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Abram & the Wheel # 1

2012-12-01, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

The best breakfasts I've ever eaten have been in the homes of friends as I've traveled, and those times are cherished in my heart for the richness in food and fellowship. But in terms of hotel breakfasts, the Radisson Blu in downtown Helsinki, Finland has the most amazing variety, quality, and abundance.

In fact, European breakfasts in general, whether in a home or hotel, make American motel 'continental' breakfasts seem like picking food scraps out of the garbage in comparison. So much so, that whenever I travel in America and eat at a motel breakfast (Have they never heard of whole grain?) and hear European accents, I want to both crawl under the table in shame of what we are offering our visitors to these shores, and apologize that this does not represent the best of American breakfast food.

No, our eggs do not normally bounce like Beckum bending a kick around a defender. No, Fruit Loops are not what most adults eat for breakfast. I'm sorry to say motel bread is white, processed, and according to numerous studies, takes more nutrients out of your body just to be able to digest the stuff than all the 'fortifying' puts back into the body, so don't eat it or you'll end up malnourished while feeling full.

Pick and choose

The Radisson Blu caters to an international customer so offers a wide variety of European, Finnish, and even American breakfast foods done right. Like circling birds of prey guests with the diversity of the UN move slowly among the choices, pouncing on this, alighting on that, loading up on new flavors. There is something for everyone.

The spiritual world of Abram was not unlike the smorgasbord I've described above; a god for every need or situation, just pick and choose. You see, there is one scripture above all others that I've puzzled on and not understood over the course of over 30 years, and it starts with Abram and his smorgasbord of choices among the gods.

I started asking the Father for revelation on this particular scripture back in about 1979 or '80, and from time to time through the years I'd revisit the verse, look at verses before and after, and come no closer to understanding it, so move on.

But about 15 years ago I began keeping it on the 'back burner' of my mind - you know when you have something on the stove that just needs to simmer, not a full rolling boil, just low heat - so you move that to the back to just sit and cook; that's what I did with this verse.

Drum roll please

"Therefore it is by faith, that it might be by grace." Romans 4:16

It didn't matter the translation, I just didn't understand it for decades. Why did faith allow grace? I've not understood that until the last few years and I've never taught on it - but that's what I want to share with you. It will move you into a deep peace in your walk with Him. At least it has opened a deeper walk for me.

The world of Abram

Abram came from Ur of the Chaldees. This is ancient Sumer, modern Iraq, the Mesopotamia of our earliest history lessons, where modern civilization began. Ur was a capital city, home of the Moon cult, dedicated to the worship of the moon. (Gen 11:27-12:4)

The ziggurat was the highest building in Ur, built upon the highest point. Why was this? It is because to the Sumerians the earth was a flat circle, sealed on the edges by the sky, and beyond that were the stars and moon, to which they could never attain, but fascinated them so. The earth was regulated by the moon and stars, so their lives were very predictable, moving in a circle, always repeating itself, wheels within wheels.

The annual paths of the moon and stars, the rhythm of planting and harvesting, the changing of the seasons made life possible, but the gods that governed all this predictability were beyond reach.

Thus as a priest or priestess ascended the temple steps, appeasing the lower gods of the earth along the way with sacrifices, eventually reaching the top, which was as far as they could go to reach the god who made the sun and moon and stars. This god was the source of their predictability, known to them as the most high god - and completely inaccessible to man.

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The rites of the temple involved having sex with a priest or priestess, because they believed if the gods watched people having sex, they would be motivated to fertilize the seed in the field, the fruit trees, change the seasons, and their business deals would prosper and bear fruit as well. That was Abram's home town.

Manipulation

The whole of the culture of Mesopotamia was built on the regularity of the moon and stars and the manipulating of the gods and goddesses to maintain that regularity, upon which life depended. Life was predictable and rhythmic.

It is this predictability in Abram's life that was about to change, and that change lays the foundation for why 'it is by faith so that it may be by grace'.

