

Stay by My Cradle  
A Christmas Message  
Delivered in Sacrament Meeting  
Orange Glen Ward, Escondido California Stake  
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INTRODUCTION

*And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 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 2:6-7)*

Swaddling consists of tightly wrapping an infant in cloths or strips of cloth which prevent free movement of the baby's arms and legs. A manger is a box or trough in a stable or barn from which horses or cattle eat.

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

*And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.*

*And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.*

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

*And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (Luke 2:8-12)*

The angels could not say, "Ye shall find the babe wearing a fleece sleeper, lying in a wicker bassinet" but "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

*And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*

*And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. (Luke 2:13-16)*

There he was, the great Jehovah, the creator of this world, and countless others. He had "come down from heaven" to "dwell in a tabernacle of clay" (Mosiah 3:5) and had become "Emmanuel... God with us" (Matthew 1:23). He had come to accomplish that which he promised he would do, when He said to the Father, "Here am I, send me" (Abraham 3:27). He had come to fulfill the mission that only he could complete - to make that "great and last sacrifice; ... not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, ... but ... an infinite and eternal sacrifice" (Alma 34:10). He had

come “to do his work and his glory... to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39)

The meridian of time was now established. Heavenly choirs rejoiced and angels had announced his advent. A new star appeared to signal his coming (3 Nephi 1:21). And the night before, in the western hemisphere, “there was no darkness in all that night, but it was as though it was mid-day” (3 Nephi 1:19). And yet, there He was, constrained to be motionless by bands of cloth, and situated in that most humble of locations, “lying in a manger”.

But, even from the beginning, the solemn purpose of his coming was made manifest. “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world” he told Pontius Pilate. (John 18:37) Was not this beginning to His earthly experience richly symbolic of the mission he would fulfill while on earth?

Does it not speak of the humble path that he would trod? Does it not testify that his life’s mission was to “descend below all things” (D&C 88:6) including experiencing first hand poverty, deprivations, and “afflictions ... of every kind” that he might “take upon him the pains and sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11).

Does it not portend that day which would take place some 33 years later when he would be once again be laid upon a wooden structure. But this time it would not be a wooden manger but a wooden cross. And once again his arms and his legs would be made to be motionless. But this time it would not be with swaddling bands but with iron nails pinning his hands and wrists and feet to the beams upon which he would be lifted up.

When we consider the humble manger scene, what message comes to our hearts? One of our favorite Christmas hymns begins with the words “Away in a manger, no crib for a bed...”. In is unclear who penned the lyrics to this beloved Christmas carol but the author captured sacred sentiments that come into our hearts when we think upon our Savior, of his coming to earth, and our relationship with him. The lyrics include these phrases “I love thee Lord Jesus;”, “Look down from the sky And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh”, and “Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay Close by me forever,...” Let’s consider each of these expressions which are reflective our response to the manger scene.

### I Love Thee Lord Jesus

“I love thee Lord Jesus”. We cannot look upon the baby Jesus without wanting to express our love for him and wanting to express to him our gratitude for his willingness to come to earth to become our Divine Redeemer.

In 1980, the church produced a made-for-television movie featuring legendary Hollywood actor James Stewart. It was called “Mr. Krueger’s Christmas”. In what is

my favorite scene from the movie, Mr. Krueger dreams that he is taken to the site of Jesus' birth and shares some of his feelings with the baby Jesus. He concludes with these words: "I love you. You are my closest, my finest friend, and that means that I can hold my head high, wherever I go. Thank you. Thank you."

"We love him," as the Apostle John expressed, "because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We sing together the words, "I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me" (Hymn 193). His love is something we "feast upon" (Jacob 3:2)

Love for him is the first and great commandment. It is the foundational principle that underpins our entire religion. It is the spark that ignites the flame of our faith. Love for and from Jesus is the power that sees us through all that we must endure while in this mortal sphere.

But we live in that prophesied day when "... the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). Conditions in the world and in our personal lives can dim our views of light of his love. Whenever this is the case, the answer is to "repent and return" unto him (D&C 109:21) and, if we do, we can "abide in [his] love" (John 15:10).

Let us separate some time this coming week to focus again our minds and hearts on our Savior and to express again to him, "I love thee Lord Jesus".

### Look Down From the Sky and Stay by My Cradle Till Morning is Nigh

The Christmas carol goes on to say "Look Down From the Sky and Stay by My Cradle Till Morning is Nigh ". Although we might no longer be young, and long ago outgrown a cradle, there are times when we each experience the child-like yearnings for a shoulder to cry on, for arms to hold us and keep us safe. When we have such feelings, what is the answer?

The counsel given of prophets is not to simply cry but "cry unto the Lord". We remember the admonition of Alma. "Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, ... Cry unto him in your houses, ... both morning, mid-day, and evening. Yea, ... pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness." (Alma 34:18-27)

We can cry unto him because he cares. We can cry unto him because he understands. We can cry unto him because he knows the answers we need. The Apostle Paul expressed it in these terms, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; ... Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Remember the account of the Nephites who were unjustly oppressed and silently cried unto the Lord in their hearts. In Mosiah 24 we read, "And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage. And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do that ye may stand as witnesses for me hereafter, and that ye may know of a surety that I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions." (Mosiah 24:13-14)

I add my own testimony to that of the ancient Nephites. I know and bear witness that that the Lord Jesus Christ visits his people in their afflictions. He visits them with his spirit, with his love, and with personal manifestations of his care.

Be Near Me. Lord Jesus. Stay Close By Me Forever

The hymn goes on to express this phrase. "Be Near Me. Lord Jesus. Stay Close By Me Forever".

To our spirits, this world in which we live is a somewhat drab and dreary place when compared to that paradise where our spirits did "once reside" (O My Father, Hymn 139). Further, except we enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost, our spirits feel a certain loneliness - a kind of homesickness - a longing to be in the presence of the members of the Godhead.

If we will comply with the terms and conditions of our gospel covenants, the yearnings of our souls to be close to Jesus forever will be realized. One of the privileges we have as members of the restored Church to attend the temple and to participate in the sacred ordinances that belong to the House of the Lord. I like to think of the temple endowment ceremony as a dress rehearsal for eternity - an eternity which involves admittance into the Celestial Kingdom where in dwells those beings whom our spirits know intimately and long to be with forever.

I love how Mormon describes the fulfillment of this dream in his commentary as recorded in the third chapter of Helaman. Concerning those who keep their covenants, he indicates that they shall "... land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out." (Helaman 3:30)

Conclusion

Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;  
The stars in the heavens looked down where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing; the poor baby wakes,  
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.  
I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky  
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay  
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,  
And fit us for heaven to live with thee there.