



And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)

There will forever be a somber relationship between the Manger and the Cross. Both are made of wood, and both represent a critical point in the life of Jesus – the beginning and the end, or, perhaps, the Alpha and Omega. One, the Manger, was a humble trough for the feeding of the beasts of the field. In some ways, these beasts present at the birth of Jesus were more privileged than we since they had opportunity to see and to sense the Divine Presence before we could have done.

But there is much symbolism in both the Manger and the Cross in addition to the obviously grave meaning for our salvation. Both represent NEW BIRTH – the Manger, His; and the Cross, ours!

There is a beautiful, 400 year-old tradition observed in Mexico for the nine days leading up to, and including, Christmas Eve. The first day of the festival is December 16 (that is TODAY). It is called, Las Posados (Lodgings). The acting out of such festivals in Mexico were conceived to educate the illiterate people to the underlying biblical truths they purport to represent. The festival lasts nine days for a reason – each day represents one of the nine months of Mary's pregnancy. Though the custom has its origins in the first Roman Catholic missionaries, it is practiced in Mexico by Protestants as well as Catholics. It is a Holy and reverent observance of biblical truth of the Nativity.

Two people dress as Mary and Joseph and travel from house to house each night (pre-designated) and are refused lodging. Here is how Encyclopedia Britannica describes the observance: *Las Posadas is celebrated in cities and towns across Mexico. Each evening during the festival, a small child dressed as an angel leads a procession through the streets of the town. The procession is primarily made up of children dressed in silver and gold robes carrying lit candles and images of Mary and Joseph riding a donkey. Adults, including musicians, follow the procession, which visits selected homes and asks for lodging for Joseph and Mary. Traditionally, the procession is always refused lodging, though the hosts often provide refreshments. At each stop, passages of scripture are read and Christmas carols are sung. Mass is held each day after the procession, and, at the conclusion of the service, children break open piñatas filled with candy, toys, and, occasionally, money. The piñatas are usually crafted in the*

form of a star, which was said to have guided the three wise men of biblical tradition to the newborn Jesus.

I wonder how many homes would afford lodging to a couple who appeared suddenly at our door in a jeep, dressed as migrants from their dusty travels. Nazareth was about 75 miles from Bethlehem. People did not consider this a small jaunt. It took days for Mary and Joseph to travel this distance through rugged and dangerous terrain. Poor Mary must have been exhausted from such a grueling trip, and no less Joseph since he walked all of the distance. I am afraid few homes in our day would open the door to baby Jesus today just as then.

The inn may be symbolic of the hearts of mankind. There is no room for Christ in the hearts of the greater part of mankind today. Mary and Joseph could find no proper shelter, so the inn-keeper allowed them to use his stables. Let me remind the reader, contrary to some popular views, Bethlehem was not a tropical paradise in December. It is located on a high desert plateau, and snows are not uncommon to the little hamlet. It must have been very cold for Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus when He was born there among the oxen, goats, and lambs.

The Manger

The manger was a trough made of rough-hewn wood designed for the feeding of beasts of burden. It was usually filled with straw or hay, and this may have provided some mattress-like properties for Mary's Baby Boy. How distressed Mary must have felt to afford only a manger in the cold stable for her Baby. But she made do with the best facility available. She wrapped the Babe in swaddling clothes (still a practice in the Middle and Far East) and laid Him there in the Manger. By the way, today the sons and daughters of God feed, as did the brute beasts, on the contents of the Manger. We feed on the Word for our health, and the Word is Christ!

The Bible tells us that the wicked are like the beast of the field and I believe some actually worse. ¹²*But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;* ¹³*And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you.* (2 Peter 2:12-13) A prophecy in Isaiah is fulfilled in the Manger scene: ²⁰*The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls.* (Isaiah 43:20)

Our Lord came unto us as a lowly Child of pilgrim parents. He came to us in order for us to know the Father and to be reconciled with Him. His birth was very poor – far poorer than most others. At birth He had no pillow upon which to lay His head, and neither did He have a pillow throughout His ministry. An important message is conveyed to us in this scenario: If no comfort can be had in the inn, a manger in the stables will do. Any place with Jesus beats an opulent palace even if it is a stable.

