

SAVIOR

Reviving Wonder

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Today, I speak to you about our wonderful Savior, Jesus. As I begin, let me share with you a poem about wonder.

The Wonder of YOU
by Brenda V Northeast

*The wonder of YOU
Caught in a moment
Joy spontaneous joy
Like a snapshot of*

*A brilliant sunset
Or Dawn's glorious rising
Or the Joy of new Birth
Love and awe fill our being*

*So will our hope in YOU
In the twinkling of an eye
YOU have filled us with
Everlasting day and everlasting joy*

*The long dark night will be forgotten
Never to come into our minds
Prince of Eternal PEACE, LOVE and JOY
We will reign with YOU in Your Kingdom of light*

Wonder has several definitions that illuminate this topic and lead us to a deeper appreciation of who He is.

Did wonder kill the cat?

Verb: be curious to know something.

Socrates said, "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom." That is not, however, what the Bible says is the source of true wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Curiosity may develop human wisdom, but God's wisdom is far higher than man's wisdom.

Listen to God's words through the prophet Isaiah, as He describes a superficially religious people, who have misunderstood God's ways, and need a revival of wonder.

Isaiah 29:13 *Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,"¹⁴ Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden."*

While Socrates suggested that wisdom begins with curious wonder, the wonders that God creates actually defeat man's wisdom! They boggle the mind.

A revival of wonder is God's answer to a lifeless religion.

Feel the wonder

The next definition is closer to what we're looking for.

Verb: feel admiration and amazement; marvel.

Author Betty Smith wrote, "Look at everything as though you were seeing it either for the first or last time. Then your time on earth will be filled with glory."

A wonder from God

There comes a time when we desperately need a divine wonder in our lives, whether we realize it or not. Isaiah identified such a time in this way: When people use words that seem to honor God, but their own hearts are far away from Him, when their only expressions of reverence for God are the result of being loaded with religious rules and fostered guilt, when their religion drives men away from God instead of drawing them near to Him—it's time for wonder to be restored!

The wonder I am speaking of today is a noun.

Noun: a feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable.

Bill Watterson (creator of Calvin & Hobbes) said, "That's the whole problem with science. You've got a bunch of empiricists (those who believe that knowledge is only reliably gained through the perception of the physical senses) trying to describe things of unimaginable wonder."

God's creation, at every level, is a thing of "unimaginable wonder." If we reduce it to ideas without feelings, and knowledge without mystery, then there can be no more surprise, there can be no more beauty, there can be no more wonder.

Mystery required

Wonder demands mystery—something unfamiliar and inexplicable. Yet, so much of our lives are aimed at reducing the unfamiliar and the unexplained. Better, we think, if we can reduce it by explaining it, by labeling it, by describing it thoroughly. Once we've managed it intellectually, we think we also can manage it experientially.

What is unexplained is not only outside of my knowledge, it is also outside of my control, and it is somehow threatening (or so we fear).

This notion dates back to the Garden of Eden, when the serpent beguiled Eve (the mother of us all) by suggesting that God was hiding Himself from us—showing us only what He wanted us to see (and isn't that the way we so often live with each other now?)—that God was hiding from us something that would make us better. That lie throws all of God's intentions toward us into question. Can we—dare we—really trust Him?

Today, we're going to see from a fairly familiar story in the Bible that, far from hiding Himself or withholding what would be good for us, God has made the supreme effort to reveal Himself to us and to provide all that would be good for us, in this life and the life to come.

Yet mystery remains, for our knowledge does have its limits.

Wonder of wonders! Amazing surprise! What God did was nearly unexpected, in spite of God's multiple promises and predictions.

It was altogether unfamiliar, for it was an event that had never before happened, nor had even entered the imagination of man.

It was beautiful beyond imagination—in its unassailable cleverness, in its impenetrable thoroughness, in its invincible effectiveness.

It was a glorious mystery, cloaked in ordinariness!

Let's read the story...

Luke 2:1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ² (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor

of Syria.)³ All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.⁵ He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.

