

THE METAPHYSICAL MEANING OF THE MANGER

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So there was an Englishman, a Scotsman, and an Irishman. They're on a train and they're all drinking in this compartment together and they're being kind of loud and obnoxious. And then the next stop, an older priest and a beautiful woman get on and sit opposite of them. And the priest is just so disgusted with them. He says, "Don't any of you have any decency in you? You know, the three of you are like a pair of right fools! But I would give 50 quid if you could tell me: Can anyone here tell me who are the three most important characters in the Bible?"

And the English man says, "The three kings!" And the priest shakes his head. And then the Scottish man jumps in and says, "God, Judas, and the donkey!" And, of course, his friends just started laughing, not taking it that seriously. And then the priest looks at the Irish man, he looks blank and he takes a drink.

And then they go into a tunnel and the lights go off temporarily. And the beautiful woman leans into the drunk Irishman and gives him a hot, passionate kiss. And in his astonishment, he shouts just as the lights come on, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" [Congregants laugh] And the priest is pleased and hands him the fifty bucks and says, "Well done, my son."

[Congregants laugh and applaud] So, um ... this morning ... All right; applause. This is miraculous! Okay, it's a miracle!

Hey, so this morning, we're going to look a little bit at Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as we look at the Christmas story from a metaphysical perspective. And metaphysical means: "meta" means beyond the physical. Beyond the physical, looking at it in a way that there are deeper truths. That there are deeper insights that we can't see in the facts and the outer conditions that help us have a greater understanding of ourselves so that we can have an experience of living more fully and more deeply.

I'll give you a simple example of a metaphysical interpretation of a Bible story. And let's just use "The Prodigal Son." Everybody knows the prodigal son asked for his inheritance and he squandered it and he was eating with the pigs. And then he came to himself and went back to his father, who welcomed him. He wanted forgiveness; his father said no need for forgiveness; just welcomed, celebrated and appreciated him. The other son felt a little jealous, because he didn't get any party. And the father reassured him, "*But I've always been here for you.*"

And so these three characters represent a different aspect in each of us. So the prodigal son represents a part of us that can be a little bit wasteful, who's maybe made some bad decisions and are kind of stuck, not living our lives up to the possibility. How many people here have ever wandered, squandered, ever not made the best move? That -- the prodigal son represents that

And then the father represents that Christ being: that Spirit of God in us that will give ourselves a second chance. That don't beat up our son or shame ourselves, but are proud and want the support to lift ourselves up to our truest and highest self, our most authentic self.

And then the other son represents a part in us that sometimes takes things for granted. Sometimes our lives are so good that we take it for granted ... and sometimes get jealous of other people, not realizing God's always there. That good is always there that we don't always take. And we sometimes compare and look at other people.

And so, from that perspective, it helps us learn more from that story about ourselves so that we can make new choices and live a more full life.

Now the metaphysical interpretation of the Christmas story is beyond the physical birth of the Christ child. It is a personal message for the birth of the Christ child/consciousness to be born in us; to help us give birth in our consciousness and our awareness of that Spirit of God within us. The different elements are in the story to understand ourselves better so we can live that in a greater way. So we can awaken to that Christ spirit in us in a greater way.

Angelus Silesius, who was a German mystic in the late 1600s said, "*Christ could be born a thousand times in Galilee, but it's all in vain unless he's born in me.*" And when he said that, he means we could be celebrating Christmas and all the activities and have fun ... and miss out the richness and the depths of the personal transformational experience and a deeper, richer experience of Christmas that is available to us.

You know, the foretelling of the birth of the Christ child is in almost every one of the Old Testament books. The messianic books prophesize of a Savior being born, of a newborn king -- the Messiah who will save us and who will give us freedom, who will make our lives better. And so this was a much anticipated event. It was predicted 700 years before in the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 7, It says, "*A sign that a virgin will conceive and bear a son and call him Immanuel.*" And then in Chapter 9 of Isaiah, it says, "*For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders, and he will be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.*"

And so the question is: Why is this great event -- so greatly anticipated and talked about -- why did it take place in a manger in Bethlehem? In an isolated place that everyone couldn't see and everyone couldn't know or witness? I mean, could Jesus have not been born in Jerusalem, in the capital city? Or in the palace or in the temple where the Pharisees and scribes would have seen the greatness of this incredible occurrence? I mean, why was it in a manger that is a remote, isolated place for animals?

