

# Meditations at the Manger

#0734

Study given by W.D. Frazee—December 26, 1960

“And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger”  
Luke 2:12.

The sign here obviously means a mark of identification. In other words, the angel said to the shepherds, The way you will know this babe, this one who is the Son of God on earth, is by a certain sign. You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

It is not the way He was dressed that was the sign. There were thousands of other babes wrapped as He was. It was the place that He lay. He was laying in a manger, not a palace. Not even a home. The Lord of glory was born in a stable, and that was the sign for which the shepherds were to look.

With the shepherds we come to the manger and meditate upon this marvel. God in flesh. Jesus, the Son of God, born in a stable, and this shall be a sign. Do we recognize it?

In order to perceive we must look. But it is not enough to look. We must look in the right place. In 1844 there were thousands who were looking for the Savior to come, but they were all disappointed. He came, but He didn't come where they were looking. They did not look where He was coming.

Where was He coming on October 22, 1844? To the most holy place in heaven. Concerning that coming, and the amazement, the surprise of God's people, the prophet says:

“And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple” Malachi 3:1.

They were not looking for Him to come there. They were looking for Him to appear here on earth.

At Bethlehem, the chosen people of God were not prepared for what happened. The Jews were looking for a Messiah. They had been studying the prophecies concerning the advent of Christ. This was their study and conversation from day to day and year to year. They were looking for Him, but not in a stable. They were looking for Him, but not in a manger. They were sure He would never appear in such simple root surroundings. But that is where He came. Through the prophet God said:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord;  
neither are your ways My ways” Isaiah 55:8.

I wonder who is going to change, God or us. If God and I ever think alike it will be because I change. With Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Oh friends, I would like to be changed and think the way God thinks. I would like to be changed and have my ways like His ways. In fact, not just like His ways, but exactly His ways. What do you say?

Suppose we come to the manger and share in meditations. In 1 Corinthians I find some thoughts expressed that help me to understand the manger, and help me to understand God's choice of the place where His Son was to be born:

“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” 1 Corinthians 1:25-31.

What has God chosen? The weak things, the foolish things, the base things. What for? To bring to naught the wisdom and the glory and the might of this world. Those are God's thoughts. Those are His ways. And if we understand anything about the manger, we see the glory of this plan.

The weak things, the simple things, the root things, the base things, are chosen to reveal the power and the wisdom and the glory of the infinite God. What for? That no flesh should glory only in God. How the story of Bethlehem humbles our pride. How it deflates our egotism. How it puts into the wastebasket the plans of men. We need to gather at the manger as the simple shepherds did, and with them marvel at God's wonderful plan.

It is worthy to note that this plan appealed and was made clear not only to the simple, humble, poor shepherds, but to the rich, influential wise men who came from the East; a few from a strange land, a far country. Paul indicates that there are a few rich men, wise men, men of influence in the church.

The rich young ruler could have been one of those, but he turned his back. Paul was one of them. He was a member of the highest counsel of the Jewish nation, a philosopher who could match philosophy with philosophy at the center of Greek learning in Athens. He was a leader in the Jewish world, and worthy of

recognition in the Greek and Roman world. Yet this is the very man that is telling us this wonderful lesson of how God chooses the weak things, the foolish things, the base things, the little things, the nothing things to bring to naught the things that are in the sight of men. And notice he says that this was the plan he was following:

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

Oh brethren, what do we need? We need the power of the manger. We need God with us. Without that we are nothing. With that our weakness may be the channel through which God pours His strength. Our very foolishness may be the agency through which the wisdom of God is brought to the attention of the great men of this world.

I wonder if Joseph and Mary apologized when the wise men from the East came. I wonder if they hid somewhere and said, Oh, we cannot receive these people. We are not equipped to welcome people of this class. Do you think they did? Apparently not, for it is written that the wise men came in and brought their gifts with them. And they returned to their country praising God that they had seen Christ the Lord.

