



# Child in the Manger

The story is told that long ago a Persian king loved his people so much he wanted to learn more about how they lived. He sought to know what trials they faced and of their everyday routines. It was said that he often dressed in working man's clothing to have a place among them so he could listen to their stories and enter their homes. One day, he visited a poor man who lived in a cellar. The man shared what small portion of food scraps he had with the king. In exchange, the king offered encouraging, loving words and then left him. Upon his second visit, the king revealed his royal identity to the man and expected him to ask for a gift or favor. Instead, the poor man became overwhelmed that the king would leave his lofty palace to spend time with him in a dark, dreary cellar. He told the king how much he was gladdened by his company and remembered the time when he shared coarse food with him. He realized that to others the king had offered his richest gifts, but to this undeserving man he gave himself.

The lowly child in the manger is the God that loved his people so much that he would do anything to be with them – even if it meant that he would have to leave his glory in heaven and enter the world as a crying infant. From lowly birth to one who was despised and beaten, God bore our humanity so that we might know his divinity. It had to happen this way. So Christ strapped on dusty work clothes and became an outcast and stranger that he could save even the lowliest among us. We didn't need a king who would come bringing expensive gifts. We didn't need royal favors that would only patch us up for awhile. We needed a King that looked like us, walked like us, and lived to know our hardships. This kind of king we would invite into our homes and eventually into our hearts.

The child in the manger is “the Child of salvation.” If our deepest need was information, we would have been sent a teacher. If our deepest need was financial, a philanthropist would have been sent. If our deepest need was of pleasure, we would have been given an entertainer. But as sinful, hopeless creatures God knew we needed a Savior. So he sent us Jesus.

Maybe this Christmas it will be different. When we read about the God of the universe coming in the form of man, maybe we'll hope he descends as a strong, groomed, handsome young ruler. After all, it is embarrassing to hear of our king being unveiled as a helpless, crying baby. And, couldn't there have been a better candidate for our Lord's mother? There must have been another woman with better credentials. But, if it had to be as an infant born of Mary, maybe the story will unfold with a royal birth. That would be fitting. At least there could have been a better cast of characters who visited the stable. But Shepherds? This is not the storybook beginning for a mighty king.

But the simplicity of the gospel required a simple entrance. No fanfare or kingly robe – only rough straw, cloths, and a feeding trough. God “lived below” because it was here where he could gather up all of our brokenness in the healing arms of his love. God the Son relinquished his rights as such and became God the man. For final and complete victory, our Savior had to come as the Child in the manger. The prelude to the greatest love story begins here. Go and worship him – the newborn, the King!

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