

The Birth of Jesus

by C.A. Coates

Jesus' birth is a sign of God's salvation coming to us in One who is wholly cast upon Him, and it teaches us to be content with God's provision, even if it is not luxurious.

Scripture: Isaiah 7:14

Topics: "Jesus Birth", "Divine Providence"

Description

C.A. Coates delves into the significance of Jesus being born in a manger, emphasizing the divine message behind the humble circumstances of His birth. While Matthew highlights Jesus' royal glory and the homage He receives from the wise men, Luke focuses on His moral glory and complete dependence on God, symbolized by the swaddling clothes. The manger represents God's provision for those who trust in Him, contrasting with the world's emphasis on independence and material resources. Despite the lack of room in the inn, the shepherds, chosen for their care and humility, witness the glory of God in the seemingly insignificant Baby in the manger.

Transcript

"She brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in the manger, because there was no room for them at the inn". Luke 2:7.

Those were not merely casual circumstances, because they were announced from heaven as being "the sign". The angel said, "And this is the sign to you: ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger". It is the sign. We should notice the contrast between Matthew and Luke. In Isaiah 7 the sign given by God is, "Behold the virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a son, and call his name Immanuel". That scripture is quoted in Matthew 1. That is the sign of God coming in to be with His people as Emmanuel, "God with us". There are no swaddling clothes mentioned in Matthew; all is great there; He is born King; His star sheds its ray afar over the Gentile world; the magi come to do homage and open their treasures to offer Him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. He is seen in divine and regal glory. But in Luke, the sign is connected with the lowliness of His nativity; no star, no homage, no offerings, but "a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger". It was the expression of weakness and complete dependence. He came in at the lowest point, personally and circumstantially.

A babe is humanity in the form of great weakness and dependence; no one is more absolutely dependent than a newborn babe; everything has to be done for it. Jesus came in as a dependent Infant, receiving all from God through the loving care of His mother. It is perfection in an infant to be the subject of maternal

love and care, and in that place His trust was in God; Psalm 22:9-10. The shepherds saw One in the place of manifest dependence, and that was to be characteristic of Him all through. It might be said that every infant is dependent on a mother's care. But what gives infinite meaning and value to the scene before us is that a Saviour, Christ the Lord, the Son of the Highest, the Son of God, was found in a condition where His mother had to wrap Him in swaddling clothes and lay Him in a manger. That He should be there exalts the circumstances to the highest point of moral glory. The swaddling clothes spoke volumes to heaven; they spoke of the place of complete dependence in which the Son of God was found as having come into humanity. God's salvation has come to us in One who came into humanity to be there as the entirely dependent One. He was cast upon God, He trusted in God even from the womb, as the Psalm tells us.

The wonder and the glory of it is that such a Person should be found in such a place, coming in at the lowest point of human weakness to be the dependent One from the moment of His birth. God found in Him One who could wholly trust Him, even as a Babe. Psalm 22 puts it clearly, "I was cast upon thee from the womb", and again, "Thou didst make me trust upon my mother's breasts". He received all as One dependent upon God, however God's care might be expressed, through His mother or through others; however it might come, it was to Him the care of His God. From the first moment of His entrance into this world He was the perfectly dependent One, who was cared for by God, and God's salvation has come to us in Him.

It was said to the shepherds, "Ye shall find a babe ...". Heaven could speak of it with delight. There was nothing for this world in a Babe who required to have everything done for Him; but there was everything for heaven. The shepherds were deeply interested; they said, "Let us see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us". A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger: that was the sign. God has wrapped up in that sign what is essential to the whole truth of His grace. The shepherds came and saw, and they spoke of it far and wide. People that heard it wondered, and those who entered into it glorified and praised God.

