

When Jesus Stepped Down

Growing up in rural Saskatchewan, I loved the Christmas story. As a little girl my favorite carol was 'Away in a Manger'. The song, the story, the wonder of it all was mesmerizing and captivated my imagination. I had seen the Christmas cards and Sunday School pictures of Bethlehem and the Judean country side. I could easily imagine a star filled sky arching over the silent hillsides. I could picture the caves where the sheep dozed dreamily and securely beside their little lambs. In the entrance to the cave sat the shepherds, visiting as the warmed themselves by the cheerily crackling fire. Emptying their steaming cups, eyelids heavy after a long day out in the fresh air, sleep was creeping upon them.



Stretching out full length across the entrance so no predator could reach the slumbering sheep, their drooping eyelids registered a strangely growing brightness. It was much too early for the sun to rise; the fire was burning slowly. But beyond its glow, the sky was now quickly lightening. Stars faded - or did they? Were those giant stars - or where the something else? Could they be angels? That bright? That big? The sky was suddenly brighter than daytime and a voice was speaking! They could understand the words, but who was this brilliant being addressing? There was no one here except the trembling shepherds. What could all this mean? Terrified, they prostrated themselves before the majestic personage.

“Don’t be afraid!” the angel said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior -- yes, the Messiah, the Lord -- has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Before the stunned shepherds could dare to reply, the sky was filled with an enormous host of others, all the armies of heaven, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” The joy made the air electric! The hair stood up on their heads. The jubilant voices echoed and rebounded off the hills, their words etching themselves permanently in the shepherd’s stunned minds.

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And then silence! The angelic beings were gone, the sky was once again dark and star studded. The fire burnt lowly. Cautiously they looked around, and seeing all was ‘normal’ checked out their companions to see if they had heard and seen what just happened. But the excitement, the joy, the electricity still sparked in the air. Quickly they compared notes, and with glad abandon flung caution to the winds, hitched up their robes and raced into Bethlehem. They had to see! They knew it was true — finally and at long last — true! The Messiah was born! He had arrived. They had to get there — they believed but they had to see with their own eyes! And they did. It was all exactly like the angel said it would be. Absolutely every detail was perfect! Oh how they praised God. After 400 years of echoing silence, God had broken His silence. He had spoken! He had not forgotten His promises — or His people! Ecstatic, they shared the unbelievable yet undeniable story to all who would hear. Filled with worship and praise, they finally returned to their hillside cave and huddled sheep. And in spite of all the excitement, fell into peaceful slumber until the morning dawned.

The story, ages old though it is, still intrigues and captivates me. And as I have taken many wondering trips to Bethlehem, I’m sure my imagination can’t even begin to contemplate the glory or the wonder of the message

for us. This year, I caught a glimpse of something that for me is quite profound. Not new of course, but something I never understood well before. Come with me and let's explore some of the thoughts about why Jesus stepped down.

I'm sure, that like me, you have at some times wondered why Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem? Why was He wrapped in swaddling clothes? Why was He laid in a manger instead of a cradle? We may never know all the answers or understand all the ramifications, but we can learn and appreciate some things of wondrous and meaningful importance.

One of the prophetic names given to Jesus hundreds of years before His birth is Emmanuel. That simply translated is 'God with us'. This was something more than His appearance to Abraham, when He came for a chat, and stayed for a meal, then went for a walk and shared His heart with his human friend. That must have been amazing. But this was more. This was God Incarnate — in human flesh! This was God — with all His Creative Power — becoming a man, becoming the creature He created!

To do this, Jesus had to step down — from many things. From long before time began, He was in heaven. In order to be born in Bethlehem, He had to step down, step out of heaven and down to the earth. He had to step out of Eternity, and step down in to the limits of time, and space. He had to leave behind beauty that would boggle our minds. He gave up the glory that would fry our circuits. In heaven He was honored and worshipped and worthy of it all. But He stepped down, limiting Himself to the status of a simple human being. From a position of the all powerful Creator, He became limited, even totally dependant as all human babies are.

It would just make sense to my mind, that if He was going to step down from the celestial throne room, at least He could be born to a Kingly family, well raised and delicately taken care of. But no, He chose to step out of the center of adoration in heaven to abject obscurity, even poverty on earth. From constant, intimate communion with God the Father, He stepped down into a human family that couldn't understand Him. From the brilliance of heaven He stepped down into the darkness of a fallen creation, a community who couldn't comprehend Who He was or why He came. From sinless perfection, He stepped down into a sin darkened world, separated from the God Who made them.

Down,

Down,

Down He stepped.

My mind can think about these things, but I can not even begin to comprehend the magnitude of them. Why was He laid in a manger? Because He was the Lamb of God, slain before the creation of the world. And like the Passover Lambs of that time, He was carefully wrapped in cloths and laid in a manger. Only a perfect, unharmed, unmarred lamb could be sacrificed for the sins of a human. And only the Sinless, Perfect Lamb of God could be sacrificed to the sins of our fallen race — mankind. Can you begin to picture it? Every detail has profound meaning. Only through Jesus can we be born anew as Children of God Most High. That is why Jesus Stepped Down.

So, you see it's kind of like this. What happened in Bethlehem could never stay in Bethlehem, but has the most vital significance for each of us this Christmas — and for every day of our lives.

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