

STARS, STRAW AND AN ANGEL'S SONG

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Luke 2:1-14

Many centuries before any of us arrived on the scene, mankind cried out for an answer to the puzzle of life. They seemed to know with a kind of sixth sense they were part of a puzzle. But lacking the key piece into which all the other pieces fit, they moved from one frustration to the next, age upon age, never quite reaching the fulfillment their hearts desired.

As J. B. Phillips has observed, it was as if they lived in a light-proof room. Outside, the sun in all its dazzling splendor shone down upon their dark little worlds, but the people inside the room knew nothing of its glory. With crude little hand-wrought candles as the source of their light, they stumbled about in the darkness. Occasionally, some brilliant soul would contrive the idea of boring a hole in the wall to see what was on the other side. And, through the tiny pinpricks would come a faint glimmer of the shining sun.

But this only added to their frustrations. To continue Phillips' observation, the very fact they had candles seemed evidence that there was a "Great Light" somewhere, and the inadequate glimpses which came to them through the tiny pin holes they had poked in their prison added weight to their belief. But they were powerless to dispel the darkness. And so, amid the gloom of their light proof room they asked questions about the meaning of light. What was the purpose of their darkness? Could it be possible that there was someone, somewhere, who could bring light into their lives? If so, what was He like? Did He really care about them and their pitiful plight? Or was He so vast and distant He could not enter into their struggle?

For uncounted millennium, people asked their questions. The activists among them built bigger and better candles. The philosophers among them poked larger and smoother holes in the walls which entombed them. But the darkness consumed their candles with a ravenous appetite and the pinpricks only raised more questions for which there were no answers.

And then one day, as if by miracle, there came one from the world of light outside who solved their dilemma. He simply took down the shutters. As the blinding light streamed in upon them, they saw in its dazzling splendor the folly of their candles and the inadequacy of their tiny pin holes.

“For the people that walked in darkness had seen a great light.”

Now, this simple analogy, suggested by J. B. Phillips in his book *YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL* may cause the sophisticates among us to smile. But in its naive little way, it illustrates precisely what happened when the Son of God invaded our world amid the splendor of stars, the simplicity of straw, and the singing of an angel's song.

The world into which He came that first Christmas day was a world of dilemma and darkness. The activists, the go-gooders, the followers of the “salvation by works” idea had built their crude moral codes and ethical systems. In the faint light of these hand made candles, they sought to improve their lot.

To some degree, they were successful. In so far as they were able to lift the sights of mankind and teach people how to live with one another, we must pay them homage. But oh, how feeble was their light, and how incapable it was of dispelling their darkness.

The intellectuals, the dreamers, the adherence of the “mind over matter” school had poked their little philosophical holes into the walls which surrounded them. And again, to some degree they were successful. In so far as their finite minds were able to grasp the infinite and cast light on the pathway of people, we must give them thanks. But, oh, how inadequate were their pin holes of light against the night which enveloped them.

And thus, as Phillips suggests, the necessity of an invader from outside. Someone who could tear off the shutters of their house of darkness and widen the aperture of their souls so they could behold the true light which lightens every path.

So God became Man! Through the babe of Bethlehem He not only tore off the shutters and widened the aperture of human minds, He also answered the question which had plagued people from the inception of time.

No longer did folks need to wonder if there is Someone, somewhere who can give them light. For here, wrapped in swaddling clothes, is One who will be called "The Light Of The World."

No longer did folks need to wonder what God is like. For this was God. Incarnate. In human flesh. And He would show them that "God Is Love."

No longer did folks need to wonder about the meaning of life. Through the example this babe of Bethlehem would set, they would discover the whole purpose of life is to love God with all their being and to love their neighbor as themselves.

No longer would folks need to wonder if God cares about their petty trials and pitiful troubles. For here, stars and straw had come together. Here, infinity and simplicity were one. Here, deity and humanity were blended. Here, in this one Solitary Life, people found God coping with life on the same terms which had been imposed upon them. For this was not God on some distant throne. This was God on the battlefield of life.

How beautiful then is the meaning of Christmas.

A little child,
A shining star.
A stable rude,
With door ajar.

Yet in that place
So crude, forlorn
The hope of all

The world is born.

Yes, it took the incarnation to show us what God is like.

A Christian professor was walking one day with an agnostic friend. They were talking about this very thing. How a human being could know what God is like. How a mere mortal could know the mind of the eternal God.

The agnostic contended it was impossible.

“It is pure wishful thinking,”

he said,

“to believe we could know the mind of the infinite.”

At that moment they passed an ant hill. Seeking to support his argument, he pointed to the ants busily scurrying in and out of their little home and said,

“It would be possible no more for me to know the mind of God than it would be possible for those ants to know my mind. How could they even know my thoughts?”

