

FROM MAJESTY TO MANGER

LUKE 2:8-12

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 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."

My wife has always put a high priority on birthdays. She made sure birthdays in our family were a big deal.

When the kids were young we threw seven birthday parties a year. We were always *planning a party* or *recovering from one*. There was never a dull moment.

But the most important birthday party of the year was held on December 25th. The Adams family celebrated Jesus' birthday! And my wife, Kathy, would go all out...

On Christmas morning we would have *a birthday cake... with candles, no less...* a real birthday party!

We wanted our kids to understand that Christmas is first and foremost the celebration of the birthday of our Lord Jesus. *Christmas is a birthday party!* Messiah was born - laid in a manger - and we celebrate His birth!

But unlike your birthday or my birthday, Jesus' *birthday* was not His *beginning*. He existed long before His Incarnation. Rewind the *time counter* all the way back to "000" and there you'll find Jesus. Fast forward to the end of time and again there you'll find Jesus.

Jesus is from forever past. He'll be forever future.

In Micah 5:2 God declares that out of the city of Bethlehem, "shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." The Hebrew word translated "*everlasting*" can be rendered, "*beyond the vanishing point.*" It speaks of when time fades into eternity.

Go as far back or forward as your mind can imagine and there you'll find the Messiah! In Isaiah 9:6 the prophet refers to Jesus as "*the everlasting Father.*"

Jesus had no beginning and He has no end, *which presents a problem when you throw a birthday party.*

How many candles do you put on the cake?

Trust me, your kids will eventually ask you the question, "*How old is Jesus?*" To which my wife would always give the insightful answer, "*Ask your dad!*"

And here's what I learned to say when my kids would ask "*How old is Jesus?*" "**He is forever young and He is forever old!**" He touches eternity in both directions.

Jesus is eternal, timeless, transcendent, yet He is fresh, alive, contemporary... Revelation calls Him "*the Alpha and the Omega* (or A to Z), *the first and the last.*"

Jesus is the God who was, and is, and is to come!

His stride spans the history of the universe. One foot sits on the threshold of time, the other at its back door!

Now, when my grandkids ask, *"How old is Jesus?"* I'll tell them, *"He is forever old and He is forever young."*

In his book *"God Came Near"* author Max Lucado has a chapter titled, *"Twenty-five Questions for Mary."* He lists questions He'd like to ask the mother of Jesus.

Here's a sampling, *"When Jesus saw a rainbow did He ever mention a flood?... Did you ever feel awkward teaching Him how He created the world?... When He saw a lamb being led to the slaughter, did He act differently?... Did you ever see Him with a distant look on His face as if He were listening to someone you couldn't hear?... How did He act at funerals?"*

Did the thought ever occur to you that the God to whom you were praying was asleep under your own roof?... Did you ever catch Him looking at the flesh on His arm while holding some dirt?... Here's a final one, Did you ever think, "That's God eating my soup?"

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but He had been there before! Bethlehem was not His beginning.

One author writes, *"This baby had overlooked the universe. These rags keeping Him warm were the robes of eternity... Mary touches the face of the infant-God. How long was your journey!"* How long indeed!

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he says of Jesus, *"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or*

principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.”

When God hung the stars there was Jesus.

Think of it, the star that led the wise men to the house of Joseph and Mary was created by the Child they came to visit. It's mind-boggling, but the carpenter from Nazareth was the architect of the universe.

When you study Old Testament history it's startling to realize just how involved Jesus was not only in creation, but in many of God's dealings with His people. The second person of the Trinity appears frequently. He's never actually called "*Jesus*," yet His identity is unmistakable! We call these OT sightings *pre-incarnate*, or *pre-in-flesh* appearances of Jesus.

Take for example, Genesis 18. Abraham and Sarah are entertaining visitors. Sarah is in the kitchen when she overhears one of their mysterious guests tell her husband that his 90 year old wife will conceive a son.

Sarah can't help but laugh... That's when we read, "**The LORD** (literally "**Yahweh**," which is the Hebrew's unique name for *the Almighty*) said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son." Apparently, one of their guests was God incognito - the Almighty disguised as a man. *Who else could that be but Jesus?*

In Genesis 22 Abraham is on the verge of sacrificing his only son Isaac. He's on the mountain where God will later

sacrifice His only Son, Jesus. It's a foreshadowing of Calvary's cross. But in Genesis we're told **the Angel of the Lord** ordered Abraham to stop.

In Hebrew the word "angel" means "messenger."

It refers to both *heavenly* or *human* messengers. I believe in many of the OT cases where the "the Angel of the Lord" is mentioned, He's none other than Jesus.

On Mount Moriah it's possible it was our Savior with Abraham. Jesus stopped the sacrifice of Isaac knowing that one day He would be sacrificed in Isaac's place.

