

## Away in a Manger – Luke 2:4-16

**Introduction** – There is a way to look at the manger-scene and simply have warm feelings. And there is nothing wrong with warm feelings. But warm feelings don't save people from their sins. Warm feelings don't feed people's souls. Warm feelings don't make this broken world a better place. But look a little bit closer and see what God is showing us in this manger-scene.

**Lying in a Manger** – Looking carefully at this passage, notice that we are told three times that the Babe was laid in a manger or found lying in a manger. Do you think that God might be trying to tell us something? A manger is something from which a domestic animal would eat – a feeding trough. It's probable that in this context it was a hay rack on the wall of a donkey stable. The stable was probably not for sheep (they were out in the fields) or for cattle (which an innkeeper probably would not have) but for donkeys stabled for the traveling guests.

**The Manger in Isaiah** (Isaiah 1:3) – *“The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's manger (crib); But Israel does not know, My people do not consider.”* This verse of rebuke from the Lord to Israel is that His children make dumb animals look intelligent and stubborn animals easy to lead. Oxen and donkeys are stupid, but they know enough to go find their master who feeds them. Judah, dumber than an ox or a donkey, cannot distinguish between right and wrong and will not respond to the Master's command.

**The Bread of Life for Dumb Donkey-men** – Why was Jesus laid in a manger? Of course we are told that it was because there was no room for them in the inn. But what else can we see? When God sent Jesus into the world, He immediately presented Him to us as the Bread of Life. But just like in Isaiah's day, we do not consider what the picture of the manger-scene is telling us. Years later, when Jesus was in His ministry years, He told us exactly where true food and true life come from (John 6:48-58).

**A Lowly Place; An Unclean Place** – We also notice that Jesus was put in such a lowly place at His birth and wonder why God did this. Not only is Jesus born and then laid in a donkey's manger, but that put Him in an unclean place. Not just dirty; Jesus was being identified with the unclean. A donkey is an unclean beast of the Old Testament laws. When God set up the Passover memorial laws for Israel, He specifically required that the firstborn of a donkey had to be redeemed with a lamb or else it was to have its neck broken (Ex 13:11-16). Not only that, the firstborn males among the people also had to be redeemed (Ex 13:13). That means that in this manger-scene we see that the food necessary to feed the unclean beasts was also the Lamb that would make unclean beasts clean before the Lord.

**Making the Unclean World Clean** – And this is what Jesus came to do. He was the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14), and He was the Lamb of God come to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). In the Old Testament, when you touched someone who was unclean, you became unclean. But when Jesus touched an unclean person, the unclean person became clean (i.e. Luke 5:12-13). Jesus was coming to a creation made unclean by our sins (Rom 8:20-21) and made it clean. That is why the separation laws were torn down (Acts 10:9-16) and, more importantly, why Gentiles (like us) can be saved and all mankind made one in Christ (Eph 2:14-18).

**The Blessed Material Life** – “God-made-man” was a stumbling block for the Greek-thinking mind and later for the Gnostics who taught that the material world was inherently corrupt. But that is not the story of Jesus and certainly not the picture of the manger-scene. Jesus takes on flesh and this does not make Him unclean. It is only when He took on our sins that He became sinful. The problem is not with the creation (stuff) but with the sin (perversion) of it and with it. This is why Jesus does not care what you put in your mouth; He only cares about what comes out of your heart (Matt 15:11, 16-20).

**The Manger reveals what you are truly hungry for:** *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...”*

**The Manger shows you Who is true food and true life:** *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...”*

**The Manger shows us the way to reconciliation with God and one another:** *“There is neither Jew nor Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

**The Manger declares this world clean and good by means of the Incarnation/New Creation:** *“...behold, all things have become new.”*

*Now, go look at that manger-scene again – and Merry Christmas.*