who is born for us. In the manger we are given the greatest treasure of all. How can we keep

quiet after what we have seen and heard? How can we not talk about it in our homes with our families? How can we not tell the people all around us? How can we not raise our voices in praise of our God declaring that news we have heard and seen today?

For the shepherds, nothing kept them from sharing this news. They didn't stop to consider their insignificant or unimportant status among society. They didn't take into account it was not a good time because it was night. They didn't even think about if their message would be believed or not. They just went and told and returned home praising God.

What often hinders our sharing of this news and raising of our voices in praise has nothing to do with the message itself. It has more to do with the roadblocks we make and put up in our own hearts, roadblocks that as sinners we are so good at putting up, roadblocks Satan is so eager to help put up. What's keeping you from flooding your Bethlehem with this news of great joy praising God? What roadblocks have you put in your heart?

Do you feel unqualified to share it? Are you afraid that you will not know what to say? Are you afraid of rejection? In your busy life, do you struggle to find that perfect time to talk with your children at home? Is it difficult to find the right time to approach that person you know needs to hear the good news of Jesus? Do you think that because you aren't blessed with the best voice, that somehow the praise you offer isn't as good? Do you see the masks you are beings asked to wear as somehow nullifying your praise and making your proclamation ineffective?

My friends, that good news to tell remains the same whether it is from me or from you. You know the story. You know what that manger means to you. You've rejoiced in that today. That perfect time might simply be a few minutes around your dinner table or an opening in a conversation. It doesn't matter if that praise filling your heart is spoken or sung, on key or off key, masked or unmasked. Yes the specific words and phrasing may not sound exactly the same as if I said it. The time may never be exactly perfect. That praise might sound better if it was sung by a choir or the person next to you. Let's face it, sharing the news and praising God would definitely be easier if the mask wasn't there.

Yet, after looking in the manger, the unhindered joy in our hearts leads us to unhindered telling and praise. You have news to share, news of great joy that is for all people. As you leave the manger today let nothing keep that joyful news of what the manger means to you from being proclaimed and praises be declared in your Bethlehem - your homes, among your family and friends, in your community, and in the world around you. Amen