John 8 tells us of a conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees. He shocked them by saying, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." Jesus states that Abraham - who lived 2000 years beforehand - had seen His day! Father Abraham had actually hung out with Jesus of Nazareth...

Of course, the Pharisees laughed at such a thought. How could that be? They mocked Jesus, "You are not yet 50 years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus answered, "I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

And Jesus deliberately uses the name God coined for Himself at the burning bush, "I AM WHO I AM." Moses was to say to Pharaoh, "I AM has sent me."

The Jews considered the name "I AM" to be sacred. This is why they picked up rocks to stone Jesus. The Pharisees knew that Jesus was claiming to be God!

Speaking of the burning bush, at first glance we assume it was the Father who spoke from the bush - but *not* so. Jesus makes an unexpected appearance...

Read carefully Exodus 3:2-6, “**The Angel of the LORD** appeared to (Moses) in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God."

Pay attention to the details here, and you're forced to draw an interesting conclusion. Verse 2 makes it clear the voice from within the bush was that of "*the Angel of the Lord*" - yet the Angel identifies Himself as *Yahweh*.

The Angel of the Lord can be none other than Jesus!

It's a fascinating thought that before Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a *manger*... His glory appeared on Sinai and shook a *mountain*.

And this is where the OT really becomes exciting. When you realize that our Lord Jesus is involved throughout, many of the old stories take on a new twist!

For example, a close inspection of Exodus 14 tells us it was this Angel of God who led the Hebrews out of Egypt, and destroyed their army at the Red Sea.

Later in Acts 7, in Stephen's history of Israel, he confirms that the same Angel Moses saw in the *fiery bush* was the One who *bush-whacked* the Egyptians.

It was actually Jesus who *executed the Exodus*.

Stephen also tells us it was **the Angel of the Lord** who gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai...

Imagine how ridiculous it was for the Jews to argue with Jesus over the meaning of the Law given He was its author. *Who were they to criticize His interpretation?*

They were [arguing the Law with the Lawgiver](#).

And despite what the old spiritual tells us, it was not Joshua who fought the battle of Jericho - *it was Jesus!*

Read Joshua 5... The night before the battle Joshua couldn't sleep so he went for a walk by the riverbank. There he saw a man in the shadows, and like any good sentinel, Joshua confronted him, *"friend or foe?"*

This unexpected soldier replied, "As Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"

Then the Commander of the LORD'S army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so."

Now who was this person who pulls rank on Joshua?

It can't be an ordinary angel. Joshua fell on his face before Him and worshipped Him. Nowhere in Scripture does an angel of God allow himself to be worshipped. *Only God Himself is willing to receive worship.*

Notice also this Commander gives Joshua the same instructions Moses received on Mt. Sinai... *take off your sandals... the place where you stand is holy.*" It's obvious, the Commander who won the battle of Jericho was the same voice that spoke from the burning bush. They both were pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus.

Realize, long before Jesus visited Jericho, and called for Zacchaeus to come down from the sycamore tree, he had seen the city's walls come-a tumbling down.

And there are many other examples of Jesus' pre-incarnate appearances... He appeared to Hagar and made promises to her son, Ishmael... He wrestled with Jacob and pinned Him with a blessing... He commissioned Gideon to fight against the Midianites.

In fact, it was Jesus, **the Angel of the Lord**, who intercepted Balaam's donkey and prohibited the sorcerer from pronouncing a curse on the nation Israel.

A thousand years later, Jesus would ride a donkey into Jerusalem not to curse the nation, but to bless.

In Judges 13, an Angel appeared to a man named Manoah and announced the birth of his son, Samson. When Manoah asked the Angel His name, he replied, **"Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?"**

This is the same name given to Jesus 600 years later. In Isaiah 9:6 He's called, "wonderful counselor."

When the angel left Manoah, the man told his wife, "We have seen God." Manoah somehow knew *the Angel of the Lord* and *God* were *One-and-the-same!* It was another pre-incarnate sighting of Israel's Messiah.

Perhaps the most amazing pre-birthday work of Jesus occurred just outside the walls of Jerusalem in the year, 722 BC. Samaria had just fallen, and it seemed Jerusalem was next. It was a crisis moment...

The mighty Assyrian army had the city surrounded.

The Jewish King, Hezekiah was scared. He prayed for God's deliverance. And in 2 Kings 19:35 the Scripture records how God answered, "It came to pass, on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000..."

But what's interesting is what Isaiah, a contemporary of King Hezekiah, wrote about this same battle.

In Isaiah 8 he writes of the Assyrian general "he will pass through Judah, he will overthrow and pass over, he will reach up to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel... And then he writes, Speak the word, but it will not stand, for *God is with us* (the phrase is literally translated "*Immanuel*")." Isaiah says the Assyrian army will overflow the land, but *Immanuel* will defend Judah. Apparently, *Immanuel* is **the Angel of the LORD.**

And *“Immanuel”* is the same name given to Jesus by the Angel who appeared to his step-father, Joseph.

