

## INTRODUCTION

With apologies to Clement Clark Moore, I've written my own version of his poem. It's to honor those people who give up their Christmas worship to take care of the babies.

'Twas the night before Christmas at Green Acres Church  
Latecomers circle in a parking place search  
Some folks arrived to find "their seats" occupied  
So they moved somewhere else slightly dissatisfied.

And me in my sweater and Mike with his grin  
Had just settled in for the praise to begin  
When out in the foyer, there arose such a clatter  
Mike called on his cell to see what was the matter.

The ushers informed him that they were surprised;  
That angels showed up, though they were disguised.  
They said they had come to prepare Jesus a place;  
And asked if we had the enough adequate space.

We all cheered with joy, would we see Jesus, maybe?  
We expected a man; but He showed up as a baby!  
The angels took Him to the church nursery door;  
Where the workers were asked if they could handle one more.

They gladly opened their arms to the child;  
When Jesus looked at the babies, they all started to smile.  
During Christmastime, let's remember this truth;  
Jesus didn't come just for adults or for youth.

God's not only here in our big worship group;  
He's there in the nursery with the workers who stoop;  
To show babies, like Jesus, they're God's special gift  
So try working in the nursery if YOU need a faith lift!

It's pop trivia time. In 1995 this female singer/songwriter recorded a song about God that became a one hit wonder. The song climbed to #1 and was later used as the theme song for a CBS show "Joan of Arcadia." The answer is Joan Osborne and the song was, "What if God was one of us?" In this song, Joan asked several questions: "If God had a name, what would it be? And would you call it to his face; If you were faced with him in all his glory?" Those are pretty profound questions because God does have a name, and we WILL face Him in all of His glory. Joan Osborne didn't answer her questions in that song, but ten years later she wrote and recorded another song entitled "Christmas is Love" and she finally answered her questions about God: "It was then on the 12<sup>th</sup> month, on the 25<sup>th</sup> day; A little child was born and brightened up our day; And I'm so glad He came to show us what true love is, Now I know, Christmas means love."

The message of Christmas is that God DID become one of us when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. In the twenty-one years that I've shared a Christmas message at Green Acres, I've examined Christmas from many different perspectives. We've talked about it from the perspective of Mary, from the viewpoint of Joseph, the Shepherds, the Magi; and even from the standpoint of Herod the Great, the original Christmas Grinch. But in this message I want us to think about Christmas from the perspective of Jesus.

What did it mean to Jesus to come into the world that first Christmas? Let's let Jesus answer that in His own words. Jesus loved to speak in parables, but there were times when He spoke plainly with no hidden meanings. This passage in John 16 is one of those times. He spoke these words to His disciples on the night before He was crucified.

John 16:28-33. Jesus said, "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.' Then Jesus' disciples said, 'Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.' 'You believe at last!' Jesus answered. 'But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'"

When you look at Christmas from the viewpoint of Jesus, it can be described as His journey from an empty throne to an empty tomb.

Pastor Rodney Buchanan captured this thought well when he wrote: "Christ gave up his position and place in glory that we might have Christmas. It began in a dirty manger and ended on a dirty wooden cross. He was born in a borrowed stable and was buried in a borrowed tomb."

Let's examine three clear statements about Jesus' Christmas journey.

### **1. AN EMPTY THRONE: Jesus said, "I came from the Father."**

From the beginning of the beginning, Jesus was seated on the throne of heaven, but He laid aside His position to come to planet earth. He stepped down from His heavenly throne.

I was already thinking about this message two weeks ago when the Celebration Choir and Orchestra presented "Miracle in a Manger." There were a couple of songs that made reference to an empty throne in heaven. Pam Toulouse sang: "He could have chosen not to leave His throne on high...But that's not the God He is, and that's not the God He was." November Roberts sang: "A throne is bare while glory fills the manger...do we fall on our knees and thank God for so much mercy?"

We don't see many thrones anymore, because monarchies are relatively rare. And the few thrones that do exist are used only for ceremonial purposes. If you've visited Westminster Abbey in London you might have seen one named "King Edward's Throne." In 1297, British carpenter

Master Walter was paid 100 shillings to build the throne for the coronation of King Edward I. For the past 700 years, every British king and queen has occupied this throne at the moment of coronation. The last time it was used was June 2, 1953 for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Prince Charles is next in line to the throne, but there is speculation he may abdicate in favor of his son, Prince William. Whoever replaces Queen Elizabeth will sit on this throne for their coronation. The first time I saw this throne in England I was completely underwhelmed. At one time it was gilded with gold and polished, and the Coronation Stone of Scotland was kept under the wooden seat. The stone has long since disappeared and the centuries have taken their toll. Today it is scarred, marred, and damaged by wars. It is considered the most famous throne on earth, but it is scratched, scarred and seldom used.

