

CHRIST CAME BEFORE CHRISTMAS

JUDGES 13

JESUS CAME TO SACRIFICE



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

The *Harvard Business Review* recently published an article entitled, "Why you need to protect your sense of wonder—especially now." Its opening paragraph was: "As the pandemic era goes on, more than ever we need ways to refresh our energies, calm our anxieties, and nurse our well-being. The cultivation of experiences of awe can bring these benefits."

It goes on: "At its core, awe has an element of vastness that makes us feel small; this tends to decrease our mental chatter and worries and helps us think about ideas, issues, and people outside of ourselves, improving creativity and energy." It has also been linked with reduced stress, depression, and arthritis, and an improved immune system.

This is not a new discovery. Einstein said "The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead." Chesterton remarked, "The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder...there are no dreary sites, only dreary sightseers."

If there's anything the church and Christians should be good at, it's wonder (1 Cor. 14:24-25). So **how can we increase wonder?**

BACKGROUND

The Son of God was present and active long before the incarnation. Yes there were predictions and prophetic pictures of the Son of God in the Old Testament. But there were also times when the Son of God was not only predicted or pictured but was actively present in the Old Testament. That's why we called this Advent series, **Christ Came Before Christmas**. How did Christ come before Christmas? Our series on the Angel of the Lord, answers:

- Christ came to save us (Genesis 16)
- Christ came to sanctify us (Genesis 32)
- Christ came to sympathize with us (Exodus 3)
- Christ came to sacrifice for us (Judges 13)

In Judges, we see the same pattern again and again: Israel falls into sin, God punishes them by handing them over to their enemies, they cry for mercy, God sends a deliverer, then Israel fall into sin again and the cycle continues. The book of judges shows what happens when there is no king and everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25). But into this scene of deepening darkness, God sends his wonderful Son with a wonderful message to Manoah and his wife, the future parents of Samson.



How is wonder God's answer to this situation?



1. JESUS IS A WONDERFUL PERSON

It was no ordinary time: because of their sins, the Lord gave Israel into the hand of the Philistines for forty years (1). **It was no ordinary suffering:** Manoah and his wife were childless (2). **It was no ordinary visitor:** The angel of the Lord appeared and promised Manoah's wife a child who would deliver Israel (3-5). **It was no ordinary angel:** He looked like a godly man and an awesome angel (6). Later Manoah realizes that he had seen God (22). **It was no ordinary promise:** Manoah and his wife would have a special son who would be dedicated to God and the deliverance of Israel from their enemies.

This unique combination of human form and divine nature is consistent with the other Old Testament appearances of this extraordinary Angel (*lit.* "Messenger") of God. Who else can this be but the Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Messenger of God? He is the eternal Word who comes down to earth with messages of grace and promises of deliverance for his needy people. In this case, the need was a child to end this couple's barrenness and bring Philistine occupation to an end.

In the fullness of time the Son would become flesh and dwell among us, full of grace and truth (Jn.1:14). But until then, in Old Testament times, he "impersonated" human flesh and briefly visited to give his people glimpses of his grace and truth.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

The Son's regular appearances in human form declare his enthusiasm and even "holy impatience" for being among us in human flesh. He could hardly wait to see us, sympathize with us, suffer for us, and save us. These brief appearances in human form were little "tasters" of his great future work. They whetted his appetite for it. What a wonderful person! May we be filled with wonder as we ponder this extraordinary person who came as an extraordinary visitor with extraordinary promises and extraordinary fulfillment of them.

WHEN WE ARE FULL OF WOE
WORSHIP THE ONE FULL OF WONDER



What did Jesus reveal about himself?
He revealed he had a concealed name.



2. JESUS IS A WONDERFUL NAME

When Manoah's wife told her husband about the Angel's visit, Manoah, her husband, prayed that the messenger might return to give them more instruction on how to raise this promised son (8). God listens to Manoah's prayer and the messenger returns to give them further instruction (9-14). Manoah then offered a meal to their guest, not yet knowing exactly who their guest is (15-16). The Angel of the Lord declined the meal but agreed to stay longer if they would offer a sacrifice to the Lord (16).

Manoah responded to the Angel's presence and promises by asking, **"What is your name, so that, when your words come true, we may honor you?"** (17). These Old Testament revelations of the Son of God often centered around his names (Gen. 16:13; 32:29; Ex. 3:13-15). That's because in the Old Testament the name of someone did not just identify them but defined them. The explained who the person was in his character. Manoah therefore was seeking more understanding of who the Messenger was so that he could worship and serve him better.

The Angel's answer both concealed and revealed: **And the angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?"** (18). "wonderful" here means 'beyond comprehension, beyond understanding, fantastic, incredible, astonishing, etc. We might say 'mind-blowing.' What sort of man claims that his name/character is beyond comprehension? There is something super-special about this man with the name Wonderful (Isa. 9:6; Matt.1:21). The answer concealed because it was not yet time for the second person of the Godhead to be fully revealed as Jesus the Christ.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

As life eternal is to know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (Jn. 17:3), is this not the question which beats in the heart of every true believer? "What is your name? Tell me more so I can honor you more." We pray for more and more understanding of who the Lord is and what he has done, so that we may worship and serve him more?

What a wonderful and wonder-filled name! Thank God it is no longer secret or so shrouded in mystery. Let us be amazed, awed, astonished, and astounded at this startling and breath-taking name (Matt. 1:23-24). "His name shall be called Wonderful" (Isa.9.6). How true! And, if we know his name, and his sayings have come to pass in our lives, let us do him honor.

