

"What is man?"

by David Orton

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California, USA. Image by © Tony Rowell/Corbis

*“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?”*

Psalms 8:3-4

Christ’s birth is the consummate divine statement concerning man. When the omnipotent eternal God, the creator of the universe, condescended to the human estate by nestling into the womb of a young Hebrew girl, Mary, he declared to the cosmos his estimation of man.

But let us first, like David the psalmist, consider the heavens. Our sun, the nearest star, is 93 million miles away and a million times the size of Earth. Even so, once we leave our solar system and venture into our galaxy, the Milky Way, the utter vastness of the universe becomes even more evident. At the speed of light (186,000 miles per second) it would take 100,000 years to travel across it. Imagining our solar system (i.e. our sun and its nine planets) as a small coin, the next nearest solar system within the Milky Way would be the equivalent of two football fields away. And then there are millions of stars throughout the galaxy, many with similar distances separating them. As incomprehensible as this may be, beyond our galaxy lies a vast expanse of billions of galaxies, the furthest observable from earth being 14 billion light years away (1 light year = the distance travelled at the speed of light over a year = 5,878,625 million miles). God only knows what is beyond this mind-bending enormity.

In the face of this vastness God has chosen man. Unlike the closed system of materialistic scientism, making man the product of evolutionary random events – of time plus chance – man is, in fact, the product of God’s choice. Tucked away in this tiny corner of the universe, seemingly insignificant, man has been imbued with inherent value; created in God’s image, male and female, as the apex of his creative genius; and called to be his vice-regent over creation.

Jesus, born of woman, is God’s final act. As deity and humanity were forever fused in the God-man, Jesus Christ, a transaction of cosmic proportions occurred. The Son of God also became the Son of Man, suffering and dying in the stead of man so as to restore him as God’s corporate Son. Heaven has now kissed earth in the only begotten Son—God and sinners are reconciled; and Christ, as the “last Adam” and the “second man”, has become the progenitor of a new humanity—one that radiates “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” and rules the universe with him as fellow-heirs.

With the psalmist, therefore, our hearts are filled with wonder—God the Father, creator of the universe, is mindful of us. In the birth of Christ he has become “Emmanuel”—God with us.

How majestic is his name in all the earth!

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