Apparently, the Immanuel who drew His sword to defend Israel, *laid down His sword*, and was *laid in a manger*. The battle-hardened Warrior became an infant. The Avenger *who shed the enemy’s blood to save Israel* will *shed His own blood to save the world*.

On our trips to Jerusalem we always visited the Mount of Olives, and stand in the place where Jesus wept over Jerusalem. On the Sunday before He was crucified, Jesus looked out over the city and cried...

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!

How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Today, a church stands in the spot where Jesus shed His tears. The name of the church is *“Dominus Flevit”* - which is Latin for *“the Lord wept.”*

But what’s stunning about the church is its dome. It’s built in the shape of a tear drop. There on the Mount of Olives is a perpetual reminder of the tears that Jesus shed over His wayward people. For long centuries, Jesus wanted to heal them, but they refused His help.

Recall His words, *“how often I wanted to gather your children...”* What was in His thoughts when He said that? What ancient images were flashing across the screen of Jesus’ mind when He spoke those words?

Their grumbling in the wilderness?

Their worship of idols?

The crushing invasions of Israel's enemies?

The rejected warnings of His prophets?

Jesus had seen all this history unfold from His box seat in heaven. He was engaged - often personally involved. Over and over Jesus had longed to intervene on Israel's behalf, *but His people were not willing!*

Here's my big point, Bethlehem was not Messiah's beginning. Mary's newborn was not a novice. Jesus came to the *manger* by way of *majesty!*

Jesus greeted the dawning of time. He poured the footings of the universe. He molded man out of mud.

Here was the One who set the course of nations - who caused kings to rise and kingdoms to crumble...

Jesus was *the Mighty Warrior, the Everlasting Father, the Eternal King, the Self-Existent One, the Commander and Chief of the Lord's Army, the Great I Am, the Law-giver, the Ruler of all Creation, and more!*

Jesus is the One who engineered every new turn in God's dealings with His people. More than being privy to Divine plans, Jesus possessed divinity Himself.

Jesus shared glory with the God who shares His glory with no one! Yet this same Jesus came into the world *a baby*. Can you believe it? *Of all things a baby!*

This is not the way we would expect *the Defender of Israel* and *the Champion of Righteousness* to make His first fleshly appearance on the world's stage.

The Almighty became weak.

The Self-existent One became dependent on the nurturing of an inexperienced teenage peasant, barely old enough to baby sit. The King of Angels became defenseless, exposed to a harsh, cold, cruel world.

Alfred Edershiem writes, "It seemed so strange that on such a slender thread as the feeble throb of an infant life the salvation of the world should hang - and no special care to watch over its safety, no better shelter be provided it than a "stable," no other cradle than a manger." Messiah was laid in a feed trough.

Listen to this poem by Luci Shaw, written from Mary's eyes as she cuddled the newborn King, "Blue homespun and the bend of my breast keep warm this small hot naked star fallen to my arms. (Rest... you have had so far to come.)

Now nearness satisfies the body of God sweetly.

Quiet He lies whose vigor hurled a universe.

He sleeps whose eyelids have not closed before. His breath (so slight it seems no breath at all) once ruffled the dark deeps to sprout a world.

Charmed by doves' voices, the whisper of straw, He dreams, hearing no music from His other spheres...

Breath, mouth, ears, eyes He is curtailed who overflowed all skies, all years. Older than eternity, now He is new. Now native to earth as I am, nailed to my poor planet, caught that I might be free, blind in my womb to know my darkness ended, brought to this birth for me to be new-born, And for Him to see

me mended I must see Him torn.” Mary cuddled the *Infinite Infant* - He had come so far to be so *vulnerable!*

And here’s what I want you to see today - it’s only against the backdrop of His pre-existence that we can appreciate Jesus’ Incarnation - *His coming in the flesh.*

As GK Chesterton once put it, “The incarnation added courage to the virtues of the Creator.” The King of holiness braved the dangers of the fallen planet.

When Jesus was born He swapped *riches for poverty, glory for scorn, respect for obscurity, honor for humiliation, praise for pain, heaven for a stable...*

He left the warmth and security of God’s heavenly throne to live in a harsh and wicked down-here.

The *invincible* became *vulnerable.*

The *Judge* came to be *judged.*

The King came to serve.

Angels were at His beck and call, waiting on Him day and night. He left it all and came to be a servant.

Author Oswald Chambers puts it, “The life of Jesus is the highest and holiest entering in at the lowliest door.” *His Majesty* was laid in a *mangy manger!*

Philippians 2:7-8 says it best, “(Jesus) 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...”

Understand when Jesus became a man He didn't stop being God. He never abandoned His divine attributes. Throughout

the Gospels Jesus frequently demonstrated His Divine knowledge and power.

