

Carols by Candlelight (20.12.2011)

I reckon that "Away in a Manager," must have been written before the author had children. The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes, But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes. Real newborns usually bawl their heads off – if not at least they cry.

To understand what happened in Bethlehem, when the Baby awakes he cries – or at the very least he sobs a little. At the heart of Christmas there has to be a real live human baby.

This is not some sort of precursor to the Superman story where a baby born on the disintegrating planet Krypton is sent by his parents in a space capsule to earth. The boy grows up to be Clark Kent, a gentle and kindly reporter for the Daily Planet. No one can tell that Kent is Superman - until you get him near a phone box! Neither is the story of the incarnation at all like Star Trek, where, so I've heard it's fairly common for an alien masquerading as a human to find his way aboard with the evil intent of commandeering the Starship "Enterprise." He looks like a human, but don't be fooled.

Be totally aware that what happened in that Bethlehem stable was not pretend. That night God took on humanness and became human. No, he didn't lose any of his divinity - the angels' grand proclamation to the shepherds in their fields is testimony to that. The virgin birth is right at the core of explaining who Jesus is – He is both man and God. Joseph is told he must name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

The way God chose to deal with the mess made by the First Adam was through a Second Adam. God could not be a God of justice and turn a blind-eye to our sin forever. Nor could he just write it off by disregarding our free-will. So, like a parent who risks his life to protect his children, God Himself became flesh because there was no other way to rescue us. No Superman play-acting. The divine Son of God was no hologram or apparition of something pretending to be human.

Wise-man meditation

"We gathered our gifts and followed this young shepherd who was quite proud to lead us to the birthplace of his king. He led us to an empty stable. "No, you've misunderstood me" I told him. "Where is the birthplace of your king your Messiah?" He insisted that this was the place of his birth. "Is this a joke?" I demanded. "A king was born here?" Well the boy explained that the mother had been forced to give birth in this stable because all of the rooms in town were full. Exploding with impatience by now, I shouted, "Well where is he now?"

The poor boy explained that a room had become available, so they had gone to stay there. We followed him to a small house near the stable. I was confused. How could this be a king? But my calculations, and the writings... Despite my unease, I entered. There in the room, was a common man in simple homespun clothing. He raised his hands in greeting. They were working hands, those of a stone cutter, or perhaps a carpenter. He looked nearly as confused as I felt. Next to him was a young girl, certainly younger than my youngest daughter.

She held a baby, wrapped in cloth, with his face shielded from our view. "Is this?" I fumbled for words. The girl smiled, and as she uncovered his face said, "His name is Jesus."

Oh! At the sound of that name I fell on my face and wept uncontrollably. I wept and I laughed, and I worshipped Him! I heard music from voices the like I'd never heard singing Glory to God in the highest! I don't know how long I remained there, but eventually, I opened my eyes. I looked up. The girl, his mother was still smiling. The man still looked confused. I rose to my knees, and reached out and touched the baby's face. He opened His eyes, and looked at me. Oh those eyes. They looked right through me, into the depths of my very soul.

Then, as I gazed back into his eyes, suddenly I no longer saw a baby, but a king; a mighty and majestic king, the ruler of all, beyond what the eye could see. King over a dark-hearted and ruthless people. And I could see my self as he saw me. I could see myself in all my darkness. And I could see that I was in prison. And you! You were there as well, my friend. We were awaiting execution for the crime of treason against the king.

And then I could see the king. He came down from his throne to live among his people. Remarkable. He gave up his royal privilege to live as a common man. Then the king came to our prison cell and demanded our release. Such mercy I'd never known. But he didn't just free us. He took the torture and the execution in our place! He voluntarily bore the punishment so

that so that we wouldn't have to.

And in my vision, I cried out protesting that I wasn't worthy for a king to die in my place! My spirit grieved so. But suddenly the king was alive and his glory was blinding, and I had to avert my eyes. When I chanced to look again, I saw the baby. My gaze was still held by his eyes. Oh those eyes, filled with love.

We left our gifts, which now seemed meager. Gold, expensive spices and incense; I would give all I have just to be able to touch Him once again. We are the ones who have been given a gift.

I've been changed I tell you. In my old age, I am a changed man. I will never be the same again."

So if "no crying he makes," means that Jesus is just a convincing fake human, then what was on the cross? Did 'it' really die? And, if Jesus did not live as a real human, filled with the Holy Spirit, what makes us think God can give us power to live for Him in this world?

There's a whole universe of difference between Star Trek's Mr. Spock lifting his hand in the Vulcan greeting of "Live long and prosper," and Jesus lifting his nail-scarred hands to bless his disciples. When Spock says, "Human emotions make no sense whatsoever," we can laugh. Let's face it, those pointy ears are a giveaway; how could he understand?

When Jesus shows us the full extent of His love and we realize the truth of it we drop to our knees in worship. It wouldn't bother me a bit to hear good healthy screaming from the stable to break the eerie stillness of that Christmas night. After all, a newborn with healthy lungs is a very good sign.