

Bethlehem

Epilogue

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:15,17

ALREADY THE GLOW IS FADING from the Christmas decorations. The tree, now dry and brittle, no longer drinks the water from its base, and its branches are beginning to sag just a bit around the edges. The tinsel and garlands with which we so gaily festooned the rooms of the house have already become superfluous in our eyes. They have now become common, even invisible. We now look past them.

Even the nativity itself. Just a few days ago it was aglow with anticipation, promise, hope. But now the silent porcelain figures gather new dust, and we wonder when to put them all back into their box for next year. For several weeks now we have looked at the

tall, ornate magi and their trusty steeds, the more humble shepherds, and the holy family itself. Joseph and Mary still gaze with loving expectation upon the baby Jesus, but now, if we are honest, we are becoming a tad bored with the scene.

Christmas is over. Just a few days after the day itself, and already we are turning our gaze from the nativity to the approaching new year.



But the Child remains. Oh, by our temporal perceptions He has changed—and will continue to change. What was once spirit



Reflections
by the Pond

No. 375
December 29, 2008

has now been born upon the earth of His own creation. He will grow into childhood, adolescence, youth, and adulthood. He will continue to mature, and grow in wisdom, until He begins His public ministry. Then He will die terribly upon a cross and be entombed, but will miraculously rise out of that tomb with a new and different form, one no longer bound by the physical laws. Then He will return to heaven, His original home, to reign forever.

The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against

You?" But Jesus kept silent.

And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see The Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Matthew 26:62-64

By our small standards the child lying in the feeding trough, Jesus Christ, will pass through many changes. But in essence He remains what He always has been.

God.

As I gaze upon the scene one last time, before carefully wrapping each figure and storing

*O that I could, with favor'd John,
Recline my weary head upon
The dear Redeemer's breast:
From care, and sin, and sorrow free,
Give me, O Lord, to find in Thee
My everlasting rest.*

Charles Wesley

it away for another year, I look again at the small Child with tiny arms upraised.

Why haven't I noticed it before? He seems to be reaching up toward *me*—for *me*. He is not a baby at all, but simply God in a different package. And He reaches up out of the manger to draw me closer—to draw me tighter into His arms and His life.

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

John 10:10b NKJV

Then I understand. I understand that Jesus came not just to bring God down to man, but to *lift man up to God*. He came so that I might participate every day in His abundant and enriching life. He came so that I may know God, know Him in a personal, intimate way—not as a fierce, wrath-consumed deity who is perpetually angry at me, but as a loving Father willing to inconvenience Himself on my behalf.

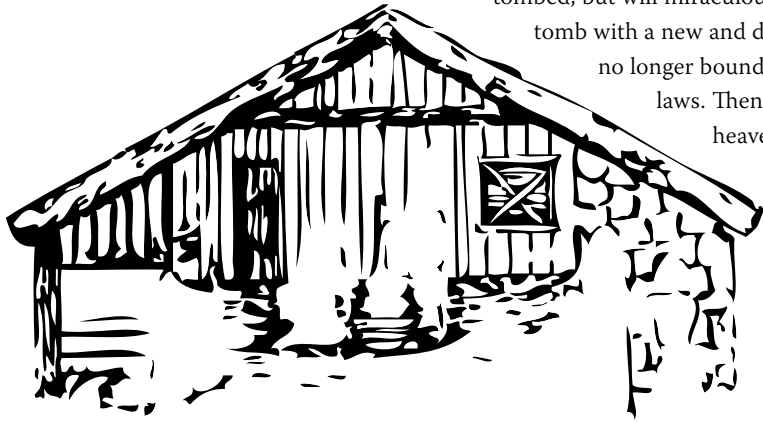


As I place the figurines back into their box I realize that just as Jesus will forever be God, He will always be this Child. For Christ will always be ready to reach out and draw me closer. And He will always be the one who was willing to come in flesh, to die.

For me.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

John 3:16-17



*O Love divine, how sweet Thou art!
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up by Thee?
I thirst, I faint, I die to prove
The greatness of redeeming love,—
The love of Christ to me.*

*Stronger His love than death or hell;
Its riches are unsearchable;
The first-born sons of light
Desire in vain its depths to see;
They cannot reach the mystery,
The length, the breadth, the height.*

*God only knows the love of God;
O that it now were shed abroad
In this poor stony heart:
For love I sigh, for love I pine;
This only portion, Lord, be mine;
Be mine this better part.*

*O that I could forever sit
With Mary at the Master's feet!
Be this my happy choice;
My only care, delight, and bliss,
My joy, my heaven on earth, be this,
To hear the Bridegroom's voice.*