

A Thing Too Wonderful  
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I am convinced some things in this world are too wonderful for explanation. Our human minds simply lack the capacity to grasp the why's and how's of a variety of things which happen around us.

**Take, for example, the navigational system of a bird known as the Arctic Tern. Now, I'm not a bird expert, but it is fascinating to read about them.** The tern finds its way over 12,000 miles of ocean from its nesting grounds in the Arctic to its wintering grounds in the Antarctic. I can't comprehend how a bird could survive in those frigid environments, much less how they could make that journey.

Ornithologists, folks who get paid to study birds, have done numerous studies; and the best answer they can give is that "instinct" enables the tern to be such a remarkable navigator. Or, in other words, they really don't know how the birds find their way.

Of course, it is not just Arctic Terns who have phenomenal "instincts." A Laysan Albatross was once released 3,200 miles from its nest in the Midway Islands and was back home in ten days. Some things are too wonderful to understand!

**Friends, there are parts of the Christmas story which are beyond our comprehension; and really, beyond the comprehension of any human being.** One of them is recorded in Luke 1.

**The Angel Gabriel has just told Mary she is going to have a baby.** She will give birth to a son whose name will be Jesus. And he will be the Messiah, the one whose kingdom will never end. Mary responds to this announcement in...

**Luke 1:34 – "How can this happen since I am a virgin?"**

Mary did not have a degree in Biology, but she apparently understood the basics of human reproduction. At least she knew that women don't have babies without men. Virgins don't get pregnant. Gabriel answers her questions...

**Luke 1:35 – "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."**

What I find interesting is that after this, Mary does not have any questions. Oh, maybe she had some in her head, but she doesn't utter them. Instead, she simply says to the angel...

**Luke 1:38 – "I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word."**

I think what Gabriel told her is a thing too wonderful, too wonderful even for questions. The Holy Spirit would work in such a way that the baby to whom she would give birth would be the Son of God. Wow! Mary certainly doesn't understand how that is going to happen, but she doesn't need to. She has heard the words the angel spoke and she believes them. Thus, in awe and wonder, she accepts them and submits herself to whatever the Lord's will is.

**Mary's attitude reminds me of a man named Job,** whom we learn about in the Old Testament book with that name. Because of some terrible tragedies which occurred in his life, Job has a whole bunch of questions for God. Most of us would have been asking the same things if we had been in Job's shoes. "Why, God? Why are these horrible things happening to me? Why, why, why?"

And God hears all of Job's questions, but he doesn't answer them. Instead, the Lord chooses to show Job some of his power, glory and splendor. Once Job sees the Lord's power, glory and splendor, he doesn't repeat his questions. He doesn't complain that God has not provided any answers. He simply says...

**Job 42:3 – "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."**

In other words, I believe Job is thinking, "OK, there is a whole lot here I don't understand. But I do understand better who you are, God. And my

heart and mind are filled with awe and wonder. The questions I had don't seem very important now. Knowing a little better who God is puts all of my problems in a whole new perspective."

Friends, I have been a pastor for over thirty years, and each December I've devoted time and energy to helping people understand the Christmas story. I want folks to recognize that Christmas is not really about Santa or Christmas trees or red and green M&M's. It is not even really about a baby in a manger.

Rather, it is about the Incarnation, about God becoming a human being in order to be our Savior. Christmas is about, as C.S. Lewis once said:

"The Son of God becoming a man  
so that men might become  
the sons of God"

I think it is so important folks know that this is what Christmas is about. God willing, I plan to spend every December for the rest of my life helping people understand what the heart of Christmas really is.

Yet, today I am going to give you some very different advice: **Don't try too hard to understand Christmas.** Don't try to dissect it and place it under a microscope as you might do with a frog in Biology class. Instead, recognize the truth of Christmas as "a thing too wonderful."

**Let your mind and heart be filled with wonder and awe as you consider what God has done in sending his Son.** Oh yes, take time to read the Christmas texts like Matthew 2 and Luke 2. Study them diligently. Ask questions and seek answers. Those passages, like every other part of the Bible, are God's Word and contain marvelous treasures for us, and we may miss some of the best gems if we don't sift through them carefully.

Yet, don't become preoccupied with just the facts about Christmas. It is a thing too wonderful! It is marvelous truth which is bigger than what any of our minds, or all of our minds put together, can totally comprehend. I would suggest that if you think you fully understand Christmas, you probably don't really understand it at all.

