



Luke 2:8-14

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Special Music: “Angels we have Heard on High” Share the Gift

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5mdybeyLVc>

The following is from an interview with Chris Hadfield that can be found in the March 2010 edition of Universe Today and is written by Nancy Atkinson:

Spacewalking: Through an Astronaut's Eyes

What is it really like to go on a spacewalk? Some astronauts have said there are no words to describe the experience, but we talked with astronaut Chris Hadfield – the same guy who gave the best description ever of going to the bathroom in space – and asked him to convey his thoughts about his EVA experiences. Hadfield has done it again, and has now given the best description ever of a spacewalk.

UT: Chris, you were part of the STS-100 space shuttle crew that flew to the ISS 2001, and you had the opportunity to do a couple of spacewalks to help in the construction of the station. I once heard you describe one of your spacewalks where you said you were holding on to the side of the space station with one hand with your face into the wind as it were, and you were looking out at the rest of the entire Universe. For all of us that wish we could experience it, what is it really like to do a spacewalk?

Chris Hadfield: Gosh, I'm not sure how to describe it. I was there for the birth of all three of my children. I did the first F-18 intercept of a Bear bomber off the

coast of Canada. I represented Canada in a bunch of different levels, including as a fighter pilot. I was a test pilot doing all sorts of very fascinating, challenging, brand new work. I went to Mir, I went to the ISS. But nothing compares to going outside for a spacewalk. Nothing compares to being alone in the Universe; to that moment of opening the hatch and pulling yourself outside into the Universe.

Sometimes you're driving on a mountain road, it's slippery and you're doing a bunch of curves and you don't really see anything because you have a cliff falling away on one side and another cliff up on the other. But suddenly you come around a corner and you say, "Oh wow!" And there you've got the whole valley in front of you, or they make one of those nice pullovers where you can stop and look out, and you do, and you stop and you get out of your car and walk over to the edge and you see where you are, where all those little myopic turns have taken you.

A spacewalk is very much like that in that the opening of the hatch is probably step 750 of the day. And steps 1 through 749 were all boring and minuscule and each one was on a checklist and you had to do every one right, so you were very painstaking. But suddenly you do this one step, and suddenly you are in a place that you hadn't conceived how beautiful this could be. How stupefying this could be. And by stupefying I mean, it stops your thought.

You've probably heard me say this before, but I knew I couldn't keep notes up there and I would forget stuff so I sorta resolved to myself that I would verbalize and attempt to, as eloquently as I could, express what I was feeling and what I

was seeing so that later I could listen to the recordings of it and remember, and not have missed such an amazing experience. And yet when I listen to the transcripts of what I said, most of it was just, “Wow!” It was so pathetic! But the experience was just overwhelming!

It is like coming around a corner and seeing the most magnificent sunset of your life, from one horizon to the other where it looks like the whole sky is on fire and there are all those colors, and the sun’s rays look like some great painting up over your head. You just want to open your eyes wide and try to look around at the image, and just try and soak it up. It’s like that all the time. Or maybe the most beautiful music just filling your soul. Or seeing an absolutely gorgeous person where you can’t just help but stare. It’s like that all the time.

What do we do with awe? You know, those breathtaking moments that leave us in a trance knowing that this point and time in space is so wonderfully conceived that it cannot be replicated. That moment when we realize that only God could have given us the gift of His presence through this event. Words cannot describe it. Music comes closer but still falls short. The experience is so very soul lifting that we do not want to move on from it, but rather spend hours of contemplation trying to grasp and hang on to every detail, even though we know that it is impossible to do so.

What do we do with that moment where we hold our first grandchild and look into his or her eyes and see not only the child but the reflection of ourselves staring back at us. What do we do with that moment when we watch a truly grand sunrise and bask in colors that could only come from God's palette, or that moment when we sit with someone we love and watch one final sunset. What do we do with that moment when we hold someone's hand and embrace their soul as they pass on to God's presence.

Chris Hadfield knew that he was about to face such a moment as he stepped through that hatch into space. So, he decided to narrate it to himself so he could listen to it later. It was that important to him. Only to realize when he listened to the recordings, that his attempts to describe the moment while being in the moment were just so much drivel. Here was the "WOW" moment in his life and all he could say was "WOW." It was an attempt to make the nature of the surreal, real by giving it an analog interface. There are moments that we can experience more with our heart than our mind and we voice them the worded expressions are trivial and fall so very short of the experience.

What do we do with that moment when we are lost in our thoughts, watching the night sky and suddenly it explodes with light and sound and we face the glorious presence of an angel when we have never experienced the presence of an angel before? How do we subdue our terrified minds in order to process the magnificence of the scene before that is appealing to our hearts and blowing our minds? How do we hear the words being spoken to us when we are enveloped in

a radiance that is raining down peace, love, joy and mercy onto us? And, when we think that that moment cannot be overshadowed, that there is nothing that could make that moment any more majestic and wonderful, we suddenly find ourselves surrounded by a multitude of angels singing “Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will towards men.”

