

GOD'S CHRISTMAS STORM

Devotions



On the Greatest Miracle in History

*“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is
Christ the Lord” – Luke 2:11*

Bergloff & Stockton

God's Christmas Storm

Version 1.4



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Preface

Because Christ is greater than any of us know, Christmas is the greatest day of the year; that is, the most important holy day of the year.

Enclosed is a collection of sermons and devotions from Pastor Fred Bergloff and myself that we have given to churches – a resource that lovers of our Lord can use for Christmas messages, devotions and worship. It is not a novel to be read, but truth material to be studied.

This is an unedited work of sermon drafts so a little tolerance may be needed.

Dr. Brooky Stockton



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Devotions on Christmas



The birth of Christ calls for premier worship because Christmas is the greatest miracle in history.

God's Christmas Storm

Revelation 12:1-5



◆ We say, “It was the night before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.” But, this is not the way it was on the first Christmas

When Christians celebrate Christmas, they erect nativity scenes with a lovely young mother figure, a handsome father symbol, and an image of the Christ child lying in a manger.

Surrounding the clean stable are clean lambs, donkeys, camels, and cows. These beautiful pastoral images communicate nothing but peace, tranquility, and happiness.

The Other Side

But, there is another side to Christmas story – John’s violent account of the birth of Jesus found in Revelation twelve – the power of God in human flesh is God’s Thunderclap in the midst of a political storm!

In this book, God reveals blood-curdling images of collapsing mountains, burning forests, demonic locusts, and Herculean dragons. And when John discusses the birth of Jesus, he does not show us a peaceful village in Judea, but a terrifying storm brewing in the Holy of Holies – God’s Christmas Storm.

The contrast between Matthew and Luke’s account of the birth of Christ and John’s account in Revelation is like looking at the two sides of a hand-embroidered picture. The front side reveals the artist’s beautiful stitch work. The backside of the art exposes a mass of tangled knots and threads. Matthew and Luke portray the birth of Christ in a simple,

pastoral setting. John shows us the twisted, tangled knots of human history—the violent storm surrounding the birth of Messiah.

Background

As the seventh trumpet sounds, voices boom like thundering canons: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ” (Revelation 11:15)! In the midst of terrifying judgment (8:7-9:20) the reader might wonder how God’s kingdom could ever be realized in a world full of unrepentant hearts (9:20). The answer to how God gains dominion over the earth is found in Chapter 12 of Revelation.

Let us take a look at it.

The Gathering Storm

Rev. 11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

John sees a dark, terrifying storm brewing in the temple of God.

All Bible students understand this symbolic language. The temple is the dwelling place of God. The ark represents His throne of justice and mercy. The storm brews because holiness and love prepare to release their fury on the landscape of human history.

John uses mythological images to describe the chilling contest. This vision portrays the climatic struggle between good and evil—the conflict of the ages. The war is about how the kingdom of God will be realized on earth. Though the triumph of God’s kingdom was announced when the seventh trumpet sounded (11:15), a question remains, “How will God’s rule be manifest on earth?”

This shocking vision is God’s answer. It reveals how the kingdom of God assumes ascendancy on earth through Christ and the proclamation of the gospel. Before us looms a blinding electrical storm, crackling thunder, ear-piercing voices. A rippling earthquake and bone-crushing hail blast from the temple of God. Out of this blizzard appears a sign.

The Woman

Revelation 12:1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

The word “and” connects this vision to the intense storm brewing in the Holy of Holies in chapter 11. Christ arrival into history was a cyclone -- a massive, discharge of unyielding holiness and pure love swelling with divine energy like giant electric capacitors in the sky.

The vision is a mythological presentation of spiritual truth. We see vivid images of a woman, the sun, the moon, stars, a child, and a huge, ugly red dragon in cosmic proportions.

The woman is Eve and Israel and Mary and humanity all rolled into one.

“Clothed with the Sun” speaks of her royal splendor and honor. Israel was heaven’s beautiful princess (ishah yapha) who gave birth to God’s downpour of love in Christ. With the moon under her feet, Israel became the hope of humanity – a guide in midnight of history. Only she could bring forth the Champion that could defeat the powers of darkness.

The Sun appears to represent Joseph’s father; the moon is Joseph’s mother; and the stars symbolize Joseph’s brethren, the twelve tribes of Israel.

The moon under her feet and a crown of stars speaks of conquest, authority, and majesty.

And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren,
and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold,
the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to
me (Genesis 37:9).

Our gaping eyes stare at the regal queen mother nine months pregnant. She does not smile. She’s in a state of shock and trauma experiencing the symptoms of fatigue, difficulty walking, trouble sleeping, trouble holding urine, shortness of breath, varicose veins, and stretch marks.

But, the scene is more than this. Before us is woman overwhelmed with contractions of the muscles around the uterus just before giving birth. Feeling the intense pressure on the cervix, bladder, and colon, her eyebrows squinch exposing the pain shooting through her lower back. Her open mouth and heavy breathing reveals the body's demand for oxygen. Looking like someone has stabbed her in the stomach and with contractions twisting harder and harder, we perceive the pain has become more unbearable. Her insides are expanding to dimensions she never thought possible. A baby is about to rush through the birth canal.

A Bible verse comes to mind,

"I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16).

Revelation 12:2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be deliverer.

The "she" is the nation of Israel, Eve, and Mary all rolled into one.

What a scene!

We hear blood-curdling cries and shrieking from a woman in the final stages of labor. She is alone, double over in pain clutching her midsection ready to give birth. But, it is more terrifying than this.

Before us is a scene from a horror movie. This woman is on the run, bleeding, seized by labor pains, and searching for a safe place to deliver a child—alone! Could anyone be more vulnerable?

The Ugly Red Dragon

Revelation 12:3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

John looks up and sees a horrible sign that causes his legs to tremble like a pair of oak trees in an arctic blizzard. The lonely woman agonizing with powerful contractions is being stalked by an adversary—a gigantic,

hungry, hideous red dragon—a platted monster lusting to eat her baby. Could anything be more terrifying?

The beautiful, multi-colored, little serpent in Genesis has become the repulsive, ugly red dragon in Revelation. Through the millenniums the massive monster has morphed into a grotesque beast with seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads conquering all humanity but One.

To John's audience the seven heads speak of nations under Satan's control which he used to terrify humanity. The dragon is the serpent, Satan, Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome rolled into one. The ten horns speak of smaller jurisdictions, and seven crowns speak of raw political power. Babylon, Greece, and Rome comes to mind. (See *Surviving the Dragon's Breath*)

To us, the beast is a symbol of the twisted instruments of sin and evil as exercised through powerful governments and their corrupt institutions to enslave men and to crush the truth of the gospel.

The Gospel in a Sentence

Revelation 12:4-5 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

Before us is the imagery of a mammoth, cosmic confrontation between good and evil. So destructive is this red behemoth that it smashes a third of the stars with one whip of his massive tail. With sticky saliva dripping from his bulging, black lips, the sniffing dragon stalks the pregnant woman eager to devour her wet, wrinkled, newborn child while still connected to her body with the umbilical cord. This predator comes to "steal and destroy." The woman is Israel who gives birth to the Messiah, and the red dragon is Satan who seeks to devour Him.

Historic Perspective

Historically, Satan attempted to destroy the Messianic line through Cain, Pharaoh, Jezebel and Athaliah, and Herod. Many other terminators were used by Satan as instruments to annihilate the Promised Seed. The savage military machines of Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece ravaged the nation. The conquest of Israel by these alien powers made it difficult to maintain the Hebrews' purpose, purity, and innocence.

The birth of Jesus is viewed in universal, cosmic dimensions—the contest of the ages – the war of the worlds. The quiet, pastoral scene with sheep, goats, and cows on a peaceful night in a shepherds stable in Bethlehem is obscured by the hunter's chase behind the scenes. Before us is a deadly pursuit by a dreadful monster—like a new born lamb in the pit of a python on a dark, cold night. In labor, the woman appears so alone and helpless without assistance of another caring human being. The growling, sniffing monster prowls through the forest eager to rip the baby from the birth canal and to taste its blood.

Despite the miserable conditions, the woman gives birth. The child born is the Ruler of the nations the political Enemy of this hideous dragon. The baby is God's terrifying electrical Storm, His bone-crushing Hail, His crackling Thunderclap to humanity, His rippling Earthquake, and His deafening Thunderbolt from God's sky to Earth. This baby is destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron and to smash them to pieces . . . and to kill the red monster (Psalm 2:1).

Like a Dream

Like a dream, the story changes dramatically.

Suddenly, the child is snatched from the clutches of the dragon and "caught up to God and to His throne." This is John's way of telling us that Jesus' purity and obedience was rewarded by a promotion to sit at the right hand of God as Christ and Lord (Acts 2:36).

Having defeated the trilogy of evil (Satan, sin, and death), the Lord Jesus is exalted in God's presence as the Messianic King and Savior of His people.

*“And, He shall reign for ever and ever, King of kings, Lord of lords
 . . . repeat in one mighty chorus.”*

John wants us to know that God did not send religion to save us. He sent his Son. He did not send an impersonal, menacing, military machine to defeat Satan. He sent a baby. God’s power and holiness and love are perfected in Jesus. He defeated the trilogy of evil (Satan, sin, and death), and was exalted in God’s presence as Lord and Christ. This is John’s way of informing us that The Babe in Bethlehem is destined to rule the world with a rod of iron and to slay the red monster.

Conclusion

Remember, the great question in Revelation is this: “How will God’s kingdom be realized on earth?”

John hears the whistling winds of a cyclone thrashing in the Holy of holies. He then receives a vision—a mythological vision of a monster’s hunt for a woman and her baby. This is Revelator’s way of telling us that Jesus is God’s terrifying electrical storm, the Savior of humanity.

That Jesus is God’s thunderclap! Do you hear him?

That Jesus is God’s lightning bolt. Do you see Him?

That Jesus is God’s rippling earthquake. Have you felt Him?

That Jesus is God’s bone-crushing hailstone that ushers in the rule of God. Have you yielded your heart to Him?

In summary, Christmas is a time to reflect on the meaning of the birth of Christ. As you think about baby Jesus lying in a manger, remember that his birth was a miracle of history—a messy affair, the result of a cosmic crisis between good and evil. All the forces of Serpent sought to destroy him. But, baby Jesus was no ordinary child. He is God’s Christmas Storm, the perfection of holiness and love blasting forth from the temple of God to wage war against sin. Through Him salvation has come to mankind.

Jesus is God’s precious gift to humanity. The gift cost us nothing, but it cost him everything. Let us take a little time to thank God for his

Christmas Storm -- the Champion who defeated our historic enemies by virtue of his death, burial, and resurrection. For it is through the Gospel the power of God is revealed unto salvation (Isaiah 53:1; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 1:16).

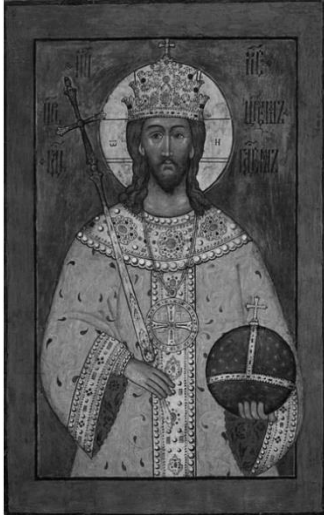
Merry Christmas!

Note: The connotation of the term "Christmas."

Yes, the phrase, "Merry Christmas" denotes "Christ's Mass," but its connotation refers to the wonder of the visitation of Christ to earth and the celebration of his birth. At all times in this brief we refer to the grand, positive connotation of the term "Christmas" and not its denotation meaning. Jesus is the Savior that takes away the sins of the world, not a mystical mass.

Facts About the Royal Genealogy of Christ

Matthew 1:1-19



♦ Matthew 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;

4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;

5 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

7 And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;

8 And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;

9 And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;

10 And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias;

11 And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:

12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;

13 And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;

14 And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;

15 And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon *are* fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ *are* fourteen generations.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

From the Greek word "Book" (biblos) we get the word "Bible".

The word "generation" comes the Greek word pronounced "genesis." Thus, this record describes the lineage-genesis of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Jesus" means "Savior."

"Christ" is not Jesus' last name. It is a title referring to the Messiah, the predicted prophet, priest, king.

The good news of Matthew is that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of Israel. Our Lord's genealogy is based on God's original promise the He would bring forth conquering-savior who would save man from the curse of sin and restore paradise lost. This Messianic promise was given to Eve, Noah,

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David. This, Jesus link to David and Abraham was paramount in establishing His qualification to be Israel's treasured Messiah.

Matthew's genealogy presents the royal lineage of King Jesus. Though He was humble, He was not a peasant!

- Mark has no genealogy of Jesus because his work presents Christ as a Servant of the Lord (and who cares about the genealogy of a servant) – a servant doing the business of His Father -- a servant that has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10).
- Luke presents the genealogy of Christ from his mother's side showing his connection to Adam – that he was a real man and not a phantom – the Son of Man (Luke 9:56).
- John has no genealogy because Matthew presents Christ as the unique Son of God, the Word, and the Creator. Because the Son is eternal, He has no genealogy. Theos has no beginning or end.

The genealogy was written by Matthew, a tax collector who was proficient at recording things, searching records, and presenting details.

This is the last genealogy of any Jew known to man. All other records were destroyed by Titus circa 70 AD; that is, this genealogy is the only genealogy man has of a true Jew.

No present-day Jew can trace his ancestry back to Abraham; that is, modern so called "Jews" are fake Jews from the Gentile, Khazarian Empire (650-968 AD) – a tribe from the Ukraine region that dispersed into Russia, Poland, and Germany around 1000 AD. Moreover, modern so called "Jews" have no genetic link to Abraham, Jacob, or Judah! They are not God's chosen people. Believers in Christ are God's chosen people.

The genealogy in Matthew goes back to Abraham, the Father of the Hebrews, to show that He was a pure Hebrew. In Luke, the genealogy of Mary goes back to Adam showing that Jesus is part of humanity.

1. The genealogy is divided into three sets of fourteen generations.

- Abraham to David, God's chosen king (14).
- David to Jeconiah -- to the Babylonian Exile (14).
- Jeconiah to Joseph: The exile to the Messianic Age (14).

2. Matthew presents Jesus in the history of Israel focusing on Abraham, the father of Israel, and David the great king.

3. The Messianic Promise was given to the world through Adam and Eve; to a nation through Heber and Abraham; to the tribe of Judah, and finally to the family of David; that is, all spiritual eyes were on Abraham, Judah, and David for the Hope of a Messiah Who would come and reverse the effects of Adam's fall.

4. He focuses on three main events leading to the birth of Christ: (1) the formation of the nation beginning with Abraham; (2) the formation of the monarchy featuring David as the first and greatest king; and, re-formation of the nation after the Babylonian Captivity in the return of the exiles to the land of Israel.

5. Why 14 generations? Seven being a number of perfection $7 \times 2 = 14$. Perhaps, the doubling of the number represents the fact that Jesus is perfect -- three times perfect (14, 14, 14).

Moreover, Hebrew letters have a numeric value. The numeric value of the Hebrews letters in the name "David" (Daleth, Vav, Daleth) = 14.

Perhaps, the three repetitions of "fourteen" is a siren blasting: Da-vid, Da-vid, Da-vid (14, 14, 14).

6. Jesus was a Hebrew of Hebrew, from the tribe of Judah, a Jew in the DNA-Abraham-Judah-David nature of the term, but He was not a Jew religiously; that is, He was not a proponent of Judaism (religiously).

7. The genealogy is not exact. Some smaller insignificant relatives are missing from the list; that is, this list a sampling of Jesus lineage – a real, but iconic representation of his lineage back to Abraham.

8. Five women are mentioned in this genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary – a message of grace and honor. Christ loved his

grandmothers and honored them here. Though some of these women committed incest, prostitution, and adultery, scandal does not matter. Each found forgiveness from the LORD.

9. No non-Hebrew males are part of this genealogy; that is, this is a pure Hebrew lineage.

10. The names in the list of both genealogies are a testament to the character of God: His sovereignty, His faithfulness; His goodness, His grace, His protection, His provision, and His mercy.

11. For the Messiah to sit on the throne of David, he had to be a descendent of David!! Matthew shows us Joseph's genealogy back to David to show us Jesus' legal right to sit on the throne of David.

12. The historic crisis revolved around the curse on Jeconiah (Joiachin or Jeconiah or Coniah) – a curse forbidding any of Jeconiah's physical descendants from sitting on the throne (Jeremiah 22:28–30). Since Joseph was a descendant of David – Solomon – Jeconiah, neither he nor any of his physical descendants were permitted to rule in Israel.

What an historical crisis for men of faith!

But, God had a hidden remedy in Virgin Mary.

Mary was also a descendant of Solomon. Being a virgin that gave birth to her son Jesus, our Lord not only escaped the curse on Jeconiah, but escaped the curse on Adam. In the marriage between Mary and Joseph (a legal contract), Jesus inherited all the privileges of His stepfather, Joseph; that is, Jesus inherited the right to be king from Joseph. His lineage to David through His mother Mary qualified him to be king by reason of his ancestry.

Adam to Abraham to David

David and Bathsheba

Solomon
(generations)

Nathan
(1generations)

Joseph

Jesus inherited the legal right to be king through Joseph, but Jesus had no genetic connection to His stepfather.

Mary

Through Mary, Jesus had genetic connection back to David, Abraham, and Adam. Because Mary was a daughter of David, Jesus had the covenant, legal, civil, social, and cultural right to inherit the “sure promises” of David (Acts 13:34). Because Mary was a virgin, Jesus escaped the Adamic curse.

13. The Emphasis in Matthew is upon Virgin Birth!

“And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” – Matthew 1:16

14. Because Jesus was born of a virgin, he escaped the Adamic curse; that is, He had the nature of His Heavenly Father, and not the nature of Adam: *He had no sin, knew no sin, and did no sin.*

15. Because He was a son of David, He was a candidate to be Israel’s Messiah-King.

16. The names in the genealogy of Christ represent the entire history of the Old Testament; the good, bad, and the ugly.

17. Because Jesus was the son of Mary, He was a perfect man with standing to offer faithful men entrance into the kingdom of God. Because Jesus is the Son of God He has the power to save us from our sins.

Merry Christmas!

Facts about the Human Lineage of Christ from Dr. Luke

Luke 3:23-38



♦23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was *the son of Heli . . .*

1. Before Jesus is called the “son of Mary” or the “son of Joseph,” He is first addressed as the Son of God -- “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (3:22).

2. The lineage in Luke called the genealogy of Jesus the (adopted) son of Joseph (Luke 3:23) – a legal fact-claim. It is **not** called “Mary’s genealogy.

3. The phrase “as was supposed” (nomizo!) refers to a custom, social practice, or legal tradition.

4. A knowledge of Biblical customs combined with a little reasoning, scholars corrected concluded this is indeed the **genealogy of Mary**, the unpretentious female descendant of Nathan, the son of David.

In Biblical terms, sons were always called the son of their father, e.g. son of David or “Ben-David” rather than the son of their mother . . . and for good reasons. The Bible gives men the responsibility of rearing sons for the glory of God.