The professor was silent for a moment and then answered:

“Well, I guess the only way would be for you to become an ant and live with them. Talk with them. Show them by your actions there is something greater than their little world. No, I guess it couldn't be done unless you became an ant.”

Do you see it? As John 1:14 so plainly declares:

“The word was made 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.”

Because God has invaded our realm, we know what He is like.

Because He was born in the stillness of a stable, we know something of His mysterious ways and value system.

Because His coming was accompanied by a galaxy of stars, we know a little of His splendor.

Because He was nestled in the sweetness of straw, we can understand His profound simplicity.

Because of an Angel's song we know that here, in the babe of Bethlehem, there is hope and there is joy.

Yes! “The word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

You see, if Jesus had been the Son of God 10,000 times over, and if, in Him, were vested even greater love and authority and glory--had He not left all to come to live on earth--He would have been too far beyond and above us to ever give us a glimpse of God.

But when we see Him as a fellow human, living our life, thinking our thoughts, enduring our temptations, feeling our sorrows, enduring our pain, weeping our tears, dying our death, and then hear Him say:

“God is a Father, and he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father”

we begin to understand the meaning of the words

“God is Love.”

“God is Light.”

“God is Life.”

For this is not God loving from afar, sitting above the fretful cares of daily life. Rather this is God personally concerned--because of the personal experiences of His son Jesus--with the mundane activities attached to living on this planet.

In one of her stories, Sheila Kaye-Smith depicts a character upon whom, as he knelt one day within a church, this great, subduing truth broke through with all the force of a personal revelation:

“There was not one pang of his lonely, wandering life,
no throb or ache or groan of his, which had not been
shared by God.”

For if, through the incarnation people had known the stars, so too, through the incarnation God had known the straw!

Beloved, do not forget the incarnation is a two-way street. We think of it as man's way to God. And so it is. But it is also God's way to man. It is the one and only all sufficient “Jacob's ladder” between heaven and earth.

“It is our way of entering into the heights of heaven's
glory. It is God's way of entering into the depths of
human despair.”

“A wondrous star; a lowly manger;
Meek oxen waiting at the stall;
A mother holding close from danger
In her frail arms, the Lord of all!

Those tiny fingers, helpless, clinging,
Framed the stars and sped them through the skies;
The ears that heard the angel's singing
Now listen to a Mother's sigh.

Omniscience shrined in baby sweetness;
Omnipotence enfolded there;
God, the creator in completeness,
Dependent on a woman's care."

Yes, through the babe of Bethlehem, we have known the stars and, through this self same infant, God has known the straws.

And because of this incredible combination of stars and straw, deity and humanity, eternity and time, we know what God is like and we have the calm assurance that, come what may, we do not walk alone. God is in this with us.

But enough of the stars and straw. Let's talk for a moment about "The Angel's Song."

When the angels joined in singing their glory oratorio above the hills of Bethlehem, there was one word which rose in soaring strains above the others. It was the word: "Savior." The reason the angels could sing with angelic enthusiasm:

"Fear not, for behold we bring you good tidings of great joy"
was because the sum and substance of their song was that a Savior had been born.

That's why Christmas is a season of hope. That's why we sing, nearly 2000 years later,

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come."

Because the babe of Bethlehem became the man of Calvary. The infant wrapped in swaddling clothes became the Savior of the world.

In the truest, deepest sense of the word, Jesus is the missing link. The one who bridges the gap between God and man. And, through Him, we have the promise of eternal life.

In his book, *The Immortal Sea*, Leslie Weatherhead writes concerning the incarnation:

“Christ’s flesh and blood formed the paper God used to send His message to the world. The paper on which He wrote His love letter to all mankind. The incarnation began when Mary said, ‘Into thy hands I commend my body’ and ended when Jesus said, ‘Into thy hands I commit my spirit.’”

To carry the illustration further, the paper may be destroyed. That is

to say, Christ’s body was put to death.

But the significance of the love letter is not in the paper, but in the message.

And the message is:

“God so loved you that He gave His only begotten Son for your redemption.”

That’s the real meaning of the incarnation. God was in Christ reconciling you to Himself.

Oh, the baby may not seem like much of a Savior to you. But remember, the baby grew up! As we shall see next Sunday, the crib and the cross are inextricably bound together.

And so, in the few days which remain in this Advent season:

Follow the star and know that it is symbolic of the baby’s splendor.

Finger the straw and know it is symbolic of His simplicity and involvement in life as we have to live it.

But do not forget the Angel’s song.

For the best part of Christmas is the good tidings of great joy: Unto us a Son has been given. Unto us a Savior has been born.

“A Savior which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

Excuse me, but “Hallelujah!”