

Two wonders

At the beginning of Lent I found myself singing an old hymn. It is in the children's section of the old Methodist Hymnbook. There are not many hymns in that section and as there was always a children's hymn in the morning service at church I must have sung it many times. It is imprinted on my memory.

It is a thing most wonderful,
Almost too wonderful to be,
That God's own Son should come from heaven,
And die to save a child like me.

The more I meditated on it the more I felt drawn to Jesus and his wonderful love. It speaks of two wonders: the first, "that God's own Son came from heaven" and the second, "that he died to save a child like me". These two wonders, that even a child can grasp, are so utterly amazing that the whole of creation gasps.

The apostle John affirms that we are children of God: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1 NIV) So this hymn speaks to me.

The all glorious God, eternal, majestic in glory, reigning over the whole universe, came to earth – was incarnated and lived among us - and he came not to a palace of splendid architecture, and royal dignitaries, not to wealth and honour, not to a royal crib, prepared with great care, furry blankets and knitted garments by family and friends, not with toys to cuddle, not to the media trying desperately to get a picture for the waiting public, but to a smelly stable, straw for his bed and parents who feared for his life. He came and lived among us. He felt the pain of his parents' anxiety, caught their fears and lived with their stress. This is our God! Living with us in all the nitty gritty of our daily lives, knowing the coldness of hostility even as a toddler. We kneel at the crib, filled with wonder, and can only worship and adore.

But there is a greater wonder. This royal baby grew to manhood in the obscurity of a small land in a far-away place and almost unnoticed. He faced rejection, condemnation and the most appalling death – crucifixion. And He did it, not for his own honour, to draw the wondering crowds to cheer, but offering himself to humiliation and shame, abuse, taunting and disfigurement – a disgusting sight. He did it for me, for it was my sin that he carried and the sin of the whole world – only God could bear the weight of such sin and pain. As we kneel before the cross in all the reality of its ugliness and stench,

"The rapture swells, the wonder grows,
As full on us new life still flows,
From our unchanging God".

Thomas Hornblower Gill

This is the secret hidden in this life of woe, it is the secret of new life: sins forgiven, guilt dealt with, pain wrapped up in love, joy beyond expression, fulfilment, contentment, all in fact that we could ever desire. And all that He desires is the love of our poor hearts.

If you have never loved him, will you love him today? If you have loved him over many years will you give him more love today? We can pray together:

I want to love You Lord;
O light the flame within my heart,
And I will love You more and more,
Until I see You as You are. William Walsham How (alt.)

