Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The King Who Would Be Man

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Before Jesus had reached His second birthday, He had already become the target of an assassination plot by King Herod, the ruthless and paranoid ruler of Roman-controlled Judea. Joseph and Mary, prompted by a dream from God, took the baby and fled the country. I imagine the sense of responsibility must have been heavy on their young and slender shoulders--they were the chosen caretakers of the very God of the universe, come in human flesh.

I'm always struck by how ironic their flight to Egypt was--the humble infant King taking refuge in the very nation from whose hand He had powerfully delivered the children of Israel so many generations earlier. While the record gives no clear indication one way or the other, I suspect the people of Egypt were never aware of Jesus' divine and royal identity--He certainly wasn't what they would have expected from a king.

Egypt's history was one proud and glorious procession of kings spanning thirty dynasties and nearly 3,000 years. Egyptian kings--the pharaohs--were powerful figures and rich beyond imagination. They wielded wealth like a weapon, built sprawling cities, commanded huge armies, lived in lavish homes, ate the best food, drank the best wine, wore the most extravagant jewelry, and spared no expense when it came to their standard of living.

The pharaohs' standard of dying wasn't bad either. They obviously never heard the saying, "You can't take it with you." Concern for their lot in the afterlife was integral to Egyptian religion, and so their custom was to pack their burial chambers with supplies they would need as they traveled to their next life. King Tut's tomb proved they didn't travel lightly.

But expecting to live forever wasn't a pharaoh's only outrageous aspiration. Records indicate Egyptian kings assumed, and were given, supernatural status. The pharaoh was thought to be responsible for bringing the floods that watered Egyptian crops, and so he received credit for providing the nation's food. He was idolized in statue, citizens bowed to his image, and in the ultimate act of pride, every reigning pharaoh claimed to be the manifestation of at least one god. Akhenaton, Egyptian history's infamous heretic, banished the national pantheon and proclaimed himself to be the living incarnation of the sun-god Ra--he believed he was god in the flesh.

Whether it's the ancient pharaohs demanding the worship of others, or the millions of modern skeptics who reject God, dethrone Him as Creator, and worship themselves, man's inherent pattern has always been to exalt himself. Rebellion against God can take no higher form than self-love--the person who seeks his own interests at the expense of others and places himself at the center of the universe. That is precisely the condition in which you and I wallowed before we were saved, and that is where, ultimately, everyone who doesn't know the Lord remains.

And while history is crowded with men who would be God, only one God would be man.

Consider for a moment what it meant for our Lord Jesus to come to earth as a man to secure our salvation. The King of heaven left His throne and took a stable for a nursery. The very Son of God was hunted by a tyrant king and became an infant exile in Egypt. The source of all wisdom and knowledge was born into poverty and lived without earthly wealth and luxury. Holy and without blemish, young Messiah was assaulted by every temptation Satan could thrust on Him, yet He resisted each one to its fullest force. The King of creation willingly subjected Himself to all of what it means to be human--pain, hunger, thirst, sorrow, physical exhaustion, the full range of human emotions--yet did so without sinning.

And in an unfathomable act of selfless, sacrificial love, He left heaven's glory to die on our behalf. He offered mercy to a people who deserved only His wrath. He stooped to accomplish that which we not only could not do, but also would not do. In love, the God of the universe stepped from eternity to intervene in human history and save those wholly unable to save themselves.

In a word, the lesson we learn from Christmas is love. Christ's love--love that was manifest in His coming, in His life, and in His death--was a love that sacrificed. A love that sought not its own needs but the needs of others. A love that counted not what it might lose but what others would gain. Love that emptied itself that others would be filled and humbled itself that others would be lifted up. Love that, to the very end, gave without thought for self or self gain.

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