I have heard Christmas described as "the holiday that fills children with wonder." That's fine, but it should be a holiday that fills all of us with wonder! The older we grow, the wiser we get, the more mature we become in our Christian faith, the more wonder there should be as we reflect on what Christmas is.

Maybe you are thinking, "Well, Pastor Dan, the Baby Jesus thing is a nice story, but there is nothing really spectacular about it. There are a lot of other things which I find more interesting, including the wonders of the natural world that you mentioned earlier."

**OK, but let me give you a couple of reasons why Christmas is, indeed, a thing too wonderful:**

**#1 is the Wonder of the Incarnation** – God taking on flesh, becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ.

As we mentioned earlier, this was the result of Mary becoming pregnant, even though she was a virgin. This is a magnificent miracle and reason for great wonder. Yet, it is something which, in today's world, Christians often don't talk much about – perhaps because of a fear of appearing "unscientific."

**In fact, surveys find that about 30% of American pastors do not believe in the virgin birth** – though many of them don't reveal that to their congregations. That may be shocking to you; but unfortunately, I have met and argued with some of these pastors. They really do exist! There are basically three parts to their argument.

**1) They say the birth narratives found in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke cannot really be trusted.** They see them as fables and note that the other two gospels, Mark and John, don't mention anything about Jesus being born.

They also point out that the letters of Paul and other apostles found in the New Testament don't make any clear reference to Jesus being born of a virgin. Yes, that is true, but the bottom line is **if you don't trust the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke, you don't really believe the Bible.** You don't see it as the Word of God.

If we are free to pick and choose which parts of the Bible we want to believe and which parts we want to reject, it is our personal judgment, ourselves, that is the ultimate authority, not the Bible. And friends, I know I certainly don't know enough to decide which parts of the Bible are true and which are not!

**2) These folks argue that a virgin birth, more specifically, a virginal conception, is simply impossible.** It could not have happened. Virgins don't get pregnant. Well friends, from the viewpoint of Scientific Naturalism, that is the case. Yet, Scientific Naturalism is a rather empty philosophy. There certainly is no scientific or empirical proof that miracles cannot occur. That is a purely philosophical conclusion, one which I believe is clearly unwarranted and wrong.

Anyone who believes in God rejects this "closed" view of reality. We realize God is free to intervene in the world he has created. If God wants a virgin to have a baby, he is free to do that. And anyone who is a Christian believes that God has done a great miracle by raising Jesus from the dead. Anyone who denies that miracle, the resurrection of Christ, is clearly not a Christian.

**3) These folks claim the Bible's teaching about Jesus being born of a virgin is not that important.** They insist that how Jesus came into this world as an infant is not nearly as significant as what he did and taught as an adult. **Perhaps, yet by trying to explain away the virgin birth, by insisting Joseph must have been Jesus' real father, they remove much of the mystery and wonder of the Incarnation.**

If Jesus was conceived and born just like any other individual, then why should we believe he was different than any other human teacher or religious leader? Yes, what Jesus did and taught are certainly important, but these are directly tied to who he is – the eternal Son of God, God incarnate, God in human form!

Friends, I don't understand exactly how the biology worked when Mary became pregnant. I don't think anyone does. It was a magnificent miracle – a thing too wonderful!

**Friends, do not let those who deny or ignore this part of the Christmas story rob you of the wonder that should be there!**

Incidentally, looking for natural explanations for God's miracles usually is not a smart thing to do. The star that led the wise men to Bethlehem and stopped over the place where the Baby Jesus was, has intrigued many over the centuries. Very intelligent people have come up with theories how this special star was a comet or a particular stellar alignment. It may have been. Yet, the main thing to remember is that God was, in a miraculous way, leading the wise men to Jesus. Thinking we understand how he did that is not necessarily good for our souls.

**#2 is the Purpose of Jesus' Coming.** He came in order to die. A wonderful Christmas display is a manger with a cross in the background. Both are significant symbols in the life of Jesus, but in so many ways, are very opposite symbols. The manger is about birth, about life coming into the world. The cross is about death, about a life being cruelly taken from this world. Yet, the two together powerfully symbolize the true Christmas message. Jesus was born so he might die.

