

# The Right Emphasis at Christmas

I don't know what it's like at your house in December, but many of us have a Christmas tree prominently displayed. Probably some lights and a box or two of ornaments—including the ugliest, but most treasured ornament: the quirky little ornament your child made in preschool class.

Our habits and traditions with Christmas decorations are as varied as the number of recipes for dressing (and I'm sure your mother's dressing is, of course, the best). Some people go all out (I'm thinking of you, Barbara, with your eleven Christmas trees), and some take a minimalist approach. I have a friend who displays a Charlie Brown Christmas tree, and another friend with a tree decorated solely with Star Wars ornaments. Others have holly and ivy everywhere; others like to run up their electric bill with enough Christmas lights to be seen from the International Space Station.



There is one constant in almost every home of Christians: a manger scene. Of course, they can be varied as well. Some are elaborate, some are large, and some are homemade. (If you want a laugh, Google “ugly manger scenes.”) Years ago, my parents gave us a manger scene they purchased in Israel. It's made of olive wood and looks great, but the baby Jesus looks like an 85-year-old man. (He reminds me of Benjamin Button in the F. Scott Fitzgerald story.)

Our manger scenes serve as a daily reminder of what we celebrate at Christmas: Jesus, the Son of God, come to earth. This is certainly fitting and appropriate, but I sometimes feel like our sole focus is on the baby Jesus. Jesus as a baby. I mean, c'mon, who doesn't love a newborn?

The songs we cherish underscore this.

Away in a manger, no crib for His bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head;  
The stars in the heavens looked down where He lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the poor Baby wakes,  
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.  
I love Thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky  
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh. (Away in a Manger)

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, All is bright  
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child Holy Infant so  
Tender and mild,

Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace. (Silent Night)

Wonderful songs indeed, but let's not focus so much on His infancy and His newborn cuteness that we lose sight of His incredible majesty. To be clear: Jesus is the central part of the story, but let's give equal emphasis to the truth that He is the sovereign Lord of the universe. I am especially drawn to the Christmas hymns that lift Christ up in this regard. Consider these verses from “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.”

Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ the everlasting Lord;  
Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of the favored one.  
Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.  
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

Hail! the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail! the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings.  
Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die;  
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.  
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King."

That's great cause for rejoicing! This Christmas, as you read the Christmas account in Luke 2, include this passage from Philippians 2.

“Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross. For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:5-11).

Merry Christmas.