

From the Manger to the Cross

Luke 2:11-12, **"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."**

Mark 15:22-25, **"And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it. And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take. Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him."**

Today's message, like our choir's message, starts at the manger and goes to the cross. The same Jesus laid in a manger is the one who came to die on a cross.

Who is this one in the manger and on the cross?

There's a story about church whose Sunday School decided to allow the children to stage their own impromptu Christmas pageant. The teachers read the story and provided some props; then they just stood off to the side and let the kids dramatize it on their own.

One girl grabbed the doll and said, "I'll be Mary."

Another said, "I'll be Joseph,"

Some scampered for the bathrobes and said, "I'll be a shepherd."

Everyone was either a lamb, or a wise man, or an angel or something else.

But one little girl had no part, so she said, "I'll be the doctor who delivered the baby Jesus."

They all took their places.

Mary had a sofa pillow with a baby doll tucked under her shirt and Joseph led her to the inn where they were rejected. When the time came, the "doctor" took the doll from Mary's pillow and held it up.

Joseph, wanting to act like a new papa said, "What is it, doc?"

And the little doctor smiled and said, "Why it's a... God." (David O. Dykes, sermoncentral.com)

Jesus was God in the flesh. He was born into this world in a human body but He'd always been God. Before His virgin birth, He'd sat in majesty in heaven. Paul says it this way in Philippians 2, **"Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped."**

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, laid aside all of that and humbled Himself to become a man. But not just a man, but a babe in a manger. The sign to the shepherds as they went to find **a Savior, who is Christ the Lord**—the sign was **a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.**

Why a manger? Why was the Son of God placed in a feeding trough for animals? Because although Jesus is the King, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord, as we learned in our study of the Gospel of Mark, **"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."** (Mark 10:45). He came to serve. He came to give His life a ransom for many. Paul again says He **"made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself."**

I like how Charles Spurgeon answered that question, Why a manger?

I think it was intended thus to show forth his humiliation. He came, according to prophecy, to be "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;" he was to be "without form or comeliness," "a root out of a dry ground." Would it have been fitting that the man who was to die naked on the cross should be robed in purple at his birth? Would it not have been inappropriate that the Redeemer who was to be buried in a borrowed tomb should be born anywhere but in the humblest shed, and housed anywhere but in the most ignoble manner? The manger and the cross standing at the two extremities of the Savior's earthly life seem most fit and congruous the one to the other. He is to wear through life a peasant's garb; he is to associate with fishermen; the lowly are to be his disciples; the cold mountains are often to be his only bed; he is to say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head;" nothing, therefore, could be more fitting than that in his season of humiliation, when he laid aside all his glory, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and condescended even to the meanest estate, he should be laid in a manger.

Jesus came to earth in the humblest of ways. He came to be a servant. And servants get dirty. Not only was He born in a dirty stable and placed in a dirty manger, during His ministry He spent His time with dirty people. People no one else would touch.

The lame, the sick, the Lepers, a woman unclean because of an issue of blood. Then there were the prostitutes, the demon possessed, the tax collectors, and the sinners.

And, of course, Jesus got dirtiest on the cross. That's where He bore our stains, our filth and our dirt.

Jesus came to get dirty. When Jesus came to earth... He didn't come to receive praise and honor. He came to minister, to serve, to give.

Philippians tells us that Jesus "...**humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!**" Philippians 2:6-8.

All through His life, Jesus faced the ridicule and insults of people of prominence. The Pharisees, teachers of the Law and the Chief Priests all sought to embarrass Him, and undermine Him, and destroy Him.

At one point in His ministry "... **many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.**" John 6:66

And when He was arrested and put on trial, Pilate tried to get the crowds to release Jesus and crucify Barabbas. "**What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?**" Pilate asked them. "**Crucify him!**" they shouted. "**Why? What crime has he committed?**" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "**Crucify him!**" Mark 15:12-14.

As Jesus was on the cross, one of final statements was: "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**" Luke 23:34.

When Jesus came, He was rejected and abused.

A lot of people in our society have not connected the dots. They will welcome the innocent, harmless Christ-child. They don't reject the baby in the manger. What they reject is the Savior on the cross.

