

“Christmas 2004”

By: Doug Warren

If Jesus was God, why was he born the way that he was?

The story of Jesus being born in a manger is so familiar to most of us (whether we believe it or not) that we seldom consider the scandal that it was meant to evoke. If it is just a heartwarming story of a young poor family enduring hardship and scorn to receive the precious gift of a fragile new life, then the only scandal is that more folks were not more hospitable to them. But that is hardly an earth-shattering tale. The narrative of this child’s birth, however, claims to be much more. It claims that this infant, born in the backwoods under the stigma of illegitimacy, is none other than the King of Kings, God Himself, come to earth.

If he really was God in the flesh, why in the world would he be born to such humble parents and in such squalor? Consider for a moment what the angels proclaimed to announce his birth, “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

One of things that makes it easy for us to miss the significance of what the angels declared stems from our association with “Christ” as an exclamation used in pain or as simply Jesus’ last name. In fact it is a title. It means “anointed” and God’s people had heard for millennia that while there were many leaders anointed as prophet, priest, or king there would come one day *the* anointed One. It is the designation for the Messiah, the promised Savior of His people.

The angels’ declaration was given to actual people within a specific cultural context. They spoke to lowly shepherds, folks who didn’t have much if any formal education, but who would have heard since their own swaddling cloth days the simple hope of their people—God has promised a messiah. But that only heightens the scandal. It’s not bad enough that God’s own Son was born in the muck and filth of a stable, look who receives the news. His emissaries are dispatched to announce His arrival and they go to a group of shepherds—people of such low social esteem they were not even permitted to testify in the courts of their day.

This scandal of God coming in such an unorthodox manner and to such lowly people was not simply a cosmic mix up. The angels were not headed for better-heeled recipients of the good news only to be blown off course. Jesus continued throughout His life, death, and resurrection to do things that didn’t seem, quite frankly, like the kinds of things God would do.

Consider the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman. To even talk with her was appalling, but Jesus would not allow convention to stand in the way of communicating why He had come to earth. Remember what the angels proclaimed and

the shepherds understood? Well, this woman who had had five husbands and was living with another man understood it too. She said to Jesus, "I know that Messiah (the Christ) is coming; when that One comes, He will declare all things to us."

Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." We know that she understood He was claiming to be the promised Christ because she ran to tell others. Many in that city came and heard the disgrace of God talking with a harlot, but they left declaring, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."

It is only when you realize exactly who Jesus is that the Christmas story becomes so shocking. Why would God tell us century after century that He is the only true God and the ultimate King of Creation, promise us time and again that He would come and save us from our rebellion and then show up in a cow stall? Why would He come that way and then repeatedly tell broken and discarded people of His presence among us?

The scandal of Christmas is not that Jesus came as a helpless baby or that He was born in a manger. It is not that He was announced to a group of social outcasts or that He spoke to a loose woman. The shocking, outrageous, mystifying good news is that Jesus comes to you and me. The God of the universe has entered into the filthy reality of our rebellion against Him and come not to slay us, but to save us. That is truly scandalous!