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# CHRISTMAS WONDER

**I**F THERE IS ONE WORD THAT CAPTURES the spirit of Christmas it is **WONDER!** We hear it in the voices of the shepherds, as they say to one another, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing.” (Lk 2:15) And we are explicitly told that all who heard what the shepherds said, **WONDERED** about it (cf. Lk 2:18).

More than any other feast, Christmas is filled with **wonder**. We catch it, especially, as children: The Advent calendar that counts the days till Christmas; the decorations, the tree, the crèche; the music; the food—everything seems transformed into a magical wonderland. Sadly, as we grow older, we tend to lose some of that sense of wonder; not only towards Christmas, but even life in general.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote, “The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only from want of wonder.” Our age is full of scientific achievements and discoveries. You would expect that we would have a greater sense of wonder towards God’s creation—and

sometimes there is—but we also live in an age of pride and ingratitude; one that has grown bored with all its knowledge. So, while on the one hand we know more, on the other, we appreciate it less; and there is no sense of wonder without gratitude.

To regain or deepen our sense of wonder, there is nothing so helpful as to think about God’s wonders in human history. As St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Phil 4:8) Sadly, we tend to prefer to stare into the darkness of the evils that surround us instead. Yet, among God’s wonders, there is nothing so wonderful as the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Prophesying of that great event, Isaiah does not hesitate to call Him, “wonder.” This fueled the imaginations of the Syriac Fathers such as St. Ephrem and St.

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Jacob of Serugh. Before going into their meditations, however, it would be worthwhile to think about some of God's wonders **before** the coming of Christ; wonders that also acted as foreshadowings of things to come.

God's wonders in Scripture are such because they defy natural explanation. In the book of Exodus, Moses encounters a burning bush that is not consumed by the fire. He must have stared hard at it for some time, trying to understand how this could be. On approaching it, the Lord spoke to him (Ex 3:2), telling him to remove his shoes from his feet, for he was on holy ground. This was the first of many wonders that God would show him.

In the book of Judges, Gideon asks for a sign from God that He will be with him in his battle against the Midianites. He places some woolen fleece on his threshing floor and asks God to let the dew come upon it only and the rest of the ground remain dry. In the morning, that is exactly what he finds: he wrings out a bowlful of dew from the fleece, but the rest of the ground is dry (Jdg 6:36-38).

In the Second Book of Kings, Elisha the prophet is approached by the men of Jericho, whose water is bad and making the land unfruitful. Elisha asks for a new bowl full of salt. He throws the salt into the spring while prophesying, "Thus says the Lord, I have made this water wholesome..." and, from then on, it was so. (2 Kgs 2:19-22)

These are only a few of God's wonders in the Old Testament, yet they pale before the Incarnation that they foreshadow. Mary is like the burning bush that Moses saw: she carried the God-Man in her womb and yet was not consumed by His holiness. She is also the fulfillment of Gideon's fleece: upon her only did Christ, the "dew from heaven" come, while preserving her virginity before, during, and after she gave birth to Him. Finally, Christ is the fulfillment of the salt that Elisha threw into the spring. For He entered our race and seasoned it, making our human nature whole again.

These are some of the meditations of the Syriac Fathers on the marvels of the Incarnation. They also wondered at God becoming a man without leaving His Divinity behind: How is it that Almighty God, Who gives nourishment to all, is now, as Man, in need of nourishment from His mother? How is it that the little Infant, clutching at Mary's breast, is the same Person as the God before Whom the army of angels tremble? St. Ephrem also marvels at the transformation that takes place in Mary's womb—the Lord entered it and came out a servant; the Rich One entered and came forth poor; The Exalted One entered and came out meek; He who clothes everything came forth naked and stripped.



The Incarnation is so great an event that, as Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote, "It split human history in two." We should meditate on it, especially during this season of the Glorious Birth of our Lord. Yet, we should not forget that God continues to perform wonders in our midst, especially the one that takes place on our altars every day. The very same Jesus, born of the Father from all eternity and born of Mary in time, comes to be with us in the Eucharist. Not only to be with us, but to be *within us* in Holy Communion! We can wonder at how far the Lord God of the Universe will go to humble Himself out of love for us! How is it that the Lord of the angels, before Whom the cherubim cover their faces and cry out, "Holy! Holy! Holy!" desires us to approach Him and receive His Body and Blood for our nourishment? They did not dare touch Him, and yet He gives Himself to us! How is it that the Lord, for Whom Heaven is too small, desires to come and dwell in our bodies and souls?

As St. Jacob of Serugh says, "Too small is the mouth to speak of the story of the Son of God" but he adds, "With wonder and love one should speak of the story of the Son of God." May our wonder feed the fires of our love and our love increase our wonder!

