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What You Need to Know About The Miracle of the Manger

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THE MIRACLE OF THE MANGER

Nearly 500 years ago a German church leader composed a poem about the birth of Christ that was later set to music in 1885. The church leader was Martin Luther and his poem is known as Luther's Cradle Hymn. Since that time untold millions have joined in singing its beautiful words:

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head;
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.*

Many have wondered just what God was doing before He created man.

Actually the Bible informs us He was involved in at least six all-important activities:

ONE

He was having fellowship with His Son. Jesus Himself refers to this during His Great High Priestly prayer:

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was ... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world"
(John 17:5, 24).

TWO

He was creating angels and the stars:

"Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding" (Job 38:4).

"When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy"
(Job 38:7).

Both were there at the creation of Adam. The starlight fell upon that beautiful garden and the angels hovered over it.

THREE

He was choosing the elect:

"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

FOUR

He was planning for a church:

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:8, 9).

Before God created the upper atmosphere he had in mind the Upper Room.

FIVE

He was preparing for a kingdom:

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

SIX

He was planning for a Savior:

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:18-20).

This last activity is amazing indeed, for it tells us God had been preparing the Bethlehem miracle for thousands of years in advance!

In other words, long before He placed the first Adam in the Garden, in the mind of God He saw the second Adam in the manger!

This will be the first of two messages, overviewing the divine glory story—WHEN GOD BECAME MAN—THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST!

Today, we’ll consider three aspects of the story:

- Some key prophecies fulfilled at Bethlehem
- Some basic reasons for Bethlehem
- A helpful illustration explaining Bethlehem

FIRST ASPECT

Some key prophecies fulfilled at Bethlehem:

It is truly remarkable to observe that nearly one third of all the Old Testament prophecies in regard to the Messiah had to do with His birth! Here are but a few of them:

- The Messiah would come!

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

This is referred to by Bible students as the PROTO EVANGEL verse, meaning, “First Gospel” verse. God now makes it official—the Messiah would someday come. It has been observed that God so loved the world that He didn’t send a committee!

- The Messiah would be a male! (Gen. 3:15) When the Messiah did appear of course His name would be JESUS, and not JENNY! The feminists are still having problems with this fact!
- The Messiah would be born! (Gen. 3:15) This may have come as a shock to Adam and Eve. It will be remembered he was created from the dust of the ground, and she from his side. But the Messiah would be born!
- The Messiah would be born of a woman! (Gen. 3:15) Again, this announcement may have surprised the first couple, for it was the man who had (in one sense of the word) given birth to Eve. But the Messiah would be born of a woman.

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4).

- The Messiah would be born of a virgin woman!

“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14).

- The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem!

“But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

He would not be born in Rome, the political center, or in Athens, the intellectual center, or even in Jerusalem, the religious center, but in humble Bethlehem, the house of bread!

- The Messiah would possess a dual nature!

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

In a nutshell, He would become the God-man. Note the two phrases in Isaiah's prophecy:

1. The phrase, "a child is born" refers to His humanity.
 2. The phrase, "a son is given" refers to His deity.
- The Messiah would be carried into Egypt as an infant. This prophecy was two-fold in nature:
 1. The historical, Old Testament fulfillment:
"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1).

This referred to God bringing Israel His son out of Egypt (Exod. 13, 14)
 2. The prophetic, New Testament fulfillment:

"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matt. 2:13-15).

This of course refers to God bringing Jesus His Son into Egypt. There is a divine irony to be seen here:
 - a. In the Old Testament God brought His son (Israel) out of Egypt in time of danger.
 - b. In the New Testament God brings His Son (Jesus) into Egypt in time of danger.

SECOND ASPECT

Some basic reasons for Bethlehem:

Why the manger miracle? Consider the following:

- To reveal the invisible God:

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18).

God loved the world, and how could he get his message across? He sent Jesus into the world to become man and tell God's story in man's language to reveal the invisible God.

- To make a sacrifice for our sins:

Jesus left the ivory palaces of heaven to come down to this world and enter the womb of Mary, to make sacrifice for our sins.

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).

“And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

- To reconcile man to God:

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19).

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5, 6).

- To provide an example for believers:

We are told in the scriptures that Christ suffered, and that he left an example for us, that we should follow his steps. The world often misunderstands the Incarnation. The world thinks Christ is the example for unbelievers. That’s not what 1 Peter 2:21 says. It says that Christ has come to be an example for believers. He is not an example for unbelievers. He is the Savior. He came to *save* unbelievers and make them believers. Once we are saved we study the life of Christ because he is our example. But there could be no example apart from the Incarnation.

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21).

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6).

- To provide the believer with a high priest:

In order to provide believers with a high priest, it was necessary that Christ should be made like unto his brethren. He passed sinlessly through all human experiences, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for our sins. He was obliged to become completely like his brethren—apart from sin, of course.

“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

- To destroy the devil and his works:

“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

THIRD ASPECT

A helpful illustration explaining Bethlehem:

The great evangelist, D. L. Moody, often related the story of a young biologist who came across an especially large and active ant hill during his walk in a forest. Delighted with his find, the biologist sat down on a nearby rock, and taking out pen and notebook, began writing down what he saw. Soon, however, the entire ant hill was in an upheaval as the tiny creatures became aware of his presence. Frustrated, the biologist walked away wishing he could in some manner communicate with them, assuring the little creatures of his interest and that no harm would be forthcoming.

He concluded, however, the only way this could happen would be to take upon himself the body of an ant and thus become part of their existence sharing his story in a way they could comprehend.

This is exactly what occurred at the Incarnation. The infinite, holy, eternal, and sinless Son of God agreed to take upon himself a finite and fleshly body that he, the lofty Creator, might personally communicate with us, his lowly creatures.

And the bottom line of this message? Well . . .

If our greatest need had been information
God would have sent us an educator.

If our greatest need had been technology
God would have sent us a scientist.

If our greatest need had been money
God would have sent us an economist.

If our greatest need had been pleasure
God would have sent us an entertainer.

But, alas, our greatest need was forgiveness and redemption
So ... God sent us a Savior.