Yet, though He maintained His attributes - He limited their use. He refused to employ them to make *His way easier* or *load lighter*. In taking on human flesh Jesus became subject to the same pain, and weakness, and temptation, and weariness that you and I feel.

Messiah laid aside the *perks and privileges* of Deity to *taste our experience* and *tangle with our enemies*.

And here's the million dollar question: **Why did He do it?** If all Jesus was after was luxury, or ease, or worship, or gratitude He would've hung out in heaven.

But what Jesus wanted most *was to win our love!*

The Angel of the Lord was feared and revered.

The Commander of the Lord's Army was respected and obeyed... *The King of heaven* was worshipped and praised. But our Lord Jesus wanted to be loved!

So Jesus laid aside all His power and clout - and made Himself vulnerable... *He became a baby...*

Think of it this way... Jesus was tired of *intimidating*, He now wanted to *entice*... The Messiah wanted to *communicate His heart*, not just *herald His judgment*.

Here's the reason Jesus came to earth - He not only wanted to be *feared*, He wanted to be *followed*. To capture our *hearts*, He became vulnerable to our *hurts*.

Is there someone you love... a distant spouse, an angry teenager, an estranged friend - and you'd like to be loved by them? Instead you don't even speak.

No matter how hard you try you just can't seem to break through to them. *Here's a possible problem - are you too busy demanding respect to earn their respect?*

Be honest... For a few moments try to be objective...

Do you try to intimidate or manipulate the person you love into agreeing with you? Or do you take an interest in their needs. Do you seek to persuade them to listen to what you have to say, by the love you show them?

Are you demanding that everyone see the problem through your eyes, or are you willing to see it through theirs? Are you too *invincible* to become *vulnerable*?

Is this why people fear you, but don't follow you?

Christmas is a lesson on relationships. To reach us the Almighty stopped throwing His weight around and became a seven pounder. No one bristles up at a baby.

God knew that a baby disarms us and attracts us. A baby draws our attention. Vulnerability is irresistible.

Here's the genius of the Incarnation...

The way you break down walls and win the hearts of people is by stooping down to their level - stepping into their shoes - showing them love they don't deserve...

Think of the person with whom you're at odds? Have you considered that their point might have some merit?

Humble yourself. Why do you need to be right?

Hey, you might be right, but you can become so *right* you've become *wrong*. What's more important to you... *to always be right?* Or do you want to *build a bridge?*

So what if you win the argument and lose a person!

Our Lord was always right, but never in a haughty way - never in a distant, arrogant, I-told-you-so-kind-of way. Jesus was always right, but He made you believe He understood your feelings, and was on your side.

Jesus might've disagree with people, but they always knew He cared! Our Lord never once folded His arms across His chest in frustration and said, "*Alright, that's it. Have it your way. I'm right, and one day you'll see.*"

Rather than draw a line in the sand, Jesus picked up a cross. And even on the cross He reached out... to a convicted thief. He prayed for the very people who crucified Him. Jesus continued to love to the very end.

It's ironic, but most of us concentrate on immunizing ourselves from people's hurts... Rather than being vulnerable, we're experts at building walls - at closing ourselves off emotionally to the hurts around us.

We keep those who need us most at arm's length.

And thus, this is why we come across self-righteous and intimidating - not Christ-like. The goal of the Christian life is not to become *invincible* but *vulnerable*.

Jesus could've remained perched on His throne in heaven, and watched our plight from a distance, as we sunk deeper into our sin. He didn't have to take a risk.

He could've played it safe. The Son of God could've stayed cozy and comfortable in heaven. He didn't have to expose Himself to the pain on earth... *but He did!*

As Philippians 2 tells us, Jesus was God, yet He laid aside His reputation. *His Highness* got low. He identified with our plight. Jesus won our love, not by insisting on us bowing to Him, but by Him serving us.

Jesus left *majesty for the manger - the throne for the trough* - and we're His followers as result! We now love our Lord Jesus because He became vulnerable to us!

Jesus found what He was looking for in a manger... *He found love!* Not just the love of Mary and Joseph, and the Shepherds... but *my love* and *your love*.

And you too will find love when you descend into the manger. When you care enough to serve - then you'll bridge the gap with those you really want to reach.

When you serve you'll earn their love, and sense the Lord's love in ways you've never known before. There's *love* in the manger... and there's *room* in the manger!

Bethlehem hotels were crowded that first Christmas.

The place Jesus was born was the place no one else wanted. And that's still the case 2000 years later.

Everyone is clawing their way to the top - *only a few people are seeking the lowly place...* We all have a choice. We can fight, and climb, and scratch - or we can humbly stoop and join *the Messiah in the manger?*

Hey, there's *love* in the manger! And there's *room* in the manger! Let me ask... *are you in the manger?*