

An appropriate scene for Christmas. But what was alarming to people as they would drive by that sign was the message on it that said, you know it's a myth.

This season, celebrate reason. Now that sign was put there by a group known as the American Atheist.

Their president, a man by the name of David Silverman, throughout the Christmas season. And as you might expect, there was a range of response to that sign.

A lot of different comments were made. Most of which were negative. One person said, and I quote, Ridiculing a belief system that for many people is the basis of their entire life philosophy is not a way to win friends or influence people.

[5 : 45] It's a way to act like a stereotype. Many of the holidays that are celebrated around this time of year are religious in nature. A part of existing as a decent person in the world is letting people go about their daily lives in peace.

Now, be honest. There are some of you here this evening that get a little upset at seeing a sign like that. You probably get a little heated, a little bothered by something declaring Christmas as a myth. I mean, how dare someone take something that is so important to us and treat it with such irreverence. But faith family, I would submit to you tonight, we ought not be angry at signs like that. In fact, we ought not even be surprised at signs like that. It should not shock us that people find the Christmas story a myth. Do you know why?

Because it actually is hard to believe. It's really hard to believe. I mean, just think about a few of the aspects that the Bible talks about in the Christmas story.

[6 : 59] For example, a virgin giving birth. I don't know if you know this, but that's not how that happens. Or angels appearing to, of all members of society, shepherds.

Wise men following stars. A king born in a manger, in a stable. Listen, faith family, for someone like me who truly believes, it's still really hard to believe.

And the reason that's the case is because when you enter the Christmas story, you're entering the story of God. You're dealing with something that human reason did not invent.

You are forced, whether you want to be or not, to behold the miraculous. And when it comes to the story of God, faith family, would you expect it any other way?

Notice this on the screen. The incarnation is hard to believe, not because it is a myth. The incarnation is hard to believe because it is a miracle.

[8 : 13] And miracles, by their very essence, defy common experience. It surpasses our understanding. It leaves us breathless, jaw to the ground, standing in awe.

That's what miracles do. So understand this, faith family. Our belief, my belief in the miracle of the incarnation doesn't rest in the fact that it's easy to believe.

It doesn't rest in the fact that it isn't strange. It doesn't rest in the fact that this is exactly how I would have scripted it. No. My belief and our belief in the miracle of the incarnation rest in the reality that it's true.

That's why we believe it. For hundreds of eyewitness testimonies have declared across 2,000 years of human history that on that night in Bethlehem, Christ the Savior was indeed born.

And it is the miracle of all miracles. It is the miracle of all miracles.

[9 : 22] And you say, all miracles? Are you sure about that, Pastor? Greater than water to wine? Greater than healing a leper? Greater than feeding 5,000?

Greater than casting out a demon? Are you suggesting, Pastor, that the incarnation is a miracle even greater than the cross? And resurrection?

Yes, I am. In fact, let me have J.I. Packer speak to this. I agree completely with his quote. Listen to this. It's a bit long, but hang with me. He writes, It's no wonder that thoughtful people find the gospel of Jesus hard to believe for the realities in which it deals pass our understanding.

Take the atonement, for instance. How, they ask, can we believe that the death of Jesus of Nazareth put away the world's sins? Or take the resurrection, which seems to be a stumbling block for many.

How, they ask, can we believe that Jesus rose physically from the dead? Granted, it's hard to deny that the tomb was empty. But surely the difficulty of believing that Jesus emerged from it into unending bodily life is even greater.

[10 : 32] Or take again the virgin birth. How, people ask, can one possibly believe in such a biological anomaly? Or take the gospel miracles. How can one believe that he walked on water?

Or fed 5,000? Or raised the dead? Stories like that are quite incredible. But in fact, the real difficulty, the supreme mystery with which the gospel confronts us, does not lie here at all.

Listen. It lies not in the Good Friday message of atonement, nor in the Easter message of resurrection, but in the Christmas message of incarnation. The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man.

It is here in the thing that happened at the first Christmas that the profoundest, most unfathomable depths of Christian revelation lie.

The word became flesh. God became a man. The divine son became a Jew. The almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby.

[11 : 48] And it wasn't an illusion. It was reality. And Packer concludes, the more you think about it, the more staggering it gets.

That's why C.S. Lewis said, you'll notice this on the screen, that the central miracle asserted by Christians is the incarnation. Every other miracle prepares for this or exhibits this or results from this.

The fitness and therefore credibility of the particular miracles depend on their relation to the grand miracle that is Christmas.

Faith family, it's hard to believe, not because it's a myth. It's hard to believe because it is the miracle of all miracles.

