

The Story Series
Week 22: The Birth of The King
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On this glorious Christmas Day when a star shines brightly in the Bethlehem sky, when angels appear and sing heavenly choruses, and a virgin gives birth to the Son of God, grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm sure you would agree that nothing brings a smile to our faces more than the kids Christmas program! I think the kiddos did an excellent job yesterday retelling the Christmas story. Bravo! There's nothing like a 7-year Joseph, wearing sneakers and a robe, knocking on the door to the neighborhood inn and the innkeeper appearing. Joseph begins to explain his dire situation – a long five day trip to Bethlehem on a donkey for the census. But most of all a wife – a very pregnant wife named Mary.

We all know what happens next. The innkeeper shakes his head declaring that there is simply no room at the inn. No vacancy.

At this point in the story, I always want to yell, "STOP! You're making a mistake! Mr. Innkeeper, think twice about what you are doing! Don't turn this family away! Do you know *who* you are turning away? That baby that is about to be born is GOD in the flesh, the King of the Universe. He's the reason for the season... ring a bell?

You'd better think about what you are doing, Mr. Innkeeper! Do you really want to be remembered throughout all of history as the person who didn't welcome Jesus in?

What if... what if the innkeeper changed his mind and found a place within his house to welcome the baby Jesus? Wouldn't that be a better ending to the story about the birth of Jesus? But if that is how the story would end, then we wouldn't have the angels appearing in the sky over the nearby fields with shepherds "watching their flocks by night" telling them that the Messiah has been born in a manger. Follow the star and you will find him.

And at this point in every kids Christmas program one of the narrators says, "And the Word became flesh and made his home among us" (John 1:14). God moves into the neighborhood, into our daily lives. That's the good news of Christmas. God comes down from heaven and becomes one of us so that we can experience God's love in a very real way. Because of our sinful nature, it is impossible for us to make our way up to God. We all fall short of God's glorious standard, St. Paul tells us. And so God, out of his great love for us, chooses to come down to us.

Because we could not find our way to God, God came to us. That is the true miracle of Christmas – God coming to earth to be with us. God taking on human flesh and living among us. Through the birth of Jesus, God promises to be with us at all times – in moments of joy and sadness, in both moments of celebration and fear, pain and uncertainty.

If only the innkeeper would have understood this. If only he would have realized that the child in Mary's womb was not just another number in the census, but it was God himself – God in the flesh. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the wisdom of God by which all things will be revealed.

Let us not forget the significance of “the Word.” John's gospel begins by declaring, “In the beginning was the Word.” Such language takes us back to the beginning of our *Story* journey, to the creation story in Genesis. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1). When God brought creation into being, the Bible tells us that God simply spoke the Word and life was brought into being. “Let there be...” and it was. That's how powerful God's Word is.

And that very Word of God is now with us in the person of Jesus Christ. We can now experience God's powerful, life-giving Word in a whole new way through this person named Jesus, the very Son of God. God said, “Let there be... forgiveness, and so it was through this Jesus.” God said, “Let there be... salvation, and so it was through Jesus.”

The Promised Messiah that we kept hearing about throughout the Old Testament has finally arrived. God has kept his promise. God has set into motion the final culmination of his master plan to save us from sin and death. God's plan to save us is code named, “Jesus,” a name which means, “He will save his people from their sins.”

“And the Word became flesh and made his home among us.” God wrapped himself in flesh and gave himself to us as a gift at Christmas. Colossians 2:9 puts it this way: “For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.” Yes, Jesus is fully human, but he is also fully God. The mystery of the incarnation.

Remember the conversation between Mary and the angel Gabriel? Mary asks, “How can this be, for I am a virgin?” We have a small problem, Mary informs the angel. “How can I have a baby within my womb when I've never known a man?” The angel tells Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will conceive the very Son of God.”

Yes, Jesus was so divine that he needed no assistance entering a womb, but so human that there was no room for him at the inn. Do you see the irony in that? Jesus, the owner of all things, the one who controls and oversees all things, couldn't even secure a room in the Bethlehem Motel 6. We will see this dichotomy play itself out again and again as we make our way through the life story of Jesus. The divine will of God being played out on the human stage of life.