How do we race to a barn, just as the angel told us to do, and find the Creator of the Universe, embodied in a baby, wrapped in cloth, lying in a feed trough surrounded by his mother, father and animals? How do we explain to people the wonder of knowing that God has stepped into the very world He created to bring salvation to every man, woman and child on this planet, when we know that our very words will fail us? If we were to record that moment with a tape recorder and listen to it later, we would realize how insignificant our words were in comparison to the actual event. And yet, this story cannot be contained. It explodes from our mouths and spreads throughout the world that the Messiah, as promised, has come to rescue us. And with all the overwhelming events surrounding the birth of this child, there is the awesome fact that he is born not in a palace or temple, but instead, with humility in a stable and laid to rest in a feed trough.

Seriously, how do we deal with all that? How did the shepherds, wise men, townspeople, deal with that?

All too often, in our feeble attempts to express the true nature of the birth of Jesus Christ, we tend to make the event more earthly than spiritual. We tip the

scale towards the commercial and embrace tradition. We almost leave the manger as an afterthought because it is so very hard to deal with the other-worldly awesomeness of the event. Instead of opening our mouths and shouting “Christ is come” we wallow in marshmallows, Christmas lights, shopping and worry. The “Christ is come” that we should be shouting from the mountaintops becomes whimper amidst the holiday clutter.

But we can find the Awesome. We can change the balance of the scale so it is back in line, where the birth of our savior outweighs the hollowness of a season based more on tradition rather than the magnificence of God’s gift to each of us. We can give voice and celebration to Awesome

Mary gives answer to our questions. She doesn’t try to minimize or change the circumstances. She simply does what we should all do. In Luke 2:19 we are told how she managed to keep the awe in the events surrounding her:

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

again

“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

Mary does two things that enables her to capture and retain the events surrounding the birth of her child. A child born of immaculate conception and brought into the world to change the lives of all people, and bring salvation to the entire world. Any human being would have a difficult time wrapping their heads

around this, but Mary is extraordinary in the way that she grasps what God has done in and through her. She wants to remember this moment. She needs to remember this moment. And not with a recording or with words. That would diminish the amplified awesomeness of the moment.

1. First, Mary treasured up all these things. She gathered not only the her own story but the stories of all those who bore witness to these events, and she treasured them. They became a part of who she was. She was a living testament to the wonderful nature of God and how much He loves the human race. She kept the stories close to her, seeing them as treasures to be relived in her mind and her heart. These stories were greater than any gift of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They added value to her life and validated her choice to follow a path that was pleasing to God. A path no other human would ever experience. She had found favor with God and became a vessel for bringing the light, love and grace of God into the world.
2. Second, “She pondered them in her heart.” She didn’t wrap up these treasures and put them out of sight. She consciously sought to remember the stories and ponder the significance of them in her life and the lives of the people around her. Her mind and her heart became a treasure chest and allowed her to find peace in her soul and also share the contents of that treasure chest with others. She didn’t become a treasure hoarder, but rather a person who shared her treasure.

So, I ask the question again, “What do we do with Awe?” If you have never experienced the awe of Christ Jesus in your life, then you are missing out on the greatest event that can be treasured in your life. A treasure so vast that you can’t begin to ponder it because you have never experienced it.

I grew up dreaming of being an astronaut. I had the bug. I listen to the words of Chris Hadfield and my soul still fills with the wonder of an experience that I will never have. I am not an astronaut. I can listen and be moved by the words and the stories, but I cannot experience the actual wonder of walking in space.

However, I can still remember the day that I chose to accept Jesus as my Lord and Personal savior; the day I chose to live a life dedicated to following Him. It has been almost sixty years since I made that decision and I can still relive that moment like it was yesterday. It is an event that I treasure and one that I ponder in my heart. It’s not about baptism, although I did follow through and encourage all followers of Christ to follow through in believer’s baptism. It’s not about living a good and fruitful life, although I have strived to live a good life and fruitful life. I have often failed, but God continues to be merciful to me through His grace. It’s not even about living forever, even though God’s promise to us is for eternal life.

It’s a about a relationship with the Creator of the Universe. It’s understanding that even in the worst of circumstances, I still have the shepherding love of Jesus Christ to see me through. He feeds me the Bread of Life. He gives me the Living water. He shelters me in the palm of His hand. He uses me to lead others to the knowledge and understanding of His grace. He walks beside me in my pain and

my joy. He carries me when I am unable to walk. He gives me peace in times of turmoil. He loves me even when I fail. He gives me courage when I am at a loss and can't seem to move forward. He is the essence of my being, the song in my heart and the reason for my purpose, praise and worship.

If you don't know that in your life. If you have never experienced that kind of awesome relationship that God freely offers to you, and you would like to have that kind of relationship, then you need to search your heart, be willing to open your spirit to the creator of all that is, accept and confess that you have fallen short, accept the forgiveness that God freely offers through the sacrifice of His Son, the child in a manger, the brother that you never knew you had that will walk with you, hand in hand, to the throne of God Himself.

That, my dear brothers and sisters, is what you do with awe.

AMEN