Notice how ordinary this all is. It is so normal, that if I didn't point it out, you would be thinking, "That's forgettable. When does the story begin? When do we get to the good part?" But that is Luke's very point! It is just such ordinariness that provides the setting for a miracle. Normalcy never excludes wonder; it is its precursor.

Luke 2:6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.⁷ She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

This is so ordinary—like millions of lives before, and billions more to come. Thus far, it is unimpressively ordinary. But Luke subtly introduces another feature of wonder: timing.

"And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born." Like the dependable orbit of the planets and stars, the gestation period of a human being follows a course so predictable that we can prognosticate a "due date" that is as reliable as Amazon or UPS.

You may ask, "But who can predict a miracle?"

Miracles may seem sudden to us, if our eyes are looking elsewhere or are blinded by our routine. In fact, they are the result of careful timing, and never arrive early or late.

Faith—someone's faith—is the ignition for a miracle, though it has been planned in the heart of God for eons. *"Without faith it is impossible to please God"* (Hebrews 11:6). Someone's faith fuels the engine of a miracle until it arrives at its destination.

And when your desire and will are aligned with God's, He's willing to share clues with you and even tell you what He is up to. *"Certainly the sovereign Lord does nothing without first revealing his plan to his servants the prophets"* (Amos 3:7).

Joseph's and Mary's lives were like your life, or mine. Waiting on the divinely appointed timing of circumstances beyond our control, while inconvenienced in certain aspects by distant governmental decrees. But generally, it's just life, as it happens, with those closest to me, and making the best of my situation. Ordinary.

However, we could not count the number of miracles, whose ingredients are just these—routine daily life, seasoned with inconvenience and difficulty. This is the usual stuff from which wonder arises, if we are open to it.

Sometimes, through serendipitous events, our lives intersect with others we have not known before. But even that usually occurs under the most ordinary of circumstances.

Luke 2:8 That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.

The only words in that sentence that suggest something unusual are the first two (“That night”), but these in themselves are not apparent. And THAT is significant for us!

Beware of reading the Bible inattentively. What may appear at first glance as insignificant words, could, in fact, be the key to a miracle. Read the Bible like one who is searching for buried treasure. (I did not say, “Searching for *imaginary* treasure.” Don’t try to *imagine* miracles where there are none, or force significance upon words that have simple meaning. But do be alert for the nudge of the Holy Spirit; He may want to highlight a passage for you, in order to reveal something extraordinary to you.)

“That night.” That night was no ordinary night! That night, human history would be irrevocably altered. That night, heaven would invade earth, and eternity would appear in time and space. That night, God and man would be unshakeably linked. That night, God would reveal Himself as never before: in the form of a human being.

That night, ordinariness was interrupted.

Luke 2:9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified,¹⁰ but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!¹² And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

Suddenness is a telltale feature of miracles and wonder! Suddenly, and without warning, the group was penetrated by a mysterious visitor. And he brought with him a great, radiant light that suddenly enveloped them. “That night” was no longer ordinary.

And what is “glory”? In this case, it is a word that means weighty—heavy, beyond words, impressive, illuminating, overwhelming. God’s presence can be like that.

They were terrified—these hearty outdoorsmen, who were accustomed to spending their nights in the field. Perhaps they had been trading stories around the campfire of the times—like King David, when he was a shepherd—that they slew a lion or a bear that was attacking their flocks. But when the light came on, their bravado vanished in the presence of the divine, and they became, once again, like little children.

“Don’t be afraid,” the angel comforted them. “This is a ‘good news’ visit! This is a happy occasion! We’re here to celebrate, and to announce good news that will be a source of great joy to all people!”

What kind of news could have such an ebullient effect? What news would begin in a field outside the village of Bethlehem that could impact the whole world?

Just this: the Messiah has come, in answer to hundreds of prophecies and thousands of prayers! The Savior has been born, who will rescue all people from their sins, and restore their confidence in God! And it has happened right here, in Bethlehem—the least likely of all places, but the place God had chosen.

That’s who Jesus is, friends! The Christ of God, our Savior. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The God-man, who loved us and gave His life in our place. Our Redeemer and Deliverer! Do you know Him today?

