

The Way In The Manger

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger” (Luke 2:7).

My family knows that I am not a big Christmas person. I enjoy seeing some of the decorations and really love for the children and the grandchildren to have a good time. Several years ago, however, I got lost somewhere in all the ludicrous and greedy materialism of the season. Let me confess, however, that because of my untiring love for music, a few of the old Christmas carols pull at my heart.

One of the first carols that I remember hearing as a boy was “Away in a Manger.” In my home church, all of us children would sing it every year in the Christmas play. At an early age, I couldn’t appreciate “O Come, O Come, Immanuel” or “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” as I do now. But something about the fact that there was not any room for baby Jesus in the inn and He had to be laid in a manger wedged in my heart.

Because “Away in a Manger” was first published in a Lutheran Sunday School book in 1885, many people have had the misconception that the lyrics of this Christmas carol were written by Martin Luther himself. Actually, the author is unknown. Ten years later, however, in 1895, William J. Kirkpatrick composed the music we now use. Since Jesus is the “Way,” allow me to change the title of the song to press home a few Christmas thoughts at this time.

The Way in the manger was the way to the Father and salvation! When Mary laid the baby in the manger—the animals’ feeding trough, she was laying down the One Who would say, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). The manger did not appear to be very promising, but the One Who was “come from God” also “went to God” (John 13:3), and would bring the true knowledge of God and His salvation to sinners.

The Way in the manger was the way to freedom and sufficiency! On another occasion, after Jesus taught that He was “the door of the sheep” (John 10:7), He added, “I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). While going in and out represents freedom and liberty, finding pasture portrays the sufficiency that is ours in Christ. Jesus was wrapped in “swaddling” clothes, or somewhat bound, that we might be set free.

The Way in the manger was the way to fullness and satisfaction! The Apostle Paul explained that “the gift of grace, which is by one Man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” (Rom. 5:15). The tiny baby may not have filled up that feeding trough, but those of us who know Him and have experienced His grace can testify that He has filled and satisfied our lives. May others be brought to this same salvation, sufficiency, and satisfaction that is in Jesus.