**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 12-6-2020
The Wonder of a Manger**

As some of you may know, I took a slow and steady path through seminary, namely 7 years. But we learn from the tortoise and the hare that that’s not necessarily a bad thing. And fortunately, it was a good school and a positive experience that I continue to enjoy auditing courses there from time to time.

And during this journey, while there was certainly enough research and paper writing, I really appreciated how my school emphasized that there was more to Christian leadership than study and writing and preaching.

We were also taught the importance of spiritual disciplines. A spiritual discipline is simply something that we actively choose to do which helps us in our walk with Christ in a closer way.

Reading Scripture just to know God better is a spiritual discipline, for example. Not to prepare a sermon or lead a Bible study, but simply to know God better. And there is actually a great number of spiritual disciplines. In fact, one is solitude, which I think we’ve all had more than enough of this year. So I wouldn’t really recommend that one at this time.

But one discipline we were taught was the discipline of wonder. Wonder is standing in awe of something. For followers of Jesus Christ, this means standing in awe of God. This is so important and we are all to practice wonder and amazement of our Triune God. And we can do this in a variety of ways.

One way that we were asked to practice this during one of our classes was to go outside and simply to find something to take a moment to appreciate. It could be the minute details of a flower or the beauty of a leaf in the autumn.

And I really appreciated this exercise. From time to time I still enjoy stopping to practice wonder when I am out walking. Just stopping to enjoy and thank God for His creative works.

We can practice wonder by appreciating the intricate details of small objects, but we can also practice wonder as we stare out into the heavens that God has made.

A friend of mine recently told me of an app that people can get on their phone that enables them to turn their phone in a particular direction and it will reveal what stars or planets are in that directions. I got the app. It is really neat. If you are interested in this, please speak to me about it.

So we can experience wonder savoring little things like flowers or enormous things, like planets. Our good Lord made them both. They both declare God’s power and beauty. We do not stand in awe of them for their own sake, we stand in awe of their Creator.

Through this month of December, as we walk towards Christmas together, my hope is that we will all practice this discipline of wonder. From a variety of angles, we will celebrate the wonder of Christmas.

A number of the thoughts that I’ll be sharing with you in the coming weeks will be coming from a book called *The Wonder of Christmas: Once You Believe, Anything Is Possible*. It was written by Ed Robb and Rob Renfroe.

(A moment to pray and ask God’s blessing on this series on wonder)

The topic of wonder reminds me of the classic Christmas song, ‘*It’s the most wonderful time of the year*.’ There’s a sense of wonder that Christmas has that is unique amongst all the seasons of a year. There is something unique about Christmas that causes wonder and excitement within us.

Today I would like for us to consider the wonder of a manger.

We’ve all probably heard the powerful account of the birth of Jesus Christ found in Luke’s gospel chapter 2. If you’ve ever watched A Charlie Brown Christmas, Linus quotes the Bible to share what Christmas is all about.

As you hear this account yourself, feel free to close your eyes and just hear it as if it was the first time you’ve heard it. Let the Holy Spirit stir within you a deep sense of awe and wonder

Luke 2:1-16

**2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A1-16&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24976a)**] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to their own town to register.**

**4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.**

**8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**

**13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,**

**14“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
    and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”**

**15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”**

**16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.**

This whole story is amazing and should stir in us a sense of wonder and amazement. We think of the shepherd hearing the angel’s announcement and the heavenly hosts appearing to them and praising God. We wonder at the announcement that the long awaited Messiah has just been born. And we wonder that this Christ child was now in a manger out with the animals. This is astounding.

But when you think about it, the fact that God came to us in this way should not surprise us too much, when we consider how God dwelt with Israel in the wilderness. After God delivered Israel out of Egyptian slavery, He instructed them to build a Tabernacle or dwelling place for His presence to go with them in their travels. And this was a very humble dwelling place. There were many enormous Temples that were built in and around that time and it was to house an idol. But the true God didn’t need a mansion. Compared to those structures, God’s Tabernacle was very simple and humble. But in this simple structure, the living God chose to dwell.

Fast forward to the coming of Jesus. He didn’t need a palace or a mansion. He didn’t need wealthy parents. Although He was king, He was not arrogant, but very humble.

Think about this for a moment. Colossians 1 teaches us that Jesus not only created all things, but that He holds them together. It is by His power that the universe and everything within it are sustained. And yet this same Jesus was willing to put on skin and come to us in such a humble way. This should cause us to wonder and stand in awe of Him.

Jesus is Lord. He is King. But He didn’t come to boss people around, but to serve. And not only this, He died a slaves death, crucifixion, for our sins. What a humble King we have in Jesus, our risen King.

So in light of the wonder of the manger, how are we to respond?

**First, please take time to stand in awe and wonder of the humility of God**. He didn’t need to be born in a palace or a castle. Celebrate that our God is not only all-powerful, but that He is perfection humble. Let this cause You to worship Him and honor Him even more.

**Second, we are to follow Jesus’ example of humility**. Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less. I know in these challenging days with covid, it is easy to turn inward and only think about self-preservation. But humility reminds us to be more focused outward and on seeking to be a blessing.

We can be a blessing to one another by reaching out to our sisters and brothers in the church to see how they are doing and if there is anything we can do for them. We can be a blessing to our community. There are needs that we can help meet. There are invitations that we can offer. That can include inviting people to worship in person or online or to go to our church website.

I want to share a story in conclusion about one of my professors from seminary named Dr. David Dorsey. Dr. Dorsey was a brilliant, but very humble man. He could have taught at larger, more well-known schools, but he was happy to teach at a school that truly honored the written Word of God.

I was blessed to take my very first course in seminary from him. It was called Historic and Poetic Books. It is an Old Testament course. During that course his health was beginning to fail and not too long after that he went home to be with Christ.

I remember another professor, Dr. Timothy Valentino, delivered Dr. Dorsey’s eulogy. And his eulogy was titled “**Big Enough to be Small**.” There is a lot in that title.

Dorsey knew who he was in Jesus Christ. He didn’t need fancy titles or a prominent name like an ivy league school. *He was big enough to be small*. *His bigness came from his humility*.

Jesus was big enough to be *small*. Jesus knew who He was and was grounded in His identity that He was willing to come to his creation and lay aside his glory. He was willing to lay aside His irreproachable holiness as God and tabernacle or dwell amongst his creation. He was willing to not be recognized as deity. And He was willing to be laid in a manger, out with the animals. And even before this, that the divine Son of God would choose to suddenly enter into his creation as a fertilized egg. Wow.

One of the Names of Christ is the Word. This Word, this Jesus, who spoke all things into existence, would be humble enough to be silent in the womb of Mary for 9 long months. That’s humility. That’s love.

Friends, let us stand in wonder and awe of the manger this morning. To think that our awesome creator God would not only come to us as fully human, but would come in such deep humility should cause us to worship. His humility flowed out of his heart of love. True humility is not self-seeking. Let us stand in awe of Jesus for this. May his humility be another reason that we live to worship Him. And may we seek to follow His example. May we always be big enough to be small.

Cited:

[Luke 2:1-16 NIV - The Birth of Jesus - In those days - Bible Gateway](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+2%3A1-16&version=NIV)

The Wonder of Christmas: Once You Believe, Anything Is Possible by Ed Robb & Rob Renfroe