Go forth

The Lord appeared to Abram and commanded him to leave his home town and country, with the command recorded in Genesis 12:1. So it was more than merely a voice. In this vision, this visitation from the Lord, God Himself commands 'You get out now'. (Acts 7:2 tells us He appeared to Abram)

This is the Hebrew word 'lekhlekha', which is defined as 'insisting on immediate action'. It doesn't mean in a week or a month. It means 'get out now' in the most insistent of tones.

Radical

Consider how radical this move was. It was stepping out of the circle of life. It was leaving the wheel of predictability to go to a strange land. In Abram's world no one did anything apart from the predictability found in the moon and celestial gods. Any decision that affected one's well being always involved the celestial calendar and appealing and manipulating a god or goddess to first get their blessing, but it always remained within the circle of life.

When the Lord appeared to Abram, He was setting Abram apart from this predictability, from this practice of religious exercise to appease and manipulate the gods. It is the moment He went from the most high god, to The Most High God. This God could not be manipulated.

God came out from among the gods of the world and essentially said to Abram, "Unlike the gods, don't be afraid my presence in your life, be afraid of my omnipresence in your life." He is God. Capital G. Later this reverential fear would be noted as 'the beginning of wisdom'. (Proverbs 1:7)

Bring it on home

For time and space I need to pause here to suggest that the foundation of all false religion is man's attempts to manipulate God - from which God pulled Abram. To treat God like a god who can be manipulated by our religious exercise, is at least sinful and possibly blasphemous.

From Cain who offered that which came from his own sweat and effort rather than submitting to the innocent blood of the sacrificial lamb, to the Christian who goes to church that extra night because they want God to remember they have urgent needs, false religion is marked by man's attempt to manipulate God, and indeed, lower Him to the level of a mere god that can be manipulated and cajoled into action. Serving us rather than us, Him.

From the Christian who feels they have to yell at the top of their lungs to express their sincerity or the person dropping \$100 bills at the feet of the guest speaker so God would (fill in the blank) heal, prosper, answer - no matter how well intended, He is God, not a god who can be manipulated.

We are not at the Radisson Blu breakfast smorgasbord, picking and choosing which part of God we want to manipulate or sample today like Abram's neighbors might have chosen which god they needed to manipulate depending on whether they needed a business blessed or crops to grow: The God of healing, I'll do this. The God of supply, I'll do this. The God of promotion, I'll do this. He cannot be manipulated.

And not only that, when God stepped out of the calendar and rhythm of Abram's world, He showed that unlike the gods, He not only won't be manipulated, He is also unpredictable.

And with that we are starting to see why it must be by faith, which means relationship, not formula - so that it may be by grace. Step off the religious wheel...until next week then, blessings,

John Fenn

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Abram & the Wheel # 2

2012-12-08, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

I've been taking you on the journey I traveled to discover the meaning behind 'it is by faith that it may be by grace', in Romans 4:16. As I mentioned last week, I've been thinking on that verse for decades, but am sharing here how I learned its meaning along the way.

From last week you'll remember: In the smorgasbord of gods Abram's neighbors were used to appeasing and manipulating, we saw how the Lord appeared to Abram, revealing that He cannot be manipulated, and unlike the gods; He is unpredictable.

From religion to faith

When Abram stepped out of the predictable, manipulate-able gods to walk with the Most High God, he left religious efforts of doing something to appease this God. This God could not be manipulated. He was independent. He was unpredictable.

When God moved Abram out of the rituals of religion, He laid the groundwork for what we have today. This is because once a person leaves ritual it requires a one on one relationship with God. No longer could Abram make an offering to the moon or stars to predict if his business venture would be successful, only God could predict. Therefore if Abram wanted His blessing to know if a venture would be blessed, he had to know Him.

The friend of God

If God revealed Himself to Abram as just one of the smorgasbord of gods, just the biggest of them all, Abram would have continued in ritualistic religion trying to appease and manipulate God. Trying to divine the future of his business ventures by doing X so God would do Y.

Once he separated himself from religion to actually know and walk with God, all efforts of trying to manipulate Him stopped because he actually knew Him. Friends don't manipulate friends. He is the only man in the Old Testament called the friend of God. Not Moses, not Elijah, not Noah or Enoch or Adam. Only Abraham is called the friend of God. He is the father of our faith because he broke out of religion to relationship, and beyond relationship, to friendship. He walked in New Testament realities.