A manger was either made out of wood or, more than likely, rock. And mangers are kind of smelly areas with the animals. These are not great conditions! And think of the other conditions: an unwed teenage girl who's pregnant by God in this environment. This is not what you would think as the classic story of the newborn king and the savior coming! So why the manger?

And so if we have a deeper look at it, we will see that there are a wonderful messages and lessons for us to learn how to give birth to that Christ child in ourselves from the metaphysical meaning and message of the manger. So let's look at the four things we can learn from the message of the manger.

And the first one is **THE MANGER SHOWS US THAT THE SOURCE OF LIFE IS SPIRITUAL**. And the most important thing is to feed our spirits, to get spiritual nourishment. Again, a manger is a feeding trough for animals. So it is animal food. And feeding, of course, is fundamental for growing, for staying alive, for being healthy and thriving. And the manger represents spiritual nourishment. It represents feeding our souls and our spirits, and to know that the Christ child is the infinite source of spiritual food and spiritual nourishment that will lift us, that will sustain us in all things. The foundation of life is spiritual and the importance of us being fed spiritually.

That's why it says, in the Bible, in the Book of Zachariah, "*Not my might, not my power, not by the outer things, but by my spirit,' says the Lord.*"

You know, Wayne Dyer wrote a book and it was called, *There's a Spiritual Solution to Every Problem*. And it's saying that everything going on in our lives is not about the outer; it is about Spirit, and making sure we're feeding our souls that we're nourishing ourselves spiritually.

So that's the first thing that the manger teaches us: that the foundation and source of life is spiritual and it's important for us to feed our souls and nourish ourselves spiritually.

The second one is that **THE MANGER IS A SYMBOL FOR US TO KEEP SEEKING GOD** and to stay on our spiritual journey. The manger was in a remote place and the only people that found Jesus in the manger had to go on a journey; they had to search for him, had to work to find him.

Who are the only people that found Jesus in the manger? The shepherds. The shepherds found him, and they had a journey and work to do to get there. Now, the Magi did get there, but that was like two years later, because the star they saw in the East was when Jesus was born. It took two years to get there.

But either way, the shepherds and the Magi had to do work. They had to travel. They had to put effort and time into seeking and finding. And if you go all the way back, Mary and Joseph had to go on a journey, as well. They had to leave their home and go to Bethlehem.

And so the message in here is we have to go on a journey and do our work. And when we do, it means we have to leave something behind. If we want to go and have a journey to find something greater, there is something we need to move away from. Maybe it's a mindset; maybe it's some drama or some story; maybe it's feelings of unworthiness or negativity. And we've got to leave that to go on a journey to discover the Christ; to deepen our relationship and our awareness of the Spirit of God within us.

You know, if we want something greater, there's something we need to walk away from. There's something we need to distance ourselves from to have something richer and more full.

So what is it in your life that you would need to move away from, release, or let go to allow yourself to have a deeper experience and connection with that Christ light within yourself? Jesus said, *"Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."* And Mary and Joseph made it a priority to go on their journey and to seek a place for the birth of the Christ.

You know, the shepherds made it a priority that they had to do. And that is a vital and important thing. You remember in the parable when Jesus says, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a hidden treasure that someone finds?"* And when they find it, they cover it up and go sell everything they have so they can buy it. When we realize that the Christ and the power of that Spirit is within us – and it will increase and give us all that we need to live our lives fully -- we make it a priority. We do the work to seek and find.

Now, one of the things: along any journey, there are going to be a few bumps. Some bumps, and things won't go our way. For Mary and Joseph, there was no room in the inn. And sometimes those things happen. Sometimes we think it's too hard. Sometimes we think it's not going to work out or, *"I just don't have it in me."* And we need to be reassured!

You know, Mary need to be reassured when she was told she'd give birth to the Christ child. Joseph had to be reassured when he wanted to divorce Mary. The shepherds had to be reassured that they would find the Christ child. Every one of us in our lives -- striving towards whatever it is -- sometimes get a little afraid, get a little scared, have a little bit of doubt. And we need to be reassured!

