

That's Our God in That Manger!

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made... ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

For millions of people the baby in the manger is just that. It's a baby. He's cute. He's non-threatening. He's a good story. For those millions of people he holds no real significance beyond a sentimental inspiration. At best, he is a symbol of vague hope.

Even for ourselves, if we're honest, we can lose sight of who that baby in the manger is. In the activity and the frenzy and the stress of the season we can lose touch with what it is we are celebrating. If we are not focused, whom we worship on Christmas and why we worship on Christmas can become vague.

To avoid that, the apostle John starts his gospel in the most unique way. Matthew and Luke basically start their gospels with the baby Jesus. Mark starts his gospel with Jesus' ministry. But John? John goes farther back to start his gospel and draws back the curtain of eternity – prior to Jesus' birth, prior to time as we know it, and space, and creation. John does so because he wants us to understand the full impact of who is in that manger and why he came. You see, there's nothing vague about the baby in the manger. That's our God in that manger!

Listen again to John 1:1-3: **"¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."** With these words John leaves no doubt as to the dimensions of the story he is about to tell in his gospel. He's not going to talk about a manger or a star or Bethlehem. He is going to talk about the eternal God, the pre-existent One. **"In the beginning,"** before anything came into being, he was, and there was never a time he was not. Just ponder that. And then try to fathom this: That's who the baby in the manger is. It doesn't get more massive or cosmic than that. But that's the context we want to keep when celebrating Christmas. In fact, we never want to lose that context as we see the baby grow up and live his life. Yes, that's our God in that manger.

Then notice his name, **"the Word."** Why **"the Word"**? What does that mean? Well, the background for that name is in the Bible itself. The Word is God's own self-disclosure of who he is and a narrative of his powerful activity. God reveals by his Word. He creates by his Word. He orders history by his Word. He saves by his Word. And nowhere is that more clearly revealed than in the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is one with the Father and whom we know as our Savior by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As mind blowing as that thought is, there's nothing vague about it. It means that the baby in the manger, who is the Son of God, can't just be thought of in sentimental terms. He can't be seen as merely a pleasant example for humanity. He can't be dismissed as a mere man. He can't be relegated to other spiritual figures of history. He can't be forced into a mold of our making or liking. That's our God in that manger – the One who was, who is, and always will be, the One who is the source of all life (physical and spiritual), the One to whom we owe our existence, the One to whom we owe our faith, the One whom we worship and celebrate today.

I don't know about you, but when I see and understand Christmas in the light that the apostle John wants me to see it, even before I'm led to sing **"Veiled in flesh the God-head see, Hail th' incarnate Deity,"** there is a greater sense within me to sigh, **"In hopelessness and near despair, I cry to you, my Savior!"** Why? Because that's my God in that manger. My holy, eternal God! And as John brings me before him in John 1:1-2, the guilt is more than I can bear. Do you sense the same? Who are we to be in his presence? Who are we that he would come to us in that manger? We know who we are. That's why the guilt is too great to bear. But that's why Christ came!

Listen to this, John 1:14: **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."** Therein lies the heart of Christmas.

"The Word became flesh." Yes, the Son of God, without ceasing to be God, became a man – with a real human body, with blood and neurons and skin and bones, subjected to human weakness and frailty, and yet, all of that without sin. It's what we call "the incarnation." And it's really the point of celebrating Christmas.

The point of Christmas is not to latch on to some vague hope that has no content or reality. The point of Christmas is not to medicate ourselves with Christmas cookies and delights and suspend all dietary discipline. The point of Christmas is not to turn over a new leaf and be inspired by the shepherds or the Magi. The point of Christmas is to remember, to marvel, and to be humbled by the earth shattering fact that the Word became flesh. Again, think of the implications. God in all his holiness and authority and power became one of us. And why? For one purpose: To do something about the sin in our lives. Yes, to actually suffer and die for it in our place. That dear friends, above all else, is where we see his glory.

Remember John 1:1-2 and John 1:14 are just an introduction. When we keep reading John and the other three gospels, we see a journey from a manger to a cross. On that journey we see a perfect life that Jesus lived to make up for every failed and fallen moment of our life. And at the cross we see a perfect sacrifice that Jesus made to pay for every dark and damning sin of our life. To see this life and this death of Christ for who he is and what he did for us is to see God's grace and truth. It is to see the greatest display of love and faithfulness this world has ever known or ever will know. To think that you not only can you say of the baby, "That's our God in that manger," but you can say of the same, "That's our God on that cross – for us." The marvel of such is, well, anything but vague. It's the truth of our salvation and the wonder of God's amazing grace.

It's no wonder why the angels sang in chorus: "Glory to God in the highest!" Amen.