Many of us have known the Lord long enough to have witnessed and perhaps participated in various religious acts trying to manipulate God, trying to divine the future of our lives, acting just like one of Abram's neighbors in the predictability of their religion, for if it is anything, (false or man-worked) religion is predictable.

Religion is a matter of maintaining control of the people really, going back to the priestesses of Ur - you must be at temple when the doors open to make the right sacrifice and say the right things or you won't be blessed - all the way down to today's religion governing giving, time, dress, words, and even who you may or may not socialize with. (Certainly not that family that left the church, everyone knows they have demons :)

100 fold return

For me? It was 1978-'79, the first year Barb and I were married. I worked for the PTL Club in Charlotte, North Carolina - Jim and Tammy Bakker - at Heritage USA. My salary was \$150 per week, of which I took home \$111.50. We would tithe either \$11.50 or \$15.00 depending on our need of that 'extra' \$3.50. Back then, we could go to the local Red Lobster restaurant for their \$2.89 all you can eat popcorn shrimp special. This was a huge treat since many of our meals consisted of crackers set on a cookie sheet, 1 tiny piece of diced onion, a tiny piece of cheese, placed in the oven to melt the cheese, a dab of mustard - that was dinner. Often. Very often.

Then we heard about the '100 fold return' teaching, in which someone took Mark 4:20 out of context, claimed it was talking about money, and said if you gave to God He would return it to you 100 fold. We were only 20 years old, what did we know? So we gave \$15 per week expecting \$1500 back any day. It never happened, and it didn't feel right in our spirits. Something was wrong.

Barb discerned it: "We used to tithe because we love the Lord and His people. Now we tithe because we are expecting something back. We moved from giving out of love to giving to get, and that's wrong." So a prayer of repentance later and heart adjustment, and we've given only out of love ever since. Grace empowers us to do the right thing, not as a license to not give/do right, but empowers us to do right with a right heart.

Rituals abound in modern 'faith': 100 fold return, praying x prayer for the next 30 days to see y result, gather people

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in a stadium to shout at the top of their lungs (to the God who actually lives inside them and who knows their thoughts before they think them) to convince God to send revival, in a strange twist making God our adversary, the positive confession - many Christians are like the residents of Ur trying to manipulate God!

All things are possible

When Abram was at home in Ur with a god for every cause, the residents of Ur knew the motives of each god. There was a god to bless the grain, a god for the cattle. A god for the business deal. A god to heal, a god to protect, a god for a new baby, a god for the dead. Every god had a specific purpose and therefore they knew each god's motives. They could appease and manipulate each according to the situation.

When God proved He was not one of them, that He could not be manipulated by ritual, He required a personal relationship, He was revealed as unpredictable - it shook Abram's world. Yet it is that fact He cannot be manipulated that makes faith possible. If Abram could do X and God would do Y, then faith is not involved nor possible, it is only ritual - works based salvation, not relationship based salvation.

Because God's motives and thoughts cannot be divined and discovered by ritual, all things are possible. In Ur, X sacrifice got Y result - always, no more, no less. Because God cannot be manipulated by X it takes the limits off - all things are truly possible. Before Abraham faith had no place in religion.

What a risk

If this God who appeared to Abram for the purpose of getting him off predictable religious ritual into relationship was a bad God, Abram risked disaster. At least in the ritual of the gods he knew what he was going to get; A lamb sacrificed in the lambing season netted 50 healthy lambs born, sort of thing. Now actually knowing God meant Abram has everything to lose for the fact there was no top limit also meant there was no minimum he knew he would get.

With the sacrifice of 1 lamb to get 50, he knew at least he would get maybe a minimum of 45 lambs born. But with no ritual which actually served to give Abram confidence in the ritual and then by extension confidence in the god, he had to trust the character of God Himself. He had better be a good God!

The way the Lord showed Abram His goodness was the conception and birth of Isaac. Consider that Abram had a very strong sense of individuality, for when the Lord appears to him in Genesis 15:1, Abram asks in verse 2: "What you going to give me, since I am childless?" That's bold. That's strong. That's confident.