Truth be told, the fact that Jesus couldn't secure a room at the Motel 6 is good news for us. It means that Jesus understands what we go through in life. Jesus knows the growling of a hungry belly, the chill of a cold night. Jesus understands all too well the hurtful betrayal of friends and being falsely accused. Jesus understands the pain and sorrow of losing a loved one. Jesus knows what it feels like to lie awake at night worrying.

Because Jesus has taken on our flesh, Jesus understands. "I know what that's like," Jesus says. Despite our best efforts, despite our best of intentions, life just sometimes doesn't work. If it's left up to us, then the forecast looks rather stormy. We are often times left feeling hopeless and defeated. Even when we do everything right, the rug of life is often times pulled out from under us. Where does that leave us?

It leaves us in need of a Savior. It leaves us with the reality that, on our own, we just can't do it. We need someone to come and save us from the predicament of our human nature. We need a Savior.

"You are to call him Jesus," the angel says. "For he will save his people from their sins."

So how did the world respond to this wonderful news that God has become flesh? The gospel writer John tells us, "He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him."

Apparently the innkeeper wasn't the only one who turned Jesus away. As Joseph and Mary pleaded with the innkeeper to allow them to come in, the innkeeper just kept saying "it's so crowded in here."

We can relate to that, can't we? Is your life as crowded as mine? Our lives are so crowded with demands and deadlines – crowded with so many things that need to be done. Our schedules so quickly become jam packed. Christ comes in the midst of our crowded lives and knocks on the door to our heart. And all too often our response echoes the innkeeper: "I don't have any room for you; my life is already so crowded."

The truth is, Christ has not come into the world to further complicate our lives, he has come to simplify it. As Christ is born into this world he does not bring with him a do-list for us to complete in order to get right with God. No, Christ comes with a list of things that he will do for us. God didn't wait until we had our lives in order before he sent Christ. God knew all along that without Christ, we would never get our life in order, and so, out of his great love for us, God sends Christ into our world to show us what is truly important, and what is not.

Our lives get so busy that we have to start saying "No" to regain some sanity to our lives. Let's just make sure that we are not turning away that which is most important. The birth of Christ is the greatest gift God has given to the world. Christ is the gift that will ultimately offer us the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. Sin and death are the two greatest enemies of our lives. Knowing that Christ will triumph over both sin and death upon the cross frees us from worry and fear. Knowing how the story ends puts the everyday concerns of our lives into perspective. Now that Christ has been born into the world, we know how the story will end. And it's a happy ending.

“Do not be afraid,” the angel says, “for I bring you good news of great joy. To you is born this day a Savior.”

When God chose to become human, God had one intention in mind: to show us how much he loves us. Jesus was born not only to live among us, but to die for us. The little baby that sleeps on the hay is the Resurrection and the Life. This little baby Jesus has come to show us how to experience abundant life and lead us to our Heavenly Father. Jesus has been born to show us the way home.

“Do not be afraid,” the angel reassures us, “for I bring you good news of great joy. To you – to you – is born this day a Savior.” The miracle of Christmas (of God becoming flesh) is happening all around us this morning. Our prayers have been answered. The long wait for some good news is over. Hope has finally arrived. It is as if God has sent each of us a very personal love letter. The letter reads, “Jesus Christ has been born just for you.”

Let us treasure those words in our heart. Treasure them much like Mary treasured the words she received from the angel. “Jesus Christ has been born just for you.” Make those words your very own, because God becoming flesh is indeed *your* story. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him (*that’s you!*) will not perish but have eternal life.”

Eternal life – that is the reason Christ was born. Knowing that our sin would always separate us from God; knowing that we would never be good enough or smart enough to earn God’s love, God takes matters into his own hands. God wraps the gifts of grace, forgiveness, hope and salvation into a tiny baby named Jesus and graciously offers him to us.

The fact that God has become flesh and lives among us means that we can go forth into the New Year trusting that there will not be a single moment where we are not cradled in the arms of God. In our accomplishments and disappointments, in our laughter and tears, in our life and our death – God will be there. For the Word has become flesh, and lives among us.

The baby Jesus is indeed God – God in the flesh – a God who walks with us every step of the way; a God who is in control and keeps his promises; a God who has taken our salvation into his own hands.

“Do not be afraid,” the angels say. “For I bring you good news of great joy. To you is born this day a Savior, Christ, the Lord!”

Thanks be to God! And all God’s people said, “Amen.”