

Aspects

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They Need a Savior

“Let us not forget the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us not think of it vaguely, and fall into the heretical fancy that the Son of God became man merely to transact certain things which were necessary to secure the salvation of men, and that after this object was achieved His human nature recedes into the background and impenetrable obscurity. No, it is not so; all-important as His work on earth was — the only foundation of our hope and blessedness — let us adore the revealed mystery that God gave us His Son, never to recall Him, as it were, and take Him away from us; He spared Him not and gave Him to us, allowing Him to become man, exalting Him as the Son of Man, enthroning Him because of his obedience unto death, and giving unto Him as the Son of Man all power in heaven and earth.” *Adolph Saphir (1831-1891), Christ and Israel*

Harry, angel 4-R (4th Rung), moved closer to the odd structure standing curiously weighted amidst the diaphanous splendor of heaven. It seemed to have grown up, like an ugly block-shaped mushroom, out of the vaporous terra of the heavenlies. The cube appeared as a gross uncleanness within the pristine dimensions of God’s domain, with textures and unpleasant colors foreign to its inhabitants.

It’s so ugly it hurts the eyes, Harry thought. *They must have told me wrong. How could The Son possibly be in that thing.* He moved closer, his curiosity overpowering the revulsion that filled him at the ugly sight.

Harry peered around one of the cube’s corners. The second side looked exactly like the first. He crept ahead, carefully staying clear of the cube’s surface, fearful that contact with the coarse material might inflict damage to his person. Reaching the end, he craned his neck around the next corner. This side was much the same, except that it contained a rectangular irregularity in its middle. A seam ran straight up to a point just above Harry’s head, angled sharply right, where it met up with another seam running straight up from the cube’s base. Near one of the vertical seams a loop of hemp rope protruded from the cube.

How does one enter such a beastly thing? Harry wondered. *Knock on the door, Harry,* came the reply into his head. “What?”

“It’s a small thing, really, to give up my glory for a little while, so that so many others might have it for eternity.”

Make a fist and rap your knuckles against the door, just above the rope. Harry clenched his fingers into a tight ball and struck his knuckles against the rough wood. Knock. “Ow.” Knock. “Ow.” Knock. “Ow!”

“Come in!”

Harry stood staring at the wall. He stared at the seams that formed a rectangle. He stared at the hank of rope. *How?* He screamed into the space between his ears.

Pull the rope.

Harry yanked down on the loop of rope. The rectangle shifted, but failed to open.

Pull the rope toward you, Harry.

He grasped the rope firmly in his hand and yanked it straight out toward him. Suddenly the door flew open, sending Harry careening backwards, leaving him sprawled in a tangled heap.

“Well, hello Harry! Good to see you.” The Son reached down and set Harry back onto his feet.

“Y — you *know* me, God?” Harry stammered, nervously putting himself back in order.

The Son smiled warmly. “Of course I do. Now, what can I do for you?”

“What *is* this thing?” Harry asked, studying the curious structure. “Is it a

new kind of throne?”

“No, no. It’s a house — a mud brick house that people live in down on earth. And this is how one comes and goes from inside,” He said, swinging the wooden door on its hinges. “Come on inside, Harry. It’s rather cozy.”

Harry followed The Son into the structure. “More like *confined*,” he suggested. Inside it was dark, smelled of clay and damp straw, and the four walls and low ceiling seemed to move in on the angel, leaving him feeling uneasy, and more than a little claustrophobic. He sucked in his breath, as if air were in short supply.

The Son laughed and moved about the room testing its dimensions. “I think one could get used to it. Now, Harry, what’s on your mind?”

The angel had never before been so close to God. Only one among countless millions, he had always been lost in the crowd of those offering praise and worship



to the throne. He knew that the upper echelon — the splendid archangels — was almost constantly in the presence of God, but those of his stripe were seldom so close to the throne and the magnificent Presence.

Now here he was, granted a private audience with The Son, and without warning his tongue became a leaden obstacle to expressing his thoughts. But he pushed back the powerful feelings of inferiority — feelings that even he realized were created solely in his own mind — and pressed ahead with the purpose of his visit.