With this God, the individual really matters, emphasizing again that God seeks relationship, not ritual from us. It is that strong sense of self that made Abram such a friend of God. Who else would dare to know God? Consider that the Lord appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - while all around these men people were doing religious acts to manipulate the gods into blessing the crop, or the stock, or life. What boldness for Jacob to wrestle with God! What boldness for his grandfather to ask: "What are you going to give me?"

Robots

Religion takes away the individual to make robotic drones. Do X and God does Y. If you want blessed come Sunday night AND Wednesday night so God will know your need is urgent. Leave your hair long lest you offend God. Give to get, have the high prophet talk to God on your behalf and give you a word - it is all ritual, manipulation, and there is nothing individual about it - nothing requiring an individual to actually get to know God. Yet that is the very thing Abram introduced - he was the friend of God.

The individual matters. Fast forwarding to our day, God now lives inside of us, Jesus told the disciples (and all who would walk in obedience with Him future: 'Now I call you my friends'. THAT is how much He values the individual, how much He values you as a unique one-of-a-kind child of His. He values each of us enough to live inside us! How dare we shrink back to the practices of Ur, treating Him like He is 'out there' and one to be manipulated - no! He is inside us! (John 15:15)

The reward of Abram's risk taking in trusting the character of God, was Isaac. God's goodness was proven when He gave Sarai the one thing she knew she could never have, but desired most: A son. In fact Hebrews 11:11 states: Sarah conceived and was delivered of a child when she was past age because she judged Him faithful who had promised. She judged God as faithful. Only friends know each other well enough to make judgement calls on their character like that. Amazing. Not a ritual to be found, they knew each other.

If God is good, which He proved to Abraham and Sarah, then there is safety in the uncertainty of not being able to manipulate God. There is safety in not knowing all His purposes. There is safety in trusting His promises. The fact He cannot be manipulated, cannot be predicted, whose motives cannot be discerned makes Him safe because He is Good.



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Therefore it is by faith, so that it may be by His grace.

For the first time in man's religious history, great and wonderful success is possible for the individual, or real and horrible failure, based on their walk with God. Forever off the treadmill of predictable ritual, man is freed to know God, to dream the impossible. Faith undermines and makes obsolete rituals and temples, cast onto the pile of irrelevance, knowing that Christ is in us, and He is the hope of glory. More next week, blessings,

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Abram & the Wheel # 3

2012-12-15, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,
I closed last week talking about how the individual matters to God, But how was Abram to know this God?

Mother Teresa

In 1988 Mother Teresa's *Missionaries of Charity* looked for a building in New York City suitable for a homeless shelter they wanted to open. They visited Mayor Ed Koch and he offered them 2 fire-gutted buildings for \$1 each, the nuns raised \$500,000 for renovations, and they started the project.

Wedging itself between the Mayor's gracious heart and the nuns' homeless shelter was the massive bureaucracy of New York City. For 18 months the nuns traveled in frustration from hearing to hearing trying to get permits for this and for that in order to remodel the buildings. The final insult came 2 years into the process when city officials suddenly decided they now required an elevator, adding over \$100,000 to the cost, though the homeless shelter would only occupy the bottom floor and the nuns explained, their beliefs forbade them from using an elevator.

Mother Teresa walked away from the project. This is the opening story in Philip Howard's excellent book from 1994, *The Death of Common Sense*. Though it is a secular book about how ever increasing though well intentioned law gradually strangles a society's creativity and ability to function, it could just as easily be about religion versus relationship.

As a parable, the well intentioned Mayor relates to the Lord, and Abram is represented by the nuns, with the bureaucracy of New York being the religion Abram left behind. The nuns had personally visited the Mayor and gotten his word, just as Abram had been personally visited by the Lord. There is no other way to know a person or God but by their word and by their presence in our lives. Don't let religious bureaucracy and rituals get between your relationship with God or it will shut you down as surely as those nuns were shut down from their noble goal.

Once off the wheel, how do you know Him?

Abram, now Abraham, walked away from the rituals of the religion he was raised with, rituals placed between man and the gods as a sort of buffer. But this God of Abraham gave no ritual, no action, no good work between the two of them which would have enabled Abraham to know his standing before this God.

