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## THE MYSTERIOUS, THE GLORIOUS, AND THE MUNDANE

Luke 2

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The Christmas story is remarkable in its contrasts.

We have the mystical.

A special star that somehow draws wisemen,  
to travel across unknown terrain  
to an unknown destination  
to meet a Savior  
unknown to them or their people.  
But there is something about its luminance  
that draws them like moths to a flame.

We have the corrupt and evil.

The ruler, the King,  
seeking the life of every male child under two,  
and the need for Jesus' family to flee,  
to become refugees.

We have the glorious.

An angel appearing out of nowhere  
announcing the Messiah's birth,  
And a heavenly host of angels  
singing "Glory to God in the Highest."

And we have the mundane.

Manual laborers, tending sheep.  
Bureaucracy.  
Taxes.  
Holiday travel.  
Travel, by donkey no less,  
though I still believe I would prefer that  
to coach on an airplane these days.

We have these four elements of the story: mystery, evil, glory, and the mundane. All a part of the Christmas story, the goal of which is to lead us to God. Throughout history, Israel was repeatedly seeking the Lord and in one passage the prophet Elijah sits in a cave waiting for the Lord to appear. A great windstorm appears, but the Lord is not in the wind. Then an earthquake and fire, but God is in none of these. Then finally a still, small voice, a puff of wind in truth, comes and the Lord is in that

still, small voice. Let us explore this Christmas story this evening to see where we might find the Lord.

### MYSTERY

The mystical star shows us that there is another layer to the reality of this world we too often miss, but one we desperately yearn for. Today, rather than a star it is snow. I know many of you felt that spark, that longing when Bing Crosby crooned those words, "*I'm dreaming of a white Christmas...*"

Snow represents that mystical act of God for which we hope. A snow, at this time of year oddly enough, warms up our insides because the lifeless trees and the brown grass and the muddy streets all find life in that perfect snow. As a child, I remember those Christmas snows. Sledding at night was the most fun. As the moon reflected on the beautiful, white terrain the cold air ripped through my jacket, making me shiver to the bone. But that was part of the magic. We would race inside and grab a mug of hot cider in our hands as the nectar enlivened my whole body. It felt like magic.

But in truth

that snow represents something more,  
it discloses that deep yearning,  
for God to cover the world,  
our world filled with grime and toil and sweat and fear  
with Holy love and peace.

In the Christmas story, the star helps us to see that God is at work – beyond what we see or know – bringing light to parts of the world and people unknown to us. In that star and wisemen, God showed us that there are whole lands of people being touched by the divine in ways that we can hardly imagine and do not understand. That star

showed us something special. There is more to God than we will ever know, and we can be warmed at any moment by this grace.

God was not in the mysterious. The star only pointed the way.

## THE CORRUPT AND EVIL

In the time of Jesus, the Jews were being manipulated and betrayed from every side. There were the Romans who subjugated and occupied their land. They constrained their faith, limited their freedom, and pushed down their heart and their hopes. As terrible as it was, the betrayal by their own was even worse. Their ruler Herod was one of them. He did not seek the good of the people; he did not represent them before Rome, trying to fight for their rights and freedom. Instead, he sought to consolidate his power using his position for his own gain. Even to the horrific extent of slaughtering innocents to protect his throne. He farmed taxes for the Roman overlords, currying favor by bleeding the Jews dry, and he brutally quashed any rebellions. He banished his own wife and son simply to consolidate his growing power and to satiate his wanton quest and megalomaniacal disposition.

In this world, we can still see there is great evil and injustice at work. As Herod targeted children we know twisted and dark forces do the same. There are people in power in all corners of the world seeking to bolster their own needs rather than that of their people.

And those two parents, in need of the support of the community and the government, instead find it has turned against them. They are warned and, fearing for the life of their precious son, they flee to an unknown land.

But God is not to be found in some great battle against evil. God did not appear to smite Herod.

## GLORY

The glory we find all around us. A few weeks ago when our choir performed the Messiah, “GLORY!” is perhaps the only, truly-fitting word. To me, it sounded precisely how I imagine heaven sounds, for all of you who were there that Sunday, you know it was truly magnificent.

I believe it is the combination of the power of the Biblical text along with the music. When I hear the tenor, declare “Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye my people,” I find myself in sorrow over the deep heartache to which God is speaking through Isaiah – the captivity to Babylon – and that same comfort people long for today.

When the choir sang, “And the glory, the glory of the Lord shall be reveal-ed!” In that song, I feel it being revealed right in that moment. And the “Hallelujah Chorus” truly feels like the very end of history, in the best way imaginable. All the wars, all the greed, all the disease, all the brokenness, every ounce of evil has been permanently wiped clean.

In that song, the promise of the healing of all creation can be heard. In those words, the total fulfillment of all humanity becomes an expression of the deepest, most lovely, most heartfelt praise – Hallelujah – and it is not the voice of one, or of a few, but of all.

God was not in the angels; the angels only announced his coming. God was not in the glory.

## THE MUNDANE

Unlike television, film, and most literature, the world does not consist of endless cocktail parties, fancy clothes, and extravagant vacations. We don’t spend most of our time looking fabulous, fighting evil, or dancing the night away. Most of life is filled with routine. Sometimes horribly, dull routine, mind-numbing, soul-sucking routine. But, at other times, comforting, ordinary routine that offers a

sense of security and even delight – that’s my morning coffee with Wendy, by the window as we look at the birds. A delightfully, ordinary moment that punctuates the mundane while at the same time offering something profound and wondrous. Just being together.

words, but through a child, as a human, to whom everyone can relate.

It is the same with the presence of God.

Within this Christmas story  
God is not found in the glorious angels,  
    they just announce His coming with style;  
God is not seen in the mystical star,  
    it just points the way;  
God does not appear to battle evil,  
    turning into a grand colossus  
    smiting all those who oppose  
    the will of the one, all-powerful Lord  
No, God is found in an out of the way place,  
in an unimportant part of the world,  
with two extremely ordinary people,  
looking for lodging.  
God is found through a mother and father  
struggling to find a good location  
to have their first-born son.

We need all of it to tell the story – the star, the angels, and Herod – but, in the end, God is found in the ordinary. The special and the mystical are meant to awaken us to who was with us all along.

Most of our experience of God comes subtly but reassuringly in the simplest of moments. Not in pillars of fire or clouds, not in handwriting on the wall, not in scores of angels singing to us, but in the breaths we take, in the coffee we drink with our loved ones, in waving to a neighbor across the street, and in saying goodbye to our loved ones.

This offers us a profound promise for each of us in knowing this is the type of God who rules over and calls to us. Though this Lord can do it all from parting seas to raining manna, God seems to prefer coming to us, speaking to us and through us – not through power or grand displays or profound