Let me tell you, there is a conviction yet to grip the hearts of many of God's children concerning the simplicity of the agencies that God will use in this closing work. And unless our eyes are anointed, like many in Israel of old, we shall fail to discern the agencies that God uses. We shall miss the manger.

“Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it” *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 507.

Think of it. The Holy Spirit falling. The latter rain falling. God at work in the very closing movement that finishes His message for all time. And yet some of God's chosen people fail to recognize it.

“Unless those who can help in \_\_\_\_\_ are aroused to a sense of their duty, they will not recognize the work of God when the loud cry of the third angel shall be heard...Let me tell you that the Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning” *Ibid*, page 300.

If you had been a public relations expert on the announcement of the birth of Jesus, would you have considered the idea of His being born in a stable and cradled in a manger? No. And may I say it would not be expected that you would have. God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways My ways."

The great lesson we need to learn at the manger is that we should let God choose His channels. We would be humble like the shepherds and be looking heavenward for guidance as they were so that the angel can tell us where to go. We need to have such an appreciation of simple things that when the angel tells us this shall be a sign to us we do not draw back and say, Oh, this can't be. It can be. It is.

"The Lord will work in this last work in a manner very much out of the common order of things, and in a way that will be contrary to any human planning. There will be those among us who will always want to control the work of God, to dictate even what movements shall be made when the work goes forward under the direction of the angel who joins the third angel in the message to be given to the world. God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness" *Ibid*.

Even the workers are going to be surprised at the simple means. I repeat, let us not miss the manger.

In the *Review and Herald*, speaking of this same experience in the approaching loud cry, Sister White said:

"There is to be in the churches a wonderful manifestation of the power of God, but it will not move upon those who have not humbled themselves before the Lord and opened their heart by confession and repentance. In the manifestation of that power which lightens the earth with the glory of God, they will see only something which in their blindness they think dangerous; something which will arouse their fears, and they will brace themselves to resist it. Because the Lord does not work according to their expectations and ideal, they will oppose the work. Why, they say, should we not know the Spirit of God when we have been in the work so many years? Because they did not respond to the warnings, the entreaties of the messages of God, but persistently said, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing" *Review and Herald*, December 23, 1890.

Oh friends, God save us. I don't want to be one of those who fail to recognize the work of the loud cry. Do you? I don't want to be one of those that fail to see it as of divine origin and ascribe to it a Satanic inspiration. I don't want to be one those

that look at the loud cry and condemn it as fanaticism. I want to be one of those that can see in the manger the Son of God. I want to see in a humble work, a simple work, and in some cases in simple surroundings what men call a crude work the sign that God is using human weakness to demonstrate His power. I will read another statement from a testimony that Sister White wrote in 1905:

“There will soon be an awakening that will surprise many. Those who do not realize the necessity of what is to be done will be passed by, and the heavenly messenger will work with those who are called the common people, fitting them to carry the truth to many places. The Lord will use in the accomplishment of His work means that we do not now see. He will raise up from the common people men and women to do this work, even as of old He called fishermen to be His disciples” *Letter 75*, 1905.

“God will work a work in our day that but few anticipate. He will raise up and exalt among us those who are taught rather by the unction of His Spirit than by the outward training of scientific institutions. These facilities are not to be despised or condemned; they are ordained of God, but they can furnish only the exterior qualifications. God will manifest that He is not dependent on learned, self-important mortals” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, page 82.

Friends, are we ready to recognize in the stable the glory of the Lord, to see God use the simplest means and agencies, and to understand that angels will unite with such a program and such a work? I was very much impressed, and I trust you all were, with the wonderful article by the editor in the last issue of the *Review and Herald*, December 24, 1959. Elder Nichol is writing the closing article of a short series, which he has entitled *The Postscript to a Long Journey*.

He has been on a trip to various parts of the world, and he has been writing his impressions from country to country. After he got home he wrote some of his meditations, and this one concerns the meditations after he got back to this country. He speaks of the poverty he found in most every part of the world; the difficult conditions under which our missionaries are laboring; the economy and self-denial and sacrifice that he met among our believers and workers generally in mission lands all over the world. He says:

“By fast plane I suddenly found myself back in America. The contrast was so great, so startling that only those who have been immersed for a time in the poverty in far lands can have any realization of the effect it can produce upon the human soul.

