

# The Manger and the Cross

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Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[ 0 : 00 ] Imagine that you are visiting some friends who have just had a baby.

! And you arrive at their house to meet their new little bundle of joy for the very first time. And as they usher you through the house and down the hallway to the nursery, instead of finding a newborn lying in a crib or in a bassinet, there he is, swaddled and sleeping peacefully in the dog's food bowl. That would be pretty strange, would it not?

What would you think? What would you say? You would have some questions, wouldn't you? Are these people fit for this responsibility? Certainly would be a thought that would be going through your mind.

We've read the narrative of Jesus' birth and we've read it so many times that I think sometimes we gloss over things like the manger in which Jesus was laid in, in which Jesus spent his first night here on planet earth. If you don't know what a manger is, it's basically what it is, literally, is a feeding trough. It's used for farm animals to eat out of. The shepherds were told by the angels that they would find Christ, the Christ child, laying in a manger. And then they said to them that this would be a sign for you. Which makes us think, a sign for what?

I think that this sign was more significant than just simply the angels giving a clue to the shepherds about where they could find Jesus, right? So that they weren't mistaken. Hey, let's make it really clear for them that this is where Jesus is at. Let's give them a clue that they've got to know because what other couple with a newborn baby is going to put their child in a manger. I think that there's something much more significant that is going on here that Jesus is revealing to us that God is ordaining this for a purpose. There are many other signs that could have been given to the shepherds, right? So why this particular one? John chapter 6.

[ 2 : 42 ] Jesus is being followed at this point in time. He's been baptized by John the Baptist. He's gone on his mission. And at this point in time, he is being followed by large crowds of people because he's doing things that are astounding to them. He is healing people of all kinds of ailments and sicknesses.

He's bringing dead people back to life. He's teaching with authority. And thus, he is doing things that are drawing a crowd to himself. And so in John chapter 6, Jesus has drawn a crowd to himself of about 5,000 men. And if we include women and children, 10,000 plus people are here following him. And verse 14 says that when the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, indeed, the prophet who is to come, indeed, is this the prophet who is to come into the world?

And from that moment, after Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding all of these people, you guys have heard that story, right? He took the two loaves and the fish and with a little sack lunch, he broke that bread and he gave thanks. And his disciples distributed that food to those who were there.

And it says that afterwards, they had enough left over to fill 12 baskets. And when the people saw this sign of Jesus feeding them, they thought, well, certainly this guy is at the very least a prophet. He's somebody important. And after this event had taken place, the Bible says that Jesus then withdrew by himself up into the mountains. And the disciples, getting a clue that maybe he wasn't coming back to them that night, that he needed that time to be alone with God in prayer, they left him there, they got into their boats, and they set sail to the other side of the sea into Capernaum.

[ 4 : 44 ] And if you remember the story that as they were in their boats, they got caught on the sea in a storm. The wind was swirling, they were afraid, and then all of a sudden, this ghost-like apparition is out in the distance, and he's drawing near to them. And you remember the story of Peter and the disciples seeing that it was Jesus and Peter walking out on the water, asking Jesus if he could do that. And as long as he kept his focus on the Lord, he could walk. But once he took his focus off of Christ, he sunk. And then the Lord picked him back up, put him in the boat, and then

instantly they were on the other side of the seashore. Then on the very next day, I want to read to you John chapter 6, verses 22 through 40. On the very next day, after these things had happened, the crowd that remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. Other boats from Tiberias came near, the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd saw Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boat and went to Capernaum seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the boat, they said to him, Rabbi, when did you come here? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.

Then they said to him, What must we do to be doing the works of God? And Jesus answered them, This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent. So they said to him, Then what sign do you do that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. Let's stop here for a moment. These people who have witnessed Jesus perform this awesome miracle are here saying, That's not enough.

[ 7 : 11 ] You know, look, Moses was a prophet, and Moses fed a nation of people. And you only fed 10,000 or so of us. We want to see more from you.