5. Dr. Luke, the physician and Christian historian, gained his knowledge of this lineage by interviewing Mary and her family on one or many of his visits to Jerusalem.

6. There are at least 75 names in Mary's genealogy, each with a history birth, life-struggle, and death. All were provided for by the Lord and protected from the touch of Israel's wicked kings and foreign kings that ruled over them; from famines and feuds; from the sins of adultery and divorce; from spiritual compromise and political division.
7. According to the Protogospel of James (3rd century), Mary's parents were Joachim and Anne. But, this is uncertain as this work is pseudepigrapha writing. Ehiphanius the monk also traced Mary's lineage back to Joachin and Anne.
8. Mary was descended from David through his third son, Nathan the older brother of Solomon. Both were sons of Bathsheba. Nathan's name means "gift of God."
9. This makes Mary and Joseph distant cousins with lineages matched from Abraham to David. Their descendants including Jesus inherited the benefits and privileges of the lineage of both sets of parents.
10. Missing in this list is any reference to Eve, Sarah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, Mary, or the wives of these men. Why? Was something wrong with Luke or is there something wrong with the mind of modern man?
11. Absent in this list is any hint of sin, transgressions, or iniquity; that is, Luke records none of their sins and weaknesses.
12. The Bible does not give any details about Mary's life because the miracle of Christmas is not about Mary, the daughter of Eve, but about Jesus, the Son of David, the Son of God.
13. There is no mention of the Jeconiah curse because Jeconiah was a descendant of Solomon and not Nathan – so, Mary and her ancestry escaped this affliction on the Messianic line. Mary, however, being a daughter of Adam did not escape the Adamic curse or inheriting his sin nature.
14. Luke records the miraculous conception of Jesus – that Jesus was conceived by the created work of the spirit and **not** by natural, nuptial conception. Since sin is passed on by the male and since He did not have a

human father, Jesus escaped the Adamic curse. *He had no sin; knew no sin; and did no sin.*

15. While the conception of our Lord was miraculous, his birth was not. His birth, like any other child's birth, was natural; that is, it came with labor pains, blood, and water.

10. There is no Biblical evidence regarding the "Immaculate Conception" of Mary; i.e., that Mary herself was conceived without original sin. This was a later development in the church that lacked a Biblical foundation – a figment of the specious imaginations of church patricians – a devilish doctrine that has led naïve Christians to worship Mary as the "Theotokos" or "Mother of God." All "hail Marys" are offered based on this heresy.

Negatively, Biblical scholars reject doctrines of Mary being a deified Theotokos. Mary did not give birth to God because God was never born: "even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God" (Psalm 90:1-4). She is not the 4th person of the Trinity nor is she a mediator between God and man!

Mary gave birth to Christ who was the God-man, the Word made flesh (John 1:1, 14). While Christians ought **not** to worship Mary, believers should honor Mary for her role in bringing mankind the Christ child. She is a model of submission, purity, reverence, humility, and service. We do reject her deification by overzealous churchmen as it causes many to venerated Mary and not the Savior.

16. Christian tradition calls Mary the Virgin mother, Mother of God (Theotokos), Ever virgin, Immaculate, and Assumed into heaven, but a simple reference to her as the Virgin Mother or Virgin Mary is sufficient to communicate the miracle of our Lord's conception.

There is no evidence however and no spiritual reason to conclude Mary remained a virgin throughout life. Perpetual virginity is neither logical, virtuous, or necessary to uphold the purity and wonder of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reason causes us to assume that Mary and Joseph consummated their marriage after the birth of Christ after or before they went back to Nazareth.

17. Mary, therefore, along with Joseph and Jesus were Nazarenes.

Matthew 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

18. Thus we conclude that Jesus received his human genes from Mary with 23 chromosomes (XY). But, where did the X chromosome come from?

Jesus was a man with XY chromosomes, the Y chromosome coming from Mary and the X chromosome coming from God – for God prepared a body for His Son in the likeness of human flesh (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 10:5) – for “she was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 1:18).

Luke’s record informs us that Jesus was fully human with the exception of having a sin nature, and that He “grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40).

19. Unlike Matthew’s genealogy which traces Joseph’s genealogy back to Abraham, Luke traces Mary’s genealogy back to Adam showing that Jesus was born a real man with 23 (XY) chromosomes – a man like us. A man **without** Adam’s sinful nature; a God-man with a disposition like His Heavenly Father – a Miracle of God in history.

Merry Christmas!

Bethlehem, the Birth Place of the Messiah

Matthew 2:1



◆ Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

Facts

1. Jesus was born in Bethlehem Ephratah a small village six miles south of Jerusalem. It was not an esteemed city like Jerusalem, Cairo, Athens, or Rome – very fitting for One so humble – a stumbling block to some; and, a foundation of faith for others.
2. Known for its agriculture, “Bethlehem” means “House of Bread” –very appropriate since Jesus is “the Bread of Life (John 6:35).
3. The fulfillment of Micah’s prophecies was first announced to Herod’s court in Matthew 2 – a government regime which was puzzled and perplexed by the announcement.
4. The Magi, the Persian King Makers, were guided to Bethlehem by Heaven’s star. The greatest intellectuals of this period, traveled to this little village to give their stamp of approval to Jesus, “the king of the Jews.”
5. They did not arrive at a palace, but a barn; they did not see a baby dressed in Egyptian linen and Persian cotton, but a baby lying in a feed trough, dressed in “swaddling clothes,” (Burlap).
6. Rachel, the favorite wife of Jacob was buried in Bethlehem (Genesis 35:10)

7. Ruth and Naomi lived in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:22) –The people blessed Naomi and Ruth which included best wishes for fame and prosperity in Bethlehem.

Ruth 4:11 And all the people that *were* in the gate, and the elders, said, *We are* witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in **Bethlehem**:

8. Bethlehem is the birth place of David.

9. Bethlehem was the location where Samuel anointed David to be king (1 Samuel 16:4).

10. Saul hunted David in and around Bethlehem much like Herod pursued Christ in and around Bethlehem (2 Samuel 23; Matthew 2).)

11. As fitting, Micah predicted the Messiah-Ruler of Israel, would come from Bethlehem; that this Ruler would be a mysterious, Divine Being.

Micah 5:2 But thou, **Bethlehem** Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; **whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.**

12. The word Ephrah, or Ephratah, is added, to distinguish Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah --six miles south of Jerusalem, from another Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun – 90 to 100 miles north of Jerusalem in the Valley of Megiddo.

13. “for out of thee” -- Micah refers to the smallness of Bethlehem as if to shock us regarding the arrival of such a Great Ruler in such a small rural community. This fact shows us the humbleness of our Lord – the modesty of the Son. Be humble or stumble. One must be humble in order to walk with meekest man to have ever lived.

14. “from everlasting to everlasting:” this simple, temporal, earthly Bethlehem is contrasted with the puzzling-paradox of the mysterious Messiah who is from “everlasting to everlasting.” Thus, the nativity of

Jesus is contrasted with eternal nativity – something that surpasses the powers of the mind to comprehend.

Merry Christmas!

Christmas, the Greatest Miracle of History

Luke 2:7



◆ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

David, the son of Abraham

The real purpose of Matthew's genealogy is to show us that the birth of Christ, the Son of David, was the greatest miracle of history.

God promised Adam and Eve that one of her daughters would give birth to the Messiah – a victorious King who would save men from the curse of sin, usher in the kingdom of God, and restore paradise on earth.

Matthew shows us that Jesus is the only qualified candidate for the office. By virtue of his sinless character, fulfilled prophecies, wisdom, and power the fulfillment of millenniums of Messianic promises, He is the Davidic King.

Three movements are presented: From Abraham to David; from David and Solomon to Jeconiah; from Jeconiah to Joseph.

Each name in this genealogy represents a history with personal conflicts, family feuds, political division, national calamities, and international strife.

The birth of Christ is a miracle because . . .

The birth of Christ survived Abraham's travel from Mesopotamia to Hebron, Jacob's troubles, Israel's departure from Egypt to the Promised Land, judgment for unbelief, forty years of wilderness survival training, the dangerous conquest of Canaan, the transition from a pure Theocracy to a Theocratic monarchy, a divided kingdom and civil wars, deportation

of the Northern tribes to Assyria, eviction from the Holy Land in 586 B.C, deportation to Babylon for 70 years, migration from Babylon back to the decimated wasteland of Judah, the difficult rebuilding of the temple and the nation's infrastructure, Hellenization under the Greeks, and conquest of the Romans in 63 B.C.

The birth of Christ survived governance by Egyptians, Canaanites, and Hitites, Sidonians, Hivites, Edomites, Midianites, Moabites, Philistines, Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

The birth of Christ survived harem building Pharaohs, Pharaoh ordering the midwives to kill all Hebrew babies; Athaliah's order to murder all the babies in the royal nursery; Haman's genocidal plan to exterminate the Jews in Persia during the reign of Xerxes (Esther); the massacre of women and children during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC) and, King Herod's order to murder all babies in and around Bethlehem (December, 4-2 BC).

The birth of Christ survived the ten plagues on Egypt, the Death angel, the war over the waters of Merom against Amalek, the Battle of Jericho, the Battle of Ai, Israel's war on 31 Canaanite kings, the Philistine-Midianite wars during the Period of the Judges, the Philistines, Moabites, and Aramean wars against King David, the Jeroboam Revolt leading to the divided kingdom, the political-religious revolution under Jeroboam, the introduction of Baalism into Israel by Ahab and Jezebel, the siege of Lachish, the strangulation of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 701 BC, the Babylonian conquest (606-536 BC), the Maccabean wars, transition to Hellenism during the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, and the Pax Romana of the Roman Caesars.

The birth of Christ survived the reign of wicked kings like Ahab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahaz, Manasseh, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, and Herod.

The birth of Christ survived the sins of Israel: tribal strife, Judah's incest, enslavement in Egypt, worship of the golden calf, unbelief in the wilderness, stubbornness, incest, rape, fornication, patricide, Sodomy, Solomon's lust for foreign wives, the golden calves at Dan and Bethel,

erection of multiple temples to Baal, integration with the nations, murder, assassinations, and intermarriage with Egyptians, Moabites, Babylonian, and Canaanite honeypots during the days of Ezra.

The birth of Christ survived national disasters, droughts, famine, pestilence, riverine flooding, earthquakes, winter ice storms, summer heat waves, lightning, locust plagues, powerful Arabian winds, wildfires.

The birth of Christ survived the turmoil's of national politics: border feuds, inflation, depression, civil war, military invasions, party factions, destruction of industry, collision in religions, legal and moral revolutions, political insurrections, impossible treaties, and sprawling empires.

The birth of Christ survived God's disciplines for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6).

The birth of Christ survived the deception and religious pretense of Herod, "bring me word . . . that I may come and worship him."

See the chastening God promised to all those in the Davidic line:

Psalm 89:31-33 If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.

The birth of Christ survived God's judgments of the Ten Plagues in Egypt, deprivations in the wilderness; and, hardship in Babylon.

No nation on earth has survived one deportation much two deportations to return to their homeland.

How could the Christ be born in a nation enduring famines, plagues, political division, conquests, deportation, cultural revolutions, and multilingualism. Knowing the lust of men and the frequency of adultery and fornication how could any lineage be pure and free from spoliation and compromise?

Think of the miracle of John the Baptist being born a purebred, high priest from the line of Aaron.

How could the Christ be born into a multilingual nation speaking Hebrew, Agro-Asiatic, Egyptian hieroglyphs, Akkadian, Ugaritic, Arabic, Aramaic, Syriac, Persian, Greek, and Latin?

Think of the miracle of Christ being born a pure bred Hebrew from David and Solomon enduring the tyranny of multiculturalism.

Think of the miracle of Christ being born of a virgin? Virginity has not been a lasting value in the West since Medieval bishops.

Think of the miracle of Christ being born in Bethlehem and not Nazareth, the home town of Mary and Joseph.

Think of the miracle of how God used the greed of Rome to issue a special tax – a legal order that forced Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem during the rainy season.

Matthew's genealogy shows us the faithfulness of God in preserving the family line despite human sin, judicial pronouncements, involuntary captivity, hostile military invasions, and multiple national deportations.

The pinnacle victory of this genealogy is the presentation of the holy Son who shall save His people from their sins.

The birth of Christ was anything but smooth, easy, simple, and effortless. Our Lord was born in an era of madmen; in a blizzard of religious controversy; and a tornado of Greek and Roman philosophies.

He was God's Christmas Storm destined to overcome history's blights as its greatest miracle.

Merry Christmas!

Christmas, a Testament to the Sovereignty of God

Ephesians 1:4-6



◆ “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

The birth of Christ is a miracle of history that verifies the Sovereignty of God and His faithfulness to keep His promises.

He promised Eve a son that would defeat Satan, sin, and death (Genesis 3). That promise was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

He pledge to Abraham that one of his heirs would be the One who would bless the whole world (Genesis 12); and, the Seed Promise was fulfilled in Jesus (Genesis 12:1-4).

He promised David that One of his sons would be the Messiah and sit on his throne (2 Samuel 7). That promise was fulfilled in Jesus:

“ . . . he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne . . .
Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:33-36).

Jesus is not only a miracle of turbulent history; He is proof that God is sovereign and in control of all things – that “all things work together for good to those that love God” (Romans 8:28).

Consider the details of marriages, children, provision, and protection God provided for all those listed in these two genealogies. In these marriages

over centuries we see the sovereignty of the Lord in His protection and provision of this Messianic family.

Consider how each family (husbands, wives, and children) in the Messianic line was preserved during migrations and deportations; in political upheavals and change of governments; through wars and conquests; over mountains and through the waters; in deserts and valleys; in military invasions and exiles; in droughts and famines; in heat and cold; in sin and compromise; in victory and defeat.

Consider how God guided initial meetings, interactions, romances, arranged marriages, the birth of children of all those in the Messianic line century after century – for millennia. Each name in these genealogies is a testament to the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord.

Consider how He provided all that these couples needed to raise a family: land, houses, crops, water, clothing, and friends. None lacked any of His provision.

Consider how He protected each one from robbers and thieves; chains and slavery; drought and floods, heat and cold, and threats on life itself so the Messiah could be born on Christmas Day.

Romans 11:33 “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!”

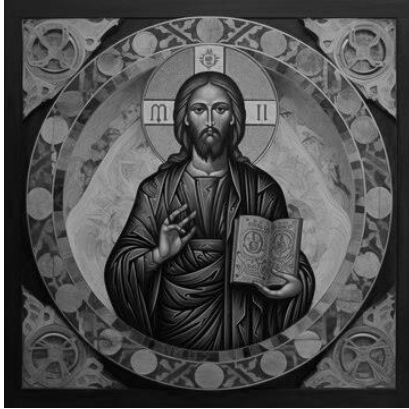
Consider how the Lord Jesus arrived in history at the last minute – 70 years before Jerusalem with all its records and infrastructure was destroyed and the nation of Israel plunged into to the dustbin of history never again to be restored (Luke 11:13-14)¹.

Merry Christmas!

¹ Know that modern “fake” Israel has no relationship to ancient Israel. Modern so called “Jews” are gentiles from ancient Khazaria or modern Ukraine.

He Shall Save His People from Their Sins

Matthew 1:21



◆ “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

The Father sent His Son into the world to save His people from their sins. He did not send a law or code or statute to deliver man.

He did not create a congress or a corporation to transform society by an act of the State. He gave His Son to die on the cross to set men free. The hope of humanity is in the babe of Bethlehem, not a president in a white house.

There is no man-made institution or government that can save man. Salvation is in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and not government.

Neither the church nor the state are mediators between God and man.

Further, He did not send Jesus to assist man in saving himself. Christ is not the Great Helper, but the Great Savior. Salvation is His work, not the work of the State.

Modern man seeks to create a humanistic utopia through law and not by Jesus Christ. The majority of politicians are deeply religious and intensely concerned about saving society through legislation. According to humanists, more and better laws are the means of creating “quality of life” for mankind. But, whose standards can create this utopian “quality of life” is not stated.

The liberal left are the new Pharisees who have an intense interest in wanting to tell their neighbor what to do and how to live . . . even wanting to regulate how many ounces of a soft drink one can have in restaurant at a noon meal. Michael Bloomberg, the New York City Mayor, banned smoking in city parks, on beaches, on boardwalks, in public

buildings, and he even proposed a ban on soda drinks. Gennaro Gattuso worries that there's no end in sight:

“It's hard to see where this will all end. As the editors of the *Los Angeles Times* suggest, the “next logical step would be to require restaurants to serve vegetables with every food order, or to require every New Yorker to join a health club, or to ban ice cream.”

But, it is worse than this. Liberals seek to outlaw free speech – an expression of faith of which they disagree. They even enact positive laws forcing gender-bender bathroom policies upon American institutions.

For this reason statist pursue the power of government to remake man and to regenerate society in their image. This is why nightly news focuses on acts of the state. A more perfect government and more zoning laws is the hope of humanists—the means of changing the culture. While law has a legitimate purpose, the restraint of evil, neither law nor the State can ever save man or regenerate society.

Christianity is a proponent of law . . . but limited law.

The phrase “thou shall not . . .” places restrictions on law. If it is not forbidden, you are free to do what you want as long as you don't infringe on the rights of others.

While Christianity believes in the rule of law, it does not try to change man or society through law. In fact, all of Christian law can be summed up in the Command “love your neighbor as yourself.” Contrast that with the zillions of codes and regulations laid upon corporate man by Congressional statutes that turn all men into criminals.

Changing man is the task of religion and the purpose of the gospel, **not** Congress!

Biblical law does not attempt to save man, it seeks to restrain evil by protecting life and punishing lawbreakers. Christ is the Savior and it is through His person and work men are delivered from the power and penalty of sin. The problem of man and his institutions is **not** the

economy or a lack of law, but sin at work in the hearts of men. What is needed is for public officials to acknowledge Christ as Savior, to surrender to His Lordship, and limit their administrations to Biblical purposes.

Our Lord came to set men free, **not** to do as they please, but to be free from the power of sin and its destructive work in the human heart.

1 Corinthians 7:23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

In the next chapter of Matthew, the Magi came to worship Christ as the new king. And, we would do well to remember that He is the King and surrender to His authority. Service to God means that believers must resist the madness of overreaching government officials. If the Magi disobeyed the direct order of Herod who demanded they return to Jerusalem as his informant on the whereabouts of the Christ child, then we would do well to model their example, and obey God . . . and in this case, obedience to God meant disobedience to the despotic orders of King Herod.

Merry Christmas!

The Word Made Flesh

John 1:1-4, 14



♦ Christmas is about the incarnation of Christ, the Word becoming flesh, the physical birth of the eternal Son, the Greatest Miracle in History.

John's presentation of Christ is not so much about his kingly lineage as much as it is about Jesus being the unique Son of God who is from "everlasting to everlasting."

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

"The Word" is a title of our Lord Jesus Christ. John call Him "the logos" – the visible expression of a thought, idea, concept, reality, being or thing. In this case, Jesus is the declaration, utterance, and exposition of God with all the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of Who we call Theos.

