

December 4, 2011/Center UMC/Psalm 25:6-12/Micah 5:1-5a/Luke 2:1-17

Interpreting The Signs: What Is The Stable?

Rev. Daniel D. Rasmussen

So last week we concluded that even though the wisemen or Magi were foreigners to the story, they were invited so that they too might hear, and have the opportunity to respond. But, we have to remember the Magi were not invited to the star, but they did see it. They were not invited to visit King Herod, but they visited him. They were not invited to see Bethlehem, but they in fact walked its streets. So what were they invited to? What reason were they invited? Was the goal of their invitation so that they could see the Christ child, and then go home?

“Ancient tradition places Jesus’ birth in a cave near Bethlehem. Caves under houses are extensively used in Palestine as stables” (Hastings Bible Dictionary, pg. 576).

The word translated “manger” can mean the trough where the animals feed, and it can also mean a structure where animals are housed and fed, or otherwise a stable or stall. We do not know for sure what it looked like, but there is one thing we know for sure. It was humble. It was not a birth place for a King . . . Kings are born in palaces not in stables or caves or placed in animal troughs.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus was born of Mary, which means He was fully human. But, the Christ, or the Messiah, the Word of God, existed throughout time. John 1:1-4 says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.” So as it may be a stretch for the mind, it is fully necessary for us to understand just who was born in that stable or manger. Was God, born in the stable? It does not take but a minute for us to realize that is both theologically and practically impossible. If God was born in the stable, then it would mean that before that time God did not exist. But John’s gospel tells us that before that moment in the stable, before Mary went into labor pains, the Christ known as the Word, existed. So that is why we have come to understand the Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully man. So, as unfortunate as the words are, when the RCC calls Mary the Mother of God, it is absolutely untenable. Mary did not give birth to God; she gave birth to Jesus, who prior to His birth, by the miracle of God was the Christ. When God became flesh, it is known as the INCARNATION.

Thomas Oden says, “The incarnation is above all God’s own act of identification with the broken, the poor, with sinful humanity. God did not enter human life as a wealthy or powerful “mover and shaker” but came in a manger, amid the life of the poor, sharing in their life and identifying Himself with the dispossessed” (The Word of Life, Oden, pg. 8). “The gospel does not introduce an idea but a person . . .” (Oden, 11).

As we contemplate what it means that God would take on the flesh, become one of us in humanity, we must also understand that He did so for the Every Man.

“Shepherds were considered untrustworthy and their work made them ceremonially unclean. Thus the most obvious implication is that the gospel first came to the social outcasts of Jesus’ day. This

would accord with a recurring emphasis in Luke. Moreover, it may be significant that in the Lord's instruction to Nathan (the prophet) . . . (he was) to tell David that he was "called from a shepherd's life" (Walter Liefeld, EBC, pg. 845). "The shepherds of Luke 2 may, therefore, symbolize all the ordinary people who have joyfully received the gospel . . ."

II Kings 7:3-11 (story of lepers telling the good news)

God has gone to extreme lengths to communicate with His people, to communicate with all who will listen that Jesus Christ has come to save us. The manger and the star both pointed to that reality. The real question is not whether you believe in the star, or whether you believe in the stable/manger, it is whether or not you believe that Jesus Christ came as God in the flesh, God incarnate. And that in His coming to earth He has alone purchased for us the opportunity of salvation.