This time of year is my favorite time of year. I love Christmas time. I love the fact that today I was willing to brave Walmart with my family, and it was packed.

The aisles were full of people. The lines were long. But yet people were being so polite and gracious to one another. Now, I'm from Kansas, and we're usually pretty nice to each other, so it could be just an Oklahoma thing.

I don't know. But I think that you would agree with me that this time of year, people just seem to act differently towards one another. It's like we know that something is important here.

We've been given something wonderful, and we want to share that with each other. But here's the thing. If we make Christmas just about giving, we see that the type of people are is that we never can receive enough.

[ 8 : 16 ] It's never enough for us. And so here Jesus is trying to tell these people who he is. But it's not enough. So let's continue. Then Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They said to him, Sir, give us this bread always.

You see the connection here with the manger? Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

But I said to you that you have seen me, and yet you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

[ 9 : 35 ] Now sometime after that, and some 33 years after Jesus was first laid in that feeding trough, he met with his disciples to have one last meal with them.

It's what we call the Last Supper, or refer to it as the Lord's Supper. And it's during this time, this meal, that Jesus once again takes bread, and he breaks it.

And he told his disciples, this is my body, which is given for you. And then if you remember, he took the cup and he said, this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

And so on Good Friday, the day that Jesus died on the cross, he became for us the life-giving bread that we seek, that we need to have life.

And so it is fitting that as he entered into the world, in his incarnation, the name of the place where he came was called Bethlehem.

[ 10 : 50 ] And you know what Bethlehem means? House of bread. His first night on planet Earth as incarnate deity was spent sleeping in a place that was used to hold food.

Laying there in a manger was one with whom the Bible says the fullness of deity dwelt bodily. We are told that omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, utter eternalness and holiness dwelled in that tiny little person.

By comparison, this makes Santa come down a chimney a logistical cakewalk, doesn't it? From the moment of Jesus' birth, the cross loomed over him.

The shadow of the cross was cast over him. His coming had a purpose. And so I want you to look at me, look with me at a Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 through 11.

Where it says there, Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

[12:05] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Though the cross would become a painful cup for Jesus to swallow, he would endure it out of love for the Father and out of the joy that was set before him.

The body that was broken and the blood that was shed purchased our salvation, and by his wounds we are healed.

So on Christmas, we celebrate the gospel. We celebrate the fact that Jesus came. We celebrate the fact that Jesus died in our place for our sins.

We celebrate the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the grave, and we celebrate the fact that Jesus is coming again. We celebrate not only an incarnation on Christmas, but we celebrate a resurrection.

[13:26] And I know that we already sang Hark the Herald Angels Sing. That's one of my favorite. That is one of my favorite, if not my favorite hymn of all time. And I love it because sometimes we sing those words and they're powerful, but sometimes if you just sit there and you look at them and read them, they're even more powerful.

So I want to read to you in closing this short message with my favorite line from that hymn. Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace. Hail the Son of Righteousness.

Light and life to all he brings risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die.

Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Glory to the newborn King.

Will you pray with me? Lord God, we thank you that you are the bread of life. Lord, we thank you that you came to us.

[14:35] That you took on the flesh, Lord. That you lived the perfect, sinless life that we were incapable of living. That you became humbled to the point of death, even death on such a cruel structure as the cross.

God, we are thankful that your story did not end on Calvary. It didn't end even at the empty tomb, but Lord, that you have arose, you have ascended, and as Dan had mentioned earlier, God, we wait with anticipation for your coming back.

God, as we prepare to sing some more songs in a short while to close the service and then spend the rest of our evening with our friends and our families and then tomorrow as we celebrate with our families during Christmas Day, God, we pray that you would help us to be mindful of why we do all of this.

That you have given us the greatest gift that could ever be given. You've given us a son, you've given us a savior, you've given us a way to have our sins forgiven, to have eternal life.

And in that, we rejoice. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.