“I found myself once more in a kind of world that has no true parallel anywhere else in the whole earth. A kind of world where the luxuries of all other lands are considered

necessities. Where there is thrown into the garbage cans of many homes enough food to keep alive whole families in certain other lands.

“It is not simply the material of abundance that startles when you suddenly land again in America, but the mood of concern for material things. You overhear men and women talking as though in all the world nothing was half so important as being able to purchase exactly the model they wish of some new and improved car, or to buy some new gadget for the home.

“It is startling enough to hear this out in the world, but it is even more startling to hear discussions of this kind among the members of the Advent movement. Have I joined in such talk in days past myself? I doubt not. We all unconsciously tend to take on the color of the environment in which we move. But at least for this first moment of return I seem to be standing apart, looking on at something strange.

“I would like to retain the picture of overseas missions. I would like to refrain forever from adding my voice to the great American chorus that sings the glories of mechanical material things as though they were of such priceless worth as to lay claim to my first thoughts and my best budget endeavors to secure them.

“We might as well face it beloved, and I would be remiss in this final report on my journey if I fail to say it. We at the home base fall far short of realizing the true magnitude of the task that God has assigned to us as a people. If we did fully realize it we could not possibly give the time and the attention and the money that we do to material comforts. Of that I am confident.

“Let others argue to the contrary if they desire. I must speak the convictions of my heart. We say that ours is the task of preaching the gospel to all the world in this generation, and we are correct. We do have that task. Heaven gave it to us. We have accomplished part of it, and for that we can thank God and take heart. But men and brethren, go with me to far lands and see the dimensions of the task that still remains to be done. We are little people with a large work, a work as large as the world, as large as the world's great population. We are little people with little time in which to do this great work for God.

"There was a phrase current in our church language some years ago. I remember a treasurer of the General Conference who employed it frequently. It was a good phrase. He used to say that we should bind about our wants. I think we ought to revive that phrase and use it with new earnestness. We need to bind about and hold in check endless wants and wishes that spring from the human heart, and are reinforced by a bombardment of color magazine advertisements, radio and TV commercials, house-to-house salesmen, and glamorously decorated store windows.

"How easy it is to respond to the appeal. How easy for us to reason ourselves into thinking that we need most everything we see. At least one or two or more things than we had the week before. Yes, it is the easiest thing in the world to reason ourselves into feeling we must have endless new things. Who can debate the statement, for example, that foam rubber is more comfortable to sit on? And so the reasoning goes on endlessly. We need more gadgets on our cars; can't get along without them. Gadgets that can easily cost fifty or a hundred dollars apiece. But can we hope to finish the work of God if we first take counsel with our comfort and our endless desires?

"We will never finish the work of God if we first have to finish acquiring the long list of things that we materially desire. One great truth ought to be fixed firmly in our souls, never to be removed, that there is no substitute for sacrifice if we are to measure up to the work that God has given us to do. It is only by the path of sacrifice, self-denial, and the binding about of our wants that we can ever hope to trod the path trod by God's great men of old."

Oh brethren, let's say, Amen. It is a wonderful thing that God is sending these messages to us through the leaders and through the *Review and Herald*. I hope everyone of you are getting this paper in your home, and reading these articles from week to week through which God is appealing to His people.

No Seventh-day Adventist will ever be able to stand up in the judgment and say, Lord, You didn't warn us. We have been warned through the Bible, we have been warned through the Spirit of Prophecy, and we are warned from time to time through the pages of our church paper. Let's wake up and heed the warning.

I want to call your attention to something very interesting. Paul, in writing to the church in Corinth that contains the message we have already studied, expresses a fear:

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” 1 Corinthians 11:3.