"was" is a being verb alongside "is" and "shall be" (past, present, future).

He "was the word" conveys the existence of Jesus in eternity past -- the eternal, forever, everlasting, enduring, perpetual, permanent, immutable, imperishable, infinite, abiding, and immortal Being we call Theos.

"and the Word was with God" signifies eternal existence of our Lord beside our Heavenly Father. For all eternity He was with God, beside God, in communion and union with God. In the company of the Father, the Son of God is equal with Father in status, essence, nature, and constitution; but separate in personality, temper, and tone.

"and the Word was God" – The Son is very God of God, the Creator, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, almighty member of the godhead. The text does not say, "God was the word;" that is, Jesus was God, but not all of God was in Christ. The Father and the Spirit are separate personalities from the Son.

“In the beginning,” in eternity past, at that time when there was no time, as far back as your little mind can take you and as far as your eye can see, the Word was!

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

This text is a summary of the three assertions made in the first verse – a double emphasis which communicates certainty; that is, He is solid, spiritual, eternal currency – a guarantee of truth that eliminates doubt.

3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Having spent years with Christ and observing Him with specificity and particularity, John concludes that the Savior is the Creator, the Almighty God, the Architect of all things, the Source of all life.

4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

Man has a fundamental problem. He is going to die. What man needs is life. John informs us that the Logos is life; that life was in Him – not just power, but life – the polar opposite of death and non-living things. Because He lives and death has no hold on him, our hope for eternal life is in Christ. Since He has life, He can give us life! Hallelujah!

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Here is what Christmas is all about. The Word became flesh; that is, the Eternal One with all the attributes of Deity was born in the flesh, as a man; i.e., he was fully God and fully man. He took on the weakness and attributes of man with little fingers, toes, eyes, and ears.

Thus Christmas is about celebrating the condescending God becoming a man – a celebration of the humanity of our Lord without losing sight of the fact that he was fully God. In love, He became one of us . . . a man, a *anthropos* who would go through all the stages of existential existence to manhood. He knows us; He understands our humanity because He is now one of us . . . forever.

Merry Christmas!

Mary and the Virgin Birth

Matthew 1:18



◆ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

By virgin birth, we do not infer a “miraculous birth.” His birth was not miraculous, but natural. Christ was born like any child would be born being pushed through the birth canal and forced to breathe.

By virgin birth, we do not suggest an “unusual conception” or “miraculous” in the tradition of Sarah or Elizabeth who were past the age of childbearing. Mary’s conception was not “miraculous” in that tradition because Mary had arrived at a child-bearing age, but it was miraculous since she never had intimate relations with any man.

By virgin birth, we do not mean an “immaculate conception” as the Catholic Church teaches. The Catholic doctrine of Immaculate Conception[1] asserts that Mary herself was conceived and born without original sin. The angel Gabriel said, “Hail, full of grace (*kecharitomene*), the Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28).

Mary was blessed by God to be the agent of the Son coming into the world. She was a recipient of grace, but only the Son was “full of grace and truth” (*pleras charitos kai aletheias*) (John 1:1). God was with Mary, but not one with her. Only the Logos was with Theos and was Theos (John 1:1).

The dogma of the “Immaculate Conception” arose from the apotheosis of Mary as the Mother of God within Catholicism. Mary was given the privilege of bearing the Christ child, but she was not without original sin. She was pure in the sense she was not promiscuous, but she was not

sinless or morally immaculate. That she was pure was her strength, and it was her purity that qualified her to be the mother of Christ.

Even Mary needed a savior:

“And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” - Luke 1:47

She gave birth to Jesus who was the Son of God, but she was not the Mother of God or some kind of high priestess to Theos. This is an overstatement and reading into the text more than is there – eisegesis and not exegesis. However, the child she bore was indeed the God-man, the Logos made flesh, the Temple of God, the mysterious union of spirit and flesh.

Being conceived by the Holy Ghost, the Son was holy, but her own birth was not immaculate. She was not sinless from her birth. Like the rest of humanity, Mary had a human father. She was born a sinner. She also needed a Savior (Luke 1:47). Mary should be respected and honored, but not worshiped and adored. Mariolatry is idolatry.

By virgin birth, we mean that her pregnancy did not originate through a sexual union with a man, but originated supernaturally through the work of God’s Spirit.

For rebels to call Mary a “whore” as modern Jews do is nothing short of blasphemy.

By virgin birth, we mean that His conception was miraculous in that Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit without the agency of a mature man. Her conception was a miracle of God; her pregnancy and delivery was a normal, human experience common to women.

Yes, Mary should be honored, but not worshipped. Hyper-veneration of Mary not only distracts from the true worship of Christ, it is completely idolatrous. Moreover, its practice feminizes the culture producing an emphasis on matriarchy. We must remember, that while Jesus was indeed the son of Mary, He was first and foremost the Son of God.

That Mary is now an Intercessor in heaven on behalf of men must be rejected.

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” – 1 Timothy 2:5.

Prayer to Mary “full of grace” is deeply religious, but hardly Biblical; a beneficiary of grace, yes; but, a benefactor by grace, no!

When the disciples were on the mount awestruck by the presence of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, they heard “a voice out of the cloud, which said, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.’” And, we would do well to do the same.

Merry Christmas!

[1] The Immaculate Conception according to the Catholic doctrine means that Mary was conceived without original sin or its stain – that’s what “immaculate” means: without stain. The essence of original sin consists in the deprivation of sanctifying grace, and its stain is a corrupt nature. Mary was preserved from these defects by God’s grace; from the first instant of her existence she was in the state of sanctifying grace and was free from the corrupt nature original sin brings (Catholic Answers; online source at <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/immaculate-conception-and-assumption>).

Merry Christmas!

The Greatness of Christ

Luke 1:32

"He shall be great"



◆ You have to marvel at the efficiency of Scripture because it contains so much wealth in such a tiny package.

Without a trumpet blast, or a Hollywood light parade, the holy text simply says, "He shall be great."

Never was there a text that says so much in so little.

The Holy Spirit gave Mary a gift and left us to unwrap the package to behold the greatness of Jesus.

Let us consider the greatness of our precious Lord

First, consider the greatness of this wonderful announcement.

God's people had not seen or heard from an angel in over 400 years. Four hundred years of silence was broken. And, now, within six months, God spoke to two people through an angel, Zechariah the priest and Mary the mother of our Lord. Moreover, we even know the name of the angel who delivered this message, Gabriel. His message is not one of judgment, but one of mercy and hope. A baby is going to be born and He is going to be great . . . Oh, how He is going to be great!

Second, consider the greatness of His name. He shall be called "Jesus," (Iesous in Greek and Yeshua in Hebrew).

His name means "savior" or the "Lord saves."

There is a shortage of saviors. Men look for savior presidents and political leaders who can save the economy and make their nation great again. But, "It's not the economy stupid . . ." It is sin! The great problem among men is not a shortage of commodities, but broken, flawed, cracked,

morally bankrupt megalomaniacs running the world serving their own interests.

Moreover, His name is sweet—sweet to hear, sweet to say, sweet to sing. It is the sweetest name I know!

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name
shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The
everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Moreover, Jesus is great because He is good. He did not kick start the economy or rev up Jewish industry. He went about “doing good” (Acts 10:38).

Third, consider the greatness of His mission.

His mission is wrapped up in His name: He “shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

We can’t even save one person from sin much less save all of God’s people from all of their sins. We can’t even save ourselves from one sin for whoever breaks one commandment breaks the whole law. But, here is One so great He can take away the sins of the world (John 1:29; 12:47) . . . and most importantly, He can save me from my sins.

Fourth, consider the greatness of His person: “He shall be called the Son of the Most High.”

By “son” the Apostle John means the “unique Son of God” – a family term that communicates the close likeness and relation of Jesus to His Heavenly father.

Who can grasp the difference between being a son of an earthly king and the Son of God? The latter is superior to the former as the Sun is superior to the moon; as gold is superior to iron; as a rose is superior to a protruding thistle.

He is called the Son of the “Most High.” We consider men great if they are the son of a rich man. But, we know in our heart of hearts they are

just raw, sinful people like us. But, Jesus? He is the Son of the Most High -- holy, righteous, loving, and just.

“Most High” is a glorious title for the Creator-God. There are high people in high places in government, but Jesus is the highest of the Highest. He is from the Source of all things. Jesus is not an angel from God or a messenger from God or a man sent from God. He is the Son of God, one in substance with God, the Second Person of the Holy Triune Spirit, God incarnate indivisibly united with the Father, the Logos made flesh in whom all the fullness of Deity dwells (John 1:1-18).

Fifth, consider the greatness of His position:

“ . . . and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.”

When a president elect selects his cabinet members, the nation looks on with great interest at who is going to be appointed to these important offices. Most of us will never be appointed to anything, much less a cabinet position.

Mary received the announcement that her son would be great because He will sit on the throne of his father David; that is, he was appointed to be the King of Israel, to rule, and bless the people of God. Imagine, the King of God’s people!

But, it is better than this. Mary learned that her son would sit on the throne of David. But, how could she possibly know that He would sit on God’s throne at the right hand of God Almighty? In a mysterious way, the throne of David was absorbed by the throne of God (Acts 2).

But, it is even more than this because Jesus became God’s High Priest, God’s Prophet, and God’s King.

Sixth, consider the greatness of the duration of His reign.

“He shall rule over the House of Jacob forever.”

Forever: We get all excited over the election of a new president. We have great hopes for them in the beginning; then, after four years, we are ready

for a new leader. But, not so with Christ! He does not disappoint! He is so morally qualified, so wise, so caring, so loving, so beneficent, so just, so fair, so competent, so victorious, and so pleasing to the Father that He is appointed King for ever and ever.

Seventh, consider the greatness of His eternal kingdom:

“His kingdom shall be no end.”

We have a saying, “All good things come to an end.” But, no so with this kingdom!

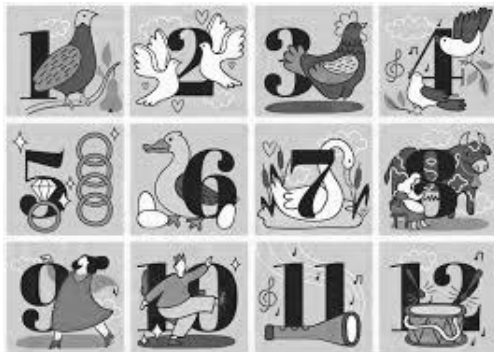
The kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God. Because He is immutable and eternal, His righteous kingdom is forever. His kingdom is forever because there is no foe, nor enemy, nor opponent who can dethrone Him. He is the Victor over all of man’s enemies – sin, death, and Satan. His righteousness prevails over sin. His life outlasts the power of death. He throws Satan into the bottomless pit. All of the world’s great leaders perish, but our Lord lives! Their tombs crumble, but our Lord’s tomb is empty.

He reigns now, and it is our privilege to bow the knee and to acknowledge the greatness of the Son even though the insane minds of this world reject him.

Merry Christmas!

The Christmas Code: The 12 Twelve Days of Christmas

John 20:31



◆ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Wrestling with being politically correct in the new world order, one columnist wrote, “Merry Whatever.”

In December 2004, Harbor Island, Florida prevented Sandra Snowden from erecting a Nativity Scene during the Christmas season even though she offered to pay for the display. Joel Schwartzberg complained to South Orange-Maplewood School District about Christmas carols and the school banned instrumental Christmas carols at the school-sponsored holiday concerts. Having enough of political correctness and the assault on Christmas, voters in Mustang, Oklahoma voted down an \$11 million school bond because the superintendent of schools ordered fifth grade teachers to take references to Baby Jesus out of the Christmas pageant.

Assaults on Christianity are not new. In the 16th Century, the government in England passed laws banning Christians from teaching their children anything that was contrary to the state controlled church. In order to preserve the faith and to educate their children in the truth of Christianity, believers codified the gospel and put it to song in what we know as the *Twelve Days of Christmas*.

In the sixth century, December 25th was declared a Holy Day. On January sixth, Christians celebrated the Epiphany, which commemorated the arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem. On this day, Christians would give gifts in honor of Christ the King. Building on the twelve days between

Christmas and the Epiphany, believers taught the song, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, to children as a catechism of the faith (England, 16th century).

“On the ____ day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me.”

The song begins with “My True Love.” Who is our True Love? Our *True Love* is none other than Jesus Christ, the One who loves us and gave Himself for us. The emphasis in the song is on what Christ gave His people. The twelve days represent the gifts of the gospel.

Day One

“On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me a partridge in a pear tree.”

A partridge is a small, brown bird that builds its nests in trees. The bird has a reputation for defending its young. The mother bird will try to lead predators away from her nest to save her babies. The brave bird, if necessary, will give its life to save her little chicks.

The partridge became a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ who came to save us from our sins by dying upon a tree. When talking about Christ in an age of persecution, parents would say to their children, “Remember, the partridge in a pear tree.” Children knew what Mom and Dad meant, but their adversaries hadn’t a clue.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Day Two

“On the second day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me two turtle doves.”

Because doves are often white, a symbol of purity; and, harmless like Christ; and, because two turtle doves were offered by Jesus’ parents on the day they made an offering in the temple, the two turtle doves became a symbol of the dual aspect of the work of Christ on the cross. The Old Testament (OT) pronounced a curse on those who disobeyed God’s law. In

fact, the OT ends with a curse (Malachi 4:6). When Jesus died, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” (Galatians 3:14). The preposition “for” is the Greek word meaning “above.” The curse was aimed at sinners, but Christ stood “above” us or over us to shield us from the rain of God’s wrath against sin.

Second, Christ not only received the curse, He gave us His righteousness. The New Testament (NT) explains Christ’s substitutionary work. He took our sins to Calvary and believers take His righteousness which – righteousness which gives each a right standing before God (Romans 3:24, 25; 4:1-5; 5:1). Because the OT emphasizes the curse upon sin, and the NT emphasizes justification, the two turtledoves represented Christ in the OT and Christ in the NT.

Luke 2:24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” {24 Lev. 12:8}.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

[Note: Some Christians identify the 2 doves as the Old and New Testaments]

Day Three

“On the third day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me three French Hens.”

In the English countryside, a French Hen was a premium chicken and very coveted by farmers. To receive a French Hen as a gift was *sans pareil*; i.e., a matchless gift. The three French hens reminded Christians not only of the three gifts of the wise men, but the three spiritual virtues that God gives to believers: faith, hope, and love. When sown, these virtues will sprout fruits of godliness.

1 Corinthians 13:13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Day Four

“On the fourth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me four calling birds.”

Crows and blackbirds will call to each other. Every farmer was familiar with the sounds of birds warning their feathered friends of the farmer’s presence in the barnyard. Keeping each other informed about possible predators insured the preservation of the flock. Have you heard of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? They are God’s calling birds. They call us to believe in Christ and to flee to the safety of His presence.

John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Day Five

“On the fifth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me five golden rings.”

A gold ring was a treasured gift. Kings wore golden rings. Rings were a symbol of power and authority. Important letters were sealed with an imprint of the king’s ring informing the recipient of the importance of the document. A ring is also a symbol of love. In ancient times, a gold ring in the ear or a nose was a symbol that the person was admired and loved by a spouse. Many husbands today wear a gold ring as a symbol of their marriage bond.

The five golden rings were a symbol of the first five books in the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Called the Torah, or the Pentateuch, these books emphasize the authority of YHWH and His love for His people (Deuteronomy 5:10; Psalm 19:9).

Day Six

“On the sixth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me six geese a laying.”

When a baby is born into a family, proud fathers will often give gifts to their friends. In our country, a Cuban cigar is a treasured gift. In the East, however, a proud parent would give an egg. A large goose egg was a special treasure. The egg as a symbol of new life was an appropriate expression of the appreciation of the new arrival in the family.

The *six geese a laying* was a symbol of the six day of creation and the new life that ensued. When parents talked about the six geese a laying to their children, they were honoring God as the Creator of the world, the One who gave them life.

Genesis 1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning— the sixth day.

Day Seven

“On the seventh day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me seven swans a swimming.”

When a baby swan is hatched, it is black. Have you ever heard of the “ugly duckling.” As the baby swan grows, it becomes white. When a swan is mature, it becomes the most beautiful and graceful of all water fowl. Likewise, we are born in sin (Psalm 58:3). Sin makes us ugly. It is not until we put our faith in Christ and experience the regenerating power of the Spirit of God, do we know the sweet victory over sin’s power. It is the Spirit that transforms us, changes us, and helps us to mature in holiness and love.

The *seven swans a swimming* represent the fullness of the Spirit (Revelation 3:1) and spiritual gifts given to men. Seven are mentioned in Romans 12:6-8.

Day Eight

“On the eighth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me eight maids a milking.”

Milk is what mothers give to newborn babies. Milk helps develop strong muscles and bones. Milk is to the human body what the Word of God is to the human spirit. His Word makes us strong and healthy (1 Peter 2:1-2). To the 16th century Puritans, the eight maids a milking represented the eight virtues that make a believer strong in the Christian faith.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

Blessed are those who mourn,

Blessed are the meek,

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

Blessed are the merciful,

Blessed are the pure in heart,

Blessed are the peacemakers,

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness

...

Day Nine

“On the ninth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me nine ladies dancing.”

Dancing is an expression of joy. Happy people dance. Sad people sit around and sulk. Is there anything more attractive in the performing arts than the grace and elegance of a ballerina or dancing woman? The nine dancing ladies are a symbol of the fruits of the Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit beautify us and make us attractive.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Day Ten

“On the Tenth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to ten lords a-leaping.”

The term “lords” are a symbol of authority. A lord is a master, a sovereign, a king. The ten lords represent the Ten Commandments and the restoration of the Rule of God in the hearts of men through the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

While men are not saved by keeping the law (justification), God saves men and then gives them the power to keep his law (sanctification).

Day Eleven

“On the eleventh day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me eleven pipers piping.”

Men playing on their flutes were called “pipers.” As the piper played in the town square, smiling children danced behind the piper as he played his flute to the crowd. Because Christ’s words were music to the ears of the disciples, they followed Christ wherever He went. But, one disciple was unfaithful. The burden for sharing the gospel fell on the eleven disciples who went through the known world to proclaim the resurrection of Christ.

The eleven disciples reminded the 16th century Christians that gospel preachers were a gift of God, and that following Christ was a privilege (Matthew 4:19; Mark 3:16).

Day Twelve

“On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love gave to me twelve drummers drumming.”

Drums are used to keep cadence among soldiers marching off to war. The “drummers drumming” represented the twelve facts of faith in the Apostles Creed. Christians may differ in church polity and church structures, but the Apostle’s Creed represents what all Christians believe and therefore unifies us as in the faith.

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

When Christianity was under assault, believers codified the faith in order to preserve it for posterity. The next time you hear the song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” remember God’s love for you and the gifts He has given you. They all come from our True Love, the Partridge in a pear tree.

Merry Christmas!

Martyrdom of Christmas

Luke 19:14

"We will not have this man reign over us"



◆ In the East and the West Christmas is being martyred by secularism in the spirit of King Herod.

