



Feature

# “GLORY TO GOD!”

*in the Lowest*

*Hidden in the manger  
are the signs of the Messiah.*

by LEE ECLOV

*“This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in cloth and lying in a feeding trough” (Luke 2:12).*

**I** ALWAYS THOUGHT THE MANGER was a sign to help the shepherds find the right baby. Otherwise — who knows — they might have heard a wee wail from an open window and worshiped the wrong child by mistake. But in the Bible, signs don’t direct traffic. They don’t say, “You are here.” Signs in the

Bible poke you in the ribs and whisper, “Do you get it? Look again.” In the Bible, signs are signals. They’re sermons in code. Pictured prophecies and parables. Rainbow, lamb, bread, wine, dove — all signs. And the feeding trough.

I suppose, like all newborns, the baby Jesus spent most of His time in His parents’ arms, but the sign was a baby lying in a rough-hewn barn rack full of straw. When the shepherds found the baby there, they saw for themselves the newborn Messiah; but more importantly, they saw what kind of Messiah He would be.

# Jesus was born so He could do the dying for us. Then He was born again from the womb of the tomb, the second Adam raised from the dust of death, to lead us like a great pathfinder to our home.

The Bible's great signs sing parts like a choir. The sign of the baby in a manger is like a carol sung in harmony.

## *"Veiled in Flesh"*

TO BEGIN WITH, this certainly seems like one of those what's-wrong-with-this-picture situations. Remember when Prince George Alexander Louis of Cambridge was born to Great Britain's Prince William and Kate? Subjects waited restlessly for the big news. A royal servant announced the birth in front of the palace. Cheers greeted proud parents. That's how a king should come.

Instead, we read of the tyrannical taxation that drove Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, of finding there was no room in the inn, and then of the ultimate indignity: the Christ child laid in a manger — a feeding trough — of all things! We shake our heads and think, *What kind of world is this where the Lord Himself finds no welcome?*

There were plenty of ways the world had failed Jesus, but this wasn't one of them. No one was at fault here. The angel didn't conclude his stunning good news with a shining shrug, "Unfortunately, you'll find the baby in a feeding trough." No, the Lord wanted to come homeless and hidden in poverty. His being at home in a manger is a good thing! That setting is more wondrous than the star that caught the eye of the wise men. The manger

was a sign — a poke in the ribs and the whispered question, "What kind of king chooses to be presented in the feeding trough of a barn?"

Søren Kierkegaard told a story that began, "Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden." He was a great king, and he could have whatever he wanted. If he sent out his courtiers, they would say, "Your majesty is about to confer a favor upon the maiden for which she can never be sufficiently grateful her whole life long." That was the problem! Even if she wanted to come to him, he would never know for certain if she loved him for himself. So he wrestled with his troubled thoughts alone. Finally, he decided that if she could not come up to his high station and be sure to love him freely, he must descend to hers. He must descend, stripped of his royal power and wealth, for only then would he know if his beloved loved him freely. So he laid aside all his power and privileges and went to her as her equal — to win her love.

Jesus' birth was a sign of love like that — of greater love than that.

## *"Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"*

THE SIGN SANG, "YOU WILL FIND A BABY," as humble as a person can get this side of death. When someone asked Jesus who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven, He gathered up a child and said, "Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of

heaven" (Matt. 18:4, NIV). Every Christmas we watch the shepherds find "the baby who was lying in the feeding trough" (Luke 2:16), and God pokes us and whispers, "Get it?" You can almost hear the strains of "What Child Is This?" in the background.

We see a similar sign in the lowly shepherds whom God sent to find the tiny King. God said in Isaiah 57:15, "I live in a high and holy place, and with the oppressed and lowly of spirit." The Lord's coming as a baby in the feeding trough signaled the coming of an upside-down kingdom where the small and humble are royalty and where the wise men of faraway lands bow to the homeless child. Jesus said, "The poor in spirit are blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs" (Matt. 5:3). The rich and powerful have no chance of entering God's kingdom unless grace can somehow downsize them. Only the child-sized is fit to enter through the doorways of grace. Through Jesus, only earth's humblest servants, The Royal Order of the Manger, will be given heaven's crowns.

## *"No Crib for a Bed"*

THE MANGER— THE FEEDING TROUGH — is another kind of sign. As an adult, Jesus said the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head. That was the story of His life. "He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him" (John 1:11). No room in the inn — ever. It was all true to Isaiah's prophecy: "He was despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53:3). No wonder Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The manger began the run-up to the cross where



God's unwelcomed Messiah would die for the sins of those who had no room for Him.

The sign also sings how low the Lord stoops to save us. The shepherds, standing wide-eyed at the straw-filled bed of Jesus, must have thought, *This is God's Messiah? How can such a lowly King save us?* They only saw the half of it. They couldn't see hidden in that tiny body the very nature of

a servant. They couldn't imagine how He would descend even lower than homelessness and the manger to death — death on the cross. The manger didn't tell the whole story, but it was a sign of things to come.

People without Jesus are dead and dying forever. Jesus was born so He could do the dying for us. Then He was born again from the womb of the tomb, the second Adam raised from the dust of death, to lead us like a great pathfinder to our home. His second birth was not in a manger, but standing in triumph outside the door of death and ascending to the right hand of God on high.

The Lord, who was laid in a manger because there was no room anywhere else, promised us, "I am going away to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Thanks to Jesus, none of us need be homeless. Thanks to Jesus, all who trust Him can be child-sized by His grace. Thanks to Jesus, those who believe in Him are royal born of the house and lineage of Jesus. It's all in the sign of the baby they found in the feeding trough. ☺

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