That earthly throne isn't much, but there is an eternal throne in heaven that is so beautiful it is beyond description. The Psalms are full of references to the throne of heaven. “Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever.” (Psalm 45:6) “The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty... Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.” (Psalm 93:1-2) “The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” (Psalm 103:19)

When the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God, he described a throne. He wrote, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” (Isaiah 6:1) What a majestic scene of glory that must have been! And we don't have to wonder if Jesus occupied the throne of heaven before Bethlehem because He prayed, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” (John 17:5)

Jesus was part of the heavenly Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity states that there is one eternal God who exists in three persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. We are limited by the human dimensions of time and space, which makes it impossible for our brains to understand an eternal God who exists as three in one. There aren't three Gods, or three thrones in heaven—there is only one God. John Wesley said, “If you can explain to me how there can be three candles in a room, but only one light, then I will explain the Trinity to you.”

So, Jesus existed long before the first Christmas morning in Bethlehem. He is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. In fact, here's a riddle you can use to witness to your friends. Ask them, “Who is the only baby ever born who was older than his mother, but the same age as his father?” When they give up, tell them it was Jesus. Since He existed from the beginning of eternity, He was older than Mary, His mother. And since He existed with God the Father, He is the same age as His Father.

Of course, atheists aren't celebrating the birth of Jesus. Instead, many of them are saying, “Merry Newtonmas!” They are celebrating the birth of Sir Isaac Newton, scientist and mathematician, who was born on December 25, 1642. Isaac Newton discovered the “Laws of Motion” that govern scientific testing. It's ironic atheists would celebrate his birth, because Newton was a committed Christian. He paid for the printing of Bibles and gave money to build 50 churches in London. He wrote: “Gravity explains the motions of the planets, but it cannot explain who set the planets in motion. God governs all things and knows all that is or can be done... Atheism is so senseless and odious to mankind that it never had many professors.”

Let's examine the next clear statement of Jesus.

## **2. JOY TO THE WORLD: Jesus said, “I entered the world.”**

So Jesus left His throne in heaven in order to enter the world. Over 40 different men wrote the Bible over a period of 1,600 years, yet it has a remarkable unity. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The Gospel of John begins the same way, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The word, *logos*, is a title for Jesus. Jesus is identified as the Creator of the world. John 1:3 says, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Then John 1:14 describes the incarnation: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

In order to come to this world, Jesus had to temporarily set aside His heavenly glory. Paul describes this in Philippians 2:5-8, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

Many people believe Jesus was merely a good man, a great teacher. But if you believe the things He said about Himself, you must agree that He claimed to be more than a man. There are some Bibles called “Red Letter editions,” meaning the words Jesus spoke are printed in red, and all the other words are in black. A few weeks ago, I read only the red print in the Gospel According to John. I was blessed again by the amazing personal claims Jesus made. Here are just a few:

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came down from heaven—the Son of Man.” (John 3:13)

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” (John 6:51)

“You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” (John 8:23)

“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here.” (John 8:42)

“I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58)

“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” (John 18:37)

As C.S. Lewis noted, in light of the audacious claims Jesus made, you cannot say Jesus was merely a good teacher. There are only three options: He was a liar (He claimed to be God and knew He wasn't); or He was a lunatic (He claimed to be God, and really thought He was, but was misguided); or He is LORD.

When I first moved to Texas two decades ago, people gave me coffee cups and shirts that said, "I wasn't born in Texas, but I got here as fast as I could." I thought, "These Texans are the most conceited, arrogant folks I've ever met." And now I'm one of those conceited, arrogant people who believe that Texas is the best place in the world to live.

Since I've lived here, I've met people who moved here from other areas. I've heard people say, "I came down from Minnesota, Praise the Lord." Or, "I came down from Boston where we park the car by the harbor." I've had people say, "Oh, right, I came down from Canada, you betcha, where I went out from my house." I've even had people tell me, "I came down from Oklahoma." (And they sound just like Texans). But here's my point. In all these years of meeting people, I've never ONCE had anyone say, "Oh, I came down from heaven." But Jesus made that claim about Himself multiple times.

Jesus left His throne in glory to bring to us redemption's story. It was a long way to come. It reminds me of a story from a missionary in Africa. This missionary teacher told the African students Christians give presents to each other on Christmas Day. She explained that gifts are an expression of our joy over the birth of Jesus and we give them as a token of love and friendship.

On Christmas day one of the boys in the class brought the teacher a rare seashell of lustrous beauty. The teacher asked, "Where did you find such a beautiful shell?" The student told her there was only one spot where such rare shells could be found. When he named the bay, the teacher knew the location was over ten miles away and the student had walked to find it. She said, "It's gorgeous, but you shouldn't have walked all that distance to get a gift for me." The student smiled and said in broken English, "Long walk part of gift."

It was a long walk for Jesus to come from the throne of heaven to a stable in Bethlehem. If we could ask God, "Why all this trouble?" I believe He could say, "Long walk part of gift."

