

# The Miracle of the Manger,

## John 1

Based on a series by Greg Fine

Introduction: Last night after we got back from choir practice I watched again the old movie, Miracle on 34th Street. The basic plot of the movie is a man, Kris Kringle, who genuinely believes he is Santa Claus. The rest of the movie is the unfolding of the evidence to support that claim and the various reactions of people to that claim.

The plot represents part of the mystery and charm of the movie. The idea of meeting not just a department store Santa, and not just some well-meaning man with a pillow in his belt and a fake beard on his face, but the real Santa Claus. As the story unfolds, there springs forth this childish hope that perhaps this Kris Kringle really is Santa Claus. It begins to open up some incredible and amazing opportunities. "Could he really be? What if he is? And if he is who he says he is, how sad not to be recognized, how tragic to be thought a fraud."

Those are the same kinds of questions asked about this miracle of Christmas, the miracle of the manger. Just exactly who is this baby lying in the manger? Could He really be who everyone says He is? Is it possible that He really is who He claims to be? What if He is?

John's Gospel describes for us in beautiful and poetic imagery this miracle of the manger:

- 1 **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**
- 2 **He was in the beginning with God.**
- 3 **All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.**
- 4 **In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.**
- 5 **And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.**
- 9 **That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.**
- 10 **He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.**
- 11 **He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.**
- 12 **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:**
- 13 **who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**
- 14 **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.** (John 1:1-5, 9-14)

The big question to be decided in the movie is also the big question as we consider the birth and life of Jesus Christ. It is a question of identity. Who is He really? Who exactly is this child we find in the manger in Bethlehem?

### I. Astonishing Claims: Could He Be Who He Claims to Be?

Consider for a moment this miracle of the manger and the astonishing claims made regarding this child. Into the humblest of circumstances Jesus is born. His mother is a very ordinary, plain, simple, poor young girl named Mary. His birthplace is a stable, a barn in a small, obscure little town called Bethlehem. Yet, He came making astonishing claims, claims that centered on His identity. He claimed to be sent from God, the Son of God, and even One with God. The angel announced concerning this child in the manger, "**For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**" (Luke 2:11) That is a rather remarkable claim, wouldn't you say?

John says here that He is God; that all things were made through Him; that He is the light of the world; that He alone gives true life; that when we see Him we see the very glory of God, the Father. As an adult, Jesus claimed to be the Bread of Heaven and Living Water which alone can satisfy our deepest hungers. Jesus claimed the authority to forgive our sins. He claimed to have come from God and to be returning to God. Jesus claimed to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only way to the Father; the Resurrection; the one who judges all people; and the only path to eternal life. Jesus claimed all authority in heaven and earth.

What do you make of such radical claims? Some people disregard them altogether. There are those who, while being very respectful of Jesus, don't take His astonishing claims seriously. The religion of Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet and teacher. The Hindu religion teaches that Jesus is one way of many to find God. Many people want to admire Jesus from a distance, but when it comes right down to it, like Kris Kringle, He's just a nice man with a beard.

C.S. Lewis points out that Jesus did not leave us the option of just respecting Him as a good, noble teacher. His own claims leave no room for that position, even though it is very popular. We really only have three options concerning what to make of these astonishing claims of Jesus. Either He was who He claimed to be, the **Lord** of all. Or, He made these claims knowing they were false and therefore He was a **liar**. Or third, He made these claims because He believed them to be true but in reality they were not, which makes Him deceived or a **lunatic**. Jesus cannot be just a nice man with a beard.

Some reject Jesus. As John says in verse 11, "**He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.**" They heard His teachings, they saw His miracles, they witnessed His death and resurrection, and they rejected Him.

## **II. Staggering Consequences: What if He is who He claims to be?**

Do you believe? What if He really is who He claims to be? Think for a moment about the incredible consequences. What if there is that awesome Someone who knows your name, who knows when you are sleeping, and knows when you're awake? And yes, He knows when you've been bad or good, and yet, He loves you and longs for you to know and love Him.

What if this child in Bethlehem really is the miracle of the manger? What if this Jesus really is Emmanuel, God with us? ***If He is, then you and I have a decision to make.*** It is a matter of eternal significance for each one of us. What we decide about this child born in Bethlehem determines our eternal destiny and our earthly direction. We cannot accept His claims without also recognizing that He has staked His claim on our lives.

## **III. A Fateful Choice: Do You Believe?**

We must all consider the question and answer for ourselves. No one can decide for us when it comes to this miracle of the manger. Is Christ who He claimed to be? Do you believe?

In the movie, Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street, the final courtroom scene represents the real moment of decision. But when we consider this child born in Bethlehem, there is an awesome reversal, a dramatic change of roles for you and me. You see, when we come before Christ, we do not sit in judgment of Him. It is Jesus Christ who is Lord and King. This miracle of the manger is God in the flesh, "**the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**" He is judge of all. We do not determine His fate. It is Jesus Christ who will determine our final destiny. Scripture records, "**For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**" (2 Corinthians 5:10)

The miracle of the manger is that God became flesh and lived among us. He came not so He could send us to eternal punishment but to set us free from our bondage to sin. God became man so that we could become children of God. John writes in his Gospel, “**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:**” (John 1:12).

Is it possible? Could He be who He claims to be? I believe! Do you?

Prayer: Dear God, I do believe the miracle of the manger; that this child born in Bethlehem is exactly who He claimed to be. He is God in the flesh, the Lord of life and Savior of the world. Right now I want to receive you, Jesus, into my heart and life. I have known about you but I want to know you in a way that is real and personal. I want to follow you and experience this miracle of Christmas in my own life. Forgive me of my sin, fill me with your Holy Spirit. Let me know the joy of walking with you throughout my journey on earth and spending forever with you in heaven. Use me to extend your kingdom here on earth until that day when you return or you call me home. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.