
3 Nephi 1 — On the Morrow Come I Into the World — The Sign Fulfilled

3 Nephi 1: the ninety-second year, six hundred years from Lehi's departure. Nephi the son of Helaman departs and is seen no more, leaving the records to his son Nephi. The signs Samuel prophesied begin to be fulfilled more fully — greater signs and miracles — but unbelievers mock, saying the time is past and the believers' faith is vain, and they set a day on which all who believe in the prophecies shall be put to death unless the sign comes. Seeing his people about to be slain for their faith, Nephi the son of Nephi bows to the earth and cries to God all that day in their behalf. And the voice of the Lord comes to him: 'Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world... to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son — of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh.' That night, at the going down of the sun, there is no darkness; the unbelievers fall to the earth, their plan to kill the believers frustrated; and there is no darkness all that night, light as midday, the sun rising in the morning in its proper order — the day the Lord is born. A new star appears. Satan sends lyings to harden hearts, but the more part are converted and baptized, and peace returns — save for the Gadianton robbers in the mountains, who grow as Nephite dissenters and a Lamanite rising generation join them. The chapter is the birth of Christ seen from the other side of the world: the sign given, the faithful delivered on the very edge of martyrdom, and the voice of the soon-to-be-born Lord speaking comfort in the night.

This is the chapter where Christ is born — and we watch it happen from the other side of the world, in a land where his birth means a stay of execution for people who were about to be killed for believing he would come. That is the extraordinary frame 3 Nephi 1 puts around the Nativity. While shepherds are keeping watch in Bethlehem and a star is rising over Judea, on this continent the believers in Christ have been backed against a wall: the unbelievers, mocking that the prophesied sign has not come, have *set a day* on which every believer will be put to death unless the night-with-no-darkness arrives first (v. 9). The birth of the Savior is, for these people, a matter of life and death in the most literal sense. If the sign comes, they live; if it does not, they die that day. And so the chapter holds two births at once — the birth of Christ into the world, and the deliverance of a people on the very edge of martyrdom — and binds them together with a voice in the night.

Hebrew Word Studies

basar (בָּשָׂר) — "flesh" — **basar, the physical flesh of a living body; by extension, the whole mortal, embodied human nature, the frail and perishable creatureliness that distinguishes mortal man from God. To take flesh is to enter the mortal, bodily condition of humanity v. 14 (to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh).** The voice of the unborn Christ names the mystery of the Incarnation in one phrase — *of the Son because of my flesh* — and the Hebrew *basar*, "flesh," carries the whole weight of it. *Basar* is the ordinary word for the flesh of the body, but in Hebrew thought it becomes the great marker of *mortality* and *creatureliness*: flesh is what is frail, perishable, dependent, earthbound — *all flesh (basar) is grass... the grass withereth* (Isa. 40:6–7); *he remembered that they were but flesh (basar); a wind that passeth away* (Ps. 78:39). To be *flesh* is to be mortal, weak, subject to death — the precise opposite of the eternal, unchanging, deathless nature of God. And that is exactly why the Incarnation is such a wonder, and why the Lord's words to Nephi are so carefully constructed. He says he comes to do the will *both of the Father and of the Son — of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh* (v. 14). The One speaking is the eternal Son, fully God — and he is about to take *flesh, basar*, to become mortal, embodied, subject to hunger and weariness and death. The two natures are named in a single breath: divine ("of the Father because of me") and about to be human ("of the Son because of my flesh"). This is the doctrine John states at the climax of his prologue: *the Word was God... and the Word was made flesh (sarx, the Greek for basar), and dwelt among us* (John 1:1, 14). The eternal Word, by whom all things were made, *became basar* — took on the grass-frail, death-bound flesh of mortal man — and the night Nephi hears the voice is the very eve of that becoming. And the depth of it is that God did not take flesh as a costume but truly *became* mortal: *forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy... death* (Heb. 2:14). He took *basar* precisely so that he could die — for only flesh can die, and his death is the whole point of the coming. The God who *cannot* die, by taking *basar*, became able to die, and by dying destroyed death. So when the voice says *because of my flesh*, it is naming the hinge of salvation: that the eternal Son entered the mortal, perishable, death-bound condition of *basar* in order to break it open from the inside. The night with no darkness announced it; the manger received it; the cross consummated it. *The Word was made flesh* — and a Nephite prophet, face in the dust on the far side of the world, heard the Word speak on the night before it became flesh, and was told to *be of good cheer*.

From the Chapter's Architecture

```cross-references John 1:1–14 (*the Word was God... the Word was made flesh — sarx/basar — and dwelt among us... he came unto his own, and his own received him not — the Incarnation and the rejection*, vv. 13–14); Isa. 40:6–8 (*all flesh — basar — is grass... but the word of our God shall stand for ever — the mortality of flesh the Word took on*); Ps. 78:39 (*he remembered that they were but flesh — frail mortality, the basar Christ assumed*); Heb. 2:14 (*he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy... death — why the Word took flesh*, v. 14); Luke 2:8–14 (*the angel and the heavenly host at Christ's birth — the Nativity Mormon shows from the far side of the world*); Matt. 5:18 (*one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled — the law not yet fulfilled*, vv. 24–25, quoted almost exactly); Hel. 14:3–5 (*Samuel's prophecy of the night with no darkness and the new star — fulfilled every whit*, vv. 15, 19–21); Hel. 16:13–23 (*the people reasoning away the signs — the lyings sent forth by Satan that resume in v. 22*); 3 Ne. 2:1–3 (*the forgetting of the signs that this chapter's closing shadow foretells*); 3 Ne. 9:15; 11:8–10 (*the voice and then the descent of Christ — the coming this chapter announces*); 3 Ne. 15:4–5 (*in me is the law of Moses fulfilled — the fulfillment anticipated in vv. 24–25*); 2 Ne. 25:24–27 (*keeping the law of Moses while looking to Christ — the doctrine the believers recover*, vv. 24–25). ```