The secularization of Christmas (and Easter) has turned the Christian message into a Holly Day with dancing reindeer and a race to purchase presents to make souls happy.

Absent from all the hoopla and commercials is the joy of the season, that God was among us . . . on earth . . . in the person and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christmas season is sheer madness bringing Santa Clause, car commercials, and stuff to the forefront and pushing Christ into the closet of our lives.

There is even a website titled "120 Must-Have Christmas Gifts of 2016 for Everyone on Your List" But, I can assure you that Christ . . . or salvation . . . or the love of God was not listed.

Instead of asking, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" consumers are asking, "Where can I purchase the best smartphone?"

There is a viridian Grinch that stole Christmas and his name is Green-dollar Secularism.

The secularist says, "Let's leave heaven to the birds and the priests. We will concern ourselves with earth." Thus, "Happy Holidays" has replaced "Merry Christmas." The hustle and bustle during the holidays have become more important than the holy day in Bethlehem.

Secularism has transformed church life into a secular system pandering to the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Self-love and personal ambition have replaced self-sacrifice and taking up the cross to follow Christ.

Secularism uses fantasy to replace history, make-believe to replace faith, and sweet, happy, feel-good themes to replace the wonderful facts of Christ's appearance on earth.

From watching all the happy, smiling faces and people jumping with joy, you'd think "things" are what makes people happy.

The forced touchy-feely sights and sounds of the Christmas season has become the enemy of the Bible's sweet, quiet account of the birth of Christ.

Herod's psychotic madness in slaughtering innocent, harmless children in Bethlehem hoping the Christ-child would be among them continues on in the form of modern secularism.

Moreover, there has to be a special place in hell for all those businesses that produce "Christmas Commercials" before Thanksgiving!

So, if you feel like a "duck out of water" during the madness of this commercial driven season, you are not alone.

"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14)

"For me to live is Christ, to die is gain" – (Philippians 1:21).

Let's not let secularism dump cold water on the reason for the season. Let us be like the Magi who saw the star and "rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Matthew 2:10).

Merry Christmas!

Peace on Earth

Luke 2:14



◆ **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.**

During the turbulent sixties, Pete Seeger
In 1955, Peter Seeger wrote a folk song:

“Where have all the flowers gone?”

““Where have all the soldiers gone? Gone to graveyards,
everyone! Oh, when will they ever learn?””

The world is on fire

North Korea continues to build up its intercontinental missile program; Fake Israel threatens neighbors to the north, south, and east; Antifa in America rap lyrics about killing all whites; men on football teams refuse to stand for the National Anthem, bitter women leak “fake” reports about sexual harassment that allegedly took place two decades previously; mere allegations without proof of claim are ending the careers of many celebrities; weekly, reports come forward about child kidnapping and abuse; and, the media has a melt downs over a traditional White House Christmas.

Men pray for peace . . . but, how can there be peace without Jesus Christ ruling over anxious hearts and minds?

Peace on earth through the Son is offered to men who are seeking to be right with God . . . but the angelic offer is not a bid for world peace based on secular, communistic DEI principles², the apotheosis of women, and the politics of Madonna.

² DEI = the feminist, socialistic philosophy of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In fact, Jesus corrected the erroneous idea that He was offering peace to the world when he said,

Matthew 10:34 **Think not** that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

A sword is a symbol of division, severed heads, and blood in the streets.

There will never be peace as long as men are united around the humanistic principles of feminism, ANTIFA, promotion of Sodomy, the acceptance of psychologically deranged males who want to dress like women, theft in the name of taxation, promotion of Islam as a peaceful religion, porous borders, human trafficking in the prison system, a militarized police state, and the belief that money is the measure of man.

Christ declared war on “Sodom (immorality) and Egypt (worldliness)” (Revelation 11:8).

“The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.” John 7:7

It is not his will that a society blasted with F-bombs, rap that lionizes rape and murder, and a Congress stuffed with liars, sexual perverts, and fraud-mongers succeed.

A new America is taking shape around us, but it is not an America grounded on Christ, but an America rooted in tolerance of religious humanism -- an America where the Washington Post and the New York Times want Americans to say “Good bye” to traditional Christian values, celebrate a Jewish Hanukkah, and to accept a new world order based on political agenda of Zionist Hollywood elites.

This new religion, though it is not really new, traces its origin to the hissing snake under the poisonous tree.

This new religion believes in salvation by multiplication of laws; that a bigger and more efficient police state can transform society and bring peace to men.

A secularized United States government is NOT strong enough to unite the left and the right, blacks and whites, Christians and Muslims, womanizers and virgins, responsible family men and roaring feminazis, Democrats and Republicans.

The government in Washington D.C. is not good enough or powerful enough to unite wolves and sheep together. America is divided, and there is nothing in heaven or hell that can unite Sodom and the City of God.

Only the Babe in Bethlehem, King Jesus, and His accomplishments through the cross are strong enough to band men together in harmony . . . and even this takes humble minds and repentant hearts.

Moreover, the religions of Islam and atheism are not noble enough to co-join the world.

Only the virtuous risen Savior can unite humanity. Only when men have peace with the God by accepting the gospel can they have peace with one another.

Isaiah 2:3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The first glimpse of Christ in the New Testament is as a baby in a stable (Luke 2-3), but the final vision of Christ is a rider upon a white horse waging war against the anti-god forces of history (Revelation 19). Jesus is at war with paganism, secularism, feminism, transvestism, and all the isms contrary to the King's law-order. He is God's Christmas Storm.

Moreover, the basis of peace offered to men is based on the shed blood—that is, it is only when Divine Claims are satisfied by blood currency is peace possible between God and the sinner (Romans 3:5; 5:9).

The first war in the Bible was fought over a religion of beans vs. a religion of blood (Cain and Abel).

Christ has declared war on those offering peace based on the acceptance of multiculturalism, Sodomy, Sharia law, equality, feminism, Zionism, disrespect for authority, and the police state.

To all those seeking the glory of God . . . we say "Peace to you!"

For all those seeking forgiveness of sins and a right relationship to God through repentance and faith in the blood of the Savior, we say "Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (1 Peter 1:2).

But, to those drilling for peace between Sodomites and the church, Muslims and Christians, and the acceptance of transvestism calls for maximum resistance -- a declaration of war!

Christmas reminds us that Heaven offers peace and good will toward men through the gift of God's Son and no other way!

The God of peace be with you (Romans 15:33). Amen!

Merry Christmas!

Simeon's Christmas Message to the World

Mine eyes have seen thy salvation

Luke 2:25-32



♦ 25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name *was* Simeon; and the same man *was* just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,

28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;

32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.

The text informs us that Simeon was a man filled with the Holy Ghost – a unique spiritual state in Israel (John 7:39). Until Pentecost, only Zacharias, John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), Jesus (Luke 4:1), and Simeon were identified as men filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary and Elizabeth both encountered the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35, 41).

Since the text says Simeon was filled with the Spirit, men would do well to listen to him!

Simeon said, "Mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation."

The word "salvation" refers to God's deliverance from ruin or loss due to man's sin and Divine judgment on sinners.

There is a salvation according to man, but Simeon saw the Lord's salvation.

He did **not** see a vision or apparition, but a real, live baby boy with a little nose, mouth, and eyes.

Salvation was **not** in a perfected form of Judaism or even a perfected form of Christianity, but in the person of Christ.

Salvation was **not** in a religious system, but in the "Lord's Christ."

Salvation was **not** in keeping the Ten Commandment, but in the babe born in Bethlehem.

Salvation was **not** in Torah, but in the Son of David, the Living Torah.

Salvation was **not** in virgin Mary, but in her living, breathing Son – the Savior of the World.

Salvation was not in the temple of Jerusalem with all its beautiful, quarried limestone rock, but the baby in the arms of His tender mother visiting the temple.

Salvation was **not** in "God" or some vague, undefined notion of Divinity but in Jesus of Nazareth, the "Word" made flesh, the God-man, fully man and fully God.

Salvation was **not** in Allah or praying five times a day, but in Jesus.

Salvation was **not** in Herod or Caesar, but the Lord Christ.

Salvation is **not** in Tibet or India or psychology, but in Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David.

Salvation is **not** in government, or in some parliament, but in this babe called “the Christ of God.”

Salvation is **not** in Republicans or Democrats or some legislation by Congress, but in “the child Jesus.”

Salvation is **not** in man’s speculations, fictions, and legends about Christ as a great teacher, but in little baby with fingers and toes “which thou hast prepared” in the presence of Thy People.

Salvation is **not** in a phantom or ideal virtues or speculation about utopia, but in a real living, breathing baby destined to die for the sins of men as the Lamb of God.

Salvation was **not** in omnism – a belief that all religions are a path to God, but in the Son of God Who is “the way; the truth; and, the life.”

In seeing Mary’s child, Simeon said Jesus is the light of the world, not in religion or Judaism or a set of do’s. “In Him was life and His life was the light of men.”

Simeon called Jesus the glory, pride, and fame of Israel. He did not glory in carnal Israel, Judaism, “fake Israel,” the temple in Jerusalem, or Zionism like modern men, but in the true Israel of God – the Lord Jesus Christ.

Want salvation? Come to Christ and humbly beg him to be your Savior and to save you from your sins.

Merry Christmas!

A Message from Anna, the Prophetess

Luke 2:36-38



◆ 36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

What excites your soul?

This widow's soul was energized by seeing the Christ Child, the son of Mary, the Son of David.

She was not inspired by Mary, but her child.

She did not make predictions about future, political events. Her message was about the wonder of Christmas, the Babe from Bethlehem.

Her first reaction to seeing the Savior was "to give thanks" unto the Lord. She did not curse the darkness, but pointed others to the Light.

Her second response was to share the good news, not with the pagans, but with the faithful who looked for redemption in Israel.

The word "redemption" comes from the Greek word "*lutrosis*" – a word that means "ransom," or "deliverance" or "to be set free."

Real freedom is about being set free from condemnation and the chains of sin – not liberty to explore your potential for sin.

Looking for freedom?

Freedom is **not** in Mary or some saint or religion.

Freedom is **not** in Washington D.C. or in the next president or in some legislation, but in Christ, the Savior of the World.

Freedom is **not** in psychology or group therapy, but in Christ.

Freedom is **not** in owning gold or having big bank account, but in Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus, the Christ of God, the Redeemer saves men from their sins.

Merry Christmas!

A Crushed Snake

Romans 16:20



◆ **And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.**

MacLaren titled this verse, "A Crushed Snake" and a few of his thoughts are recorded here.

Jesus was born to crush the Snake.

"There are three other Scriptural sayings which may have been floating in the Apostle's mind when he penned this triumphant assurance. 'Thou shalt bruise his head'; the great first Evangel-we are

to be endowed with Christ's power: 'The lion and the adder thou shalt trample under foot'-all the strength that was given to ancient saints is ours; 'Behold! I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy'-the charter of the seventy is the perennial gift to the Church."
(MacLaren)

"Echoing all these great words, Paul promises the Roman Christians that 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.'

Paul is gazing on all the great things in God which make Him the God of peace, and in them all he sees grounds for the confident hope that His power will be exerted to crush all the sin that breaks His children's peace.

Now the first thought suggested by these words is the solemn glimpse given of *the struggle that goes on in every Christian soul.*

Two antagonists are at hand-grips in every one of us. On the one hand, we have the 'God of peace,' and on the other hand, 'Satan.' If you believe in the personality of the One, do not part with the belief in the personality of the other. If you believe that a divine power and Spirit is ready to help and strengthen you, do not think so lightly of the enemies that are arrayed against you as to falter in the belief that there is a great personal Power, rooted in evil, who is warring against each of us.

Notice, 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet.' Yes, *it is God that bruises, but He uses our feet to do it.* It is God from whom the power comes, but the power works through us, and we are neither merely the field, nor merely the prize, of the conflict between these two, but we ourselves have to put all our pith into the task of keeping down the flat, speckled head that has the poison gland in it.

Turn, now, to the other thought that is here, *the promise and pledge of victory in the name, the God of peace.*

We, too, may achieve a conquest over the dragon which, although it requires effort, does not disturb peace. There is a possibility of bruising that slippery head under my foot, and yet not having to strain myself in the process.

'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet'; *and in bruising He will give you His peace to do it.* For every struggle of the Christian soul adds something to the subsequent depth of its tranquility.

Lastly, note the swiftness with which Paul expects that this process shall be accomplished.

'God shall bruise him under your feet shortly,' there lay *in the back of his mind* the thought, '*the Lord is at hand.*'

Instead of 'shortly' we ought to put 'slowly' for the most of us.

There are a great many evils that, unless they are conquered suddenly, have very small chance of ever being conquered at all. You never heard of a man being cured of his love of intoxicating drink, for instance, by a

gradual process. *The serpent's life is not crushed out of it by gradual pressure, but by one vigorous stamp of a nervous heel.*

'Shortly,' and it will be 'shortly,' if we reckon by heavenly scales of duration. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

'The Lord will help her, and that right early.' 'The Lord is at hand.'
(MacLaren).

Isaiah 30:15 For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In (your) returning and rest shall ye be saved; in (your) quietness (rest) and in (your) confidence (trust) *shall be your strength*: and ye would not.

Rest, Soul, rest. Trust, trust, trust!

Merry Christmas!

Rules Regarding the Celebration of Christmas

1 Peter 3:15



◆ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

America is changing.

It can no longer be called a Christian country.

Secularism is now the approved religion of the United States government and this religion is being shoved down the throats of Americans whether they like it or not!

Thus, Christians must prepare for increasing hostility to Christmas by atheists, secularists, Muslims, Jews, and Zionists.

Santa Claus and commercialism rule the day. Christmas patterns panders to the interest of business, not to those doing their Father's business.

Nevertheless, there is a measure of freedom left for Christians to enjoy the reason for the season.

"It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate"- *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969)

Legal Rules Regarding Christmas celebrations

Source: Rutherford Institute

Rule one: Christmas slogans on T-shirts, hats, and pins cannot be censored.

Rule two: the school system has no authority to censor students or teachers from wearing apparel that celebrate this holy season.

Rule three: public school teachers may teach students about Christmas and its significance as long as it is taught objectively.

Rule four: public school teachers may send Christmas card to families and students . . . on their own time.

Rule five: Christmas music is permitted including those with intense religious themes.

Rule six: public schools may not require children to sing Christmas songs if they do not consent.

Rule seven: public schools may not prohibit distributing literature concerning the Christmas holiday or invitations to church.

Rule eight: private citizens may erect public displays / symbols in public parks subject to reasonable time, places, and manner.

Rule nine: Government entities may also erect displays that celebrate Christmas in the context of the Christmas holiday.

Rule ten: businesses and employers may not prevent employees from displaying Christian symbols in the work place.

Rule eleven: Employers must make reasonable accommodations for employees whose religious beliefs prevent them from working on Christmas.

Rule twelve: "Government recognition of Christmas as a public holiday and granting government employees a paid holiday for Christmas does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment."

For the legal rules regarding the practice of Christmas, see Rutherford's, "The Twelve Rules of Christmas." – Legal and practical way to manage potential conflicts.

Merry Christmas!

Christmas Grace

Matthew 1

Five Women Who Found Grace

A Christmas Sermon



◆ Today, I want to talk about sex, incest, prostitution, and adultery, that is, I want to talk to you about the Christmas story — a story of five women in the genealogy of Christ who experienced the grace of God.

Because of her co-conspiracy and cover up in the murder of Duncan, Lady Mac Beth developed a neurosis. So deep was the stain of guilt on her conscience, she tried to wash the blood off her hands with water every

quarter of an hour.

Inside each of us is the knowledge of good and evil. Our conscience screams because of the sins we have committed against God.

Can anything silence the trumpet of the guilt and the pounding drum of condemnation that awakens us at night and wearies us during the day?

In the Christmas story we have a message of grace that can bring rest to the soul and silence the squawking conscience.

In Matthew's account of the birth of Christ, he provides for us a genealogy of Christ. His ancestry informs us that He is gracious and that He accepts sinners.

Five women are mentioned in this account, and every one of them represent a gracious inclusion into the family of God:

Tamar (Genesis 38)

The text says, "Judah was the father of Boaz and Zerah by Tamar" (1:3).

So fowl is the weather surrounding the story of Tamar, that most preachers are embarrassed to read the story in public, including me. It offends the sensitivities even of the most callous among us.

Unlike Isaac and Jacob who married well, Judah was forced to choose a wife for his sons among vulgar Canaanite women. He chose Tamar for his eldest son, Er. But, Er was so wicked, the Lord slew him. Tamar was then given to Er's younger brother Onan, who refused to perform the duty of a kinsman redeemer for the family by impregnating Tamar, and the Lord took his life.

Judah had a third son, Shelah, but he was not old enough to marry and so Tamar had no choice but to return to live in her father's house.

After Shelah came to maturity as a man, Judah was afraid to give Shelah Tamar to wife because she seemed like a curse on the family. He was afraid that what happened to Er and Onan might happen to Shelah. Judah kept postponing his responsibility — the duty of providing a kinsmen redeemer for his son. All of this sex and clan marriage seems grossly odd to the modern mind, but the procreative duties of a kinsmen redeemer was a holy, biblical obligation (Deuteronomy 25:25).

Seeing that Judah neglected his duty, Tamar took matters into her own hands. Dressing as a prostitute, she placed a veil over her face, lured Judah to her lair, arranged a price, and performed the act of a common whore. Judah, naïve about the identity of Tamar, copulated with her. A few months later, Judah heard a report about the pregnancy of Tamar, and arranged to have his daughter-in-law burned for harlotry. When Tamar pulled back the curtain of truth, she exposed Judah as the father of the child by producing his walking staff and personal treasures. Everyone was stunned! Convicted of his dual sins, neglect of duty and incest, Judah said about Tamar, "She is more righteous than I."

This earthly, sensual, steamy story of lust, rebellion, prostitution and incest is so slimy one wonders how in the world could the Spirit of God even mention Tamar in the genealogy of Christ. Why would the Spirit want the world to know that sweet Jesus was a descendant of an incestuous union? Shouldn't his line be pure and holy?

Oh, marvelous grace that saves a wretch like me! In the midst of this death, sex, and seduction there is something admirable about Tamar's faith. Widowed twice and neglected by a weak father-in-law, she could have prowled through the neighborhood and lured another virile young man to her side. But, Tamar was **not** that kind of woman.

For some reason, despite the wickedness of her first two husbands, she developed a love and attachment to the family of Jacob. Despite their weaknesses, she saw that the Lord was with this family. Because God was drawing her to Himself, she desperately wanted to be a part of it.

Forsaking her own culture, she took radical steps to insure her place among the Israel of God. In this red-light mess was a candle of faith. Out of grace, God gave her two sons. One of them would carry the messianic hope. Out of Perez came kings and princes: David, Solomon and Nathan, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. Though we cannot approve of Tamar's method of deceit, the end of her faith was noble and she was received by grace in the Lord's family. Would to God we had more people like Tamar that would radically seize the opportunity to be a part of the family of God . . . for "The kingdom comes violently, and the violent seize it" (Matthew 11:12).

Oh, the grace that Christmas reveals!

Rahab

While Tamar played the role of prostitute once, prostitution was part of Rahab's occupation. Rudyard Kipling coined the phrase, "Prostitution is the world's oldest profession." Considered the lowest form of earning a wage, a prostitute is despised for her trade by honorable men and women.

Prostitutes work streets near trash-strewn allies behind the whitewashed self-storage buildings on the edge of town. These dark places carry the stench of urine, and there only the occasional car buzzing along expressways overhead breaks the eerie silence. Except for an occasional homeless man pushing a shopping cart full of bulging black garbage bags toward the underpass, prostitutes work alone. A 33-year-old prostitute usually has deep sunken black eyes, the haggard look of sixty year old woman, and braless breasts that sag beneath a skintight black body suit.

Rahab was of this sort. Turning her residence in Jericho into a tavern, lusty men frequented her cat house for a round of cheap beer and fun. Who can imagine such a life? Furthermore, not only was Rahab a harlot, she was a Canaanite and her city was targeted for demolition by Israel's army. Marked for slaughter, all that she prized was destined to be burned.

But, there was something wonderful about this woman. She possessed a spark of faith that shined like a candle in a dark cave. When the spies were discovered, she defied her king's order and hid the undercover special reconnaissance foreign military personnel – simply called “spies.”

She believed the Lord was with Israel and that the condemnation of her people was just. “I know the Lord has given you the land,” Rahab told the spies. She had more faith than the spies who entered the land 40 years before.

Like a spider lives in a king's palace, Rahab slinked her way into the Lord's house by securing a covenant with the spies.

Not only did she believe her city would fall and that Israel would be victorious, she had a faith that worked. She told her mother and father, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews about the judgment to come. On the Day of Judgment, twenty to thirty people crammed in her home to find protection and safety based on her covenant of grace with Israel's finest. Her faith heard the condemnation, believed in the judgment, received the spies, worked to protect God's people, entered into a covenant with Israel, evangelized the lost, and found a home with God's people.

Years after the destruction of Jericho, Rahab was loved by a Jewish man who accepted her as one forgiven by the Lord. A child of God, she became Salmon's bride. They bore a Jewish son named Boaz, a noble, wealthy man destined to be a blessing to everyone living in Bethlehem and to all with a stake in the kingdom of God.

Rahab did not know at this time that she would be a great grandmother of the King David, and a trophy of grace in the lineage of Israel's Hope. No

wonder the Spirit was proud to showcase this woman who was an object of God's love.

One night in a church service a young woman felt the tug of God at Her heart. She responded to God's call and accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. The young woman had had a very rough past, involving alcohol, drugs, and prostitution. But, the change in her was evident. As time went on she became a faithful member of the church. She eventually became involved in the ministry, teaching young children. After a while, this faithful young woman caught the eye and heart of the pastor's son. The relationship grew and they began to make wedding plans, and this is when the problems began.

You see, about half of the church membership did not think that a woman with a past such as hers was a suitable mate for a pastor's son.

The church began to argue and fight about the matter. Then, they decided to have a meeting. As the people made their arguments and tensions increased, the meeting was getting completely out of hand. The young woman became very upset about all the things being brought up about her past.

The pastor's son could not bear the pain it was causing his young, faithful wife-to-be. As she began to cry, the pastor's son stood to speak. "I challenge every one of you to think carefully about what is happening here tonight. It really is NOT my fiancée's past that is on trial here. What all of you actually are questioning is the ability of the blood of Jesus to wash away sin. Today you have put the blood of Jesus on trial. So, what is your verdict? Does the blood of Christ wash away sin? . . . or not?"

Tears welled up in the eyes of every Christian in the auditorium. The whole church began to weep as they realized that they really had been slandering the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Too often, even as Christians, we bring up the past and use it as a weapon against our brothers and sisters, or even against ourselves. Forgiveness is a foundational part of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the blood of Jesus could not cleanse the soul of every single person, then all of us would be in a world of hurt.

As the old hymn says, "What can wash away my sins? NOTHING, but the blood of Jesus." End of case!!! (Author unknown)

Ruth

Ruth was a Moabite. Moab was a descendant of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter. Incest was so despicable, God pronounced a ten generation curse on the offspring of these twisted sexual relationships (Deuteronomy 23:2ff).

Further, the Moabites were objects of God's wrath because they worshipped the god Chemosh and sought to seduce Israel with harlotry through the false prophet of Balaam (Numbers 22-24).

It was into the region of Moab east of the Dead Sea that Elimelech and Naomi journeyed to find prosperity during a season of famine in the land of Israel – a picture of backsliding. In Moab, their two sons married Moabite women, Orpha and Ruth. But tragedy struck. Elimelech died and soon afterwards his two sons perished. Could anything be worse –three impoverished women bound together under a widow's shawl?

With all her dreams and hopes smashed, Naomi made the hard decision to return back to Bethlehem, a broken, shekel-less widow. The Lord dealt so severely with Naomi she urged her daughters to stay in Moab after her departure. But, Ruth refused:

"Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17
"Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

Why would Ruth cling to Naomi? From all appearances, the woman was "bad luck:" A famine, poverty, three marriages, three deaths, three widows, three funerals, and three empty purses.

Though pierced with the dagger of death, I think Ruth saw in Naomi that dignity of character and nobility of Spirit she could not find in all of

Moab. Though she did not understand the LORD, there was a beauty about Naomi that could only be explained by Naomi's faith in the LORD.

Though the LORD dealt harshly with her, Ruth believed He was good, kind, and gracious. She would rather serve this poor, old widow under God's care than serve in a palace of the king of Moab. The worst of life under YHWH was better than the best of life under the god Chemosh. Like Moses before her, she was "choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." Would it be worth it?

Leaving her family in Moab, Ruth found a way to survive by gleaning in the field of Boaz. There, Ruth found protection beneath the wings of YHWH. Under the eye of providence Ruth worked with nobility, reaped an abundance of barley, found protection in the fields of Boaz who had a heart willing to accept the duties of a kinsmen redeemer, to marry Ruth, and to care for Naomi. While today this sounds odd, it was completely consistent with Old Testament law.

In Deuteronomy 25:5–6, God provided for levirate marriage to insure the continuation of the family line. Levirate stems from Latin and means "husband's brother."

Ruth, a Moabitess, had no obligation to submit to the law of Israel. Yet she humbled herself under it and, in effect, asked Boaz, a man much older than she, to perform the service of the goël, a "kinsman-redeemer," by marrying her according to Mosaic law so she could bear a son to carry on her husband's name.

Placing a Moabite woman in the Messianic line highlights the fact that Jesus came to redeem sinners because He is not willing that any (Jew or Gentile) should perish (2 Peter 3:9). "God so loved the world" (John 3:16) is not just New Testament theology—it is a biblical rule!

Like everyone who comes to God, Ruth is a trophy of His divine grace. Despite her lineage, she embraced the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and David, the greatest king of Israel who ever lived (other than Christ, Himself) was far fewer than ten generations removed from his Moabite heritage (Numbers 25 and Deuteronomy 23:3). Oh, the wonders of grace.

The story of Ruth reveals another truth as well. It illustrates a beautiful picture of God's redemption of mankind through Christ, our kinsman-redeemer. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sinned, plunging all humanity into estrangement from God. God promised to redeem that which was lost (Genesis 3:15). Hence God had to become man so He could become a near-kinsman and purchase back what was His to begin with:

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:5–7).

When He came to earth in the incarnation, Jesus assumed the form of a man. The word for “form” is the Greek word *morphe*, the root for the English word *metamorphosis*. Jesus has always been God; but He morphed, or changed, His outward appearance to take on the appearance of a man. But that wasn't enough. He then took on the roll of the lowest kind of man—a slave, or bondservant. A bondservant willingly professed his loyalty and love for his master by publicly allowing an ear to be pierced with an awl (Ex. 21:5–6). From that moment on, he was forever identified with and bound to his master.

Bathsheba

Her name means “seven,” “daughter of the oath,” and “daughter of opulence.” It is pronounced, “Bat-Sheba.”

She was the beddable, eye-catching wife of Uriah the Hittite, the faithful soldier of David. The lonely, shapely woman took a bath in full view of the king's balcony. Surely, she knew that David would gaze on her soft form and be stirred by his manly lust. Though warned by her conscience, she ignored the Seventh Commandment and gave in to the king's manly aggression. Like so many weak women, Bathsheba lacked the strength and resolve to say, “No!” Craving the love of a man she forsook the love of the Lord. Locked in the grip of passion, she broke her vows and slipped into a bed of adultery. She never dreamed that she would become pregnant, and be caught up in a web of lies, murder, and deceit.

Bathsheba's story is David's story. She too was stricken with guilt. She too tried to cooperate with the cover-up plan. Her conscience haunted her day after day. Widowed one day, and married the next seemed too smooth and waxy. Everywhere she went in the court, she received an evil eye. Everyone knew, even the Lord.

When Nathan pointed his bony finger at David and said, "Thou art the man," he exposed the sin of Bathsheba as well. When God forgave David, he also forgave Bathsheba. So forgiven were David and Bathsheba, that their son Solomon was loved by the Lord and placed on the throne of David. When God forgives, He fully forgives. What marvelous grace!

Mary

The fifth woman mentioned in the Lord's genealogy, is Mary the mother of Jesus. The object of grace and favor, Mary was the chosen vessel to carry the Son of God. But, she seems so unqualified to be the mother of the Messiah. She was a descendant of King David, but at this stage in history the power of Israel's monarchy had so diminished, this princess was merely a common girl with no prestige, no power, and no wealth.

All the energies of the Davidic Monarchy were leveled by the political upheavals in Israel reducing the king's descendants to paupers. Mary did not have the wisdom of age, for she was just a teenager. Mary did not possess great skills, for she was very young. Mary did not have great talent, for she was a common girl. Her only virtues were purity and humility.

Think of it! The last woman in this genealogy was a pure, undefiled virgin – totally qualified to be the mother of our Lord.

When informed that she would carry the Holy Child before her marital union with Joseph, her standing in the community was in great jeopardy. However, Mary surrendered to the Lord saying, "May it be done to me according to your word."

Jesus existed before the world began. The One who scattered the constellations across the heavens, could have been born into any family on earth. But, he chose this family. And, what a family! Simply put, the

family of our Lord contains former adulterers, fornicators, harlots, and incestuous relationships. In other words, they were poor, ordinary, simple folk.

If there is one lesson these women provide in the Christmas story is that Jesus receives sinners. Oh, the grace of God!

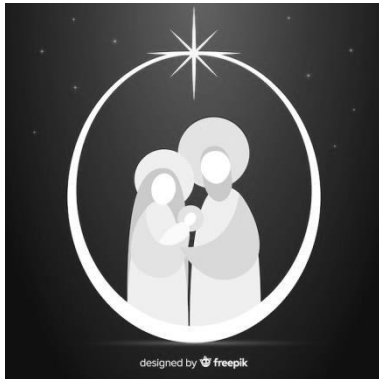
No matter what you have done, there is forgiveness waiting for you. Despite your sin, you can find love and acceptance in Christ. But, you cannot become a member of this family by being born in a Christian nation or Christian family. You cannot become his child by joining a church or by turning over a new leaf, but you can only become a child of God by turning from your sin and trusting the grace God provided for you in the birth, death, and resurrection of His Son.

Merry Christmas!

The Christmas Proclamation

Luke 2:10-14

"I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord . . . suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying Glory to God in the highest . . ."



◆ The Christmas time Proclamations summons us to join the holy angels, the Magi, and the shepherds to celebrate the birth of Christ the Lord.

May the glad tidings of the Savior's birth be echoed again through the church.

In this infant we see the greatest event in the history of mankind, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Logos made flesh, the Incarnation of God, Theos among us in human form, the Divine-man, fully God and fully man, the Temple of God in the flesh, born of the virgin on Christmas day in Bethlehem.

In this infant we see the fulfillment of prophecy, the *terminus ad quem* of Holy Writ, Abraham's Seed, the True Israel, the grand subject of all the prophets, and the hope of Adam's fallen race.

In this infant we see the visible manifestation of purity, holiness in the flesh, self-emptying humility, justice from the high court of heaven, the fullness of love, the wisdom of the sages, the power of God, and the mercy seat of Moses tabernacling among us in waves of grace.

In this infant we see the Living Torah, the subjective standard of the righteousness of the law, the living, breathing embodiment of truth, purity, and goodness.

In this infant we see Israel's Lawgiver, Judge, and King. But, He is more than this. He is the King of the Nations destined to rule the world, the

One to Whom all men must give account, the Prince of the kings of the earth, the Ruler of the Cosmos, the King of kings and Lord of lords, our Warrior-Champion who defeats man's enemies—Satan, sin, and death by virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead.

In this infant we see sin exposed, the proud humbled, hearts broken, tyrants rebuked, the wicked crushed, kings instructed, justice executed, mercy exalted, races united, and justice personified.

In this infant we see our salvation, justification, redemption, regeneration, reconciliation, and sanctification.

In this infant we see our Lord appointed to sit on David's throne now ascended to the right hand of the Father ruling the world, saving souls, and defeating the anti-god forces of history.

In this infant we see the hope of immortality, the promise of resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of eternal life — the Lord Jesus Christ about Whom the Father said, "This is my beloved Son. Hear ye Him."

Come, join the Christmas summons . . . "Glory to God in the highest!"

Merry Christmas!

Who Knew?

Luke 2:11



◆ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

The birth of Christ is the greatest, most significant event in history.

It was the day that the Creator of heaven and earth, the Son of God and the King of Israel was born of the virgin in Bethlehem.

Think of it! Immanuel, God among us!

But, who knew?

The Herods and Caesars and the Roman Senate did not know. Even the Great Sanhedrin had no knowledge that the King of the Nations was among them on earth, in Israel, in Bethlehem.

Mary knew. Joseph knew. The Magi, the Shepherds, Simeon, Anna, Elizabeth and Zechariah knew – that is twelve to fifteen people were privileged to understand and see the incarnation of the Son of God – that God was dwelling among men on earth in human form.

Only 12 to 15 people knew the Son of God was born in Bethlehem!

And, how did they know?

Luke 2:26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

They knew because God revealed it to them through angels and other means. God acted in history to give this handful of people special knowledge about the greatest event in history.

In the east, Christians celebrate the epiphany or the coming of the Magi to worship Christ with gifts from the East in January.

The word “epiphany” means “a sudden, intuitive perception or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something . . .” the king-maker Magi and all the actors in the Christmas drama had an epiphany regarding Christ; that is God revealed to them the wonder of the Christ event!

Revelation, not investigation, was the unique means whereby these blessed people came to know that Christ was born, that prophecy was being fulfilled, that the Savior of the world had arrived in the City of David.

Moreover, the Sadducees, Pharisees, and governors of the world did not know the Logos was made flesh and dwelt among them.

Do you know?

Do you know Christ and do you understand the grand significance of His birth?

If so, how do you know?

Is it because you are greater than, smarter than, better than other men?

If you know Christ as your Savior and appreciate the wonder of His incarnation, **it is because GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF TO YOU!**

Most of the world is caught up with Santa Claus, gift buying, and the sounds of the season. Most people on earth (pagans, Jews, Muslims) have no knowledge or appreciation for the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . and, if you do, it is because God was pleased to reveal to you the wonders of the presence of His Son on earth in human form.

So, if others are ho-hum about the true meaning of Christ, know that the whole world at the time of Christ’s birth had no knowledge of the Son.

You are blessed because God determined in eternity past that you might come to know the truth about the greatest event in history — the incarnation of the Son of God.

The President, members in the house and senate, and supreme court judges may not know, understand, or appreciate the glories of God among us in the Person and ministry of Christ, but YOU DO! And, why? Because God revealed His Son to you. Hallelujah!

Take a little time this Christmas season to thank God that in His grace He chose you to know the truth about the Savior who came to save His people from their sins.

Merry Christmas!

Was Christ Born on December 25th?

Luke 2:11



◆ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

Why December 25th?

christmas-vasili-nesterenko-2004

The birth of Christ is the most important event in history, as well as one of the most joyful holidays in Western tradition.

Some modern skeptics have questioned the date and proposed a September date for our Lord's birth.

Others have suggested that Christmas is the result of Christianizing *Sol Invictus* (birth of the unconquered Sun), a pagan festival.

What is the argument for the birth of Christ being on or around December 25th?

Consider the following Biblical facts

The Annunciation of Mary took place during the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (Luke 1:25-26). Overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, the Christ was conceived in her womb. Upon hearing the news, Mary visited Elizabeth in Judah and stayed with her three months (Luke 2:56). We think this visitation took place in late March or early April circa 2 B.C.

John the Baptist was conceived six months earlier after his father, Zechariah had finished his service in the temple during the fall festivals. If we can determine the time Zechariah ministered in the temple, we can determine the time he went home to be with his wife Elizabeth. We understand John was conceived in September circa 3 BC.

Consider the Eastern Orthodox Tradition

The first argument for the December date is because of tradition.

The churches in the East inform us that John the Baptist was conceived in September and born around June the next year (2.B.C.). If this be the case, then the Annunciation took place in March / April, three months before John was born. Based on a 40 week gestation period, these Eastern Orthodox Church propose the following dates:

John's conception – September 23rd, count six months and we have Mary's Annunciation – March 25th, count three more months and we have, John's birth – June 24th . Count nine months from March 25th and we have the birth of Christ – December 25th

Since its ecclesiastical memorialization during the 4th century, both the East and West have celebrated the birth of the Savior on December 25th, and for good reason.

Saint John Chrysostom (347-407), Archbishop of Constantinople, had no doubt about the accuracy of December 25th being the birth date of our Lord.

He informs us that December 25th was chosen for the celebration of the Nativity because it was an ancient tradition in the West (Rome / Europe) and was received by the East in 376 AD. St. Chrysostom delivered the following Christmas sermon at Antioch on December 25th, 386 AD:

“It is not ten years since this day [Christmas Day on December 25] was clearly known to us, but it has been familiar from the beginning to those who dwell in the West.”

“The Romans who have celebrated it for a long time, and from ancient tradition, and have transmitted the knowledge of it to us.”

(Addis WE, Arnold T. A Catholic Dictionary: Containing Some Account of the Doctrine, Discipline, Rites, Ceremonies, Councils, and Religious Orders of the Catholic Church.

Benziger Brothers, 1893. Original from Columbia University,
Digitized Sep 15, 2009, p. 178)

We may take it as certain that the feast of Christ's Nativity was kept in Rome on December 25th. It was introduced by St. John Chrysostom into Constantinople and definitively adopted in 395 (Thurston. H. Transcribed by Rick McCarty. Christian Calendar. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume III. Published 1908. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Nihil Obstat, November 1, 1908. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor. Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York).

The hand of providence: Acceptance of the December 25th date was adopted by all the churches without objection in the early years of the church.

Antioch, the homeland of Chrysostom, adopted this day with eagerness and celebrated the birth of Christ on December 25th.

John of Nicaea confirmed to the Catholics of Armenia that James the brother of Christ did not censure this celebration or the date of it.