“W — well, God,” Harry began, “I — I’ve heard a rumor — a rumor about *you* — and I thought I’d check it out for myself.” Harry exhaled, relieved to have finally gotten it out.

“A rumor, huh?” The Son said. “This can’t be good. What have I done now?”

“Oh, *no!*” Harry cried, horrified that The Son would think such a thing. “No — nothing like that, God. You see —”

“Listen, Harry,” The Son interrupted calmly, reassuring the angel with a warm hand on his shoulder, “pretty soon I’m going to be taking a new name — a *human* name. Why don’t you help me get accustomed to it by using it now.”

“Uh, sure. I could do that.”

“Good. The name’s ‘Jesus.’”

Harry rolled the unfamiliar word around in his mind, sampling the flavor of it, mentally affixing the name to The Son. “Je-sus. Well, that shouldn’t be so hard. Jesus.” He grinned up at The Son, feeling his earlier nervousness slip away more with every moment spent in the Presence. “Well, God,” he began. “Sorry; Jesus, I’ve heard others talking about you going down to earth for awhile, and —”

Suddenly a light went off in Harry’s brain. Of course! The new name, the curious structure in which they now stood — these were in preparation for The Son’s visit! Harry was slow, he knew; he wasn’t still on the 4th Rung after all his centuries for nothing. But sooner or later he was able to put the pieces together.

“Then, of course,” Harry blurted out, “it *must* be true! Why else would you need a human name!”

Jesus grinned at the angel. He winked and said, “Harry, don’t ever let them sell you short. You’re right on the ball.”

“Then it’s true?”

Jesus nodded. “That’s why I made this house: so I could get used to living as humans do — to experience the sights and smells and sounds of their existence.”

“But Jesus,” Harry shook his head, perplexed, “You’ve never done anything like this before.”

“Sure I have. A few times, anyway. Don’t you remember when I visited Abraham and Sarah at the oaks of Mamre?”

Harry did remember, and recalled how fascinated he had been watching The Son personally give the two old believers the news that Sarah would indeed give birth to a son. Yes, and he now recalled even more instances in which God had visited earth to deal more directly with His people.

“So then,” Harry said, “this is no big deal.”

The Son turned quickly serious, moving about the small room as if measuring its circumference. “Actually it is,” He said, stopping before the wall opposite the door. Instantly a small square opening appeared in the mud brick, and white heavenly

light pierced into the dark interior of the structure. “This time, Harry, will be *quite* different. This time I’ll be there in the flesh.”

Horrified at the prospect, Harry felt his stomach twist in revulsion. “*Flesh?*”

“Oh, it isn’t all *that* bad,” Jesus chided. “There are millions of people living that way right now.”

“Yeah, but they’re *used* to it! You’re used to so much better.”

“But it’s the only way it can get done.”

“What?” Harry screwed up his face. “What would be so important that you’d have to do all that?”

The Son looked into Harry’s eyes in a penetrating way that the angel had never before experienced, and said, “Their redemption. It’s time for me to go down to earth and fulfill the law We established long ago.”

Becoming transfixed by the Presence, and The Son’s willingness to sacrifice His own comfort, Harry said in a hushed tone, “But, in person? Couldn’t you do it from up here?”

The Son moved toward a corner and a small, crude stool appeared. He sat down, rested his chin in his hand, and said, “There was a time, long ago, when We considered that. But you know, Harry, these people need a Savior. They really do. They need someone they can see with their own eyes, whose voice and words they can hear for themselves — and they need someone they can touch, and feel is really there with them.”

Never having been assigned to earth, Harry’s experience with humans was strictly secondhand, but he was beginning to understand how, because of the type of beings they were, they might appreciate God meeting them on their own level. He turned to The Son and said, “They need a ‘Jesus’.”

“It’s the best way to show them God’s love,” Jesus said. “Put Him into flesh.”

Harry stared out the newly formed window, gazing into the more familiar brilliance that enveloped the tiny hovel. “Okay, I think I can see this,” he said. “But one thing — and please, Jesus, I don’t mean any disrespect — are these the right people? Is this the right time? As I understand it, the world’s a pretty small place right now, and these people have a lot to learn. Things are fairly primitive down there.”

