

“Why in the world did you do that?”

I can still hear my mother’s voice echoing in my mind sixty years later. I had been caught with my hand in the cookie jar, and I was dead meat. I don’t remember when or where it happened nor anything else about the incident. I just remember that I was wrong and I had been caught. What’s more, my little crime spree didn’t make much sense since my mother was generous with her cookies, needing little more than a request to grant her sons’ desires. However, having been a cookie thief before getting caught this time, I did know that stolen cookies tasted much better than permitted ones. Still, my offense was silly, the fruits bearing little proportion to the risk involved, since my mother was a strict, though fair, disciplinarian.

What has stuck in my mind down through the years as a helpful tactic for living is the question itself: “Why in the world did you do that?” Or, as I have gotten somewhat wiser, to cast it into the future: “Why in the world do you want to do that?” It is my prudent mind looking to the future and trying to make me think through the implications of my thoughtless coveting. It is a very good question, whether past or future oriented, for understanding oneself, for freeing oneself from the prison of unquestioning acceptance of an unexamined life.

I have a fantasy of cherubim, seraphim, angels, and archangels, the executive branch of heaven, looking aghast at the Everlasting One and asking the same question: “Why in the world do you want to do that?” He’s just told them His plan to help the hapless human specks inhabiting a third-rate planet circling a minor sun on the fringes of a slight universe that many of the angelic host didn’t even know existed. Their duties took them to far more important activities and they were a little nonplused that the magnificent I AM who caressed each of them every moment of their existence had something in mind they were not privy to. Though to be fair, Michael and Gabriel nodded their heads pensively, perhaps because they had already been messengers and activists in this same place.

“You want to do what with a baby?” they asked.

“Well, actually,” said God a bit shyly, “the Baby is just the beginning. But it will be the most fun part.”

“Wait a minute,” said the mid-level assistants in the State Department, who were used to defining the basics of strange situations, “just what is a human and what is a baby?”
Clipboards ready, pens poised expectantly.

God smiled radiantly, “A baby is the beginning of a human being, and a human being is a cross between nothingness and an angel. They’re an experiment,” said God, gazing dreamily somewhere between two colliding galaxies that everyone knew eventually would produce billions of planets and fascinating life forms.

Furrowed brows indicated that the concept was challenging. Angels are good messengers but they're nowhere near as good at conceptualizing and creating as the Almighty. Sometimes She just left them in the stardust.

"But what do they do?"

"Why, they love," was the august reply. "Or, rather, that's what they do eventually. That's what I made them to do, but it takes them awhile to get the hang of it. They start off as a baby, vulnerable and dependant and a bit self-centered, and it takes them a few years and lots of effort and no little assistance from the Department of Grace and Favor to grow out of that."

("What's a year?" asked the second assistant for Black Holes and White Knights, shielding his question behind a convenient wing. "Hush, I'll tell you later," whispered the Deputy for Temporal Affairs, a not-very-important sub-bureau in the Dimensions Department. "Tempus fugit" was his not-very-helpful closing comment.)

Focusing back on God's obvious pleasure in explaining His plans, the two heard someone say, "But that's what we all do. It's how we are like you." The speaker blushed sweetly as the Divine Gaze wrapped her in obvious joy and approval.

"Well, yes, that's true, little one. But these blobs of spirit-filled protoplasm need extra help. I think there's a glitch in their programming. They've stopped doing what I asked them to do."

The universe of universes filled with a stunned silence. "They don't do what you invite them to do?" came the disbelieving query from a cherub near the back of the crowd.

"Well, no," said God wistfully.

"But... but... don't they know that is the way to be happy, the way just to be?" More furrowed brows indicated that this idea was well-nigh unthinkable and took much intellectual and emotional energy even to conceptualize.

"They're learning," said God somewhat defensively. "That's what the Baby is for. I'm going to be born as a Baby so they can see that love is the way to live, like us, forever."

More stunned, disbelieving silence in the Throne Room. "You're going to what?" came a sigh.

God said, with a huge smile, "I'm going to become one of them and show them how to do it."

"But... you've never done that before," came a wondering voice

"No," replied God, "don't you think it'll be a great adventure?"

"Why in the world do you want to do that?"

"Because they really need Me."

One of the more experienced archangels, who had lots of practice in reading and interpreting God's announcements, said, somewhat brazenly to the Divine Face, "There's something else, isn't there? There's something you're not telling us."

God looked a little embarrassed and merely nodded.

"Well, what is it? C'mon, 'fess up."

"Um, I'm going to live in their world and I'm going to do the hardest thing they have to do; I'm going to die, just like they do."

("What is 'die'?" said a somewhat naive cherubic artist, turning her attention from the next planet she was designing in her mind. "Shhhh," shushed another voice, this from the Office of Resurrection. "It's something that happens only in that universe. It's a coming all apart, so that you no longer are and you no longer love." Added the voice apologetically, "It's not very nice." The artist stared uncomprehending, obviously not believing what she had just heard.)

Neither did anyone else. No one could believe their ears.

"But it's all right," went on God eagerly, "I'm going to give life to that person again, so that He won't be lost to death. He'll live with us forever. And I'm going to do the same for all the rest of them."

The silence lasted for perhaps two hundred billion millennia.

Then, timidly, a voice broke the silence: "Will it really be all right?"

"Have I ever lied to you?" asked God gently.

"Noooooo, it's just so... so..."

Gabriel finally shook himself, folded his wings out of the way, and said, "What can we do to help?"

God's face brightened immediately and She said with a grin, "When we start it all off, I think an angelic chorus singing lustily would be a grand way to begin."

And that's what they did. "Glory, glory, glory," sang the angels. Every subatomic particle and every nanospace to the very edges of the universe rang with their song. The chorus got so excited that they forgot to keep themselves hidden and the sky above Bethlehem shone with the brightness of a hundred billion angels. Scared the heck out of a bunch of shepherds in the hills.

"Why in the world did you do that?" I want to ask.

Except that I already know the answer. Love. All for love. Merely love.

Merry Christmas.