But there is no room in man's world for One who is wholly cast upon God. It is not dependent ones who get the best room in the inn; it is independent people, men with material resources who get the best rooms. An inn is a place where men are measured; the best rooms are given to the rich, the common rooms to the poor, but for Jesus there was no room in the inn. There is no room in man's world for perfect dependence upon God. Men say, 'We have our societies, our unions, our clubs. Come and join us and we will protect you and make things comfortable for you. You will have a nice time in the inn'. But if a man says quietly, 'I raise no question as to what you are doing, but for my part I prefer to depend on God', many a confessor of Christ in Christian England has found that it meant the loss of his daily bread. There is no room for dependence on God in man's world; every form of independence is there. God provided the manger for Jesus; it speaks of a provision that lies outside man's arrangements for himself or his fellows. The manger is outside what man provides for man, but God always provides for those who are content to accept whatever provision He may be pleased to make. God always has had, and always will have, a provision for those who trust in Him, and those who are in dependence on Him will prove it. It may not be luxurious, but it will always suffice for faith. Truly dependent ones accept what is provided, and find the care of God very sweet even in outward reproach.

The manger implied an outside place - a place of reproach; but it was God's provision for that holy Child, not a dignified place in this world, but honoured as being God's own provision for One who wholly trusted in Him. There will always be that which answers to the manger; it is for us to see that we are content with it; it is a sign of wondrous portent. People say, 'Why do you not build a fine chapel, and have it on the main

street, and put yourselves into prominence?' We must remember the sign of the manger which speaks of divine provision in the place of reproach. Think what it was for Joseph and Mary to come to David's city and to find no room in the inn! The rightful heir to David's throne comes to David's city and there is no room in the inn! If things had been right in Bethlehem the best rooms in the inn would have been vacated for them. Yet they accepted the manger, and it became the sign of where God's salvation would be found. You will not find God's salvation in the best rooms of the inn, but in the manger. The grace that was coming in was not to be great and honoured in the world; it was to have the lowest place in the estimation of men. But what we want is the mind of heaven. Joseph and Mary were in the secret. They knew the greatness and the glory of the Child who was just about to be born when they went into that city, but they accepted the manger as God's provision.

All the interest of heaven centred in that manger and in the Child lying in it wrapped in swaddling clothes; outwardly there was the expression of greatest weakness and dependence, but everything that was great and glorious was there. How favoured were the shepherds to get communications from heaven! They learned where all true glory was found; they learned divine favour in that which to men was of no account. The inn represented man's provision for himself and his fellows, and there was no room in it for Jesus, but there were shepherds abiding without who were sympathetic with heaven.

The wise men in Matthew recognised under the instruction of heaven that He was the King. They said, "Where is the King of the Jews, that has been born? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to do him homage". They saw the royal glory that attached to the Child, and they did Him homage; they gave Him choice and costly gifts. But in Luke it is the grace of God coming near to men, and what is brought out is the place of dependence into which He came, the place of having no resource save what God provided. Jesus came to be in the place of dependence and to be of no account in the estimation of the world - to lie in a manger. The shepherds were sympathetic with the thoughts of heaven, and all those thoughts centred in that Babe in the manger. In Matthew His official glory is prominent, but in Luke it is His moral glory. In Luke's gospel we see the Lord many times in prayer. It is the setting forth of One who was in absolute dependence, and the swaddling clothes were the sign of it. He received all as the expression of the care of His God. The shepherds were greatly affected by what they heard and saw; they returned glorifying and praising God. Shepherds represent those who care for what has value before God at some personal cost to themselves. God took up shepherds like Moses and David because in caring for their flocks they were in keeping with His own thoughts. If there was no room for the Lord in the inn, there was room for Him in the hearts of the shepherds; heaven took them into confidence. As having been taken into the confidence of heaven we see the most wonderful glory in that which in the eyes of man was of no account whatever. The shepherds said, "Let us see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us", and they came and saw, and became witnesses of it to others, and returned glorifying and praising God. All who heard it wondered, but Mary did more than wonder; she "kept all these things in her mind, pondering them in her heart".

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