

The Wonder of His Joy

Psalm 19, Psalm 8, Ephesians 1, Romans 8

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One of the special experiences of living in a rural area is our view of the night sky. Because we don't have a lot of city lights, we are treated to views of the heavens that many around the world can only dream of. Especially when you're out in the country, on a clear night you can see more stars than you can count, you can see the Milky Way, and if you're like me, you simply stand in awe at the beauty and majesty of what you see.

If you take a telescope with you, you can see even more. As you may be aware, I'm a bit of a nerd, so I built a telescope to do exactly that. You can see other galaxies, nebulae, and the other planets in our solar system. In the last 30 years or so, we (NASA, not me this time) have even been able to put telescopes in space that let us peer deeper into the universe than we had ever imagined. We are constantly discovering more and more of our vast universe.

I often wonder if the wise men mentioned in the Christmas story were astronomers, men who studied the night sky and were simply trying to understand a strange new phenomenon, or whether they were more like astrologers—a bit superstitious, believing this new star meant something special. I suspect it is more of the latter, but whatever the case was, the Lord spoke to them in a way they could understand. They may not have known who Jesus was, or even who the Lord was, but they knew from looking into the sky that this star meant something special was happening, and they didn't want to miss it.

Sometimes, I think we lose some of the wonder of Christmas because the story is familiar to us. We fail to see just how much of a big deal Jesus' entry into the world was, because we've heard the story so many times. So this morning, I want to try to take a step back and approach the Christmas story from a slightly different angle—so we can understand what made Jesus' coming so astounding, and in the process, rediscover the joy of Christmas.

The Universe

Before we zoom in to the Christmas story, I want to zoom out, way out, and take a look at the universe God has created. In the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, we are told that God created everything simply by speaking. God spoke, and then these things came into existence. That tells us something about the power of God to create. The universe was created by His Word.

Understanding this caused David to respond like this,

¹ The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship.

² Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known.

³ They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. ⁴ Yet their

message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world. God has made a home in the heavens for the sun. ⁵ It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race. ⁶ The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat. (Psalm 19:1-6, NLT)

David looked up at the sky and saw something about the character of God. He saw God's power and majesty and craftsmanship. He said that the skies declare God's glory without ever speaking a word. He speaks of the sun, its heat, its light, and its intensity, and tells us that God is the one who created it and made a home for it.

As we have progressed in our exploration of creation, we can understand this to an even greater degree than David did. We keep finding the universe is even bigger and more mysterious than we had previously known. And yet God spoke it into existence. We have learned about the sun—that it is a star, a ball of fire that releases more energy each second than a trillion atomic bombs. We cannot even conceive of this kind of energy...but God created it with a word. And we have since learned that our sun is not even something special in terms of stars. It's just kind of a middle of the road star. And there are probably trillions more stars (or even more) in our universe of all sizes and strengths. Our Lord created all these things, which shows us His power and greatness.

As we grasp the vastness of our universe, it should drive us to our knees in worship to realize that there is someone who created all of this. We cannot even conceive of the grandness of our universe—and we are even less able to conceive of the greatness of the One who created it.

God Sees Us

It's one thing to look at the enormity of our universe and be floored, but we can be floored in examining God's creation at the other end of the spectrum as well. When we study the creation at a microscopic level, we see how the creatures God created function, and we are once again amazed at the complexity and ingenuity with which we are intricately designed.

Probably at some point you had to (or were supposed to) learn about the parts of a cell: the nucleus, mitochondria, ribosomes, cytoplasm, etc. We know there are these different parts that are all functioning inside of a cell. What we sometimes fail to understand is that inside each cell we essentially find an entire city—a manufacturing marvel that runs 24/7 and can respond to changes in its environment appropriately and rapidly. And that's a single cell! Every living creature on the face of the earth is made up of cells (sometimes billions of them) just like this.

As medical science has advanced, we consistently come to appreciate how marvelously complex and meticulously designed the human body is. Even with all the advancements of modern science, there are still many mysteries about how our bodies work. And we recognize that there are millions (or even billions) of different species, each created unique from one another, functioning in different ways and with different abilities.

Even within species, each individual creature is unique. We are each created with special abilities and strengths. Our personalities are unique. While we understand a little bit about how our DNA gets passed on from generation to generation, the reality is that God is the One responsible for creating each and every thing on the face of the earth. The same God who created the entire universe with a word has shaped and fashioned you, me, and every other creature in the universe uniquely and individually.

David, when thinking of this truth, wrote this Psalm,

³When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—⁴what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? ⁵Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. ⁶You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—⁷the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, ⁸the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. ⁹O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! (Psalm 8:3-9, NLT)

David marveled at a God who was big enough to create the universe, and yet involved enough to care about each one of us. God knows you, He created you, and He cares about you. How can that be? How can it be that God cares for us at all, because we seem so insignificant when we think of the vastness of our world?

That is part of the wonder of Christmas. In this giant, complex universe, God cares enough about you and me that He hatched a rescue plan to save us even though we deserved condemnation and destruction. We constantly rebel against God, seemingly spitting in His face by the way we live, and yet He made plans to save us.

The little baby being born in Bethlehem was such a big deal because it is the proof that God cares for us and had a plan to save us. The birth of Jesus should cause us to marvel at the fact that the same God who created the vastness of our universe, even down to the smallest details inside every cell, also cared enough about you and me to rescue us from our sin. That's the wonder of Christmas.