But that is what Christmas is all about. The baby in the manger was born to die. Jesus came to serve and to give His life.

John Donne in his "Christmas Sermon," Dec 25, 1626, said this:

The whole life of Christ was a continual Passion; others die Martyrs, but Christ was born a Martyr. He found a Golgotha even in Bethlehem. For, to His tenderness then, the straws were almost as sharp as the thorns after; and the manger as uneasy at first as His cross at last. His birth and His death were but one continual act, and His Christmas-day and His Good Friday, are but the evening and morning of one and the same day.

The Christ of the manger is the Christ of the cross. He came in humility to a little town called Bethlehem. He came in humility to serve. He came in humility to give His life a ransom for many.

Max Lucado had an interesting observation in his book "God Came Near":

"When God chose to reveal Himself to mankind, what medium did He use?

A book? No, that was secondary.

A church? No, that was consequential.

A moral code? No, to limit God's revelation to a cold list of do's and don'ts is as tragic as looking at a Colorado roadmap and saying that you'd seen the Rockies.

When God chose to reveal himself, he did so through a human body.

The tongue that called forth the dead was a human one.

The hand that touched the leper had dirt under its nails.

The feet upon which the woman wept were callused and dirty.

And his tears... oh, don't miss the tears. They came from a heart as broken as your or mine has ever been.

So, people came to him. My, how they came to him!

They came at night; they touched him as he walked down the street, they followed him around the sea; they invited him into their homes, and placed their children at his feet.

Why? Because he refused to be a statue in a cathedral or a priest in an elevated pulpit.

He chose instead to be Jesus.

There were those who mocked him, who were envious of him, who misunderstood him and there were those who revered him. But there was not one person who considered him too holy, too divine, or too celestial to touch. There was not one person who was reluctant to approach him for fear of being rejected.

REMEMBER THAT.

Remember that when you see the nativity scene with a helpless infant drawing shepherd and wise man, manger beast and celestial angel, all in an unthreatening atmosphere that was to mark his entire life, even when that life was eventually slain on a desolate hill in Judea. Remember. For man seems always to build barriers between himself and God, but Jesus builds bridges."

Jesus is the one mediator between God and man. Our sins separate us from God. We need a Savior. We need the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We need the crucified Jesus to forgive our sins. We need His sacrifice to turn away God's wrath. We need His resurrection so that we might live. We need Jesus, the one who died for us.

This Christmas we need to look beyond the manger. We need to avoid the temptation to keep Jesus as a baby, to never let Him grow, be despised and rejected and ultimately die on the cross for our sins.

Pastor Jeff Strite wrote a Christmas song called, **Lookin' for a Tree**

"One foggy winter morning I went out into the field, lookin' for a tree for my home.
I searched the field all over just to find the perfect tree to decorate for Christmas morn.
I found what I'd been looking for, a tree both strong and tall.
I decorated, strung the lights, and placed it down the hall.
But somehow there was something wrong, my pretty Christmas tree.
Couldn't show me what I longed for to see.

(Chorus): Looking for a Christmas tree, with a meaning that says love to me.
I want more than tinsel and garland bright, yes I'm lookin' for a tree.

There was a baby boy, born on Christmas day, in Bethlehem so many years ago.
A gift to all mankind wrapped in swaddling clothes, given so that we might know.
There were no decorations, no reindeer in the yard.
No Currier and Ives portrait on a Christmas card.
The manger smelled of sheep and goat and cattle in their stall.
There was no Christmas tree down the hall.

(Chorus)

The Story of that baby Jesus still can make me smile, but the little baby soon became a man.
And the crowds that once had cheered him on, became a howling mob.
"Crucify Him" was their demand.
They nailed Him to a rugged cross, stained with dirt and mud.
The only decoration on that tree... was His blood.
And there upon that Christ filled tree we saw God's gift of love.
The True Gift from the Father up above.

(Chorus) Looking for a Christmas tree, with a meaning that says love to me.
I want more than tinsel and garland bright, yes I'm lookin' for a tree.

(Tag): The story of that Christmas morn, it pointed to the cross.
And now I'm lookin to the tree."

Are you looking to the tree? The cross on which Jesus died for your sins? Are you looking to the Savior who came to give His life to ransom yours?