Thus, over the next 100 years of his life, God revealed elements of His character to Abraham. (We are told he was 75 when he left town upon seeing the Almighty, and he lived to 175 years. Genesis 12:4, 25:7)

Over the span of a century Abraham learned He was the Giver of the Promised Land in Genesis 12, the Almighty God in Genesis 15, El Shaddai the Source of Life in Genesis 17, The One allowing tender intercession in Genesis 18, Jehovah Jireh the Provider in Genesis 22 and into friendship.

Thus, Abraham knew God by His Word when He appeared to him, and by His presence in his life. This is how we know Him too. For this reason in part Paul says: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles (non-Jews) through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." and "You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:14, 26)

The blessing of Abraham is in part, the freedom from ritual to know God by His Word and by His presence in our lives, the Holy Spirit. It is by faith so that God might demonstrate His grace to us.

The reason for the law

You may ask about the laws of Moses and the ritual God Himself gave Moses - those 613 laws outlining how man may approach God, how man is to treat man, even down to what types of food to eat and not eat. If God wanted

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relationship, then why did He give Moses the law?

The answer is found in Romans 3:19 and Galatians 3:21: "Now whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and all the world may be found guilty before the Lord." "If a law could have been given that would have imparted eternal life, then righteousness would have come by the law."

In other words, God gave the law to Moses to show mankind there is no ritual, no religious action that could make man righteous. So once again, the Lord took mankind back to the truth revealed to Abram - there is no ritual, no law, no exercise that can make a person right before God. Only a 1 on 1 relationship with God with no ritual between us, makes a person righteous. What Jesus did on the cross ensured this ability to personally know God.

The Word revealed

After the deaths of Moses and Joshua, Israel went through nearly 4 centuries of roller coaster existence, from revival to the depths of sin and back again. Finally came a boy named Samuel, to whom one night the Lord stood in his room and called: "Samuel, Samuel". When Eli figured out it was the Lord calling the boy he told him to go back to his room and answer:

"Then the Lord came and stood as He had the other times, and said, 'Samuel, Samuel.'" The Lord appearing to Samuel was the start of the 'modern' age of prophets in the Old Testament. Samuel was the first prophet in relationship with a king of Israel, and this pattern of king and prophet would continue through Malachi. In keeping with this pattern I Samuel 3:21 says: "...the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel as the Word of the Lord."

As Abraham knew God by His Word when He appeared to him, so too would the prophets through the centuries. The vision of the Word of the Lord was how He communicated to the holy men. If you have had the idea the prophets wrote their books as if some unseen hand were merely guiding their pen, you are incorrect. The Word of the Lord appeared to them, and they wrote what they saw:

Isaiah - "The vision of Isaiah the sone of Amoz which he saw...The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." Isaiah 1:1, 2:1

Jeremiah - "...then the Word of the Lord came to me saying, Before I formed you in the belly I knew you...then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth..." Jeremiah 1:4-9

Ezekiel - "...the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God...the Word of the Lord came specifically to me, Ezekiel the priest..." Ezekiel 1:1-3, (but most of the book is his visions of the Lord)

Hosea - "The Word of the Lord that came to Hosea...and the Lord said to Hosea..." Hosea 1:1-2

Joel - "The Word of the Lord that came to Joel..." Joel 1:1

Amos - "The words of Amos which He saw concerning Israel...the Lord said..." Amos 1:1-2

Obadiah - "The vision of Obadiah, the Lord God says..." v1

Jonah - "The Word of the Lord came to Jonah...And the Word of the Lord came a second time to Jonah saying..." Jonah 1:1, 3:1

Micah - "The Word of the Lord that came to Micah, which he saw..." Micah 1:1-2

I don't have the space to list the rest - but understand that ever since "The Lord appeared as the Word of the Lord to Samuel", when the OT prophets say 'The Word of the Lord came to me', they are talking about the Person known as The Word of the Lord, in a vision or what we'd call, visitation. (You may be interested in my 2cd/mp3 series 'I AM' to learn more)

It is this same Word of the Lord that Abraham got to know when he stepped off the circle of religious ritual to know God. He knew Him by His Word and presence in his life - that same for the prophets - they saw Him as the Word of the Lord.

