

Jesus' Birth and My Life -- What's The Connection?

The welcome that Jesus received in Bethlehem is a good illustration of how most people respond to him today. The original manger scene was a cold and dirty cave. Jesus entered a world unfit for his royal presence. God's willingness to enter our world, darkened and dirtied by sin, is a reason to be thankful. We don't have to clean up our act first in order to make room for him. When Jesus comes into our life, he accepts us as we are. God is not afraid of dirt. God comes to us, wherever we are so He can save us away from the filth and pain.

Because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was obviously pregnant by this time. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the village inn.

1. What makes our inner world unfit for the presence of Jesus?
2. How do we fail to make room for Jesus in our lives?

Encounters with the living God inevitably bring fear. So the angels had to reassure the shepherds, "Don't be afraid!" Once the shepherds realized the fact that God accepted them and wanted to communicate with them, they were free to worship the Christ child. The fact that Jesus came in the flesh reassures us that our holy and almighty God is also a personal God. God is with us and for us. We need not fear the unknown future or the all-too-familiar past. When we put our faith in the living God of yesterday, today and tomorrow his perfect love casts out all fear.

That night some shepherds were in the fields outside the village, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terribly frightened, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—

has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!" Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors." When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Come on, let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this wonderful thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." They ran to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger

1. In what ways do I fear to hand all of my life over to God?
2. In what seemingly ordinary ways and places has God come into my life that I need to recognize?

In our recovery, painful thoughts of a guilt-ridden past or an uncertain future often intrude and disrupt the present. Some days these disrupting thoughts cause us to feel depressed. Certainly these darker issues must be faced for us to break free from the patterns of the past. But Mary shows us how thoughts about positive things can lift our spirits and give us the courage to take the next step. She meditated on the things God was doing and wanted to do in her life. When we do the same, we take a step toward recovery and wholeness. Pondering the joy with the sorrow, the awesome with the awful, and the gain with the pain will lead to emotional and spiritual healing.

Then the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary quietly treasured these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their fields and flocks, glorifying and praising God for what the angels had told them, and because they had seen the child, just as the angel had said.

1. What are some of the wonderful things God has done in my heart that I can treasure in my heart?

- How is God speaking to me this Christmas? Through the manger, the shepherds, or Mary?
- What can I do to make a space for God in my heart this Christmas and in the coming days?