

From the Cradle to the Cross  
December 7, 2014  
Isaiah 40: 1-11; Mark 1: 1-8  
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A young executive was leaving the office late one evening when he found the CEO standing in front of a shredder with a piece of paper in his hand.

"Listen," said the CEO, "this is a very sensitive and important document here, and my secretary has gone for the night. Can you make this thing work for me?"

"Certainly," said the young executive. He turned the machine on, inserted the paper, and pressed the start button.

"Excellent, excellent!" said the CEO, as his paper disappeared inside the machine. "I just need one copy..."

Stories like these are funny... but they only make sense when you get to the end.

We all know the beginning of our story. Everyone loves the baby in the manger. The baby Himself elicits nostalgia and compassion. No wonder Christmas is so popular even among those who would never think of themselves as Christians. The Christmas story touches everyone regardless of creed, religion or moral persuasion

We know our Christmas story:

- Engaged
- Pregnant
- Had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem
- Born in a stable

Let's take a step back though and look at each of these elements individually.

Which of these is significant?

- Child born

- According to Scientific American, approximately 255 worldwide births per minute or 4.3 births every second
- It was a male child
  - Ok so what?
  - A little more than half the births worldwide are male.
- A star in the sky
  - They sky is filled with them
- Angels – Shepherds – Wisemen
  - Ok... so that's new
  - But they could have had the wrong house

So what is so special about THIS child? His birth? Yes his birth is unique. But what if this is all that happened... this unique birth was it- the end of our story... would we still be celebrating it 2,000 years later? No. Because though his birth is unique, it is not what is truly important. Without the end, the beginning has not meaning or significance.

So as we look at the beginning, we must also look at the end...

For us, the meaning of the manger is found only in the suffering of the Child who was laid to rest within it.

I know it may seem odd to want to talk about Good Friday and Easter when it is almost Christmas. But the Christmas lights and bells only make sense because of the Ash Wednesday ashes, the cross, and the empty tomb. As Black Friday just ended, we can look to Good Friday... A day when our Savior died on a cross. He died so that we might have life. He died so that our sins may be forgiven. He died so that he might rise again. In the shadow of Christmas trees, snowmen, and Santa Clause, I am asking us to think back 8 months ago when we were instead looking at lilies and an empty tomb.

Because the end of our story- Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension- is why Jesus was born. Through these acts, Christ reconciled us to God and gives us eternal life. If Christ has not been raised, your hope is futile and you are still in your sins. (1

Corinthians 15:17) Good Friday, not black Friday, is the reason that Christ came to us as a babe in the manger.

Billy Graham reflects on this by saying, "Both are equally important, because both were an essential part of God's plan. Without Christmas, there would be no Easter—and without Easter, Christmas wouldn't matter. Christmas marks nothing less than the coming of God's Son into the world. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, most people took no notice; what difference did one more baby make? But on that night one group did take notice: the shepherds. The reason was because God sent an angel to them to announce Jesus' birth. He told them, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

Christmas was only the beginning, however. Jesus grew up—first as a boy with His family, and then as a man. And when He began preaching, people flocked to hear Him because He told them about God's love for them. In time, however, His enemies put Him to death on a cross. His body was taken down and put in a borrowed tomb.

But the tomb could not hold Him! When some of His followers came to the tomb later, they found it empty. An angel appeared (just as at His birth) and said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" (Luke 24:5-6). Death and Hell had been conquered, and our salvation had been won. This is God's gift to us—the gift of eternal life through Christ."

In the midst of putting up nativities and thinking about the miracle of Jesus' birth, we should also be reflecting on the miracle of his death and resurrection.

"Read it again, Mommy. Pleeeeee read it again," begged Mackenzie, my then seven-year-old. Her three-year-old brother, Mitchell, echoed her plea. "Yes, Mommy, especially the part about the little boy and his donkey!"

Then, after tottering over to the basket to put away the book we'd just finished, Mitchell asked me to read him a story from the Bible about the other Jesus.

‘What other Jesus?’ I asked.

“Not baby Jesus,” he replied. “Big Jesus who died on the cross.”

Now realizing that he hadn’t connected the two in his mind, I sat and explained that the baby Jesus grew up to be the same Jesus that died on the cross to save us from our sins. Somehow he’d figured baby Jesus was a fairy tale and big Jesus was for real.

I realized we adults can do much the same thing. Oh, we know there is just one Jesus and that He is for real, but we are content to leave Him harmlessly in the manger. Somehow a sweet, adorable little baby is acceptable to the world around us. A Lord who calls for men and women to choose either to obey Him or to suffer the consequences is not. But we can’t have one part of the story without the other.

We must never forget that the hand-hewn manger one day became an old rugged cross. We can’t just peer lovingly into the manger without looking obediently to the cross. Baby Jesus deserves our adoration as much as the Lord Jesus deserves our allegiance. Because of the end, we get to celebrate the beginning!

From the cradle to the cross . . . O come, let us adore Him!