And yet it is true. You say, what in the world does this have to do with us? And when in the world are you going to get to the passage? Let me give you three very simple and quick things this evening.

[12 : 59] That because of the essence of the miracle of the incarnation, what this means for us. Here's the first, and I'll show them all in the passage that we read. The first is this, that the miracle of the incarnation can only be the result of divine revelation.

When you're talking about something this great, this magnificent, this glorious, the incarnation cannot be, nor is it the invention of man.

Rather, something this miraculous and glorious can only come to us from God.

Look at how it came to the shepherds here in verse 8. And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

[14 : 06] Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

This good news of the miracle of the incarnation was revealed to shepherds. Now, I don't have time to preach two sermons.

There is a sermon in that alone. Amen? Like, I thought about the fact that of all the pageantry and all the bright lights and festivity that comes with Christmas, there is something to be said that on the first Christmas night, the one to whom this miracle was revealed were shepherds.

Common shepherds out watching sheep. That tells you something about where you're going to find the glory of Christmas in your life.

[15 : 16] That's a whole other sermon for a whole other day. What I want you to see here is shepherds in the ancient Near East, unlike what's often depicted in our nativity scenes, are rough and rugged loners.

They have no prestige whatsoever in society. And yet they are the ones to whom God reveals the birth of Christ. And the point here is to say this.

Notice this on the screen. The shepherds didn't invent the Christmas story. They received it. The shepherds weren't out saying, Hey, Larry, I got a really good idea.

Hey, Joe, come here. All right, let's think through this. No, they're doing their own stuff, the normal things that they do. And all of a sudden, God shows up through angelic host and reveals to them glory and the majesty that is the incarnation.

And I would submit to you, faith family, that that is how the gospel comes to us. Listen to Matthew chapter 16, verse 15. Jesus said to them, Who do you say that I am?

[16:19] And Peter replied, You're the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered, Blessed are you, Simon, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but who?

My Father who is in heaven. Peter will write later in 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 21. No prophecy has ever been produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Galatians chapter 1, verse 11. Paul writes, For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through what? A revelation of Jesus Christ. Notice this on the screen, faith family.

The reason why the incarnation blows the mind of humanity is because the incarnation comes from the mind of God. No wonder people think it's a myth.

[17:23] No wonder they find it hard to believe because you're dealing with the mind of God. And Paul writes this in 1 Corinthians 2, 14. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.

They're folly to him. And he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Everybody come in close.

When you approach the Christmas story, you cannot approach this miracle like it's any other story. You're going to force it to fit your man-made system of human logic.

You must realize you are entering into something far greater. You are entering into the story of God. It is a miracle.

Given to us by divine revelation. Dorothy Sayers wrote, The incarnation is the most dramatic thing about Christianity, and indeed, the most dramatic thing that has ever entered into the mind of man.

[18:31] And so this miracle that is the incarnation is so glorious, so beautiful, it's so majestic, it can only come from God.

It cannot be, and it is not indeed, invented by man. Here's the second thing I would have you see in our passage, is the miracle of the incarnation produces an immediate response.

I want to show you how the shepherds, when they receive this divine revelation from and through the angelic host, notice how they respond. Look at verse 15.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

There's the revelation. And they went with what? Haste. And found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. What was their response?

[19:29] Upon receiving this divine revelation, the shepherds do not debate what they should do. What do you think, Larry? Larry, Joe, you believe all this stuff? I don't know. I don't really, this whole, you know, angelic stuff and, you know, Emmanuel, God with the, it doesn't really fit my paradigm.

Because when I went to college, you know, they told me that this stuff was a myth. No, that's not how people respond when they encounter divine revelation. When the shepherds experience the divine revelation of God through the angelic host, do you know what they do?

They make haste to do what God had told them to do. And I would submit to you this evening, Faith Family, that the same thing is true for every single one of you.

And those of you watching online, listen, the Christmas story will not leave you neutral. It will not leave you neutral. You are either with him or against him.

You either believe or you do not believe. And the way that you know you've experienced this miracle is you do what the shepherds did. You obey, you believe, you act, you do what God has called you to do.

[20:42] Why? Because how can you do anything otherwise? You have seen the glory of God. You have beheld the majesty of this miracle.

Notice it on the screen. You cannot encounter the Christmas miracle and remain the same. You've entered into the story of God. And everything changes when that happens in your life.

Oh, greater than the leper experiencing the miracle of healing, or the 5,000, the miracle of bread, or the disciples, the miracle of a man walking on water, the incarnation.

In it, you are experiencing the reality of God who has come into your story, who has come into your world, who has come into your life. And just like the shepherds, you can no longer be the same.

