

Title: Christmas: A time of wonder and worship

Subtitle: The transforming power of pondering the wonder of Christmas

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/qGTCkmc2GGg>

With its longing and hope, the Season of Advent has finally brought us to this place of celebrating the most spectacular event in human history. Luke's Gospel describes in detail what happened as Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem for a Roman registry. For "*while they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.*"¹ Then, with wonder and awe, as "*the glory of the Lord shone around them,*"² angels announce his birth to shepherds, who were "*keeping watch over their flock by night.*"³

The nostalgia of this moment has inspired traditions and hymns that have endured through the centuries. Christmas songs and hymns that celebrate the event and retell the story bring back many nostalgic memories.

In December 1965, astronauts James Lovell and Frank Borman were hurtling back to Earth in their *Gemini 7* spacecraft after having completed the longest flight in the history of the US space program up to that time. On their way back, NASA radioed them, asking if they wanted any particular music piped up to them for their journey home. They requested Bing Crosby's "*I'll be home for Christmas.*" This song was an instant hit when written during WWII. Today, it is still one of the most requested songs of the season: *I'll be home for Christmas; you can count on me.*

¹ Luke 2:6-7

² Luke 2:9

³ Luke 2:8

*Please have snow and mistletoe, And presents under the tree.
Christmas Eve will find me Where the love light gleams. I'll be
home for Christmas, If only in my dreams.*

This song has only 40 words, but it tugs at the core of our being. Even if we don't have happy homes, we still yearn for one—a place of love and safety. C.S. Lewis said sometimes images like this are like “the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not truly heard, or like news from a country we have never yet visited.”⁴ Lewis used these metaphors for the human longing for something beyond our current experience. That longing is a desire for God, suggesting something for which we can only catch a glimpse. It is a reminder that there is always more to discover beneath the surface of the Gospel. This longing is what makes the Christmas message so timeless and nostalgic. The Good News of Great Joy is still waiting to be received, for God left his home in heaven so we could have a home with him forever.

The world that Jesus entered was not a cozy place. It was one of darkness. Yet, ***“the true Light, which enlightens everyone,”***⁵ was coming. The prophet Isaiah wrote, ***“Those living in the land of deep darkness, on them a light has dawned.”***⁶

When the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds, ***“they were terrified.”***⁷ But to their astonishment and surprise, they received a heavenly message. ***“The angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.’”***⁸

⁴ C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory.

⁵ John 1:9

⁶ Isaiah 9:2

⁷ Luke 2:9

⁸ Luke 2:10-11

Then the angel said, **“This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”**⁹

When signs are given in the Bible, they have great significance, even if, at first, their meaning is hidden. This ***“babe wrapped in bands of cloth”***¹⁰ is a sign that should cause us to stop and wonder. It causes us to think about how astonishing the event really is. Could the God who created the universe be willing to come to Earth, even if it meant his glory and power would be hidden? Why would God make himself so helpless, vulnerable, and dependent? That babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, is a sign that we should never forget. It means that God has no wish to frighten us into recognizing him and no desire to impress us into worshipping him. Instead, he comes to us softly and tenderly so that our minds and hearts can choose whether we would love him in return. So don’t lose the wonder! If He went to such lengths to give you such freedom, don’t waste it. Each day, we walk through a world filled with signs of his love waiting to be revealed to those who approach it with the childlike wonder.

The lowly shepherds show us the transforming power of such wonder when they go to see for themselves “this thing that has happened.”¹¹ After searching earnestly for the child and seeing ***“Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger,”***¹² they ***“made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed.”***¹³

The Christmas story concludes with ***“Mary, who treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”***¹⁴ There was

⁹ Luke 2:12

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Luke 2:15

¹² Luke 2:16

¹³ Luke 2:17-18

¹⁴ Luke 2:19

certainly a lot to treasure and ponder: a miraculous pregnancy, a healthy baby, a surprise visit by some shepherds, and a report of angels in the skies over Bethlehem! Mary knew that ***“God performs wonders and miracles that cannot be numbered.”***¹⁵

So, to recover the wonder of Christmas, we, too, must ponder these things and let them take hold of our hearts so that the glory of that first Christmas may not fade from our memories. The wonder of this moment resounds with comfort and joy that still echoes down through the ages. And we, by patient reflection, can receive its life’s transforming power.

Therefore, the meaning of Christmas is more than you may have imagined, with a silent night, a gentle mother surrounded by animals gathered around a tiny baby lying in a manger. That humble place became the throne of heaven. On this Holy night, for a brief moment, everything did seem right with the world. But, in the big picture, he came into a messy world with no room for him. Yet, he came to offer the hope that our own story, no matter how broken or painfully ordinary and discounted, can be made more genuinely alive and full of holy light. A light that shines amid the darkness and shows us that God’s love still prevails. ***“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”***¹⁶ Amen.

¹⁵ Paraphrased from Job 5:9

¹⁶ Isaiah 9:6