

THEY FOUND HIM IN A MANGER

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Reading: Luke 2:12

If you were a *hungry* horse, and I put some food in your eating-place, you'd come prancing right up to eat it. If you've ever seen a hungry horse, you know how eager they are to eat. They are hard to hold back. And they really enjoy their food!

Can you picture a horse's feeding trough? —a box about 3 ft. wide, 1½ ft. across, 2 ft. high. The horse's master dumps its food into this—some grain or grass, some salt or perhaps some water. Did you know that a “manger” is just a feeding trough like this? It is a dish from which the horses eat.

Now, think about the Christmas story: Why was the baby Lord laid in a horse's feeding trough?

The first reason was “because there was no room for them in the inn.” There was no house for them to stay in, and no bed for Him to sleep in, so they had to use something else...something that was in the stable. There was a manger there, so they used it! They made it comfortable with some grass or blankets, and laid Him in that.

But I want to talk about another reason why they laid Him in a manger. They laid the Lord in a horse's feeding place, because this has a spiritual meaning. It means that the Lord satisfies our spiritual hunger, just like food satisfies a horse's hunger.

A good person's mind is like a hungry horse. It is very eager to “eat.” That is, it is very eager to *learn* from the Lord.

Learning is like eating. We take into ourselves truths from the Word. We “chew them over” or think about them. And when they become a part of us, we feel happy and content—just like a hungry horse that has just had a good meal.

The things that we get from the Word give us spiritual energy. If a horse ate bad food or didn't eat enough good food, it would become tired and run-down. Then it couldn't do its work very well. It couldn't take people on journeys. It couldn't run. It couldn't pull a cart. It couldn't carry someone on its back over mountains and over rough trails and roads. It would stumble or fall down or just stop working.

The same would happen to us if we didn't have good spiritual food from the Word. We would get tired of doing useful things for other people. We'd get tired of being nice. We'd become too la~' to think about whether or not we're doing what's right. We wouldn't care any more about what the Lord wants. In fact, if we stopped reading and learning from the Word, we would soon forget all about the Lord. We would forget who He was, and why He made us!

This would be sad. Without the Word, instead of helping other people and loving them in the right way, we'd do all the wrong things and be a big nuisance—like a tired horse who does its work badly. If we stopped getting good food from the Word, we would even start to hurt others—like a weak horse who falls down on a rocky path, and throws its rider over a cliff; or like a horse who's too sick to watch where it's going and control itself, so it tramples over people and crushes them.

The truths of the Word give us spiritual energy and life. They teach us the right way to love others. They teach us how not to hurt them. When we eat the good food that is in the Word regularly, we are healthy, happy, useful, and satisfied.

Now when the Lord came into the world, there were many people who were hungry to learn from Him. But they didn't know how to find His truth. They didn't know where to look. They were so starved for truth that the Lord had to come Himself to teach them and feed them with heavenly bread.

And you know something amazing? The Lord, when He came, *was the Word!* He told this to His favorite disciple John—that He was “the Word made flesh!” (The Word which was born as a man). Deep down, the Word is the Lord Himself, because when we really understand the Word, we are understanding the Lord. And when we love and obey the Word, we are loving and obeying the Lord.

Maybe you can see from this why the Lord once said:

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger. and he who believes in Me shall never thirst....Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:35, 53).

These words may seem strange at first. The Lord wants us to *eat* Him?! But if we understand that the Lord *is* His Word, and if we understand that all the Lord's life and energy and satisfaction come to us from His Word, then it makes sense.

Now do you see why the Lord was first laid in a feeding trough when He was born? The good people in the world, like the shepherds, were hungry to learn about the Lord. They wanted to be filled with His truth and satisfied with His

goodness. To these people it was a special sign of hope that the Lord would bring them new life. So the angel had promised: “This will be a sign to you [that a Savior has been born]: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12).