Because a miracle has happened to you. Amen? So what do we see here? In this majestic, glorious miracle that is the incarnation, that it can only come from God, it cannot be invented by man.

[21 : 58] And because it is from God, you can't be neutral. You either believe, or you do not believe. And if you believe, it moves you to action. Which leads us to the third and final point this evening.

And that is that the miracle of the incarnation results in worshipful reverence. You know this. Don't you? When you encounter something amazing in life, what's the natural response?

All. You stand in awe of it. You're so amazed by the thing. It's so beautiful. It's so glorious. It's so incredible that you don't have words.

You just stand there in amazement. I could give many examples. Here's a few. Maybe it's the birth of a child. Maybe it's falling in love.

Maybe it's experiencing some spectacular view. But whatever it is, when you experience something that amazing, the natural response is awe.

[23 : 04] Look at me. How much more the miracle of the incarnation. When you behold this, you will be driven like the shepherds on your knees in worship.

Look at verse 17. It says, And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. But watch how the shepherds respond. The shepherds returned doing what? You know, it was all right.

You know, I mean, it was average. They are glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

They are captivated. They don't know what to say. They don't fully understand it all. It's so hard to believe, but it is true.

[24 : 05] And because it was true, it demanded their reverence and worship. And they were found glorifying God. So I ask you, faith family, sincerely, as you, like the shepherds, approach the manger this Christmas, do you do so with awe and wonder?

Is your mind blown? Is your heart full? Do you just want to drop to your knees and sing for joy? Are you, listen, are you transferred from the rough and rugged life of herding your metaphorical sheep into a moment of divine worship?

You know, that's what happened on the first Christmas. These shepherds went from the normal routine of life of just managing sheep to being in awe of what has happened.

And that's what I hope, if just for a moment, if just for a glimmer, if just for a few moments this evening, that that would happen in your life, that you would shift out of the, whatever the herding sheep looks like for you in your life, that you'd be transferred out of that into a moment of just beholding glory and standing in awe of this miracle that is God with us.

That is, after all, the consistent response in all of the miracles. Some of you have been with us for several months as we've looked at all of these miracles of Jesus. And the common theme in all of them is this.

[25 : 45] People are amazed. How can he walk? He hasn't walked for years. We've never had a meal like that before. I've never heard anyone teach with such authority.

If that is true in those miracles, how much more the miracle of all miracles that we would be found amazed.

Faith family, this miracle is so glorious, so majestic. It can only come from God. And because it can only come from God, you can't be neutral about it. And if you've experienced it, here's how you know.

You'll be found on your knees. Maybe not physically, but in your heart. You'll be found glorifying and praising God.

You know, C.S. Lewis was a brilliant man. He was truly brilliant. He was a teacher of medieval literature and a committed atheist, as many of you know. He was also best friends with a man by the name of J.R.R. Tolkien.

[26 : 52] They would frequently go to local pubs and debate for hours. And Lewis would always do everything that he could because Tolkien was a believer. And Lewis did everything he could to discredit the story of Christ.

It's a myth. It's a myth, he would tell Tolkien. And one night, the two of them went walking out in the snow. And Tolkien turns to Lewis and he says this.

He says, Lewis, your problem is that when it comes to Christianity, the myth is true. And Lewis said that that line that Tolkien said haunted him for weeks.

and it was the very line that moved Lewis from being an atheist who did not believe in God to becoming a follower of Jesus Christ.

And Lewis wrote this, quote, now the story of Christ is simply a true myth. A myth working on us in the same way as others, but with this tremendous difference, it really happened.

[28 : 11] And that changed everything. It changed everything. Faith, family, the miracle of the incarnation is hard to believe.

But it's hard to believe not because it's a myth. It's hard to believe because it's the miracle of all miracles. because it didn't originate from the mind of man.

It comes by divine revelation of God. And here's the miracle. God came into our story for the purpose of saving us from our sin.

Now that's hard to believe. But the good news of the gospel is it is true. So come, let us adore him. Come, let us adore him. Come, let us adore him. Christ, the Lord.

[29 : 17] It is the only reasonable response. And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray together. Let's pray.

Lord, that is my prayer for each and every one of us is that we would just behold glory tonight.

There would be a sense in which we would say, I find this so hard to believe.

That's right. because you're entering into the story of God. You're entering into something that the natural mind cannot understand. You're beholding something that is so much bigger than our brains can comprehend.

and yet it is true. It really happened. And it has changed everything in the world.

And it can change us tonight. From common shepherds watching over sheep to praising and glorifying God.

[30 : 36] would you do that transformation by your grace in us tonight. May we worship you truly and be in awe of your glory.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen.