



The Stairs at Preah Vihear's Koh Ker Temple

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Preah Vihear, Cambodia
Christmas 2023
CHRISTMAS EVE FROM PREAH VIHEAR

Heaven Came Down to Us
December 24th, 2023



He Came Down

The Secret Place, Koak Rumdeng, Preah Vihear — "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory ..." John 1:14

A friend who lives in Siem Reap, the site of Angkor Wat, recently visited the famous temple. In the center of this world renowned site, is a staircase leading up to the pinnacle of the temple. I have climbed those stairs, and they are extremely steep, the steps high and hard to navigate. My friend said that a guide told him that the steps were intentionally made that way to remind the King, who was the only one allowed to climb to the top of the sanctuary, of how difficult it was to go to heaven. After almost 35 years in Asia, I have seen many examples of people trying to attain salvation—from self-mutilation to pilgrimages to good works. Like those steps at Angkor Wat, it is not only difficult to ascend to God, but impossible. No human effort could bring us back into fellowship with a Holy God. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, *"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."* Isaiah 64:6

At Christmas time we remember and celebrate the incarnation of Jesus. The Nativity is the story of how God did not stay in the sanctuary of Heaven, preserving His own holiness and maintaining His distance because we were not worthy to be with Him. Rather, knowing we were helpless to reach Him and save ourselves, God did the unimaginable. The Creator of all things descended from His glory in Heaven and clothed Himself with flesh, in order to live among us and become familiar with our sufferings, sympathizing with



our weakness (Isaiah 53:4; Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16). The Christmas story is not just a holiday, it is the incredible story of God's plan of redemption which even the angels could not imagine. Jesus came down to us, when we could not ascend to Him. The Holy One of Heaven descended to this sin infected earth and became flesh and dwelt among us. Jacob's dream of a ladder spanning from earth to Heaven was fulfilled in Jesus (John 1:51).

The real Christmas story is told in many of the carols we hear and sing during the Advent and Christmas season. In the song *O Come O Come Immanuel* one verse goes—*"O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heavenly home. Make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery."* Jesus, through His Incarnation, has opened wide the way to our real Home. He is Immanuel, God with us, and has gone to prepare a place for us. For 2,000 years He has been preparing. And by all accounts, His second advent seems imminent, if we take notice of the signs around us.

No, God did not just wash His hands of us, leaving us to languish in this dark world of sin. Even though we were far away from Him, enslaved in sin, he did not abandon us. *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..."* (Ephesians 2:5). Heaven came down to us. No more futile efforts, religious exertions resulting in nothing. He descended those stairs to the lowly manger, born in the flesh, God with us. Jesus, through His blood and sacrifice, has made us worthy to ascend with Him to Heaven to be with God forever. This is the real story of Christmas. Let us not lose it in all the shopping, cookies, decorations and celebrations. Take a moment to ponder the mystery.

"Let all mortal flesh keep silence, And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded, For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth, Our full homage to demand."

[Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent by Fernando Ortega](#)

Blessed Christmas from the Living Fields, *Joel*

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