

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

December 2014

What Kind of Sweet Little Christmas Picture Is This?



Have you ever noticed that when you look at a picture with you in it, you always check to see how you look first? Do thoughts like, *Is my nose really that big or is that just a bad angle?* or *Wow, I am actually pretty good looking*, run through your head? It doesn't matter if the picture was taken with the rest of your family standing in front of natural beauty as glorious as the Grand Canyon, the first thing you see is you.

I'm old enough to remember when Christmas cards actually had a picture of the man-

ger, magi, shepherds, a star, and the Christ-child on them. What do our Christmas cards look like now? You guessed it: they are photographs of the family standing in front of the Grand Canyon (and yes, I actually sent out one of those) or with our favorite pet or in front of our new car or house. Like with everything else, we've made ourselves the center of the Christmas story, and we're using it to trumpet our own story . . . a story about our family and how wonderful we are . . . actually, the story I'm most interested in is the one mostly about how wonderful I am.

Then, for a brief moment, something else starts to take center stage, and the whole world begins talking and singing about Someone else . . . at least for a few moments, because the Christmas story is the one story we can't find ourselves

in. It is the one story strong enough to pull us out of our story and into it. And even though we keep trying to find ourselves there, I am pretty sure that none of us has any prenatal photos of angels trumpeting our birth to a group of shepherds in the Middle East. And although I am fairly certain that I was pretty much a perfect baby, I'm also certain that I was conceived in the normal way. No world ruler set out to kill me because he felt threatened by my birth, and although my grandma did bring my mom a handmade blanket, that is nothing compared to gold, frankincense, and myrrh offered by magi to foreshadow my destiny on a bloody cross.

The story of the Nativity, the story of the second person of the Trinity becoming an infant,

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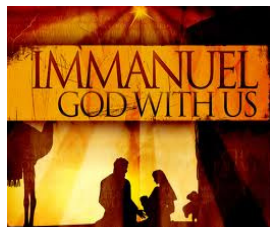
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wet with amniotic fluid, wrapped in coarse rags, seeking sustenance from his mother's trembling little body, is meant to shock us, to force us to look away from ourselves for just one moment, to him, to his birth. This birth is a glorious picture of scandalous humility and terrifying love beating in a little baby's heart. Who could imagine that his love would make him serve us like this? Why is the one whom the angels worshiped lying there in a cold stone feeding trough surrounded by smelly and warm cattle manure?

What kind of sweet little Christmas picture is this? And where are we? Where is the portrayal of our family standing in front of the Grand Canyon looking

all put together in our cool (or uncool) Christmas sweaters?

Even though this is what we say we believe, and our hearts say "yes" and "thank you, Lord" when we hear this story, we still want Christmas to be about us and our delicious cookies and our mad present buying skills. We keep inwardly yelling, *Look at me!* while there he lies, first in this manger, then in a cold stone tomb. And he says:

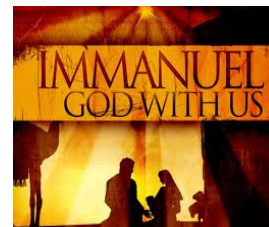
No, you look to me. I'm the only one who will bring you peace. I'm the only one strong enough to take center stage and hold it . . . and I love you even though you're always trying to take my place. I'm here to save you from your self-focus and all your sins and I will do it. You can believe because I've done this, I'm lying here like this. My name is Jesus, and I'm your Savior.

[by: Elyse Fitzpatrick & Jessica Thompson - The Gospel Coalition]

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

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