HIS WONDERFUL REVELATION
MEANS WONDERFUL ADORATION



He has a wonderful name.
What does this wonderful Messenger do?



3. JESUS DOES A WONDERFUL ACT

Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who work wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching (19).

The NKJV translates the last part of this verse, "And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on." The KJV puts it like this: "And the angel did wonderously; and Manoah and his wife looked on." The NIV is "And the Lord did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched."

What was the wonderful thing that the Angel did? **When the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord went up in the flame of the altar (20).** What's he thinking? He's thinking about his future sacrifice for sinners and cannot but have a trial run. The Son of God saw the altar, smelt the smoke, and felt the heat. But instead of stepping away, he stepped into the flames, and started rising heaven-wards. Little wonder that at this wonderful sight of this wonderful person doing this wonderful act, Manoah and his wife fell on their faces to the ground.

What was the Divine Messenger doing? He was "practicing" or "rehearsing" his future sacrifice, pictured and promised in the Old Testament sacrifices. He went up to God in the flames of a sacrifice, picturing his ultimate sacrifice at Calvary. There he stepped not into the flames of a burning goat, but into the flames of an angry God. He did not just rise heavenwards in a few brief moments, but stayed in the fire until the divine flames burned themselves out on Him. Yet, as here, there was no stepping back, but a stepping forward. How much more wondrous, amazing, astounding, astonishing, and awesome.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Do you see how eager Christ was to become a sacrifice for sinners? He wanted his Old Testament saints (and us) to know how restless he was to offer himself as a sacrifice for us. He's saying, "I'm hankering, yearning, pining, longing, willing, and ready to die for your life. Is that not a wonderful thing?"

HE WAS DYING TO DIE
SO WE COULD LIVE AND NOT DIE



What difference does this make to our lives?



4. JESUS GIVES WONDERFUL FELLOWSHIP

As the Angel ascended, Manoah and his wife descended, falling on their faces to the ground (20). How long they stayed there we do not know, but considering what they'd just seen, they probably stayed prostrate and prayerful for some time. As they lay there and the realization of who and what they had seen began to dawn on them, **Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God"** (22; Gen. 16:13-14; 32:20; Ex. 3:6).

But while Manoah despairs, his wife rejoices in God's grace. Manoah desponds, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God." But, his wife rejoices in God's goodwill, and encourages her husband to hope in God by pointing to the accepted sacrifice, gracious revelations, and precious promises (23). What wonderful words of fellowship as a confident believer counsels a doubting believer away from fear and towards assurance. They both saw the same wonderful sight and heard the same wonderful words but responded with different kinds of wonder. Manoah's wonder paralyzed and petrified him. His wife's wonder thrilled her and excited her. She wanted her husband to grow in faith and reasoned him towards that. They had fellowship with the Son and with one another.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Sacrifice comes before communion and is the basis of communion. Fire is before fellowship and warms fellowship. Christian fellowship around the cross encourages the strong in faith who help the weak in faith. The sacrifice of Christ is the basis of our salvation and our assurance.

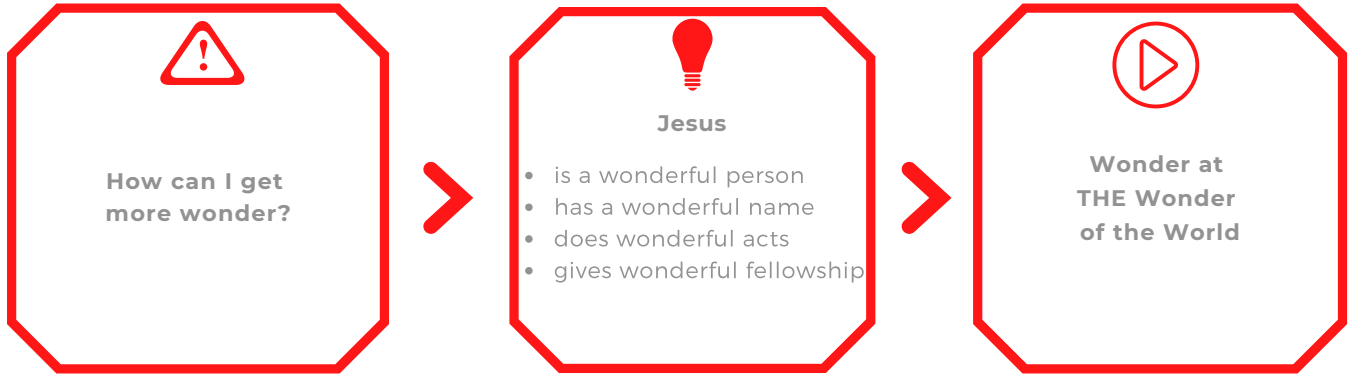
FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST FIRES
FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER



Hear God's Story > Change your Story > Tell the Story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



PRAYER: Wonderful Savior, fill me with wonder at your wonders and use me to help others towards wonder.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think there is so little wonder in the world today? What are the effects of this lack?
2. What are the effects of spiritual wonder? What thoughts, feelings, and actions, accompany it?
3. How can you increase spiritual wonder in your life?
4. Which one of Jesus's many names fill you with the most wonder?
5. What's the most wonderful aspect of the cross of Christ for you?
6. What is Christian fellowship? Who do you have Christian fellowship with? What effect does it have upon you?

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