Cyril of Jerusalem, in writing to Pope Julius (337-352), caused Julius to search out the matter. In reading Josephus, he discovered that Zechariah saw the Angel and was mute, and that John was conceived on 23rd of September, and that six months later the Theotokos³ received her announcement about the Lord; and that she gave birth to the Christ on the 25th of December.

³ Theotokos means "mother of God" – an accepted belief in the Greek orthodox tradition. The Protestant west takes umbrage at this statement for two reasons: (1) The statement implies that God was born through Mary. How can a human mother give birth to God? If the Greeks only meant that Mary gave birth to a son who was fully God and fully man, the term might be more acceptable. Moreover, (2) Greeks worship and pray to Mary as if she was some kind of goddess – an offense to the Biblical mind.

We all should all love Mary, and respect the fact that she was the Lord's chosen vessel. She desires honor, but not worship.

Basil the Great (330-379) delivered his laudatory discourse on the Nativity of Christ on the 25th of December.

Emperor Honorius of Rome (393-423) showed his brother Arcadius in Constantinople that the Roman Christians celebrated the nativity of Christ with much enthusiasm on the 25th of December.

Anastasius the Roman (491-518), Theophilus of Alexandria (385-412), and John of Jerusalem (356-417) celebrated the Lord's birth on December 25th.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), in his book *On the Holy Trinity*, states Christ was born on December 25th.

Chrysostom went on to say,

“This festival hath been everywhere proclaimed so rapidly and hath grown to such a height. That which Gamaliel said concerning the preaching of the Apostles, I might confidently assert concerning this day; that because God the Word is of God, therefore it shall not only be overthrown, but every year be more widely observed and ore clearly known.” (Quoted by W.P. Ten Broeck)

The second argument for the December 25th date rests on the fact that those in the early church had access to the records / archives in Rome and expressed no doubt about the accuracy of the date.

The December 25th date was celebrated first by those in Rome who had access to Roman archives, and they celebrated December 25th as our Lord's birth day without any objection or equivocation.

According to Luke 2:2 the birth of Jesus was at the time of “the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria” (3-2 BC). This taxing “census” or “enrollment” occurred precisely in keeping with Luke's chronology regarding the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ:

“Tertullian (Against Marcion 4.19) states that the enrollment at the time of the birth of Jesus was ‘taken in Judea by Sentius Saturninus,’ and we remember that for Tertullian, as for many other early Christian scholars (§ 489), the date of the nativity

was 3/2 B.C. Josephus (Ant. 17.89) refers to the time when Herod the Great had opportunity to speak about his son, Antipater, to Varus, and says: 'At this time there happened to be in Jerusalem Quintilius Varus, who had been sent to succeed Saturninus as governor of Syria.'" (The Enrollment of Quirinius)

The birth of Christ as being on December 25th goes back to the archives in Rome.

Moreover, this argument rests on the presumption that mothers know with specificity when their children were born, and Mary is no exception! How could she forget anything? She must have told Luke, Paul, Peter, John, Matthew, and the other disciples the precise details of her unique pregnancy, angelic visitation, and her delivery at Bethlehem. That Jesus was born on December 25th must have been accepted in the first century without question.

Further, Dr. Luke received his details about the dates and circumstances of our Lord's birth and the birth of John the Baptist from Mary. This information spread rapidly through the churches in the first century before it received ecclesiastical ordination in the 4th century. And when our Lord's birth was memorialized on December 25th, it received immediate universal acceptance . . . because it conformed with what the churches around the Mediterranean had already asserted.

Theophilus (A.D. 115-181), Catholic bishop of Caesarea in Palestine:

"We ought to celebrate the birthday of Our Lord on what day soever the 25th of December shall happen." (Magdeburgenses, Cent. 2. c. 6. Hospinian, De origine Festorum Chirstianorum.)

The third argument for the December 25th date rests on the premise that Zechariah was acting as Deputy High Priest on the Day of Atonement in September that year and that John was conceived on or around September 23rd.

Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Ambrose, Theodoret, Dionysius the Areopagite, Venerable Bede, and Theophylact among others affirm Zechariah was acting as high priest on the Yom Kippur that year.

This view calculates the conception of John in October 3 BC, and Mary being pregnant visited Elizabeth when Elizabeth was six month pregnant; that is, sometime in late March or early April 2 BC. If this is the case, Mary would have given birth to Jesus around December 25, 2 BC.

The entire tradition of the church has acknowledged that Zechariah was the high priest in September.

The objection arises from some noting the text does not say Zechariah was the high priest, but only a priest (Luke 1:5). The answer is that it was common to call the high priest "the priest" as Leviticus 13:2 says of Aaron: "They must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons . . .". The term "priest" and "high priest" were an interchangeable title. For other examples see Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:15.

It is also clear that Zechariah was ministering inside the Holy Place when the angel appeared beside the altar of incense (Hebrews 9:4). Further, the people were concerned (overcome with anxiety) because Zechariah delayed in coming out of the temple (Luke 1:21).

Thus, it has been proposed that Zechariah could have "censed" in the Holy of Holies and as he returned into the Holy Place, the angel Gabriel met him who delayed his return to the people out of the Holy Place into the courtyard. That the people were anxious supports the view that Zechariah was performing sacred duties on the Day of Atonement that September. Jewish tradition informs us that prayers were shortened so as not to cause anxiety among the people.

Mishna, Yoma 5:1: "He did not make the prayer long so as to frighten Israel."

So, when Zechariah did not return quickly, the people were naturally distressed about the delay speculating that he might have been slain by the Lord; and, there is this fact: That Zechariah came out of the temple

mute must have left an indelible impression on everyone, especially Zechariah, Elizabeth . . . and later Mary.

We also know the priesthood had become a political matter. Tension arose between the people and Rome; between Jewish conservatives loyal to Torah, and the party of liberals loyal to the Roman State. In order to keep peace with Rome, Herod killed a rebel high priest and appointed his own political priest who would favor Roman occupation. As scholars examined the lists of high priests during this period, we know they were elected, selected, and chosen by lot each year between 3 BC and 6 AD. A priest for a year couldn't attain too much political power.

Moreover, there is a good argument that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist because John was the true high priest of Israel in contrast to Caiphas who was a political choice for high priest by Rome.

Objections to the December Date

However, this argument is not without objections.

The objection arises out the fact that Zechariah was of the order of Abijah (a descendant of Eleazar, the son of Aaron) which served twice a year for one week at their appointed times; that is, the Luke reference could refer to his service earlier in the spring.

It is true, that Zechariah did serve as a priest during these periods twice a year. But, Chrysostom inform us he was chosen by lot to serve on the Day of Atonement (a fall festival) as a deputy high priest, and that one of his duties was to burn incense on this day. If this be true, then John was conceived sometime in late September or early October 3 BC.

Josef Heinrich Friedlieb argues it differently but comes to the same conclusion that Zechariah ministered during the Fall Festival saying the priestly course of Abias (the course of Saint Zacharias) was undoubtedly serving during the second week of the Jewish month of Tishri – the very week of the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of Tishri. In our calendar, the Day of Atonement would land anywhere from September 22 to October 8.

Some object to the December date of our Lord's birth because shepherds were not active in the field during the winter season. But, there is an answer to this. First, this just isn't true. Sheep need care all year round. Secondly, sheep were needed for the temple services, and it reasonable to think the priests secured many of their mandatory sheep offerings from, in, and around Bethlehem which is only six miles away from Jerusalem . . . and during the winter season.

Some object to the December date because it was the rainy season in Israel. First, Bethlehem is not in Norway or Siberia. It is on the same latitude as northern Florida and Dallas, Texas. An average day in December will be 54 degrees – that is, perfect!

Finally, Providence has given us December 25th as the day to celebrate our Lord's birth as a blessing to the whole world.

This day has been a witness to Chinese, Japanese, Indians, and Africans that God-incarnate lived among us; that the kingdom of God invaded history in and through the birth of the Son. December 25th is sweet incense blessing the whole world with hope, love, and charity. It is a triumphant witness to the love of God that sent his Son into the world to save sinners.

Moreover, it is a human perversity to think that this great event was the product of haphazard guess work and sloppy scholarship among early Christians. Only a proud, arrogant modern man interested in advancing his own reputation would challenge this date twenty-centuries removed from those who had access to the early records and their deposition in the Roman archives. What a shame for a pastor to discourage Christians from celebrating the Lord's birth on December 25th being the Grinch that stole Christmas.

While it is not necessary to know the exact day of our Lord's birth, December 25th is a reasonable time to celebrate the greatest event in history.

Let us remember our Lord's birth on December 25th as the day the God-man entered history to show us the Father, and to save us from our sins. Merry Christmas!

A Positive Christmas

2 Corinthians 1:20



◆ 20 For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

Christmas is about God fulfilling His promise to send a Savior to redeem mankind. But, how many promises in the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ?

The answer is “all of them!”

The background of this text is constructed on the fickle criticism of Paul and his delay in returning to Corinth – a delay that stirred up criticism in Corinth against the apostle.

Since Christ is God’s truth incarnate and all of God’s promises are “yes in Him,” the apostle had no authority from God but to be a true man and to preach a true gospel. His delays in returning to the Corinthians were not due to being “flaky” and two-faced, but due to unforeseen circumstances which were out of his control. Though the apostle appeared to be erratic, he assures the Corinthians that God is reliable and that all his promises are true; that all his pledges find their fulfillment in Christ.

“as many as the promises of God” should be read “As many are the promises of God.” Some translations read, ““In him is the Yea, wherefore also by him is the Amen to God for glory by our means.”

In every case the basic thought is the same, all of God’s promises have been ratified, installed, sealed, and fulfilled in Christ. He is, as it were, the incarnate “Amen” to Old Testament promises (Ellicott).

The word “yes” represents the voice of God; the “Amen!” represents the voice of believers.

Christmas joy is not in temporal, earthly gifts, but in Heaven's gift to mankind – eternal gifts in a human package.

Need hope? Look at Christ! Need salvation? Look at Christ; need guidance? Look at Christ. He is the fulfillment of every promise, every hope, every blessing in Holy Scripture.

Our view of Christ is too small, and our thought about Him are too few.

He is greater and more positive than any of can articulate.

Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Thus, Christmas represents the positive hope of all men. The King and his kingdom arrived in history. All the blessings of His reign are available to us in a first fruits way: justification, eternal life, the Holy Spirit, and forgiveness.

Let us open His gifts by faith and enjoy them today!

Merry Christmas!

Was the Virgin Birth Necessary?

Matthew 1:23



◆ Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

According to Redbook Magazine 56 percent of U.S. seminary students reject the idea of the virgin birth.

According to the Sunday Telegraph in London, England, 25 percent of the clergy do not believe in the virgin birth.

One New Hampshire vicar declared, “There was nothing special about his birth or childhood—it was his adult life that was extraordinary” (Highbeam Research).

According to the Harrison Poll (1993), 93 percent of professing Christians believe in the virgin birth, but only 27 percent of non-Christians believe the Biblical account.

Among college students, only 60 percent believe in the virgin birth. It appears the more education one receives, the lower the percentage of those who believe. Of those polled, 86 percent of republican accept the traditional view compared to 73 percent of democrats.

At a Kamal Harris Rally in 2024, someone shouted, “Jesus is Lord,” and she responded, “You guys are at the wrong rally.” This is why there is no such thing as Christian democrats.

Parthenogenesis

The Greek word for “virgin” is *parthenos* (παρθένος). The word “genesis” means beginning. Therefore, in theology parthenogenesis refers to the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Sumerian Civilization, we find

a mythological carving on a wall about King Tukulti II who was created by the gods in the womb of his mother. The Babylonians believed that Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14) was conceived by Semiramis by a sunbeam from the Sun (Baalism to the Jews).

In India, Hinduism claims that after Vishnu was reincarnated in the form of a fish, tortoise, boar, and lion, that Vishnu descended into the womb of Devaki to whom Krishna was born. There is even a legend that Alexander the Great was born of virgin by the power of Zeus through a snake. The Romans believed that Zeus impregnated Semele without physical contact and that she conceived Dionysus, lord of the earth.

Modern science has observed parthenogenesis in aphids and social insects, honeybees, and ants. An unfertilized egg will give rise to the male drones and the fertilized eggs to the female workers and queens. Charles Bonnet was the first to observe the phenomenon. In 1900, Jacques Loeb achieved the first case of artificial parthenogenesis when he pricked unfertilized frog eggs with a needle and observed that in some cases normal embryonic development followed. In 1936, Gregory Pincus induced parthenogenesis in rabbits by changing the temperature of the ovum and using chemical agents to facilitate the process.

But, parthenogenesis is completely impossible with the human race. There is no known agent or process apart from conjugal fertilization that can produce human babies. This fact alone should cause one to at least question the virgin birth of Christ. To believe in the virgin birth without facts is fideism; i.e., the willingness to believe anything without evidence.

Why should a person believe in the virgin birth of Christ?

Mary and the Virgin Birth

Let us clarify what we mean by the virgin birth. By virgin birth, Evangelical Christians do not infer a “miraculous birth.” His birth was not miraculous, but natural. Christ was born like any child would be born with constrictions, blood, and water.

By virgin birth, we do not suggest an “unusual conception” or “miraculous” conception in the tradition of Sarah or Elizabeth who were

past the age of childbearing. Mary's conception was not "miraculous" in that tradition because Mary appeared to have arrived at a child-bearing age.

By virgin birth, we do not mean an "immaculate conception" of Mary as the Catholic Church teaches. The Catholic doctrine of Immaculate Conception asserts that Mary was herself conceived and born without original sin.

Like the rest of humanity, she had a human father. She also needed a Savior (Luke 1:47).

By virgin birth, we mean that her pregnancy did not originate through a sexual union with a man, but originated supernaturally through the work of God's Spirit.

By virgin birth, we mean that His conception was miraculous in that Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit and not by a man.

Reasons for the Virgin Birth

1. The textual reason

The text says, "When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." (Mt. 1:18).

The Biblical writers were not dummies. They understood the "birds and the bees" and how babies were born out of wedlock. They also understood the skepticism that would sprout surrounding the birth of Christ. Notice that Matthew does not indulge that skepticism, but simply tells the facts surrounding the birth of Christ. Mary was pregnant before they consummated their union. Joseph knew Mary was pregnant, and he knew he was not the father.

Joseph was the first skeptic! Joseph was caught in a tension between the facts (She was pregnant) and Mary's testimony and character (She appeared to be a pure woman).

However, Joseph was no man's fool.

Unable to reconcile the issue, he decided to divorce her. And, he would have divorced her except God intervened through revelation to reconcile the issue. In Joseph's dream, God revealed to him that Mary was indeed pregnant through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Mary's faithfulness to Joseph was no longer in dispute, and the reason for her pregnancy was acceptable to him. There is no evidence that God spoke to Joseph before this event or after this event, but the dream was powerful enough to overcome his skepticism.

2. Matthew's character and training

Note the character of Matthew as an historian. His documentary on the life of Christ is first rate as a biography. As a Jew, He was aware of the commandment, "You shall not lie." He was a follower of Christ who taught the Golden Rule and held his disciples to the high standards of the Torah (Mt. 5:17). He heard Jesus denounce the Pharisees for lying (Jn. 8:44). Christ taught publicly and opened himself up to his critics requesting them to expose a lie in his own teaching (Jn. 8:46). Even Jesus' enemies called him, "true" (Mk. 12:14). To insert a deliberate lie into the record of Christ's birth would be to deny his Jewish and Christian training. For Mathew to lie does not seem plausible.

3. The prophetic reason

The text informs us that God did not leave Joseph wrestling with his own subjective experiences but directed Joseph to look to prophecy through the medium of a dream (Mt. 1:22, 23):

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

God refers Joseph to Isaiah's prophecy that He would give as sign to the House of Israel. The sign of his visitation would be that a virgin would give birth to a son. From Genesis to Malachi, the Scriptures predicted the

coming of a Redeemer that would defeat man's enemies and usher in the kingdom of God.

This redeemer would come through the seed of a woman (Genesis 3:15). He would be one of Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12, 15, 17, 20, 22). He would be an Israelite (Num. 24:17). He would be a descendant of David (Is. 9:1-6). He would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). And, He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). A virgin birth was necessary because Biblical prophecy demands fulfillment.

4. The linguistic reason

The text uses the Greek word *parthenos* to describe Mary. The term *parthenos* refers to a young unmarried woman who has not had a conjugal relationship with a man. Philip the evangelist had virgin daughters (Acts 21:9). Virgins are addressed in Paul's treatise of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:25, 28, 34. The church is called to be pure "virgin" (*parthenos*) espoused to Christ. To think that the term *parthenos* means anything else other than a pure, unmarried woman is untenable.

Skeptics, however, advance the belief that the term *parthenos* refers to an "unmarried" woman rather than to a classic "maiden" or "virgin." In the Hebrew culture, two words were used to describe unmarried women. The first is called a *bethullah* (בְּתוּלָה) and the second is called an *almah* (עַלְמָה). Rebecca was called both a *bethullah* (Gen. 24:16) and an *almah* (Gen. 24:43).

The difference between the two words, however, is interesting. The term *bethullah* could refer to an unmarried virgin or an unmarried widow (Joel 1:8). The term *almah* refers ONLY to a young, unmarried maiden. The term "virgin" (English) or "*parthenos*" (Greek) in the Isaiah 7:14 comes from the Hebrew word "*almah*" leaving us no doubt that Isaiah was predicting the birth of son through a classic maiden. In the Septuagint, the Hebrew translators translated the Hebrew term "virgin" (*almah*) as *parthenos*.

But, there are difficulties with Isaiah 7:14, because Isaiah applied the term to his wife.

The clenching argument for the virgin birth is grounded on the principle that *the fulfillment is always greater than the promise*. The promise of Isaiah

was in regards to a young woman would give birth to the Messiah, but who would have ever dreamed the fulfillment would involve the Spirit's impregnation of a virgin?

5. The typological reason

The Scripture teaches that men are born "sinners" (Psalm 58:3; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10-19; 23); i.e., with a rebellious, selfish nature. Children are not born good or neutral but with an inclination towards evil. Humanity inherits this "bent towards sin" from Adam (Romans 5:12ff). The sin nature is passed on to children from their father, and since all children have human fathers, all children are born sinners. If Christ had had human a father, he would have had a sin nature. Since he was born of a virgin by the Agency of the Holy Spirit, He escaped the curse of sin. For this reason, Jesus is called the righteous one (1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:15) with whom God is well pleased (Matthew 3:17).

6. The theological reason

If Christ was not born of a virgin, then all of the Old Testament (OT) types and shadows are meaningless. For instance, all of the OT sacrifices had to be "without blemish," perfect in physical appearance. The Passover lamb had to be inspected for four day to test its qualifications to be a sacrificial lamb. The red heifer had to be pure red. All the bowls and vessels of the tabernacle had to be clean. Bread offered to the Lord had to without leaven. All these types pointed to the Perfect One Who would be born without sin (Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5) and Who did no sin (1 Pet. 2:22) and Who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Only a sinless person, born of virgin could fulfill all the OT types, which symbolized the perfection of Messiah.

