



In Search of Swaddling Clothes and a Manger

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Luke 2:10-12

When we read about the swaddling clothes mentioned in Luke, we often think of a diaper or being wrapped in a blanket, much like we swaddle babies today. But in Luke 2:12 the swaddling clothes seem to have a greater significance. So much so that the angel used it as a way to help the shepherds identify the Christ child.

The words “wrapped him in swaddling clothes” (Luke 2:7) comes from the single Greek word sparganoō. The word means to wrap a newborn child with a special cloth by passing the strips from side to side. The cloth used is the same cloth (or swaddling bands) that were used when the mother and father were married.

Before a couple were married, the bride would start work on embroidering swaddling bands. During the wedding ceremony, the couples’ hands would be wrapped together with these bands in a symbol of union. Later, the bands would be used to secure the blankets around their newborn children.

The swaddling bands would include symbols embroidered on them that would indicate the family’s history or lineage. Since Mary was from the tribe of Judah, the swaddling bands may have had symbols like a lion, lamb, or tree of life. Since she came from the royal line of David, she would have also been able to use the royal colors of blue and white.

Since anybody familiar with the Old Testament would have known that Christ would come from the lineage of David, referring to the baby’s swaddling would have been a very good way to identify him.

Also striking would be his lying in a manger. A manger is a feeding trough designed to hold the animals’ food above the contaminated ground. The manger would have likely been one of the cleanest places among the animals. The contrast of a baby dressed in royal swaddling clothes lying in such a place would definitely call the attention of the shepherds.

Like the shepherds back then, we also seek Christ. And the angel’s message is still important to us today as we look to identify him in our lives. As we look for him, we will find signs of his noble lineage that testify that he is the Son of God. We will also see evidences of his greatness and power. But most often we will find him not in palaces, but the humble mangers of life. It is in our everyday lives that we see his tender mercies and feel of his love. If we forget to stop and look for him there, we run the risk of missing him.