

*Living Nativity: True Myth*  
*By Jason Huff*  
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Tonight, I want to tell you a story about Jack and John. Jack was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Raised in a nominally Christian home, his mother died when he was only ten years old. Soon afterwards sent off to boarding school, he became an atheist by his early teens. The one comfort he had was reading. Jack was fascinated by ancient stories and mythologies and legends. He studied at Oxford University, but his studies were interrupted by World War I. He served in the British army and reached the front line in France on his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Severely injured by friendly fire, Jack eventually returned to duty and then to his studies in 1919. He was recognized as a student of the highest caliber of Greek and Latin literature, ancient history, and philosophy. He eventually became a teacher at Oxford for nearly three decades.

It was in his second year teaching that Jack met John. Jack didn't immediately take to John; in his diary, Jack mentioned that he found John a smooth, harmless chap who might just benefit from a smack or two. And yet not long after that, Jack and John found a shared interest – a love of Norse mythology. The two become close friends, and they started a club where they could compare notes about the stories of ancient gods and epic wars and brave heroes.

Jack was still deeply committed to his atheism, yet for all his lack of belief, God still had a hold on him. John was a committed Roman Catholic who didn't force his faith on Jack, but Jack clearly saw the results of John's faith. Jack wrestled in his soul about what he believed, shaken by the fact that he had stopped believing that he didn't believe. At the age of 31, Jack became a theist. He didn't know what god he might believe in, but he was certain that some higher power was out there. He just wasn't sure who or what that was.

But God wasn't through with Jack yet. One night, Jack and John and another friend met for dinner and took a stroll through the grounds of Oxford. They began discussing the ancient myths they were so fond of and the truth that these legends hid, and then how they related to Christian belief. Jack finally realized it – Christianity was the true myth, the culmination of all these legends and tales from around the world, the historical reality that all these ideas from all these places hinted about. The longings of the world told in story after story found their truth in God's Kingdom. They stayed up talking well past 3 in the morning. As Jack would say, "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and when we [arrived], I did." The ancient mythologies he had studied all his life prepared him to see that God was at work in our world, making right what once went wrong, the promise of all of history fulfilled in Jesus.

So you might have guessed that Jack and John were people of note. Jack, the man won over by the truth of faith, was what they used to call C.S. Lewis, the writer of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity* and a host of other books that made him the greatest Christian author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Over 100 million copies of *The Chronicles of Narnia* have been sold. Having sold 3 million copies in English, reports from China tell us that the book that most Chinese Christians have read besides the Bible is *Mere Christianity*.

And Jack's friend John was John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, the author of the best-selling fantasy series *Lord of the Rings*. By far the most influential fantasy author ever, Tolkien had huge difficulties finishing his stories, and for many years Lewis was the only one who read his material. Tolkien said that if it weren't for Lewis' interest and unceasing eagerness for more, *Lord of the Rings* would never have seen the light of day. Jack and John's influence on modern culture and the faith that centers all their work is still felt today.

I wonder what Jack and John might have thought about our world today. We live in an age where myths have returned. It's amazing that we live in a society that is abandoning Christianity, but it still wants hope. It still wants something to believe in. And so we have mythologies everywhere. *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, the Marvel universe, the DC universe, *Game of Thrones*, and the list could go on for miles. The main form of entertainment in our culture today is about superhumans of one sort or another doing extraordinary things. They are the equivalent of modern gods – the villains cheat death to come back again and again, the heroes face incredible David vs. Goliath odds, they do the impossible. We don't have to look back to Greek and Roman mythology; we have our own.

Now it might be hard to compare Iron Man flying around in his armor with Zeus or Hercules. But both the new tales and the old tales have something in common, despite all their differences. They point out the longing in our hearts for meaning, for purpose, for direction. We want to know, "Why do we exist?" We want to know, "What I am here to do?" We want to know, "Is there a reason for human suffering and pain and death, and will they be overcome?"

We come up with stories that attempt to give us hope and courage and a sense of morals. But those stories never completely satisfy us – which is why Hollywood can make billions of dollars every year recycling the old ones and trying to make new ones. The stories can never satisfy us because they aren't really true. As much as I love Luke Skywalker and Frodo and Harry, they aren't real. They can teach me things, but they can't save anybody.

That's why Christmas hits a nerve deep within us. Christmas is where heaven meets earth, where as the song says, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight." All the hopes and legends and prophecies, they come true. They are realized in an infant child born king of the Jews. God, who put that longing for meaning and purpose and direction in our lives, reaches out to us and says, "You will find meaning and purpose and direction in me, through my Son." All the heroes of the Old Testament story who really existed in history? All of them point to the final hero, the hero above all heroes, who will give His entire life to us and for us.

The name we remember for Jesus most at Christmastime is Emmanuel, which means "God with us." This is where the ancient mythologies break apart and the truth becomes such a blessing. In ancient religion, you didn't want "God with us." That was a horrifying prospect. Gods came down to create mischief, to cause problems, and to punish those they felt were unworthy or disrespectful. Many of them were all too human – lustful, violent, vengeful. You didn't want Zeus within a hundred miles of your daughter! Even when the Israelites first encountered God in the wilderness, after He had rescued them from Egypt, the signs of His glory and might up on the mountainside terrified them. Even after all God had done for them, they preferred a golden calf, a religion they could control, a far off God that left them alone.

But in the true story, the Gospel, what all of the myths and legends hint about, Emmanuel “God with us” is the very best thing that could ever happen. Instead of pouring out wrath, God sends His love. Instead of bringing terror, God brings salvation and peace. In the infant Jesus, instead of God punishing us for not being on His level, He gracefully comes down to us on our level to show us who He has made us to be. He entrusts Himself to us.

And unlike the gods of Mount Olympus, Jesus makes Himself nothing, a humble servant, so that we can be raised up, changed, and brought into His Kingdom. In the ancient myths, the warning was always, “Be good or the gods will bring retribution.” In the true story, because we cannot be good enough, Jesus is good for us, dressing us with His own goodness so we can enter into the gates of heaven with thanksgiving and praise. For all that will believe in the Christ, eternal life awaits.

So enjoy Christmas. Enjoy the stories of wise men and angels and shepherds. All of them tell us that God wants a relationship with you. He is not distant at all. He has come near. If you’ve never entered into that relationship, do it tonight. Let go of the baggage and burdens you carry and just believe the story beyond all stories, the truth that all the best stories point to, that our Creator loves us and wants to be near us; that the Father’s Son came into our world so that we might know Him forever. And that’s no myth. That’s the truth.