Right here, in Trinity Community Church, in an unlikely place and at an unlikely moment, a tremendous change can begin.

Wonder of wonders! Freedom from guilt and shame! Deliverance from emotional pain. Salvation and healing can be yours. Do you know Him today?

Luke 2:13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,¹⁴ “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

Suddenly, the glory increased, the song ascended to a crescendo, and their wonder was magnified.

The angels’ song revealed the spectacular magnificence of this event—touching Heaven and changing earth. The Savior’s birth was to be a source and revelation of God’s own glory!

Here, the word “glory” refers to the praise, honor, and appreciation that will be ascribed to God as a result of the miracle that was taking place “that night” and its impact on all the world. And as the praises go up, the peace and blessing come down.

This peace is not just the absence of wars and strife. It is the *shalom*, the wholeness of the human soul, in its connectedness with God and with other people and all of God’s creation.

You have heard it said that God “*works all things together for good to those who love Him , to those who are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28). These are the same ones the angel was talking about—those who please the Lord (not through their faultless performance

for Him, but through their persistent confidence in Him). Glory and peace. Peace and glory. Hallelujah!

Luke 2:15 When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, “Let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” ¹⁶ They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷ After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.

Angels come, and angels go. If you’re visited by an angel, don’t expect to be attended by him every day. You must return from the mountain top to the valley. Mountain peaks provide a grand vista of God’s beauty, but at the peak of the mountain no fruit grows; it grows in the valley below. Life returns to its ordinariness. But you should not think, therefore, that miracles cease or that glory dissipates. God’s miracles and glory breed wonder, and wonder pursues God’s purpose.

“Let’s go and see.” Enthusiastically, they followed the angel’s directions to see for themselves what God was up to. They were not disappointed! They found everything just as the angel had described it to them. They were so encouraged!

They had experienced the glory of God. They had heard the testimony of angels. They had witnessed the miracle of God’s grace—the infant Savior. In wonder, pursuing God’s purpose, they began to tell everyone what had happened to them and the Good News they had discovered.

Those simple shepherds’ wonder was transformed into acts of faithfulness and enduring trust. That’s how wonder grows—through acts of faithfulness and enduring trust. Yes, wonder GROWS! And, as it does, it touches the lives of others, like ripples on a pond.

Luke 2:18 All who heard the shepherds’ story were astonished, ¹⁹ but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰ The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

Oh, what a night! The Savior had come! For most of the world, NOTHING had apparently changed, everything appeared just the same. Still ordinary. But in reality, though mostly invisible, EVERYTHING had changed.

It has an immediate effect on the shepherds, who returned to their ordinary work, but with a new spirit; they began praising and glorifying God.

It has a lingering effect on Mary, who continued in her everyday life, but with a renewed mind, meditating deeply and repeatedly on her experiences.

And it had a ripple effect on all who heard the story second-hand; they were astonished at the news—God had done marvelous things.

Life goes on, yet everything will change, because the Savior has come.

The lost are to be found. Sinners are to be forgiven. The broken are to be mended. The captives are to be released. The lame are to be healed. The blind are to see. The sick are to recover. The lonely are to be put in families. The outcasts are to be restored to fellowship. The dead are to be raised. The world is to be transformed.

Why? Because the Savior has come. Immanuel. God with us. God for us.

On that ordinary night. In that sleepy, little village. In the sight of those simple shepherds. In a cattle trough inside a barn. A miraculous wonder occurred. An earth-shaking wonder!

Do you see it? Can you feel it?

What will you do about it? What will you do with what you feel here just now?

How will you let God know that you are thankful that He is for you, not against you? Perhaps you will make time regularly to pray and repeatedly tell God how glad you are that He has saved us.

How will you let Him know that you trust Him and will follow in His ways? Perhaps you will carve out more time to study His Word in order to learn all that He has done for us and what He wants to do through you.

They are simple steps. Some would say, ordinary. But, if you're willing and obedient, they can be grounds for increased wonder and marvelous miracles.