“It was worked out long ago, Harry. Now’s the time.”

“But is it necessary to give all this up — the throne, the grandeur, the *glory* — to go where people live like this?”

The Son answered with a sigh. “It’s a small thing, really, to give up my glory for a little while, so that so many others might have it for eternity.”

“But Jesus,” Harry said seriously, “you’ll be losing who you *are* — your identity.”

“No, I’m not losing it. Just setting it aside for awhile. I’ll still be God, only now — for a little while — I’ll also be man.”

“Sounds complicated,” Harry said, screwing up his face.

“Yes, I suppose it is,” Jesus said, rising from the stool. “But nobody ever said it would be easy to save all of mankind.”

. . .
O bringer of salvation,
Who wondrously hast wrought,
Thyself the revelation
Of love beyond our thought.
Frances R. Havergal

To Give People a Chance

“God could, had He pleased, have been incarnate in a man of iron nerves, the stoic sort who lets no sigh escape him. Of his great humility He chose to be incarnate in a man of delicate sensibilities who wept at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood in Gethsemane. Otherwise we should have missed the great lesson that it is by his *will* alone that a man is good or bad, and that *feelings* are not, in themselves, of any importance. We should also have missed the all-important help of knowing that He has faced all that the weakest of us face, has shared not only the strength of our nature but every weakness of it except sin. If He had been incarnate in a man of immense natural courage, that would have been for many of us almost the same as His not being incarnate at all.”

C.S. Lewis

Jesus pulled open the wooden door and held it for Harry to leave the small house. From the compressed dirt floor of the building, Harry expected to step onto the familiar, unresisting surface of heaven, but instead found himself standing upon another, even more unpleasant surface: mud.

“Oh,” he blanched, grimacing as his foot sank down into the wet muck. “What’s *this*?”

Jesus laughed. “What’s the matter, Harry. Afraid of a little mud?”

“Mud?”

“A mixture of water and dirt,” Jesus explained. “This is what happens to a road in Palestine when it rains.”

“Rains?”

“Never mind, Harry.” Jesus sighed, stepping carefully through the muck until he found a drier path, which he followed down the middle of the roadway that passed between two rows of dwellings almost identical to the one they had just left.

Harry tried to keep up, placing his feet carefully along the same path as Jesus, trying to keep his steps out of the unpleasant mud. The light level was dramatically reduced, and his eyes were having a difficult time adjusting. Harry strained to see through the faint light: the seemingly endless rows of drab, mud-colored houses varied only by the dim glow of oil lamps that could be seen through a few of the open windows.

“Why is it so dark, God?”

“Ah,” The Son raised his finger to remind Harry of his mistake. “Jesus, remember.”

“I’m sorry. Yes. I’m having a hard time remembering. Why is it so dark, Jesus?”

“This is what is called ‘night’ on earth. It’s how it looks when the earth has rotated out of the sun’s path.”

“How terrible for them!” Harry gasped. “And how often does this phenomenon occur?”

“Every twenty-four hours, of course.”

“Oh *my*! No wonder they’re in such a terrible state.”

“Not at all,” Jesus chuckled. “It signals a time of *rest* for them. Very important for the human body. Since I’ll be

spending a little time in one, I wanted to get the feel of it early on.”

“This seems like such a drab existence,” Harry said, continuing on just behind Jesus. He imagined the impact of the residents when The Son burst upon their community, and his breast swelled with pride, knowing that he — a lowly 4th Rung angel — was playing even a small part in God’s preparation. “I sure wish I could be there when you make your grand entrance,” Harry said, his voice heavy with awe. “It’ll sure be something to see.”

“Why do you say that?” Jesus said, continuing down the street, glancing here and there at the houses painted by the fading light.

“What? What do you mean?” Harry stammered excitedly. “Why, just picture it: The Son of God arrives on earth in all his heavenly glory! There’ll be trumpets and cymbals and cheering throngs to greet you when you show yourself to them. Why, they’ll be so *surprised* — so happy that the Messiah has finally come, in all your *majesty*!”

Jesus turned quickly around, stopping the effervescent angel by the shoulders. “Harry, settle down! Listen to me now: It’s not going to be that way.”

Harry gazed up into the eternally patient, yet insistent face of The Son.

“It’s not,” he said meekly.

“That’s not how humans are born.”

“*Born*?” Harry cried, his gut filling again with revulsion at the thought of that most unseemly human practice.

“But, you — I mean you’re already —”

“Yes. I am,” Jesus said firmly. “But I must become *flesh*, and flesh must be born. It doesn’t just *appear*.”

“But Jesus, isn’t the whole idea to make some kind of an impact down there? To actually *change* the world and its ways?”

“The idea, Harry, is to save lives. The idea is to give people a chance to live with God forever.”

“Okay. Right. And I would think the best way to accomplish that is to make a real *splash*. Give them a display of your power — your *might*. Really impress them!”

“Harry, Harry,” Jesus shook his head sadly. “You don’t know these people as well as you may think. They aren’t impressed with ‘splash.’ You’re forgetting about the biggest splash We ever made. Remember when We helped Moses save the people from the clutches of Pharaoh? We split the Red Sea into two parts, revealing the dry land, gave them safe passage between towering walls of water. Talk about an impressive miracle!” Jesus gazed sadly around him at the people beginning to emerge from the houses after their small evening meal. “Before the water could even fill in the dry channel they were grumbling and complaining to God.” He sighed, and spoke with a voice heavy with sadness, yet at the same time filled with overwhelming compassion. “No, they may be impressed for the moment, but that’s as long as it lasts. They don’t need a parade. They need a Savior.”

Harry was silent, watching the face of The Son as he studied the people around the houses, images momentarily oblivious to their audience. Harry felt the sadness like a great heat coming off The Son’s figure, and enveloping even him like an

“They don’t need a parade. They need a Savior.”

A Humble Birth

uncomfortable woolen cloak. The angel could not bear the weight of God's emotions, and stumbled back away from him.

Harry still felt he needed to confirm the unbelievable news. Finally breaking the silence, he said, "So you'll be *born*."

"Just like everyone else down there," Jesus answered quietly.

The angel shuddered and said more to himself than to his companion, "There's got to be a better way."

Jesus grinned at Harry, relaxing again. "Oh, and We've already picked out my mother," he said teasingly. Harry, still having a difficult time comprehending all this, remained silent. "She's a sweet girl," Jesus continued, "from Nazareth — a small town very much like this." He swept his arm around to encompass all the streets and dwellings and people around them. "She's engaged to be married to a man from the same town, so I guess that'll be *my* home town." Then he repeated the name, as if enjoying the simple act of forming the word between his lips. "Nazareth."

Their path had taken them to where the rows of houses stopped, where the road broadened into the coarse scrub of the surrounding low hills. Jesus stopped, scanning the horizon, but still immersed in thoughts of his new family.

"Her name is Mary," he said with quiet delight. "That's a nice name, isn't it Harry. Her betrothed is Joseph. Mary and Joseph — they'll be my parents."

Harry was still wrestling with the mental picture — struggling to place The Son in the lowly confines of a humble village such as the one in which they now stood, surrounded by people of low means, such as these that milled about the town's mud streets. He tried to imagine The Son as a tiny babe held in the arms of a young girl named Mary, and the idea was so incredible to him that the image kept vaporizing before he could complete the picture in his head. It was just too much for his small mind to comprehend. Harry thought about the girl, her innocence, her fragility, and the amazing idea that she could actually hold God in her two small hands.

"Will she know?" Harry asked.

"Know what?"

"That she's giving birth to the Son of God."

Jesus nodded his head. "Gabriel's already told her."

Harry was beginning to realize that these humans must be made of tougher stock than he had first imagined. "Must be quite a lot for a young girl to take in," he said seriously.

Jesus turned to head back down the street, deeper into the darkening light between the crude hovels, back to the villagers now preparing to retire for the night.

"Yes. I imagine so," he quietly sighed.

/ / /

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's Strength and Consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley

"He is not humanity deified. He is not Godhead humanized. He is God. He is man. He is all that God is, and all that man is as God created him." *Charles H. Spurgeon*

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The road bordered by mud brick houses was gone. The mingling people going about their evening business were gone. The whole untidy scene was gone, replaced by the opaque purity of heaven. The uncomfortable sensation of being trapped in a wrong place was leaving Harry as the two walked together upon the more familiar surface of the angel's home. Far in the distance was a dark speck, and Harry wondered if they were perhaps returning to the first dwelling in which he had found The Son.

"You're looking forward to it, aren't you," Harry volunteered.

"I'm looking forward to what it will accomplish," Jesus replied.

"Well, at least your parents — since they know you're the Son of God — will surely give you a suitable lifestyle. Certainly you've selected parents from a priestly, or even royal family."

Jesus brightened. "Actually they *are* of the royal line of David. I'll be meeting them for the first time in Bethlehem — the City of David, and Joseph's hometown."

Harry was getting confused again. "But you said they were from Nazareth. That's in the north, isn't it?"

"They *are* from Nazareth," Jesus said, "but you see, the emperor down there — it's Caesar Augustus right now — he'll be ordering everyone to return to their family towns to be registered for a census." Jesus grinned at the angel. "See how it's coming together? He's counting heads, so I'll be born in Bethlehem instead of Nazareth. Bethlehem is Joseph's family town, so he and Mary will go there to be counted."

"Ah, then they have a second home there," Harry said triumphantly.

"Uh, no . . ."

"Family to stay with?"

"Harry," Jesus sighed, "they're in the royal line, but Joseph is a simple carpenter — an honorable man with very little in his purse."

The angel was again frustrated by what seemed to him a convoluted logic. Surely, he thought, the best way to get the message out — the best way to accomplish the planned task — would be to place The Son into a prominent family, into a situation from which many would hear the message of deliverance. Or, if not a highly-placed family, at least near someone with a position of authority in Jerusalem — better yet, at the Temple itself.

"But why a carpenter," Harry moaned, "when there are so many really important religious leaders in Israel —"

"Yes," Jesus grimaced, "*too* many."

"Wouldn't any one of them be a better choice?"

Jesus answered with a heavy sadness in his voice — with the sound of a father whose children have disappointed him deeply. "You may find this hard to believe," he said, "but most of the

problems I'll have on earth will be caused by the religious leaders. They will become the biggest obstacle to people believing in me. And they'll go out of their way to get rid of me."

As Harry and The Son continued on, the far distant speck had gradually become larger, until the angel could see that it was some sort of rough hovel, similar to, but also different from the first. This dwelling appeared to have been carved out of solid rock. Instead of standing free, like the first, this one was a deep depression in the side of a hill. As they drew closer Harry saw figures milling excitedly about the crudely-arched entrance, craning their necks to see inside.

But Harry's mind was still on God's logic in placing The Son in a humble, peasant family, rather than with a more esteemed family of prominence. It still seemed foolish to him. Exasperated, he said, "Will there at least be emissaries present to properly inform the public?"

"Mmm — yes, in a manner of speaking," Jesus smiled as the pair came closer to the crowd of people outside the cave. "The shepherds will be close by," he explained, "and they'll tell others."

"*Shepherds?*" Harry squawked, emitting a sound similar to that of a person being strangled. "Out in the country? What will you be doing out in the *country?*"

"Well, you see," Jesus said as they approached the entrance to the cave, "the town will be filled with travelers there because of the census." The people smiled happily at the pair, and politely moved aside to give them passage. Past the scruffy onlookers, the two stepped just inside the opening, their feet shuffling onto the deep mat of straw spread about on the floor. "So," Jesus stooped to peer back into the cave's dusty interior, "the only available lodging will be a stable."

Harry was again feeling that nagging sensation in the pit of his belly: the feeling of being in an alien place. The dust-filled air attacked his nose with the sharp stench of aging manure; around him came the bleating of lambs nuzzling for their place at a teat, and the baritone lowing of placid bovines incessantly chewing their cud. The light was so dim — one small oil lamp supplied the only illumination — that Harry could just barely make out the crouched figures huddled back inside the cave. And on top of everything else, he had a sinking feeling that he had just stepped in something warm and squishy.

Harry felt The Son's hand on his arm. He looked up to see the smaller of the two figures before them reach down into the deep hay mounded atop a stone. The woman appeared to be exhausted, her face worn and ringed by sweat-stringed hair that betrayed some great exertion. That she could hold herself up was a wonder, but she lifted the tiny form to her breast. As the baby found the nipple, the woman smiled down at him and murmured something private and warm.

"Who *is* this?" Harry asked, still uncomfortable in this strange place, yet strangely drawn to the scene being played out

before him. Who were these scruffy peasants with their newborn child taking refuge in such a wretched domicile? What sort of person would be so careless and unthinking as to give birth where the beasts were lodged? Surely these folks were the lowest of the low.

"I told you, Harry," Jesus said quietly, as if he didn't want to intrude on the moment, "I have to be *born.*"

The angel stared up at The Son, stunned. He couldn't believe his ears! "You're telling me that the long-awaited Messiah — the King of Kings — the very Son of God will be born in a filthy *stable?*"

Jesus chuckled at the angel's not unexpected response. "You make it sound like a *bad* thing," he said. "Harry, I'm not going to earth to be a member of royalty waited on by his subjects. I'm going down there to be a *servant* — so that I can wait on them."

"I'm not going to earth to be a member of royalty waited on by his subjects. I'm going down there to be a *servant*, so that I can wait on them."

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly-minded,
For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of old on earth He stood,
Lord of Lords, in human vesture,
In the body and the blood,
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heav'nly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the pow'rs of hell may vanish
As the darkness clears away.

Liturgy of St. James, 5th century

So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him . . .

Luke 2:39-40

In Person

"The Second Person in God, the Son, became human Himself: was born into the world as an actual man — a real man of a particular height, with hair of a particular colour, speaking a particular language, weighing so many stone.

"The Eternal Being, who knows everything and who created the whole universe, became not only a man but (before that) a baby, and before that a fetus inside a woman's body. If you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or a crab." *C.S. Lewis*

He had never been down to earth before, but now that he had been sent, Harry was determined to make the best of it. He was determined to get along.

If the truth be known, Harry had never been terribly impressed by the human species; he had always considered them a most inconvenient, unsightly bunch. But ever since The Son had gone down to be born and live amongst them, Harry had acquired a new level of interest in the inhabitants of earth.

Harry had been set down in the hill country of Lower Galilee, directly west of the lower tip of the Sea of Galilee — the great fresh water lake around which lay the cities of Capernaum, Gennesaret, and Tiberias.

Almost immediately his feet began to ache. The road was hard-packed soil, and on this day it seemed to the angel that it may as well have been forged iron beneath him. Each step on the compacted earth jarred his bones. Meanwhile the gravity of the globe worked against him. Harry was unaccustomed to these physical constraints; heaven's surface did not press back against one's feet, and there was likewise no force constantly pressing one down toward the ground. *How do these humans bear it all?* He wondered.

The road followed the contours of the land, rising and falling, curving around the small hills. After awhile the road widened, here and there small dwellings began to appear nearby: an inn, a metalsmith's shop, a pottery shop surrounded by orderly rows of mud bricks drying in the sun. The private dwellings became more numerous, even sharing walls, until Harry realized he had entered what these people would call a town, or village.

To the angel everything was intolerably filthy. The walls of the houses were constructed of baked mud; the street was made of the same: dry or wet dirt; even the people themselves, in Harry's opinion, were badly in need of a bath: their exposed flesh — and especially the feet — was caked with dust. To Harry even the air itself was filled with dust, making it a challenge for him to breathe.

Feeling perfectly miserable, and increasingly homesick for the purity of heaven, Harry nonetheless continued on, passing down the road bordered by businesses and houses, until he came upon a shop surrounded by the pleasant aroma of freshly cut wood. Affixed to the outside wall was a hand-lettered sign that read 'Carpentry.' Harry peered inside the open window; planing a new tabletop, a middle-aged man stood working on a floor littered with the curled shavings created by his tool.

Harry heard a rasping sound coming from a narrow alleyway next to the building. Crouched on a bench was a teenage boy filing a narrow piece of wood, smoothing the rounded surface to become a leg for the table being finished by the older man inside.

What is it about him? Harry thought. *He looks familiar, but how can that be. I've never been here before.* But something drew him closer to the boy. He stepped into the alley and moved toward him, mentally devising reasons he could use to explain his interest. Just then the boy heard Harry and looked up. Instantly his face broke into a broad smile, and the angel suddenly knew what it was that had drawn him inside.

"J — Jesus?" He said, not daring to imagine it was true.

"Harry!" The boy cried, leaping to his feet. "It's sure good to see you!"

His heart beating and his throat choked with emotion, Harry embraced Jesus, but then, remembering himself, quickly pulled away. "I — I'm sorry, God."

"Oh Harry," Jesus grinned, embracing him again, "I'm just so glad to see you again."

"I wasn't sure it was you," Harry said, suddenly aware of the odd sensation of touching flesh. He touched Jesus' arms, shoulders, gripped his hands. "So this is what it's like."

"How have you been, Harry?"

"I've missed you. We all miss you."

"I've missed you, too," Jesus said, picking up the table leg on which he had been working. "But I've got a pretty good life here."

"So," Harry glanced around, "when will it begin?"

"What?"

"C'mon," Harry said confidently, but leaned closer, in case Jesus didn't want others to hear, "you're the messiah! You came down here to save these people. When will you be taking over?"

"Take . . . over?"

Once again Harry was confused — and it was an unpleasant sensation. Why did he always end up feeling like such a dunce around The Son? There was always such a vast gulf of understanding stretched between them — as if Jesus had already made it safely to shore, but he still floundered out in the waves.

"Am I missing something?" Harry said, betraying his frustration. "Isn't that why you came down here in the first place? You said they needed a Savior!"

Jesus looked down, and Harry could feel the powerful wave of sadness emanating from him. "Oh, they sure do."

"So when will it begin?" Harry said insistently.

"Come with me," Jesus said, drawing Harry out from the alley and into the street. He led him down the street a ways, to where the houses stopped, then pointed toward a nearby hillside. "Harry, do you see that shepherd over there — the one surrounded by all his sheep?" Harry nodded, wondering what Jesus was getting at.

"Do you see how he keeps the flock close by, protecting the sheep from any predators?"

"Predators?"

"Wolves, jackals — they can come attack the sheep, kill them for food."

"Hmm — yes, I see," he nodded.

"Harry," Jesus explained, "I've come as a good shepherd, to offer protection and life to my flock."

"These people are up against some pretty stiff competition," the angel snorted. "Caesar, the Roman army, Herod — don't you think they could use a little more than a simple shepherd?"

"You're right," Jesus said, "and they'll *have* more."

"Well, I would think so."

"Notice the small lamb in the arms of the shepherd," Jesus said, pointing again. "See how quiet and gentle it is, so spotlessly pure?"

"Yes, I see it," Harry sighed impatiently.

Jesus said quietly, "I've come as the Lamb of God — the sacrifice that will take away the sins of the world." The angel could only stare at Jesus incredulously.

"Harry, these people need a Savior," Jesus continued, "but not another king or warrior. They've already had that. I'm not here to save them from a power-hungry emperor, or an army, or a wicked king. I'm here to save them from themselves. Only God Himself will be a sufficient sacrifice to cover all that."

Harry couldn't believe his ears. "So, you gave up everything . . . only to . . ."

"I love these people, Harry. I came to experience what it's like for them — what it's like to live with a body that ages and dies, what it's like to suffer loneliness and pain, to feel the pull of sin, to experience — as much as I can — what it is to be human."

"And I'm sure you've already experienced all that. Isn't it enough?"

Jesus turned to Harry, and again the angel could feel the powerful emotions of The Son pushing out from the small body of Jesus. "My living like them won't save them, Harry. But my dying like them will." He sighed and moved toward the hillside sprinkled with grazing sheep, as if he would like nothing better than to simply step away from his responsibilities. But then he stopped. "Later, when I'm an adult," Jesus continued, "I'll spend some time teaching and discipling a few followers. But most people won't believe, and the religious leaders will conspire against me. They'll work with the Romans to put me on trial."

"*Trial?*" Harry squeaked.

"This isn't heaven, Harry. They won't easily believe who I am. They'll find me guilty —"

"Guilty of *what?*" Harry cried, his voice rising.

"It doesn't matter — it won't to them. They'll humiliate me, and put me to death with other criminals."

"But *you're* not a criminal!" Harry protested.

"I have to die, Harry. It's necessary — for them."

The thought of The Son being tortured and killed for these low, sinful beings filled Harry with anger and revulsion. How could they? How dare they kill the very one who had come to save them? Didn't they realize it was he who had *created* the world? Created even *them*?

His gut ached, and his mind was gorged with anger at these people. But still — even through his powerful emotions — Harry understood that all this was, incredibly, part of God's plan, and

it was not his place to question. But his sadness for The Son was almost overwhelming. He reached toward his friend. "Jesus . . ."

"But it's all right, Harry," Jesus consoled him. "Don't feel badly. It won't be the end — but a new beginning!" He smiled. "I won't stay in the grave. I'll return to heaven. And because of it, these people will have a chance for life — *real* life with the Father!"

"How much longer will you be here?"

"In earthly terms, quite awhile," Jesus said, placing his hand on Harry's shoulder affectionately. "But in heavenly terms, no time at all."

"Then we'll look forward to that day," Harry said bravely.

"As will I, my friend," Jesus said, turning back toward his home, "as will I."

Harry turned to leave, but then glanced back at Jesus, watching him return to his work at the carpentry shop. He would be returning to heaven still confused about the reason for Jesus to be here on earth. But he also understood that it really wasn't important whether he did. More important was that the *people* understood, for they were the ones needing a Savior.

"My living like
 them won't
 save them —
 but my dying
 like them will."

. . .

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown
 When Thou camest to earth for me;
 But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
 For Thy holy nativity:

(Refrain) O come to my heart, Lord Jesus!
 There is room in my heart for Thee.

Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang,
 Proclaiming Thy royal degree;
 But in lowly birth didst Thou come to earth,
 And in great humility:

Thou camest, O Lord, with the living Word
 That should set Thy people free;
 But with mocking scorn, and with crown of thorn,
 They bore Thee to Calvary:

When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing,
 At Thy coming to victory,
 Let Thy voice call me home saying,
 "Yet there is room,
 There is room at My side for thee:"

(Refrain) My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus!
 When Thou comest and callest for me.

Emily E.S. Elliott

Notes:

Page 2: “. . . at the oaks of Mamre?” - see Genesis 18:1-15.

Page 7: “. . . as if he would like nothing better than to simply step away from his responsibilities.” - see Matthew 26:36-40, and Mark 14:32-42.

Page 7: “. . . to feel the pull of sin . . .” - see Hebrews 2:17-18.

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Linda and I have been sincerely grateful for subscribers who have expressed their appreciation with a gift. Our praise continues to be lifted up to God, as these contributions are seen as a sign of His affirmation of this work.

If you feel led by the Spirit to contribute, we would like to express our appreciation in a tangible way.

Winter Reflections

We are preparing a series of booklets based on my weekly column, *Reflections by the Pond*. The first booklet in the series is called *Winter Reflections* — a collection of columns from winter months around the pond.

With your gift we would like to send you a copy of *Winter Reflections*. Simply request the booklet, along with your name and address, when you send your gift, and we'll express our sincere appreciation with this brand new booklet.

Here's a sample:

The Christian never loses the companionship of the Holy Spirit. Like the brown oak trees that surround the frozen pond, no matter how dead and lifeless the Christian appears on the outside, there is always extravagant life bubbling inside in the person of the Spirit. Like the dry brittle weeds of the winter field, the deep roots of the Spirit never die.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth.” John 14:16

The Christian never loses his or her life-giving connection to God. Which sets us apart from the trees of the field. There will come a day when the death-like appearance of the tree will be real, when the spring bud will no longer form. There will come a day when the deeply hidden roots of the grass will indeed wither and die. But for the one who has placed his or her trust in Jesus Christ, that day will never come.

(from *Winter Reflections*)