Kind of reminds me of this young father pushing his trolley with his baby. And the baby's crying a little bit, and he's saying, *"Oh, there, there, John. There, there, John. Everything's going to be okay. Just stay calm, John. Stay calm."* He's pushing and says, *"Oh, we just have to go around the park once, John. Just stay cool; everything's gonna be okay. And then we'll go home and we'll meet mom and everything will be fine."*

A lady sees this guy pushing this and says, *"Oh, that's so cool! You're a young father, and it's so neat that you're reassuring your son, John."*

He said, *"Oh, my son's name's not John; my son's name is Billy."*

And she said, *"Well, who's John?"* He said, *"I'm John."*

You ever had a time in your life where you were facing something hard and you say, "Oh, no, it's going to be okay. Just hang in there. It's going to be okay"? We all need to take that journey, and the journey's not easy. We've got to leave stuff behind, and we've got to be reassured every now and then. And that's what the angels of God did in the Bible story. They reassured Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, "It's going to be okay. God is with you, it's gonna be okay."

And that's an important part of the spiritual journey. Keep seeking, keep seeking. It's a spiritual journey that you're on. Christmas isn't a day; it's a process that we have to keep moving forward. Keep seeking, keep going deeper.

And how do we do it? It says in the Book of Jeremiah, "If you seek me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart." You just have to sincerely keep seeking God in the manger of your own heart. No one can go there for you. Only we can do that for ourselves. And it's a vitally important thing to keep moving, to keep seeking, to keep doing our spiritual work. And it all happens in here, but we need to keep working towards it.

I want you to think for a second what that journey must have been like for Mary and Joseph; you know, to travel those miles to Bethlehem. I wonder what that journey would have been like for them, for the shepherds, for the distance they had to travel. I bet it wasn't easy. But it was so important to them that they kept going.

And sometimes we think, "Oh, man, I don't want to go that far. I don't want to work that hard. I want an easier version of spirituality. I want to maybe take an Uber on that journey, or the light rail. I like Amazon spirituality. I just order it and the next day it's on my front door." But the fact is: this stuff takes work. It's inner work, but it's work. But the payoffs are so beneficial because we expand our consciousness and awareness to the living Spirit of God. You know, the kingdom of God might be within us, but we're the ones who have to cultivate it, connect with it, and bring it alive so we could fully experience and express it.

Let's talk about Herod for a second. King Herod, of course, was the king and he didn't want to hear about some other king being born. And so he wanted to destroy baby Jesus. He wanted to destroy the kingdom, because King Herod represents our ego and our egos want to be in control. You know, our egos want the power. And our egos will sometimes undermine us and sabotage ourselves, you know, to not give up that power and that control.

And so on this journey, there are a lot of things we need to face. That's why the manger is saying: Keep going. Keep searching. Keep going deeper. Keep doing your spiritual work to awaken to deeper levels of your oneness of the Christ in you.

And so the next one -- the third one -- is that **THE MANGER TEACHES US WE CAN MOVE FROM A MESS TO A MIRACLE.** If you really, really think about it, in that manger with those animals, the Christ child was born. And that same Christ child walked on water. That same Christ child healed the sick. That same Christ child raised the dead. That same Christ child fed the 5,000. That same Christ child turned water into wine. Sometimes we can go from a mess to a miracle!

Everybody's conditions of life are not easy. Jesus' conditions were not easy, but it's through that Christ power -- that resurrecting power, that miracle working power -- that his life raised to do great things.

You know, there's a wonderful line that Jesus said: "He who believes in me shall do the works that I do and even greater things than these." So whatever condition you might be in your life that isn't ideal -- that isn't great, that doesn't look like you can't overcome or prosper -- that power is in you. And that's one of the powerful things that the manger teaches us. That we could rise from that to something greater and better. There is more life, there's more love, there's more joy, there are more possibilities,

there's more hope ... There's more of everything available to us. And that's one of the things that this message of the manger is really teaching us.

Could you imagine if Jesus was born in a palace with servants everywhere, taking care of his every need? Do you think his message would have been as powerful? I suggest not, because every one of us has adversities in our lives. Every one of us has struggles and difficulties. And to see that example -- you know, from the manger to miracles -- makes us realize that we've got it in us. That we can rise, too! That we are not hopeless; that we are hopeful! And that we are powerful, and greater things can come.

