

The Baby in the Feed Box

Luke 2:1-20

Well, it's Christmas time. There's no point denying it anymore. As of today there are 12 days until Christmas. I get a little grumpy sometimes as the shops seem to start their decorations earlier and earlier each year but there is no point denying it now. Christmas is soon.

There's much to love about Christmas time. I'm starting to get excited. There's food to look forward to. There are friends to have round. Carols and singing and much else. And it's really fascinating to see people's Christmas traditions come to the fore. At Christmas on my Liz, my wife's side, we always have prawns. We think it's wonderful that we can have fresh seafood at Christmas so we do it every year. I'm sure your family have your own.

And as a community we have our own traditions in and around Christmas, things we do and stories we tell. But the funny thing is, many of the stories that we tell aren't all that accurate.

For instance, we speak about the 3 wise men that visited the baby Jesus when he was born. But when we read Matthew's gospel carefully we see no mention of how many there were, only that there was more than one. So where do we get 3 from? Probably because of the gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. 3 gifts, 3 wise men but it could have been 30 wise men from the east.

We also speak as though they got there soon after the baby Jesus was born. In our nativity scenes we see baby Jesus in the manger and the wise men off to the side, but again the Bible doesn't really support that. It says that they went to where the baby was, not that he was still in the manger.

Now, in a way these little differences don't matter all that much. If the Bible doesn't tell us how many wise men there were then it doesn't really matter. But it is worthwhile to look carefully at the text and see just what really happened when Jesus was born. This part of the Bible is very familiar to most of us as God the Son came into the world. And that's something worth getting right.

Luke, the medical man of science, records extraordinary details with very little fanfare. Let me show you what I mean.

From verse one,

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to their own towns to be enrolled. Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He

went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Did you notice how much power the Roman government is able to exert over its subjects? Never mind the fact that the Emperor ordered a census of the whole known world, or at least the portion of it that Rome controlled. People were required to return to their hometown in order to be counted. Young Joseph had to do it with his very heavily pregnant fiancé. I have a couple of friends who have just given birth and a couple more who are very pregnant and the thought of them doing any kind of serious travel on foot or even by donkey is hard to imagine. But they were compelled to go.

And we can see just how pregnant Mary was because she gives birth in the next verse.

From verse 6,

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

No place for them in the inn. Let's think about that for a moment. There are so many people in town that the inn is full. That's reasonable, everyone is in town for the census. But imagine if you had bought a room in the inn and you were there as a heavily pregnant young woman comes in looking for a room. The owner says,

I'm full up but you can stay out the back in the animal shed if you want. Mind where you tread and watch out for rats.

She looks around, hoping that someone will help her, but people avoid her gaze. Out in the shed it is.

She gives birth surrounded by mess and animals and flies and smells and dirt. She has a son and has nowhere to put him except in a manger. When we think of a manger we think of a nice wooden trough lined with straw with a buxom baby boy nestled comfortably in the middle of it.

But let's call it what it is. He's lying in a feed box for animals. Mary has no choice but to put that delicate, tiny new born boy down in a feed box. It was probably either that or on the ground in the animal... muck. This is not a peaceful scene. Animals are loud and intrusive and smelly and rough. This is probably a young girl, with a new baby, out in the back shed with little more than swaddling cloths and a manger. There aren't many people who have come from a more humble beginning than this. And considering who this baby is, it's all the more remarkable. Let's have a look at how he is introduced.

From verse 8,

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Quite often at Christmas time we see pictures of this scene. Some shepherds with cuddly, snow white sheep looking up at an angel or messenger of God. The angel delivers the message and the shepherds decide to go and see this child. It's all very nice and pleasant.

And when I talk with people about the Lord Jesus, one of the things I hear with some frequency is something like "If I saw God, then I would believe. If God showed himself to me, I'd become a Christian."

Here in the Bible we get a look at what happens when someone does see God... in way. Remember, these are shepherds. These guys defend the sheep from wolves and large cats and other predators with not much more than sticks and clubs. They are out with the sheep all day and all night. They are tough and hardened.

The Bible says an angel comes to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were filled with fear. They were terrified. They only saw God's glory, not even God himself and they were completely overcome. They were filled with horror and dread.

The nice, peaceful scene we think of about the messenger or angel visiting the shepherds was nothing of the sort for those men. They had to be reassured before they could hear the message.

That message comes to us from verse 10,

¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

The baby born to Mary is no ordinary child. He will be a Saviour, Messiah and Lord.

Savior because he would die in the place of those he saves.

Messiah or Christ, because he's the anointed one. The one promised by God in the Old Testament, the one that Jews had been waiting for four hundred years. And he's the Lord or King, the one who would rule.

And how are the shepherds to recognise this magnificent Savior/Christ/King? He will be wrapped up and lying in a feed box.

They talk amongst themselves and decide that they would head over to the town and see this momentous child.

Verse 16

¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told

them.¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The baby in the Manger.

Having had a closer look at what actually happened, what are we to think of the baby in the manger? I think there are two things can take away from this passage. The first is to remember who this baby is. This is the one who would be savior and Christ and Lord. This is not an ordinary child. And as we see depictions of our Lord and savior as a baby and as we celebrate God coming to earth this Christmas, let us ask God to help us to remember who that little child is. That one born in such humble – almost appalling – circumstances is the one who would grow to die on a Roman cross for our sins, be raised to life and take his place as the King of the earth.

If you don't yet trust in the Lord Jesus as your savior, I hope you've seen that there is more going on here than a nice story that we bring out at this time of year. There is a lot more to this baby than we first thought. Maybe it's time you found out what the Lord Jesus and Christianity is *really* about.

So, first: remember who this baby is.

Secondly, we can take the example of the shepherds as we prepare for Christmas. The shepherds returned to their work glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. They had seen a messenger of the Lord, they had seen the Lord as a baby. How much more, we who are Christians, who have God's Spirit dwelling in us, have to praise and glorify God?

As you meet with various friends and family over Christmas period and as you share in all your wonderful Christmas traditions, make sure that you speak of the one who came so humbly. Speak of the *real* Jesus. The one we read of in the Scriptures. The savior, Christ and Lord. Tell people that that tiny frail baby is God and that he came to be our savior. Show them in the Bible what really happened, or invite them to church as we declare the truth about this all-important child. What a wonderful way to serve this Christmas.

Please pray with me as I ask God to help us to do that.

Heavenly Father,

With all there is to do and with so many people to see as we approach Christmas please help us to remember who that baby is. Help us to see and to remember that he is not just a helpless babe, but the Lord of all Creation.

Father we ask that you would help us to be bold in sharing what we know about him at Christmas time. Help us to talk with people about the real Lord Jesus, to read the Bible with them or bring them to church. Help us, please, to be bold and share what we know about the most important baby ever born.

In Jesus' name we pray.

13th Dec 2015

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St Mark's South Hurstville

Amen.