7. The historical reason

Not only did the Messiah have to be free from Adam's curse, he had to be free from the curse upon Jeconiah. Jeconiah is called "Cononiah" or "Coniah."

The Messiah came through Abraham to David and from David to the Messiah—real people in history. God promised that one of David's descendants would sit upon the throne of David (2 Samuel 7:1ff; Isaiah

9:6; 11:1). The term “son of David” was a messianic term and everyone in Biblical times understood the title to refer to the messiah king that was to come. One of David’s descendants, an heir to the throne, was so evil and so wicked the Lord pronounced a curse on his descendants. This curse is known as Jeconiah’s curse. This meant that none of Coniah’s physical sons or descendants could inherit the right to be a king and to sit in David’s seat of power. If Jesus were a descendant of Coniah, He would indeed be related to David, but He would also be under the curse, and, therefore, would be disqualified from sitting on David’s throne.

Jeremiah 22:30 Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.

Matthew 1:11 And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:

Though this curse appears to frustrate the promises of God regarding the Messiah, the conflict is resolved in the virgin birth of Christ. Because Jesus was born of Mary, the great granddaughter of Nathan, the son of David, Jesus was genetically linked to David and thus to Abraham. Because Joseph was not his biological father, Jesus was free from the curse upon Jeconiah. Because Joseph adopted Jesus as his son, Jesus inherited the right to sit upon David’s throne by virtue of the fact that Joseph was a descendant of David. When the angel appeared to Mary, the angel announced that she would have a child Who would sit upon the throne of David. In Acts 2, Peter announces this prophecy to be fulfilled by virtue of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension into heaven (Acts 2:30-32).

If Jesus had not been born of the virgin Mary, there would be no resolution to Jeconiah’s curse.

8. The redemptive reason

The name “Jesus” comes from the Hebrew word for “Joshua”, which means “Jehovah our Savior.” If Jesus was NOT totally free from sin, He would not qualify to be a Savior. If He had sin in Him, He would have to

pay for His own sin. Because He was sinless, He could be our Savior and bear our sins as the Lamb of God.

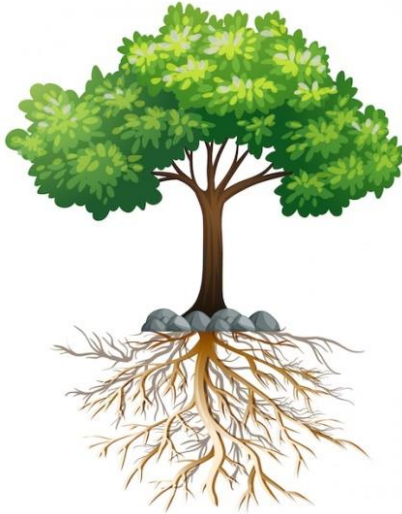
I heard a story about a preacher in Philadelphia. At the close of the service a stranger came up to D.M. Stearns arguing, "I don't like the way you spoke about the cross. I think that instead of emphasizing the death of Christ, it would be far better to preach Jesus, the teacher and example." Stearns replied, "If I presented Christ in that way, would you be willing to follow Him?" "I certainly would," said the stranger without hesitation. "All right then," said the preacher, "let's take the first step. He did no sin. Can you claim that for yourself?" The man looked confused and somewhat surprised. "Why, no," he said. "I acknowledge that I do sin." Stearns replied, "Then your greatest need is to have a Savior, not an example!" (Source unknown).

In summary, the virgin birth of Christ is foundational to the Christian faith. Because Jesus is free from sin, He is qualified to be the Savior. The great hope of Christmas is that God so loved the world He sent the Holy One, born of a virgin, to save His people from their sins. That hope is more than pie in the sky when you die. It is thoroughly grounded in history and the virgin birth of Christ. Don't depend on polls to determine your faith, believe the Scriptures and you will be saved from your sins — for *He came to save His people from their sins.*

Merry Christmas!

A Root Out of Dry Ground

Isaiah 53



◆ 700 years before Jesus' birth and crucifixion *the suffering and triumph* of the Savior-Servant was described by the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus is called "the Arm of the Lord." This text reveals the barbell strength of the "*Arm of the Lord*" exerted at Calvary to save sinners.

Every word ripples with power. Entire New Testament themes regarding the person and work of our Lord are compressed into the beef and brawn of these phrases.

The text begins with a question, "*to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*"

All the wisdom, knowledge, eternal power, force, and vigor of the durable, incorruptible, strength, and bone-crushing muscle of God points to the Babe in Bethlehem wrapped in swaddling clothes.

This babe's power is summed up in Isaiah's Messianic metaphor, "*the arm of the Lord.*" He is none other than "*El-Shaddai*" - a brawny title derived from the male deltoids, biceps, and pectoral muscle groups.

The answer to the question "*to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*" is the disciples.

The Messiah's youth, humanity, purity, vulnerability, innocence, sensitivities, and gentleness are contained in the description, "He grew up before him as a tender shoot."

The "*dry ground*" references the abusive, censorious, and hostile depravity of the opponents of Jesus where He chose to live. He was God's King carving out a kingdom built on moral power in the ghetto of humanity – a reference that includes the murderous intent of King Herod and the unbelief of the nation.

When the disciples met the Christ, there was nothing unusual about his appearance. He was not physically bigger or more handsome than other men. There was no outstanding manly beauty that lured men to Him. He was not the kind of man people would have voted for the title of Mr. Universe, but there was no criticism of him being effeminate. He was in all respects, a man's man.

In his external form and body, He appeared to be a normal, garden-variety looking Hebrew. All the depictions of a chiseled, well-groomed European Christ by painters are creations of men and not divinely inspired.

But, masculine strength, power, wisdom, and ax-grinding confrontation bulldozed its way through the citadels of Jewish corruption conquering hardened hearts.

The title "man of sorrows acquainted with grief" embraces all of our Lord's hypertrophic suffering He experienced due to the distresses, agitations, cares, pressures, burdens, afflictions, grievances, heartbreaks, disappointments, hurts, strains and pains that He endured among the Jews of that day.

The nation's stunning ridicule, disdain, neglect, scorn, snobbery, hate, and contempt for Christ by the Jews is compressed into the phrases "He was despised" and we "esteemed him not."

The phrase "*He has born our grief and carried our sorrows*" refers to His broad-shouldered power to dead lift the burdens, sickness, infirmities, maladies, ailments, disorders, emotional and mental distress that weighs down humanity.

On top of this, the disciples observed that not only did Christ suffer because of the "*contradiction of sinners against himself*," but a unique suffering labeled "*smitten of God*" became the optimum strength test during His agony on the cross.

Consider for a moment that our Lord was the only man born to die -- to die for the sins of the world.

To suffer at the hands of men is one matter, but suffering caused by Heaven itself is quite another.

To endure abuse by irascible men takes manly strength, but to endure the punishment of an offended deity takes the muscular grit of *El-Shaddai*.

Some men are called to endure the anger of men, but the "arm of the Lord" endured the wrath of God.

Our Lord's feverish agony and "*chastisement*" at the cross caused by the weight of our carnal sins, godlessness, rebellion, delinquency, neglects, immorality, malfeasance, prurience, pride, fleshly attractions, promiscuity, concupiscence, perversity, obscenity, profanity, vulgarity, sensuality, anger, wrath, dissensions, slander, contumelies, sedition and the like are compressed into terms like "*our transgressions*" and "*our iniquities*" (Galatians 5:19ff).

The phrases "*wounded*" and "*bruised for our iniquities*" reference our Lord's endurance test at the cross including his whippings, beatings, impalement, discomfort, pains, throes, agony, misery, passion, torment, bleeding, thirst, and His mental, emotional, and physical anguish.

The phrase by "*his stripes are we healed*" refers to life-saving benefits procured by our Lord's perseverance at the cross, and includes the gleaming benedictions of salvation, reconciliation, forgiveness, justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, and resurrection.

All these salvic cures are needed because of the infirmities and disorders caused by man eating fruit from the Poisonous Tree.

The entire history of Adam's autonomous race with its shameful sins and rebellion against God are simply summed up as, "*All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way*" (53:6).

We can do a lot worse, but we can hardly do better than to consider the barbell power of the "*Arm of the Lord*" exerted at Calvary to save sinners.

"Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing, my great Redeemer's praise."

Merry Christmas!

O Worship the King

Matthew 2:2



◆ Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.

This is the first use of the word “Worship” in the New Testament.

The story of the Magi is introduced to us as men who had come from the East to pay homage to the Christ Child.

There is no higher calling in life than to worship the Savior. In fact, history would have not known anything about this priestly class from Persia had they not pursued a course of venerating Christ.

Let’s put it another way, because they worshiped the King, they are remembered in every country of the world during the Christmas season as the “wise men.” Wise men worship Christ the King, and those that worship Him become wise.

But, what is worship? If you ask a hundred different people, you will get a hundred different answers.

Since honoring God is man’s highest calling, and since this is the first usage of the term “worship” in the New Testament, let us seek to discover the meaning of the word from this passage.

First, Worship Involves Revelation

Matthew 2:2 saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

We are told that the “three kings”[1] saw His star in the east; that is, God showed them a celestial sign and they immediately associated it with the

birth of a prince; that is, God revealed the truth about His Son to the Persian Magi.

How did Joseph and Mary know about the Christ child? By revelation! An angel came to Mary and God revealed Himself to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35).

How did the shepherds in the field know about Jesus? Luke 2:5 tells us the “glory of the Lord shone around them” and announced to them the birth of the Savior, “Christ the Lord.” How did they know? The answer is: by revelation!

Notice what Luke 2:26 says about how Simeon came to know about the birth of the Lord Jesus:

“And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”

Only a handful of people worshiped Christ on that first Christmas. Jerusalem and all the towns of villages had no knowledge (spiritual insight) that a king was born.

The only people who can truly worship Christ are those to whom God reveals Himself!

So, if you are one who honors Christ at Christmas time, it is because God chose to reveal the glories of His Son to you.

Second, Worship Involves Investigation.

Matthew 2:52-5 “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? . . . and Herod assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

When the Zoroastrian priests saw the star, they knew something significant was about to happen . . . but what? We know they were upper class Babylonians and that they had access to historical archives. Quite possibly, they possessed a copy of the Book of Daniel. Perhaps, they read Daniel nine and calculated the time of the birth of Israel’s king.

When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, they asked, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?” Immediately, all of Jerusalem was “troubled.”

A new king other than Herod? The Jerusalem scholars searched the Scripture, and discovered David’s great Son was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2).

There is lesson here for us. Worship is only possible with the true knowledge of Christ. Worship involves reading the Bible, studying the meaning of words, searching out historical events, and investigating ancient records to discover knowledge about the King. The discovery of truth about Christ promotes worship, and true worship is based on the true knowledge of our Lord.

If you want to worship, spend time hugging the Scripture to get to know Christ better.

Third, Worship Involves preparation

Matthew 2:1 “behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem . . .”

Notice the particle “behold” which summons us to marvel at these men and their journey.

The Magi planned their trip from Persia to Jerusalem (800 to 1000 miles). Think of all that was involved in this expedition: leaving their jobs, packing, purchasing supplies, hiring porters, giving instructions to their contemporaries and families, and the journey itself.

True worship involves preparation and planning to pray, to study, to strengthen your spirit, to settle your mind, to calm your emotions, and to prepare a gift to offer to the Lord.

Fourth, Worship Involves Separation.

Notice the prepositions “from” and “to”:

“ . . . from the east came to Jerusalem . . .”

The Magi left their family, friends, employers, co-workers, and countrymen. They left their homes, work place, daily duties, and city. They left all that brought them comfort, and accepted the duty to travel to an unknown place through unknown territory toward an unknown destination.

Likewise, worship involves separation from all that we deem precious. The followers of Christ must leave their work, worries, and fears to magnify him. They must turn off their TV, radio, and computer to reverence Christ. And, they must travel to one of God's temples to meet with the saints to worship Him.

Worship involves separation from men and all that beckons for our attention; and, it involves getting into the presence of King Jesus.

Fifth, Worship Involves a Positive Cheer and Celebration.

Matthew 2:10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

The air must have turned musky, locker-room stagnant in the presence of Herod. No doubt, having a convention with this sulphurous monster was like meeting face-to-face with the "angel of death" (Joseph Mengele) presiding over Hitler's death panel.

After leaving the malodorous grey presence of Herod, the Magi mounted the camels saw the Bethlehem star and "rejoiced with exceeding great joy." It's amazing the stench of death aromating from Herod's court did not quash the enthusiasm of these ambassadors on a mission to reverence the Christ. Can't you feel their relief, and their renewed excitement to be guided once more by that celestial sign?

True worship must survive the insincerity, deception and pretense of fake worshippers, "bring me word . . . that I may come and worship him also" (2:8). Herod wanted to eliminate Christ, not worship him. True worship must survive the chicaneries of pretenders.

Likewise, there is joy in worshiping the King. Even if you don't feel like it, rejoice. Go for an Oscar, and celebrate the Lord's birth.

Sixth, Worship Involves Adoration

Matthew 2:11 And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Notice the object of their homage, "Him!" Worship is about Christ-esteem, not self-esteem; about giving, not receiving; about loving, not taking.

When the Magi came to the house where Mary and Joseph were staying, they "fell to the ground and worshiped Him" (2:11) – a proper posture before this King – an Eastern custom showing respect and honor.

Occupied with the greatness of Another, these Eastern princes prostrated themselves before this Child Prince.

Notice these dignitaries did not prance into the presence of Jesus yodeling, dancing, prancing, jigging, hopping or clapping. The word for "worship" here is *proskuneo* which means "to fall prostrate," or "to bow the knee." These Eastern Princes assumed a respectful, subordinate position before a Superior; that is, they were acknowledging the authority, majesty, ascendancy, prestige, and prerogatives of One greater than themselves.

Moreover, notice the titles ascribed to the Child with Mary: "King of the Jews" (2:2), "Messiah" (2:4), and "Ruler" (2:6).

Worship, first and foremost, is a sincere and genuine acknowledgement of the authority, power, and supremacy of our Jesus as Lord, Master, Sovereign, Judge, Lawgiver, and King. It is not dancing to the doxology in a leotard.

The call in Matthew to salvation is not to "believe," but to subject one's self to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Matthew 21:31 Which of the two did the will of his father?"
They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

Matthew 9:6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” – he then said to the paralytic – “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you (a beam of subjection), and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

The gospel of Matthew presents the hope of entering the kingdom of God (3:2; 4:23; 5:20; 7:13; 18:3).

Matthew warns us that no man can serve two masters (6:24); that the way to enter the kingdom is to own Christ as your King and surrender to His authority. Moreover, Matthew warns as well as invites men to come to Christ. The danger, however, is superficial profession without possession (7:21); confession without subjection.

Worship, therefore, is about acknowledging the worthiness of Christ, His character, and His accomplishments. Enough of man! Enough of self! Enough of entertainment! Let us see Christ, bow the knee to Him, and confess His authority among men!

Seventh, Worship Involves the Presentation of a Gift

Matthew 2:11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

The Magi did not come to get, but to give; not to receive a blessing, but to be a blessing; not to be happy, but to honor Him. These worshippers gave the King gifts of frankincense, myrrh, and gold.

Likewise, worship involves a presentation of a sacrificial gift to the One worthy of all that we have, own, and possess. He does not ask for it all, as He has need of nothing. Worship is not for God’s benefit; it is for our benefit. It is important that we recognize His value. And, it is our privilege to honor him with our wealth.

Eighth, Worship may Involve some Form of persecution

Matthew 2:3, 12, 13 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.

Imagine Herod and all Jerusalem being "troubled" (terrified, frightened, upset) about Eastern princes coming to honor Christ as the "King of the Jews," but they were.

Humanists and feminists are perplexed and angered by attention given to Christ and not them. Worshippers of Christ must survive the snide remarks and subtle legislation that seeks to stifle Christmas joy in the name of fairness and equity.

When the Magi came to Herod and informed him that they had come to worship a new born king, Herod's court went into panic mode. They would not have been upset if the Magi had come to see a great "teacher," or "scholar," or "rabbi," or "religious leader." It was the claim of king, of authority, of sovereignty they could not countenance. That the "Child" was a Prince threatened their status, their authority, and their civil power.

Likewise, it was the claim that Jesus is King and must be obeyed that turned the world upside down in the first century (Acts 17:6-7). Preaching a sweet, passive, peaceful, docile, lamblike Christ doesn't have the power to flip light switch much less turn the world upside down.

When the Magi notified Herod that they had come to worship the new born king, Herod became agitated and ordered the Magi to find the Christ and to report back to him. But, sensing malice aforethought in Herod, the Magi remained aloof. Warned in a dream to not return to Jerusalem, they took another route back to Babylon. When the Magi did not return, Herod ordered his military commandos to murder all the young children in and around Bethlehem . . . and, they did!

Notice that the Magi did not obey King Herod, the head of the Roman state in that country. They obeyed God . . . and this made Herod angry — angry enough to murder innocent children. Disobey the government? I guess these ambassadors had not heard of modern ecclesiastical beliefs on Romans 13 that since “all governments are ordained of God,” good people are required to obey all executive orders proceeding from the god-State. Irony intended.

Let’s put it another way, the Magi refused to recognize the legitimacy of Herod’s administration . . . the jurisdiction of Herod . . . the lawfulness of his order . . . or the authority of Herod over them. True Christians don’t kiss the rings of kings or give them a pinch of incense every time they enter the market place.

This priestly class of men were not incorporated with Rome; had no contract with Herod; and no nexus connecting them to his control. They were not Jews subject to Rome’s appointed Magistrate. They were free men. Because they acknowledge only the authority of God over them, they declared Herod’s order null and void in their own affairs.

Oh, that we had wise men like this among Christians who know that Congress has no authority over them!

While worship pleases God, it does not please others. Totalitarian governments compete with God for the affection and devotion of the people. They have no room in their jurisdiction for another king, and they certainly are not going to acknowledge the authority of Christ and surrender to His law-order.

Therefore, believers in Christ can expect some form of resistance and hostility to the worship of Christ from civil rulers and their alliances — especially if you seek to obey and God’s law — and, if you insist government officials should obey God’s King!

When government is god in the minds of men, you cannot expect them not to betray you! You cannot worship Christ without making some government idolater angry at you.

Therefore, in your devotion to Christ, expect disapproval, belittling, criticism, castigation, jail time, and some form of antipathy and estrangement.

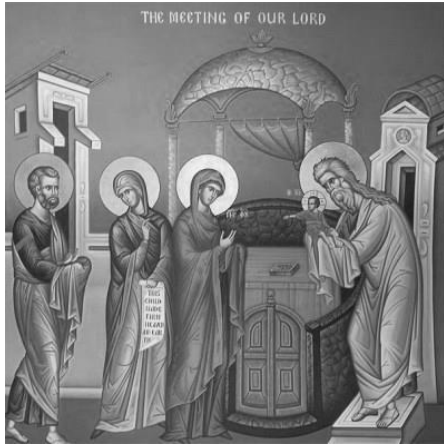
In conclusion, this is the first mention of worship in the New Testament . . . and it defines the character of the true worship of Christ. The story of the Magi instructs us about how to worship. And, we would do well to model their homage to the Child of Mary . . . and acknowledge Him as our King.