Danger of losing our what? Simplicity. Was Eve hypnotized back there? That is the expression the Spirit of Prophecy uses. Satan tried to hypnotize Jesus four thousand years later, but Jesus wouldn't let it be used on Him. Today that great mastermind of evil is seeking to hypnotize every human soul, and we can be safe only as we keep looking to Jesus. We can be safe only as we refuse to look at the great hypnotist, and refuse to listen to his words that would induce hypnosis. We need to beware lest we be beguiled.

One of the greatest dangers today is that the best way to work for God is to get as far away from the manger as possible; that the wealthier our surroundings the better we can do our work; that the more luxurious our facilities the more we shall accomplish in reaching the influential people of this world. That is part of the subtlety of the serpent.

“Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ is not to study how he can best meet the requirements of the world. He is not to pattern after the world in his appearance and equipage, flattering himself that this is the way to meet the higher classes. The gospel forbids the cherishing of worldly ideas. You may ask where. I point you to the life of Christ”  
*Medical Ministry*, page 160.

We are summoned to the manger and to Nazareth and the whole life story of our Lord. Listen.

“Think of what He was before He came to our world—commander of all the heavenly intelligences. How did He come to this earth? We know Him as a poor man, who to the very close of His earthly history maintained His humility” *Ibid*.

That's the point. Not simply that He began at the manger, but He ended at the cross. In our world today it is all very well to be born in a log cabin if you end up at the White House. But here was one born in a stable, growing up in a poor home in Nazareth, and at thirty years of age still a humble carpenter.

Going out to call the fishermen to unite with Him, He went from place to place, from city to city a homeless wanderer.

“Reproach and penury His daily lot. He lived to minister to the needs and lighten the woes of men. And He could say truthfully to one who sought Him, thinking that He might someday obtain material advantage, ‘The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head’” *Ibid*.



Ah, my friends, what did He need? Did He need some experts to manage his program and tell Him how to make an appeal to the world? No. Did someone try it? Yes. What was His name? Judas. Oh, and Judas could have been converted. He could have been turned from those human ideas that were inspired of Satan. But no, he kept trying to introduce into the work of Jesus those ideas of how to appeal to the people by using worldly methods. But Jesus would have none of it. It so disappointed Judas that he finally sold out the Lord of glory for thirty pieces of silver, and became the betrayer of Christ.

Oh friends, let us be warned in time. What do you say? Let us see what God is after. It is not merely starting in sacrifice and self-denial, but it is continuing through to the finishing of the work. It is in the city above that we shall have the golden streets. It is in the city above we shall have the gates of pearl.

If God enables us to have something here that is comfortable so we can use it to His glory, let's thank Him for it, but God forbid that we should glory in our facilities and keep wanting more and more and more while mission fields call in vain for the means with which to reach people with the most primitive methods. God help us to get our eyes on the life of Jesus. God help us not to miss the manger.

"The idea that outward show gives influence to a man or his position is one of Satan's lies. Let no man climb above the methods and example of our Lord. There is no higher standard than the life of Christ. As a people, we are to shun the pretence of the world which has made men and women what they are today. We are not to copy the customs and practices of worldly wise man in order to gain favor or influence" *Ibid*.

God save us from all such ideas. Oh, that we may glory in the only thing worth glorying in, the sacrificial love, the self-denying love of Jesus our Lord. Oh, that we may see in Bethlehem something more than a story to write Christmas carols about. Let us see in the manger the message of infinite love telling us how God does things.

Our heavenly Father, as we have gathered at the manger this evening hour, we thank Thee. We thank Thee for some little measure of vision that here indeed is the revelation of Thy ways. And we thank Thee that it is possible for us, poor, weak, unworthy, to receive the Lord of glory and let Him tabernacle with us.

We pray that Thou wilt help us to see not only the beginning of Thy sacrifice at the manger, but the filling up of the cup of self-denying love in Gethsemane and at the cross. And may we choose to follow Thee from the manger to Calvary, understand that only when we leave this world shall we leave the sacrifice. Grant that our will shall be aligned to Thy will, our choice to Thy plan. Grant that we shall glory in the things that God glories in, and shall despise the pretence, the show, the affectation that characterizes this world. Grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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