### **3. AN EMPTY TOMB: Jesus said, "Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."**

Jesus didn't come to be a permanent resident of earth. He was an expatriate from heaven, a temporary resident. He never intended to stay more than about three decades. When He spoke these words in John 16, He knew within 24 hours He would be betrayed, arrested, tortured and crucified. He also knew after three days He would walk out of the tomb and after forty days, ascend back to heaven. The tomb is empty, but the throne is occupied.

We don't have to wonder where Jesus is today. The Bible teaches that Jesus has returned to His throne in heaven with His Father. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2)

The two main Christian holiday celebrations are Christmas and Easter. Just think: If the tomb wasn't empty, then we wouldn't be celebrating Christmas at all. If Jesus hadn't been resurrected from the dead, there would be no reason to celebrate His birth. If Jesus didn't come back from

the dead there would be no reason to celebrate the birth of an obscure Jewish baby born in a tiny village in a faraway country 2,000 years ago. The empty tomb shows us Jesus is more than a man—He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In the 1500s, Scottish King James V didn't like being shut up in the palace in Edinburgh, so he sometimes disguised himself as a farm laborer and slipped out into the town and countryside to mingle with the common people. If someone asked his name he would reply he was the Good Man of Edinburgh.

One day as he was wandering about the countryside, five robbers attacked him. He carried a sword and valiantly defended himself, but he was no match for five men. In a nearby field a hired farmhand was threshing wheat and witnessed the attack. He rushed up with a pitchfork and chased off the attackers and probably saved the king's life.

He didn't recognize James as the king and took him into his cottage and washed and bandaged his wounds. He then offered to escort him back to Edinburgh to protect him from further attacks. As they walked along, the two men developed an easy friendship. The farmer, John Howison, told his new friend he worked as a laborer at Braehead Farm, which belonged to the king.

John asked his new friend what he did and the Good Man from Edinburgh said he worked at the palace. To repay John for his kindness, the Good Man from Edinburgh offered to show John around the palace if he would come on the next weekend. John accepted the invitation and showed up the next weekend at the palace. His new friend met him at the gate and showed him around. Then he said, “Would you like to meet the king?” John said, “Of course! But how will I recognize him? I've never met the king.” His friend said, “That's easy. You'll recognize the king because when he walks into a room everyone else will take off their hats and he'll be the only one wearing a hat.”

In a few minutes the two men walked into the palace throne room filled with people. Suddenly, everyone looked in their direction and took off their hats. John realized he and his friend were the only ones still wearing their hats and he said, “Well, it's either you or me that's the King and I know it's not me!”

The King said, “Of course, it's me.” The two men continued their friendship and the king eventually granted Braehead Farm to John Howison and the Howison family retained the farm and passed the story along for many generations.

One day the King of the Universe visited planet earth incognito, disguised as the Good Man from Galilee. He was confronted by ruffians and slain, but He rose again. Few people really recognized Him for who He was. He returned to His Father and one day will come again. Like John Howison each of us must say, “Jesus, either you're the king of my life, or I'm the king.” Trust me, He's the king and He will rule in your heart if you'll invite Him.

## CONCLUSION

As we enter 2012, there is a lot of uncertainty in the world. Who is going to be elected President?

Will the world end, as some claim, in December? Will there be more terrorist attacks? What's going to happen to the economy? I can't answer all those questions, but there is one thing I can say with absolute certainty: JESUS IS STILL ON HIS THRONE. Our God rules; and our God reigns!

In the last verse of John 16 Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." The only people who truly have peace on earth this Christmas season are those of us who are in Christ. Whatever happens, we find peace because Jesus has overcome the world.

God is still on His throne, and if you are in Christ, one day you will worship around that throne. The Apostle John, who heard Jesus say He was returning to His Father, actually had the opportunity to see the throne of heaven. Years later, when John was an old man, he was exiled to the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean Sea. He had a vision he recorded in the Book of Revelation describing God's throne.

"At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it...A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne...the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'" (Revelation 4:2, 3, 10-11)

The message of the angels at Christmas and the Resurrection was identical. They said, "Do not be afraid." Come see for yourself. To the shepherds guarding their flocks they said, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord...You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." The shepherds accepted that invitation and said, "Let's go to Bethlehem to see this thing that has happened." (Luke 2:10-15)

Thirty-three years later at the empty tomb, the angels said, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay." (Matthew 28:5-6)

Today, that invitation still stands. Come to the stable once again and see the Baby who vacated His throne in heaven. But don't stop there. Go to the cross and see Jesus taking our sins in His body. Then come and see the empty tomb, then fix your eyes on Jesus who is enthroned in heaven and one day will come again!

This popular praise song isn't a Christmas carol, but it could be: "You came from heaven to earth; to show the way; from the earth to the cross; my debt to pay; from the cross to the grave; from the grave to the sky; Lord we lift your name on high."

## OUTLINE

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes