

Before there was an atom or a molecule, before there was a star or a galaxy, before there was light or motion, before there was matter or mass, the eternal Son was God. He was. He existed... He was the self-existent God.

(A.W. Tozer)

in the beginning...

part

1

A Very Old Soul

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5)



THE TYPICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MODERN HOMO SAPIENS is that history begins on the date of his or her birth. Before that, emptiness. Blackness. Void. And if, by chance, there *was* anything pre-dating the individual's launch into existence, it is utterly immaterial. Pointless. Boring.

Here is an experiment for the brave of heart. Corral one or more high-schoolers and—after you have pried the cell phones from their hands, and removed the iPods from their ears (if you can)—pose the following:

1. Who was President of the United States when Pearl Harbor was attacked? (Bonus point: What was the year?)
2. What dance did Chubby Checker make famous? (Bonus point: On what medium were his songs recorded?)
3. What device did Alexander Graham Bell invent?
4. Who was President of the United States during the Civil War? (Bonus point: Who were the two opposing generals at its end?)
5. From what country did the United States gain its freedom after the Revolutionary War? (Bonus point: Who was general and com-

mander-in-chief of the American forces?)

6. What event signaled the beginning of the Great Depression?
(Bonus point: In what year did this occur?)

As an amateur historian, I have been asked, “Why? What is so important about knowing history? What does any of that have to do with *me*?” To those questions there are many answers, but permit me to focus on just one by asking a question of my own. If you were stranded on a desert island, with only one person to talk to for an indefinite period of time, which would you choose: a well-read, thoughtful person who not only had read about historical events, but had pondered their significance in the cosmic scope of mankind’s existence—or a vacuum-headed, self-centered twit who thinks that the most important person who has ever lived is Britney Spears? Hmmmm?

Frankly, I’d rather be around a person with depth, understanding, wisdom—and an over-arching perspective on where modern man fits into the vast, fascinating tapestry of human and cosmic history. (And by the way, *who* is Britney Spears?)

Already There

Now, while history itself began long before the date of our birth, *our* history did not. Our personal history began, to be precise, at our conception—nine months before our untidy entry into this world. Before that, we did not exist beyond the glimmer in our father’s eye.

The biography of Jesus, however, “begins” in the self-illuminated halls of eternal heaven, uncountable eons before that fateful day in Bethlehem. The *person* Jesus—male child, homo sapiens, flesh—was, indeed, born in that dung-scented stable in, approximately, 6 B.C. But the One who *became* Jesus for man—Son of God, second person of the Trinity—was, as the apostle John writes, “in the beginning.”

When we stand before our nativity set and gaze upon the tiny figurine of the Christ child, we are looking at nothing less than the incarnation (“in flesh”) of God Himself.

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.”

(John 14:8-11)

The Child of Christmas was a brand new baby, but a very old soul. We cannot say with certainty how well-informed His infant consciousness was regarding His divinity, but we *can* say with certainty that His divinity was there. For the Son of God does not post-date God the Father. Both are from “the beginning.”

To human ears, the word “beginning” denotes a starting—a point in time when nothing becomes something. If I begin to chop wood, it is because a moment before I was *not* chopping wood. If my car begins to run, it is because a moment before it was not running. If I begin writing a letter, it is because just moments before the letter did not exist.

But the rules are different in heaven. God did not have a “beginning” as we understand that word. He—that is, the triune God consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—*was* before everything and anything else. Time and space do not have the same hold on God that they do on us; He exists outside of them. This applies to Jesus. As Merrill C. Tenney translates the first phrase of John 1:1 from the Greek,


When the beginning began, the Word [Jesus] was already there.

Spirit of Christmas

The world tries mightily to dissociate us from the wellspring of Christmas. Some attempts are righteous and good, even noble. The world tries to convince us that Christmas is all about charity, good will, generosity, all the while stripping out of the holiday its real name, insipidly renaming even its tree to “holiday” tree. More than that, every year the world beats us about the ears with its yuletide preoccupation with extravagant consumption, begging us to spend hundreds of dollars on each of our kids—all, of course, in the “spirit of Christmas.”

None of it matters, for none of it has anything to do with the real Christmas. Christmas is not about trees (of any name), charity, giving, turkey dinners or expensive gifts.

The true “Spirit of Christmas” was incarnated about two thousand years ago as a baby suckled by His teenage mother in a filthy stable. When He came, this Spirit was already ancient—older than time itself.

If we are to celebrate Christmas, we are to do it on our knees. We, like the magi, are to bow before very God in flesh, God condescending to dirty Himself with the mud and muck of His creation—not with its sin, but certainly with its humanity. He could have remained in the purity and untarnished joy of heaven. Instead, out of His pity and love, He came down to us. 

*O worship the king, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing, His power and His love;
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.*

*O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.*

*Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light,
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.*

*Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender! how firm to the end!
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend. Amen.*
(Robert Grant)

Answers: 1. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, (Bonus: 1941); 2. The Twist, (Bonus: Vinyl 45s); 3. The telephone; 4. Abraham Lincoln, (Bonus: Grant and Lee); 5. England (Great Britain), (Bonus: George Washington); 6. Stock Market Crash, (Bonus: 1929).

© 2005 David S. Lampel. Permission is hereby granted for original material to be reprinted in newsletters, journals, etc., or to be used in spoken form. When used, please include the following line: “From The Journey, by David S. Lampel. Used by permission.” Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible (Updated Edition), © Copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission. Where indicated, Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, is Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. The Message by Eugene H. Peterson, Copyright (C) 1993, 1994, 1995, 2002 used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved. The Journey is published weekly in HTML and Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format. For a free subscription, go to <http://dlampel.com/subscribe/>.