

Once upon a time, the God of the universe became one of us

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Christmas:

Once upon a time, the God of the universe became one of us – a newborn child. I know we've heard the story; we know what happened – Mary and Joseph and the baby and the shepherds and the angels. But the heart of the story is this; once upon a time, the God of the universe became one of us – a newborn child.

This is a miracle too huge to comprehend. Like most people, I can only come at it through the story. But even stories are hard if we can't hear them like a child does.

Our adult concerns mix things up. There he was; the God of all, lying in a manger. The most important person in the world! And we start thinking about things like hygiene or security or privacy or protocol. If he was such a VIP, who was looking after all those things? But the story ignores our adult concerns. Angels invite in a bunch of grubby gate-crashers. There are no special precautions taken – not even considering how young the mother is. No, she'd just had to endure a long journey on foot, or on donkey-back. And she'd had to give birth amongst farm animals.

Once upon a time, the God of the universe came among us as the first-born child of an unmarried teenager, and God took no special precautions for a safe arrival.

Why? Well, it seems that God just wanted to be with us on our terms; you can't really be *with* people if you set yourself apart. That would have made Jesus something like a tourist in an air-conditioned bus who never gets out; just waves at us

through tinted windows as the bus roars on to the next attraction.

But God didn't just want to look at us; God wanted to be with us – Emmanuel – to be one of us. So, once upon a time, the God of the universe became one of us – a newborn child.

If a great ruler needed shelter and hospitality from us and asked for it, didn't order us to give it – that'd make us equals, wouldn't it; that ruler and us – on the same level as each other.

That's what God has done for us; the God of the universe came among us as a newborn child, needing shelter, needing food, and not too much later, even needing to flee persecution as a refugee. By coming in that way, God changed *us* somehow; called us to care for God – to become like God is – givers of love and care. God's need; God's vulnerability; God's helplessness – they call something from us which can heal the world far more wonderfully than power can.

Power is another of those adult concerns we plague ourselves with. With all the problems in the world Jesus was born into, why didn't he come as a super-hero, stop wars, end social injustice, wipe away the evils of prejudice, dishonesty, greed, poverty, illness and environmental destruction? Wouldn't that have been better?

I don't think it would. It's hard to argue why, but essentially, it's best demonstrated in the story of the life of Jesus. Once upon a time, the God of the universe became one of us – a newborn child. God is born, grows up, and lives for many years a life that is ordinary like ours; works, eats and sleeps. God takes the time needed to win our trust. God starts doing this in the baby we greet today; Jesus.

You can trust a baby. We can deal with someone who's just like we are; we know where they've come from. We don't feel threatened; we don't think they'll ask too much of us, or

think too little of us. This is what God did for us; God took the time and the shape needed to win our trust. And because of that, when Jesus grew up and started telling us about the Kingdom of God, we could understand what that meant in a totally new way, because Jesus spoke in a language that emerged from human experience – think of his parables; Jesus spoke our language.

When he healed and forgave people, Jesus scandalised those in power – and also many of us who prefer to see justice ‘really’ done. But slowly, gently, he taught us God’s way of healing, accepting, life-giving justice, peace and mercy. And we accept it from him because we know him; we can trust him. We can see the depth of his commitment to us.

In this baby, we can see how God works. Jesus comes gently to open up channels of communication with us that don’t threaten us. In Jesus, God models love and commitment and understanding and acceptance and everything else we need to become fully human – everything we need to live lives filled with emotional and spiritual security.

The Christ Child has done this – called us to summon up the real resources of our humanity; simply to be there for each other in the same way as we would with a baby – with our compassion, our care, and our readiness to nurture.

God transforms humanity in Jesus; the baby of Bethlehem. In Jesus, God is seen to learn what it is to be one of us so that trust and understanding can be complete. So we’ll let him touch us and we’ll listen when he tells us that there’s a world beyond our minds, our pride and fear and guilt. It is called the Kingdom of God.

So when once upon a time, the God of the universe came among us as a child, needing shelter, needing food, and soon, even needing to flee persecution as a refugee, God changed us all. God our shepherd somehow lifted us from dwelling on our

battles and our fears and weaknesses, and made us like shepherds too. God called up our capacity for transforming love from deep within us all.

When I, when you meet this Child, God begins a slow, intricate process of calling from our most profound depths the greatest gifts and the truest strengths our humanity can give birth to. God calls up our true selves, made like this child we worship, in the image and likeness of God. And that's something no superhero can do.

Once upon a time, the God of the universe became one of us – a newborn child. Glory to God in the highest.

God bless all of you and yours this Christmas. Amen.