Even if we make mistakes like the prodigal son, or have been unwell, like the hemorrhaging woman, or have lack of loaves and fishes ... no matter what the situation or condition looks like, there is hope and greater possibilities available to all of us.

And then the last one I want to talk about is how **THE MANGER TEACHES US THE IMPORTANCE OF DOING OUR WORK TOWARDS PEACE ON EARTH** and goodwill for all. When the angels are talking to the shepherds... at the very end when he's saying, "*But you'll find the baby in the manger,*" the very last line is this, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will towards all men.*"

And I wonder ... When that is said ... After saying that you'll find this baby, that's the last line the angels said. I wonder how we think peace on earth and good will is going to come? I wonder what the intention for that was?

I would suggest that we are all called to do our part to create peace on earth and good will towards all. Here's a writing by Henry Van Dyke that I think captures some of the idea of how we've been called to help bring peace on earth and goodwill to all. Here's what it says. It says:

"Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people and remember what other people have done for you? To ignore what the world owes you and to think of what you owe the world? To put your rights in the background and your duties in the middle distance, and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground? To see that your fellow men are just as real as you are, and try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy? To know that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life? To close your book of complaints against the management of the universe and look around for a place where you can sow some seeds of happiness? Are you willing to do these things even for a day? I mean, then we will be living Christmas."

So, my question is: Who in your life can you express more love, compassion, and kindness to? Let me ask it again: Who in your life can you express more compassion and love and kindness to *that you don't want to express more love and compassion and kindness to*? Who in your life do you need to make peace with? I mean, who in your life do you need to help bring a smile to their face or ease their burdens and make them a little bit happier?

You know what's interesting? We always and should think of our loved ones and all the people we know in our lives and those expressing more love in those areas and kindness and compassion is hugely important. But, you know, research is showing that our interactions -- short interactions -- with people who are strangers, who we do not know, has a huge impact on our sense of community, well-being and belonging. That small interactions of a little smile or opening a door or letting someone into traffic, or just saying, "*Hey, how are you doing?*" and really meaning it ... All those things actually play a huge role in our overall sense of well-being and happiness.

Could you imagine taking away all those moments in your life and it only being about who you know and who you love? I would suggest life would not be as fulfilling. I was getting my eyes checked at the Target Optical and the lady there, her name was Linda. I didn't ask her name; she was so brilliant. And the place

was packed and she was kind of moving and taking care of everybody, and, *"Oh, I'll be right there."* I mean, she was terrific. At the end I said, *"You know, you're fabulous."* I mean, just watching her do her thing. I mean, she spent a minute or two with me, but watching was just incredible. And she said, *"You know, I like doing it. I do it for the people and I do it for myself, as well. I want to feel good, and I want them to feel good."* I said, *"You know what? It shows and it makes a difference."*

I may never see Linda again, but in that little interaction that was very, very brief, it brought a little bit of light into my life. I bet many of us don't realize that our smile or comments or *"How are you doing today?"* -- all these things make an absolute difference. And could you imagine if we all made a commitment every day in all of our small little interactions with people to make it as compassionate or positive or kind? Even if it's a smile, I bet it makes a bigger difference than we realize. I think if we may make that commitment, there would be more peace on earth. There would be more goodwill to all humanity if we are willing to do that. We are called to be the ones to bring peace on earth and goodwill to all.

You know, the birth of the Christ child to me is about living an awakened spiritual life. Awakened consciousness, knowing that we are here for the good of all creation and for the betterment of all people. That we are here by the benevolence of the Creator to be channels of light: to bring more peace and kindness and goodness and compassion into the world.

And the way to do that is to allow that Christ shall to be birthed in us and to learn the lessons from the manger, which are: to know that the source of life is spiritual. To nourish our spirits, to nourish our souls. The second is to keep seeking; keep doing our inner work; keep on our spiritual path/journey. Christmas isn't a day; it's an unfolding process of the birth and the oneness of the Christ. Reassure ourselves and do all the things that we need to keep ourselves going on that path. The third is to show ourselves that we can move from a mess to a miracle: that the unfolding miracles and possibilities to resurrect our lives is absolutely possible. And finally, to do all the things that we need to do our part -- by just reaching out and being kind to one another -- to bring peace and goodwill to all people.

Let's all have a powerful, deep, and wonderful Christmas by applying the metaphysical meaning and message of the manger.

God bless you all!

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