A person's word is the expression of their character, the word of a person flows out from their character, and their word is a result of their presence in your life. Thus, the Word of the Lord which flows out from His (the Father's) presence became THE means of knowing God. The Lord would appear as the Word, give him His word on the subject at hand - and let them walk it out in faith.

Made flesh

From Abraham to Malachi they knew God by His Word, with each appearance/visitation revealing a little bit more about His goodness, His plan, more about the Word of the Lord.



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The Word of the Lord came to men down through the centuries: Abraham in roughly 1900 BC, Moses in 1400 BC, Samuel about 1050 BC, Isaiah in 750 BC, Habakkuk in 620 BC, to Malachi in 430 BC...and then 400 silent years....as if the universe itself was waiting, counting down the time...then around 4 BC-1 AD this most amazing thing in all the universe happened:

"And the Word was made flesh, and lived among us..." the apostle John makes that amazing statement in John 1:14 - that Word of the Lord who appeared to the boy Samuel, to Isaiah and showed him heaven in Isaiah 6, who put His hand on Jeremiah's lips to call him as a prophet, who appeared to Jonah and told him to go to Nineveh, then a 2nd time after his time at sea, to Ezekiel who saw the cherubs and Him on His throne in chapter 1, to Micah with the revelation that 'He has shown you what the Lord requires, to do right, love mercy, and walk with your God'...and now THAT Word of the Lord who visited the prophets through the centuries, has become a Man and lived among us.

Amazing Grace! Forever freed as Abram was from the circle of religious ritual, the whole of mankind can know the Word of the Lord personally - He became one of us! The conclusion of this series next week. Blessings,

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Abram & the Wheel # 4

2012-12-22, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

The Word became flesh and lived among us. What an amazing statement in John 1:14. The Word that appeared to Abram to pull him out of religion into relationship, that Word who appeared to the prophets through the centuries, was now made flesh. The Word of God the Father, became a man. Let's look at that.

What happened in heaven

Hebrews 1:1-3 explains what we've been looking at the past 3 weeks:

"God (the Father) at various times and in many ways spoke to the fathers by the prophets. But He has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...who is the brightness of (the Father's) glory, the express image of (the Father's) character) and who upholds all things by the Word of (the Father's) power..."

This Christ, the Anointed One, lived with the Father in glory all of man's existence and before, but would as the above says, at various times speak to the prophets down through the centuries until the time came to reveal Him as God's Son, the Word of the Father's power.

Philippians 2:7 says He 'emptied Himself', which is the literal meaning of the Greek word used here, 'ekenosen'. The self-emptying Son of God, not of His deity, but of His rights and privileges of being God's Son. He chose not to exploit His privilege, but wanted to use His great authority to restore mankind to the Father.

My most solemn vision

Many years ago, among the first visitations I had with the Lord and with my guardian angel, I asked the angel how they (angels) regarded we mere humans, for now we are less in rank but one day will be over them in rank. He looked at me with horror that I'd even hint at them not liking the future reversal.

"It is RIGHT! It is PROPER! Remember, we know Him as Creator, but you know Him as Savior!" And with that I was in the Spirit, taken to heaven, watching an event unfold as a mere bystander as if I were at a parade but with no emotional attachment to the event before me. I was just there, watching, and not knowing why I was there.

What seemed to be millions of angels were standing before the throne of the Father, which was an intense light that didn't hurt my eyes at all, I just simply could not see any details, but that wasn't the focus of attention anyway.

Suddenly, out of the light of the Father's throne came walking the Lord Jesus, as if stepping out of a bright fog to be revealed as he continued slowly, deliberately, looking straight ahead. He did not turn around to look at the Father, He just kept walking quietly, solemnly, on.

As He passed where I was standing, though as one several feet/meters back from Him, as if I had arrived too late at a parade to get the closest seats to the street - the angels parted to let Him pass through their midst, some looked on, some lowered their heads, some knelt on 1 knee with lowered eyes, some knelt on both knees. I just stood and watched as what was happening was very solemn, not a sound was heard, no one spoke. Heaven was deadly serious

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about whatever was being played out in front of me. The angels were worshipful, reverent, and amazed. As He had just passed where I was...

Our Savior

Suddenly we were back in my living room, and my angel continued: "You just saw what happened when He left heaven to be conceived in Mary's womb. We know Him as Creator. That He, our Creator, would humble Himself to become one of His creations for the purpose of suffering death because of His great love for you, is beyond us and wonderful. We are amazed at His love for you. You know Him as SAVIOR, and it is good, and it is right, and it is proper that you be over us, for the great love with which you are loved."

It was nearly a year later that I happened to be reading Hebrews 10:5-7 when the depth of what I saw suddenly hit me like a ton of bricks: "Sacrifice and offerings are not what you wanted, but a body is what you've prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have had no pleasure. Then I said, Look, I am coming, in the fullness of the book it is written of me, to do your will O God (Father)."

His conception

That body was given in Mary's womb. We don't know how it was He emptied Himself to be conceived as an embryo and growing baby in her womb, but it happened. We know that the blood traits are carried by the male, not the egg of the woman, thus in mankind sin is passed father to son and on to all mankind. But this blood was different because the Source of conception was heavenly.

Thus the Father's Son carried pure blood, untainted by sin, in his veins. All man, yet all God, the Word appearing here and there through centuries to mankind, now took upon Himself human flesh for all eternity. For He is raised from the dead as a man as well, now a glorified body, but a human body still.

And so it was the angel Gabriel told Mary how conception would happen: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest (Christ, the Word of the Lord, as Hebrews 1:3 states, is the Power of the Most High) will overshadow you, therefore the holy one to be born of you will be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35

The word 'overshadow' is interesting as it means 'to throw a shadow upon', as a cloud passing overhead. It was in that overshadowing that Christ, the Word of the Father's power, emptied Himself of all rights and privileges as God's Son, to become a human baby in the womb, albeit with pure blood untainted by sin in His veins. Not half God half man, but 100% God and 100% man.

The shepherds

Luke 2:8 tells us shepherds were in the fields watching over their flocks. This only occurred in spring and fall, and many expected Messiah to appear in the fall Feast of Tabernacles, called the Festival of Lights, celebrating God living with man. We should note the sign given to the shepherds by the angel: "And this will be a sign to you; you will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a feed trough."

Historically, we know as Israel grew and cities swelled, many families didn't have animals required for sacrifices. Also, the population of the tribe of Levi grew along with the rest of the nation, yet only a small number were required in service to the temple.

By the time of Jesus many Levites had become shepherds and raisers of other animals to supply the animals used in sacrifices for the city dwellers, to be sold in the temple, and their home area was Bethlehem. So it was priests that these angels appeared to, to tell them Messiah the Great Shepherd and final sacrifice, had been born.

Mere underwear

But why was 'swaddling clothes' a sign? Swaddling clothes is what we'd call today, underwear. The softest cloth available, as you can imagine, is what was used to wrap the newborn Jesus. But to priests these clothes meant something additional.

In the temple, used swaddling clothes from priests were turned into wicks for the lamps in the temple. The greatest of these lamps is called 'The Light of the World'. It was during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Festival of Lights, that the Light of the World lamp was lit with great ceremony, burning the oil and wick of swaddling clothes. That sign, the oil representing the Holy Spirit, and the 'wick' which was Christ Jesus to be later 'burned' as the last sacrifice on the cross, that was the sign to the priest-shepherds.

And this whole series of Abram stepping out of the repetitious wheel of religious exercise to actually know God, finds its conclusion when the Word of the Lord, that One who appeared to mankind through the centuries, was made flesh and lived among us, that we may know God.



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That is why the Luke 2:13-14 says immediately after the lone angel tells the shepherds the sign of the swaddling clothes: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army (host), praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

That is not saying you all be at peace with one another - it is the armies of heaven saying glory to God, He is saying 'peace and good will towards mankind'. The Word became flesh - the expression of the Father and His love for us, embodied once and forever in Christ Jesus. Amazing grace. And that is why it is by faith, not ritual, that we might receive His grace. Amen and Merry Christmas!

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