The Manger of rough-hewn wood was typical of that upon which He would again lie down and be fastened by nails thereto – the Cross at Golgotha.

The Cross

I almost stated the shadow of the Cross was a sorrowful blemish across the Manger scene, and though that is true, it is not altogether the complete story. The shadow of the Cross lay across the countenance of all of the Universe from its Creation until now. It will not be denied its sacrifice in order that men might be reconciled to the Father in Heaven. This shadow followed Jesus along the Galilean shores, along the Jordan valley, to Samaria, Tyre, Sidon, and to the tomb of Lazarus at Bethany. It followed Him off to the Temple at Jerusalem, and finally was born by Him to the place of His own sacrifice thereon.

The rough wood of the Cross was not strange to the Carpenter of Nazareth, or to the Baby at Bethlehem. Both were made by Him at the dawn of Creation. He slept on that wood as a baby, labored on that wood as a Carpenter under Joseph's supervision, carried that wood to the place of His execution for us, and died on that wood as Redeemer and Savior.

Our Lord marched ever relentlessly on to that destiny of the Cross throughout His ministry. He counseled His disciples about the event, but it was too harsh for them to believe and accept. *¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: ¹⁵ That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. ¹⁸ He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* (John 3:14-18) *⁵¹ And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.* (Luke 9:51)

Just as the Goat of the Sin Offering of Leviticus 16, and the Scapegoat both alike reflect our Lord's sacrifice, so did the brazen serpent lifted up on a pole by Moses in the wilderness as a remedy for the serpent's bite. Lots were cast on two goats taken from the flock in the wilderness. One lot fell upon the first goat as a sin-offering. That goat was then sacrificed by Aaron to mitigate the sins of the people. But the lot fell on the second goat to become the Scapegoat. Many have misunderstood (in my humble opinion) this goat to represent Satan; but I firmly believe this Scapegoat represents Christ just as did the first. The first Goat of the sin Offering was sacrificed just as Christ was sacrificed. But, then, strangely, all of the sins of the people were placed also upon the Scapegoat. The Scapegoat was then led out into the wilderness where no man was and abandoned. To me, this represents the risen Christ who bore our sins on the Cross, died and was buried, rose from the grave on the Third Day, and ascended where no man could immediately follow – Heaven.

So, we have an unbroken relationship between the Baby Jesus in the Manger (the sin Offering) and our Lord on the Cross (as the Scapegoat) who is taken where no man lives and ascended to Heaven. Bear in mind, too, that our Lord was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem.

One way or the other, the story of our Lord Jesus Christ proceeds in unified field from the Manger to the Cross; but, more importantly, from Creation to Judgment Day.

I attach one of my poems that I hope you will enjoy. It is copyrighted for the sake of preventing any from usurping my use of it. If you like it, you are free to use and share as much as you like (only not for profit):

Following Those Prints

Once on a day of Joyful Beauty and air pristine
I happened on the trail, at Jordan's
Banks, where our Lord had trod,
And saw there in the stony edge a gleam
The footprints of his nail-pierced feet upon the sod.

Along the shore of Galilee's coast
A fishing boat with sides weathered by the tempest's blast
Lay anchored now in quiet repose
Silent witness to the Stormy past.

Onward down the River Valley green
The Footprints led to Bethany
And on the way, an opened Tomb
Whose owner rose as beckoned lovingly.

On across the western plains to Sychar's well
That Jacob dug for all to quench a thirst
The prints paused briefly for a Woman Lost
Mixed there with others who came as did the first.

Quite steady on the prints led to the Temple Mount
Where tables, overturned in fury hot,
At which the money changers made their count
And fled the Master's blistering reproach of all their lot.

Straight on the steps led through the narrow Way
To Pilate's seat foreboding, proud and dark,
Past judgment seat where Peter thrice on that last Day
Denied his love for Christ and missed the mark.

Now haltingly they merge on Dolorosa's rocky lane
Where Jesus bore His heavy cross alone
Up Calvary's granite slopes of Crimson Stain
Where last He bled and for our sin atoned.

From out the tomb in Garden fair and sweet
The prints led on to Glory high and Great
And up beyond the heavens' pearl-decked gates
He now commands the hearts of all of Faith.

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