Being Humbled

Part of what makes Christmas so astounding is the fact that in becoming a man, Jesus humbled himself to a degree that we often do not think about. We think about Jesus as a human being, and it doesn't seem like that big of a deal, because that's all we know. But remember what Jesus gave up to become a man.

The One who spoke the universe into existence with a word now had to learn how to speak as a baby. The One who had the power to create now was dependent upon others to care for Him. The One who created a perfect world now entered a world that was corrupted by sin. The One who created humans would ultimately allow himself to be executed by His own creation.

This is one of the things that we often forget about when we think of Christmas. We know it was a wonderful time of Jesus coming into the world, but we often forget how much Jesus gave up to come and be our rescuer. Jesus humbled himself to a degree that we cannot even fathom—because He loves us.

What is even more mind-boggling is that this was God's plan from the very beginning.

Listen to what Paul tells us in Ephesians 1,

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. ⁶ So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. (Ephesians 1:4-6, NLT)

Did you catch that? Even before God made the world, He had chosen to save us through Jesus. That means that God created the world knowing we would fall into sin, knowing we would need a redeemer, and planning to save us by sending Jesus into the world to die as our sacrifice.

I don't know about you, but I have a hard time wrapping my head around this truth. This certainly isn't the way I would have done it. Sometimes we imagine that the cross was plan B, because we messed up God's perfect plan so God had to adjust. But that's not true. The cross was the plan from the very beginning. God knew we would mess up, and He had a plan to save us.

Even back in Genesis, God began to hint at this plan when He said that Adam's offspring would ultimately crush Satan. Even then, He was pointing forward to Jesus. Next week, Dad will unpack some more of the ways God gave us hints about Jesus' coming into the world, but for today, we simply need to understand that the reason the birth of Jesus was such a big deal was because it was the beginning of the fulfillment of the plan He had put into place before the creation of the world! The scene in Bethlehem is astounding because we see God finally starting to bring all the pieces of His plan together.

God's Plan Is Good

As we look at the baby in the manger, we should be reminded of the fact that our God is great. He is powerful. He cares about you and me. And we should see that He has a plan that is good and perfect.

Let's be honest, there are lots of things in our lives that do not seem good and perfect. There are lots of times that it sure seems like our world is messed up. And our world *is* messed up. It is not the way God designed it, because we have sinned and made a mess of things. But here's the good news, God wasn't surprised by this fact, and He is working to bring good out of it.

Can I humbly remind you that this is true in every aspect of our lives as well? The God who is working to bring all of history to His good purpose is doing the same in your life. We all have struggles and burdens to bear. They are hard, they are painful, and they are things that, if it was up to us, would not be part of our story. But let me remind you that God is the One who is writing the story. And listen to what Paul says about this in Romans 8,

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

³¹ What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? (Romans 8:28-32, NLT)

Paul says that God is working everything in our lives for ultimate good. He does not say that everything that happens in our lives *is* good, but that He will use it *for* good. The basis for Paul's confident assertion is Jesus. God sent Jesus into the world to effect the ultimate good for you and me, so we can have confidence that God will ultimately bring good in all things.

Jason Gray has a song that celebrates this truth called, "Even This Will Be Made Beautiful". Listen to some of the words he wrote,

Maybe you were hurt
By the lies of someone else
Or maybe even worse
Were the lies you told yourself
Maybe you're the one holding up the wall
Or maybe you're the one with the wrecking ball
Even though it's hard to believe
Even with everything you've seen

Even this will be made beautiful

Do you feel the pain
Of every blow that knocked you down
Or do you bear the shame
Of every wound you handed out
No matter what you gave or what you received
If you were left or the one to leave
Even though it's hard to hope again
This is not the bitter end

Even this will be made beautiful

All the broken promises
Every loss of innocence
Every dream that was stillborn
Every "I don't love you anymore"
Every wound, and each regret
Every sickness, all of death
In every heart, to every hurt
Love will have the final word

Even this will be made beautiful

We can declare these things confidently because we see God's perfect plan played out at a manger in Bethlehem. From the humble beginnings of the Messiah, we could not have guessed how God would make the story more beautiful than we could have imagined. But He did. That is the wonder and the joy of Christmas. Just as God made something beautiful out of our sin and rebellion, and the death of Jesus, so too will He make something beautiful out of your life. No matter what you face, you can have the confidence that even this will be made beautiful by the Lord. The proof is found in a manger in Bethlehem.

Conclusion

We've traveled quite some distance in our study today. We started by looking at the vastness of our God and ended with the realization that this same God cares for you and me with a love that we cannot even begin to grasp.

I hope as you celebrate this Christmas season, you'll allow yourself to be floored by the wonder of Christmas. When the angel said that the birth of Jesus was good news of great joy for all people, it was true. It was the fulfillment of God's grand plan, a plan He had put into place before the creation of the world.

I hope these truths about Christmas will give you confidence to celebrate with a new joy. Christmas is not simply a past event, it is a truth that impacts every day of our lives. Christmas gives us confidence in the hard times because it reminds us that God cares about us, and just like He prepared our redemption, He is preparing a place for us when we die. Christmas is not irrelevant to daily life; it is the fuel that enriches every day. It is a truth that warms our hearts. It is our comfort in difficult days. It is God's love shown in the most vibrant way possible. If we want evidence of that, we need to look no farther than the baby in Bethlehem. This baby was God, the Creator of all things, coming to the earth to save you and me. I don't know about you, but I think that is a pretty good reason to celebrate.

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