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The Last Battle, by C. S. Lewis is the final book in the Narnia series. It is also among the most emotional and dramatic of the books as it is an allegory for the end of the world. In this book we learn the fates of most of the Narnia children, who were the great kings and queens of Narnia. However, what is fascinating about this book is that the end of the Narnian world centers around a stable. In the first part of this book the Narnians are enslaved to a false religion and an anti-Christ figure, or an “anti-Aslan”, in the person of Puzzle, the poor hapless donkey in a lion costume, is enshrined in the stable. As the story moves towards the great and final battle and the certain defeat of the Narnians, the figure of the anti-Christ is removed from the stable. The Kings and Queens of Narnia, the children of the series, who had been dead, begin to appear from the stable door. Finally, right before the battle is lost, the earth begins to tremble, the air grows sweeter, and a brightness flashes behind the opposing armies and Aslan, the golden lion and allegorical Christ appears at the stable door.

Aslan opens the stable door, the stars begin to fall from heaven, and darkness covers the land. And from all over Narnia every creature comes running to Aslan, thousands upon thousands of creatures come and meet Aslan face to face, and those who were good and loyal to Aslan pass by his right side and through the stable door, and into heaven. Those who were wicked and evil pass by his left side and are swallowed up forever in his shadow. From inside the stable door, the children who had been frequent visitors to Narnia witness the end of the world. Aslan calls down fire from heaven, the wind and the seas roar, and finally all comes to an end. The stable door is closed, and the children turn around to find that they are already in the midst of a new world. They are now in a world that will never know pain, suffering, death, or sin, and it becomes harder for the reader to distinguish between Narnia and the heaven that we are promised by Christ.

There is no denying that the Chronicles of Narnia are an allegory of Christianity. Lewis was criticized **for** how explicitly Christian the Chronicles of Narnia **happen to be**. So explicitly Christian is Narnia that everyone knows that Aslan represents Jesus Christ, and that the Last Battle takes its cues from the book of Revelation. However, this book is unlike the others in that it is dripping with Theological significance. The humble manger in Bethlehem on that first Christmas morn was indeed the door to heaven. The babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger is what set everything in motion, and the last battle will be fought if not physically, then spiritually around that stable that in Bethlehem. And while we do not find in the Scriptures that the Christmas Manger will be the focal point of the end of the world, yet in a very deep sense, it is. The fight between good and evil, the

battle not of flesh and blood but of principalities and powers has always been over God made flesh.

But this story contains another great spiritual truth. Just before the second coming of Aslan, many of the animals in Narnia, both good and bad, found the courage to look through the stable door. Before Aslan appears, the stable had become a source of curiosity to them. Some went in only to run away in fear. Some looked through the door and found only the inside of an ordinary stable. Some walked through the stable door and found that they were in a totally different world all together. Each investigated the stable and according to the state of their souls saw something different. The same is true for us. We look into the replicas of the stable that our world knows, the manger scenes that we use as Christmas decorations, and react to what our souls see. Some look into the manger and see a representation of the first few humble moments of Jesus Christ, the Love of God and Savior of the world. Some look into the stable and see only the dusty representation of an infant, their hearts and minds unable to know Jesus. And some look into the manger only to turn away fearful and disturbed, unable to make peace with the infant who has come to be their Savior.

Today images and figures of that stable abound. But what do we see when we look into that image of the stable? What did the shepherds see when the angels called them and their flocks out of the fields around Bethlehem to that humble little stable? The simple shepherds saw a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. The promised Messiah, who Isaiah prophesied would be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, on Who's shoulders the government shall rest, and who shall reign forever is an infant lying in the feeding trough used by the livestock that knelt beside St. Mary and St. Joseph. The shepherds saw the humblest of births, a child born in a stable because there was not room in the inn. But they also saw that an ordinary stable in the backwater town of Bethlehem was heaven on earth. And this remarkable vision was not granted to the priests and scholars of the day, but to the simple, uneducated, blue-collar shepherds.

We have grown so used to seeing manger scenes, we no longer think of them as being a replica of the great paradox that first manger scene was. When we look into the manger scene this evening and tomorrow, may we look beyond the figurines and see instead a replica of heaven on earth. May we ponder a-new, how God can be born as an infant and dependent upon His mother for His every need. Let us remember that Lewis is right, that the humble door to the manger is the door to heaven. And let us remember too, that this same infant who comes to us this night, will come again at the Last Day and we shall behold Him, to our horror, or to our everlasting joy, face to face. Amen.