Whenever a baby arrives, the parents are almost always filled with special hopes and dreams about that child. If it's a baby boy, Dad often buys him a tiny baseball glove or miniature football – expressing a dream that this boy is going to be an athlete someday. If it's a girl, Mom will quickly buy a pretty little dress and will maybe dream about the day when she will help her daughter pick out a prom dress or a wedding gown. Parents look forward to things like the first time the baby will say, "Mama" or "Dada." They dream about things like graduations and grandchildren.

**When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, however, God the Father already saw the shadow of the cross falling over that stable manger. That is why Jesus was born – so he could die on that cross.**

Oh, tragically, many parents have watched their children die. That is a horrific experience. I would suggest, however, that God is the only Father whose Son was born with this very

purpose. As Jesus himself said, “I came to give my life as a ransom for many.”

Mary, however, was not really aware of the path her little baby would be called to take. Simeon gave her a hint of this when she took Jesus to the temple. He told Mary...

**Luke 2:34b-35 NLT – “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”**

The cross was Jesus’ destiny right from the beginning. Keep that in mind as you think of the cross and the manger. And then ask yourself this question: **“Why? Why would God the Father send his Son to die?”** Why would Jesus, God the Son, willingly come to earth knowing that the cross was his destiny? Why?”

Maybe you are thinking, “Well, Pastor Dan, I know that answer. You told us today that Jesus came so he could die in our place, so he could be our Savior.”

Yes, that is true. But why? Why would the Father send the Son to do that? Why would Jesus willingly agree to do so? “Well, because he loves us.”

Oh yes, that is true. But why? There is certainly nothing about me or you which merits or is even worthy of his love. “Well,” you might say, “he loves us because of his grace, his undeserved favor.”

Again, that is true. But why? Why does God choose to show us his grace? Why does he choose to show me his grace?

An old Appalachian folk song (it is in our hymnal) captures that question:

*I wonder as I wander out under the sky  
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die  
For poor, ornery people like you and like I  
I wonder as I wander out under the sky*

Friends, that night Jesus was born in Bethlehem – if an angel would have asked the Father, “Why is Jesus down there in that stable?” God could have answered, “He is there so that 33 years from now he will die on a cross to pay the penalty for the sins of Dan Erickson so that he might experience my salvation.” The angel would have said, “Who is Dan Erickson?” God’s reply, “Oh, just some guy who 2000 years from now will be living in Chisholm, MN.” “Where?” “Be patient. You will find out where that is in about 1900 years.”

Friends, that conversation is a thing too wonderful, and if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, that same conversation could have happened with your name instead of mine. Jesus Christ came to this world to save you. Can we understand how it all works? No, but we can believe, embrace and celebrate this truth. And we can let the wonder of Christmas fill our hearts and minds!

**Yet friends, I do need to warn you – the true wonder of Christmas is lost if we refuse or ignore the salvation God graciously provides.** Neither the cross nor the manger really means anything if we decide we are good enough the way we are and don’t need the grace God offers through Jesus.

The wonder comes when we realize that Jesus was born in that manger and died on that cross for me, for each of us as individuals. There is little wonder if we think that being a Christian is about going to church, or getting baptized, or being a good person, or giving money to the Salvation Army.

Instead, true wonder can only come when we understand that a Christian is someone who, by faith, receives the salvation that God freely gives us through Jesus Christ.

So friends, when by God’s grace, we stop trusting in ourselves and put our trust, our faith, in the Lord Jesus, we then experience his salvation. We then become part of his family, and then the message of the manger and the cross, the true meaning of Christmas, becomes a thing too wonderful.

I hope that has happened in your life. If not, there is no better time to receive God's magnificent gift of salvation than Christmas 2018. If you are still not sure what I mean, make sure you talk to me or to someone who has truly experienced the wonder of Christmas.

**Oh friends, Christmas, the real Christmas, is a thing too wonderful. We celebrate that by singing the song, "Silent Night" as we close our service. And let me say, maybe the song itself is another example of a thing too wonderful.**

A number of years ago, I was at the nursing home, singing Christmas carols with residents there during the chapel time. We started singing, "Silent Night," and suddenly one of the staff members got very excited. She motioned a couple of the other workers to come over to see one of the residents. It was a woman who had not spoken a single word in almost two years. And all of a sudden, she was singing. She was singing, "Silent Night." Was there a natural explanation for that? Maybe. But to me it seemed like another example of a thing too wonderful!