Merry Christmas!

The Feast of Circumcision

Celebrating the Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ

Luke 2:21



♦ **And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.**

The Eastern Church ordained the Feast of Circumcision to prevent heresy – any kind of Platonic belief that Jesus was merely a phantom, human invention, or apparition of the first century. Sadly, American churches have failed to ordain a day to celebrate the circumcision. Every Christian church would do well to establish a day to remember His circumcision on the level of celebrating Christmas in order to arrest apostasy.

Before us is the gospel. It is good news that Jesus was circumcised – evidence he was fully a man and not a phantom.

It pleases God for His children to celebrate all the events of His Son on earth because the visitation of our Lord was the most important matter in human history.

That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself is not only the grand meaning of the incarnation, the story must be told again and again until the church is purified.

That the God-man was among us being fully God and fully man demands our thoughtful attention. Who cannot pause and wonder that “The Word” became “flesh” and dwelt among us as the antidote to Adam’s indulgence at the Poisonous Tree?

In Greek / Russian Orthodox tradition, the Feast of Circumcision is a “dogmatic feast:” that is, a mandatory feast ordered by the church to preserve the orthodox faith.

Let us consider the Gospel of the Circumcision of Christ. All Orthodox churches consider it a “GREAT FEAST”.

Introduction to the Great Feast

Historically, Eastern Christians celebrate the circumcision of Christ on January 6 as part of the Feast of the Theophany of Lights.

January 6 was chosen because of its proximity to Christmas. Some believe it was a time when pagan Rome honored the winter solstice, a celebration of the sun as the god that gives light to support the world; that early Christians sought to redeem pagan days and to focus the world on the wonder of the Christ-the birth of the God-man; that when pagan Rome moved the celebration of the winter solstice to December 25th, Christians responded in like kind; that they celebrated the Sun of Righteousness arising in history on December 25th (Malachi 4:1-4), and the circumcision of Jesus on January 6.

But, the above explanation falls short of the truth.

That Jesus was born on or around December 25th was well accepted by the church. When the Eastern Church memorialized the birth of Christ on December 25th in the 4th century, it was immediately accepted in the east and west.

The celebration of Christmas on December 25th is grounded on the premise that John the Baptist was conceived near September 25th, and born the following year on or near June 25th; that Mary being pregnant with Jesus met with her aunt Elizabeth sometime after March 25th or Early April while Elizabeth was six months pregnant.

This appears to be the case. A December 25th date makes sense . . . and this happened to be the season for the Feast of Dedication, the 25th of Kislev — a memorial that lasted eight days celebrating the re-consecration

of the temple following the victory of Judas Maccabees in 165 BC over the Hellenistic kings, in particular, Antiochus Epiphanes.

This Jewish festival lasted eight days. It is called “Hanukkah” or “Festival of Lights” by modern Jewry. They celebrated it from the 25th day of the month of Kislev to the 2nd of Tevet in commemoration of the Rededication of the Temple by the Maccabees following their victory over the Syrians under Antiochus IV. It is characterized chiefly by the lighting of the nine candle menorah on each night of the festival.

The term “Hanukkah” is derived from the Hebrew verb “הִנִּיחַ”, meaning “to dedicate.” Tradition has it that the Hebrew priest had only enough oil to fill the candelabra once and that the supply lasted all nine days before a new supply of sanctified oil could be supplied. It shocked all — a miracle to the priests of that day.

So, there is good reason to believe that Jesus was circumcised on January 1st eight days after His birth on December 25th or on the last day of the eight days of the Feast of Lights, the 25th of Kislev; that is, the celebration of the circumcision of Christ had nothing to do with replacing pagan holidays.

Christmas was formalized in the East under Chrysostom circa 386 AD. Because a December date for the birth of Christ was undisputed by the Mediterranean Churches, the memorialization of the birth of Christ on the 25th of December was immediately accepted without dispute.

Furthermore, there is a good argument that Christ was born on or near the 25th of Kislev, the first day of the Feast of Lights or Feast of Dedication, as God’s Candelabra, the Light of the World. It was during the Maccabean Feast the Good Shepherd revealed to his disputants that He was one in substance with the Father; that is, “he and the father are one;” that he was very God of God, God incarnate, the God-man (John 10:21-31).

And, it was on the last day of this feast, the Lord was circumcised. Thus, celebrating our Lord’s circumcision in early January is very appropriate.

The Significance of the Great Feast

(1) The circumcision of Christ occurring eight days after His birth confirms the humanity of our Lord.

It causes us to consider the seedless conception of the Savior in Virgin Mary—a true and supreme miracle.

Untainted by Adam’s transgression, there was one man among us, without sin, prepared to be the pure Lamb of God to save His people from their sins. The Feast of the Circumcision of Christ remains a perpetual rebuke to the Gnostics who shunned the material world, and embraced spiritual idealism — the reduction of the physical world to a mere illusion. Consequently, the Gnostics denied the humanity of Christ, and embraced only a “spiritual redeemer.”

The Great Feast announces the Savior was totally human — a little baby with pink cheeks, moist lips, a little nose, two eyes, ten fingers and toes. He became one of us . . . a boy . . . a young lad . . . and eventually a manly man!

(2) The circumcision of Christ is proof that He was truly man in space and time.

As a man on a pilgrimage through time, He followed the prescription of circumcision given to Father Abraham. While Christ pre-existed in the presence of the Father as God of God, He was also the son of Mary, a true man, a Hebrew, a Son of the Covenant, a baby boy under the rites of circumcision. Here we have Christ assuming the nature of man and following the path of infancy to perfect manhood here on earth in space and time.

(3) The circumcision of Christ is gospel in Luke 2:21.

It is good news that God was at work to save His people. Government cannot save us. Scientist cannot save us.

God did not send an angel to redeem man. No animal was sufficient to supply the price of redemption. He sent His beloved Son, the Second Person of the Triune God to become an anthropos. Simeon could say on this day, “My eyes have seen thy Salvation.” Salvation was in a

Theanthropic Person, not an event . . . or an angelic being . . . or acts of the State.

God did not send His law or ritual to save us. Salvation is in a person, not a plan . . . and, not a ceremony to be saved.

(4) The circumcision of Christ is the day He publicly received the precious name, "Jesus."

On this day, Virgin Mary complied with the instructions by the angel in Matthew 1:21-22 to call him " in Greek or "Jesus" in English — the name pre-determined by the Father before the Christ was born — a name given to the child before Mary and Joseph lived together and consummated their marriage.

The name "Jesus" means "Savior" and enlightens us with the brightness and glory of His mission.

The name "Jesus" (Iesous") is is an English / Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Joshua," or "Yeshua," which means "Jehovah is Salvation."

With prophetic grandeur, Isaiah calls the virgin's child, "Immanuel" telegraphing to mankind that "God is with us." (Isaiah 7:14).

[Note: the promise of a young woman bearing a son applied immediately to Isaiah's wife who was not a maiden . . . but young married woman. But, the prophecy had Messianic implications where *the fulfillment was greater than the promise*; that is, God promised Isaiah's wife that she would have a son within a year. The promise contained an immediate significance with future overtones of the Messianic hope . . . which ultimately stunned everyone — that a true virgin would give birth to the Son of God. Thus, as typical in prophecy, the fulfillment was more marvelous, more wonderful, and more stunning than the promise.]

In Zechariah's prophecy (Luke 1:67-79), he uses terms like "visited us," "accomplished redemption," "horn of salvation," "salvation from our enemies," "mercy toward our fathers," "rescued," "Sunrise on high" "to

shine,” “to guide,” and “the way of peace” to infuse megatons of meaning into the importance of the Sun of Righteousness appearing in history.

(5) The circumcision of Christ announces the power of His name.

He is not only Sweet Jesus, He is Powerful Jesus; not only Meek Jesus, but Mighty Jesus!

Consider His spiritual power. He is the Savior – and, saving one man is no small task. Consider the bone-crushing power involved in washing away all the sins of all His people at cross and His command for the bone-dead “to rise.”

Consider His political power. Born into history is the God-man, the true Israel, the King of the Nations, the Master and Benefactor and Lord of mankind.

Consider the moral power of our Lord. He was the innocent, sinless, flawless, perfect lamb in heart, mind, and soul with no sin in Him. Men wrestle with scarlet sins within and without. The very best among us may achieve perfect responses in despairing circumstances for a second or two, but our Lord lived out a life of perfection 24/7, 365 days a year, for 33 years. Even when squeezed at the cross by the wrath of man and the wrath of God, only the fragrance of virtue trailed His sacrifice. That’s power!

(6) His circumcision signifies our Lord’s immutable state of absolute purity.

Circumcision acknowledged the fall of man; that sin was in the world, and that men must either master it or be mastered by it. Thus, circumcision was a physical ritual that illustrated man’s need for cleansing and purity; to engage the will to separate from sins and to devote one’s self to God.

The Dictionary defines purity “as the condition or quality of being pure; freedom from anything that debases, contaminates, pollutes.” The word “pure” is used over 97 times in the Bible. The Hebrew sense of the word simply means “an emptying out or being clean” implying that one is void

of all the vices that the Ten Commandments condemn: idolatry, unfaithfulness, deceit, covetousness.

While all males were circumcised as a symbolic gesture as their duty under God's covenant to live free from the dominion of sin, His circumcision was a statement of His perfection.

Hebrews 7:26 For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;

His circumcision was more than a ritual symbol. It bore witness that He was truly pure, free from sin, and full of goodness.

What was a sign to all Israelites and anemically achieved among the saints was marvelously actualized and perfected in Christ. Selah!

While the world and flesh became the crucial reference point to men, the God-man walked in perfect balance the tightrope between heaven and earth. He was spiritual, but not other-worldly; He was truly a man, but not a lewd and sensuous person. His circumcision was more than a sign of purity, He was purity personified in human life spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

The Word of God exhorts us:

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8).

But, to Jesus, all these lovely things came naturally.

Here is a man that never swore, cursed, lied, or slandered others. He never thought ill of man or told their secrets to others. He had no sin, knew no sin, and did no sin. He was pure but not naive; holy, but not isolated. He was free from the seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. Like fresh snow that delights the eye or

pure water that satisfies our thirst, the Lord was pure; i.e., free from all the vices and corruption common to men.

(7) His circumcision denotes perfect holiness and dedication to God.

Using an American idiom, our service to God is half-baked and incomplete at very best.

While purity has to do with freedom from defilement, holiness has to do with attachment to righteousness. The Savior was not only 100 % pure, He was 100% devoted to the will of God. He was the prototype of the burnt offering totally devoted to will of His Father.

The background to holiness is found in the exodus story where the LORD warned the Egyptians that He would kill their firstborn if Pharaoh did not let His people go (1450 BC).

“[A]ll the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the beasts” (Exodus 11:5).

In Exodus 12, God gave Moses detailed instructions on how to keep the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Then, at the beginning of chapter 13, rather abruptly, God briskly introduces the setting apart of the firstborn:

“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Sanctify to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and animal; it is Mine’” (Exodus 13:1-2).

Since the LORD redeemed the firstborn of Israel by the blood of the lamb, all firstborn males were redeemed and set apart for the service of the LORD.

Due to Israel’s redemption in Egypt, God claimed rights over the firstborn. Every firstborn child was to be ceremonially dedicated to the Lord; that is, he was holy appointed to temple service. Later, this requirement was transposed upon the Tribe of Levi.

Circumcision was a sign of detachment from the carnal and devotion to the spiritual; a sign of forsaking the temporal to pursue the eternal; a sign of turning from the natural to the supernatural; a sign of rejection of the flesh and admission and empowerment by the Spirit; a sign of repudiation of sin and devotion to God's law-order; and, a sign of being in a covenant (contract) relationship to the LORD God of Israel.

Christ is called God's Firstborn (Colossians 1:15-17)—a reference to His preeminence, not birth in time. Unlike Israelite males who were ceremonially holy, the Son of God was actually holy in aspect of His being. His seedless conception insured freedom from Adam's sin (purity). He was not only untouched by Adam's sin, He is archetype of righteousness itself (holy). For this reason, He received the appellation, "The LORD is our righteousness."

Christ's holiness is set against the background of the Biblical testimony to the sinfulness of man. Job declared that the sons of Adam are "abominable and corrupt," as one who "drinks injustice like water" (Job 15:16). Thus, the writer of Hebrews declares our Lord was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26); that is, His circumcision declared the perfection of purity and holiness in the God-man.

Think of it! There was one man among us Who was free of Adam's infection, and Who was totally, completely, wholeheartedly dedicated to the will of God. What a marvel, and what joy He must have brought to the Father.

(8) His circumcision was a statement of incision

When God works among men, He makes covenants with them. When God made a covenant with Abraham, he ordered that Abraham and all his male descendants be circumcised (Genesis 17).

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant . . . a ritual signifying the babe had a duty to keep the covenant obligations . . . to be purely devoted to God . . . something lacking in most ancient Hebrews.

In the Old Testament, the English phrase “make a covenant” is most often a translation of the Hebrew term *kārat berît*, which literally means “cut a covenant.” The verb *kārat* means “cut off, cut down,” and the noun *berît* means “covenant,” which is related to the words pact, contract, compact, treaty, alliance, and league.

Thus, circumcision, in its literal and serious sense, refers to a *berît*, a covenant cut with God.

To Hebrews, circumcision meant that a man was under the Law of the LORD God; that is, circumcision was the sign that a man had a duty to obey the law of his King; that he was to be a servant of His Majesty. But, because of the weakness of man, fulfillment of the law was sporadic and at times in Israel’s history decadent.

But, not with our Lord. Law was etched on his heart; and, physically, he bore the marks of a cut covenant with God. He was not just committed to the law, He was the Living Torah, the subjective expression of perfect righteousness.

Jesus is the Mediator of God’s Covenant.

Hebrews 9:15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

Jesus is the Mediator between God and men.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; (1 Timothy 2:5).

He is God’s Representative to men, and man’s Representative to God. He represents the interests of God to men, and the interests of men to God.

His blood is the consideration of the contract between believers and God: “blood of the covenant” (Hebrews 10:26).

Furthermore, the act of circumcision is a symbol of cleansing; of separating from Adam’s sin; of devotion to the will of God. In order to be

a part of God's family every man and woman must be circumcised in spirit — cleansed of their own sins by the Savior. This act of faith produces a cleansing of the heart from sin which Christians call "spiritual circumcision."

Colossians 2:9-12 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

(9) With Christ's circumcision, the law was being fulfilled so that grace could reign.

Circumcision was THE LAW! It was not an option or great suggestion.

When Christ was circumcised, the law was already incised in his heart; and where law ruled, grace reigned hand-in-hand with perfect law. The throne of the LORD God is one of justice and mercy (Isaiah 16:5). John could say that majesty coalesced in the Son because "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). In verse 16 of this chapter, John announces, "And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." The Greek script reads "grace anti grace;" meaning "wave upon wave of grace;" or, an endless supply of grace to meet the needs of sinful man.

Law is not the opposite of grace. The opposite of law is lawlessness; and the opposite of grace is licentiousness. Our Lord was able to fulfill the law, and in fulfilling the law, He was gracious to men.

Paul said that our Lord was "the end (telos) of law" (Romans 10:4); that is, He fully, perfectly, completely fulfilled all the requirement of the law for righteousness in His life and death. He did for Israel what Israel could not do for itself. The blessings of the covenant were conditioned upon Israel's obedience. Unlike Israel who disobeyed God in their time of testing, Christ obeyed the law fully. He obeyed God's law on Israel's

behalf. In his life, He was Israel's Representative that fulfilled Israel's covenant responsibilities to God (Romans 5:20). In His death, he removed the curse of covenant breaking by becoming a curse for them (Galatians 3:1-14).

Not only is Christ Israel's Representative and means of obeying God's law for them; He is God's Representative (Mediator), the means or locus of covenant blessings promised to Israel by God if they trust Him.

Mary was under command to offer two turtle doves for her purification in child birth. Little did she know that He was the Dove that would have His neck rung and his blood shed to wash away her sins at the cross. And, not only her sins, but the sins of all of God's people. He is our sin offering, trespass offering, peace offering, meal offering, and burnt offering all combined into one. For this reason, at his circumcision, Simeon could say, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation . . . a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32).

Glory! Men are not under law for justification. Men are justified by grace through faith; that is, they are declared righteous because of their faith in the doing and dying of Christ. In His death He fulfilled the law which resulted in the salvation of men (grace).

Do not hear what is not being said. We are not saying Christians are antinomian or anarchists. There is all the difference in the world between accepting the law as the standard of righteousness and making it a means of your salvation; between one trusting his law-keeping as a means of salvation, and a trusting one keeping the law because it is the right thing to do. Though Christians are not justified by law keeping, they are sanctified by law; that is, they accept God's law as part of His household rules which must be kept in the course of this life.

The text says, "His father and mother were amazed the things said about Him" at his circumcision (2:32), and one who understands the circumcision of Christ will be no less astonished.

"Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel" (2:24);

that is, our destiny is determined by our reception or rejection to the One Who was circumcised on that day. Salvation is based upon our acceptance of His offer to represent you and I as the God-man before Heaven's Tribunal.

Let us keep 'THE GREAT FEAST' with wonder and joy.

Merry Christmas!

Mercy, Allah, and Jesus Christ

Luke 1:54



◆ 54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of *his* mercy;

Fred called me on the phone alerting me to the Methodists who were turning their churches into virtual mosques:

<http://www.infowars.com/methodist-churches-converting-to-virtual-mosques-for-muslim-migrants/>

We talked. Their theology appeared to be a strange mixture of honey and arsenic, Benzos and venom.

These Methodist left-coasters didn't understand the most fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity. Apparently, they'd been drinking the Christmas Kool-Aid of pinko, eco-wacho, one-world, DEI equality religionists.

We couldn't stand it! Here is our article on the difference between Islam and Christianity –the difference between swimming in a puddle on the side walk, and swimming in the deep, blue sea.

It is the difference between Santa Clause and the gospel of Jesus Christ

It is the difference between vegetables and BLOOD!

Islam teaches that the god Allah is merciful.

In the Hadithi Qudsi, Allah tells man of the greatness of His forgiveness and mercy so that no one would despair due to the amount of sins he may have committed. This claim is supported by the following verse in the Quran:

“Say: O My servants who have transgressed against their own souls, despair not of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah

forgives all sins. Truly, He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.
(Surah az-Zumar 39:53)

“When supplicating, one should truly seek Allah's aid and His forgiveness and demonstrate his need for Allah and submit to Him with fear and hope in receiving the desired response. Allah advises in Surat al-Araaf 7:56: And invoke Him in fear and aspiration (of hope). Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to those who do good.”

Likewise, Christianity teaches that God is merciful.

Psalm 103:11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

Psalm 100:5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

But there is a BIG difference between the mercy of Allah, and the mercy of the LORD God of the Bible.

Consider the following differences:

First, the mercy of the god Allah is based on emotion.

Muslims teach that Allah is full of mercy; that his heart is tide pool of goodness waiting to be poured on good people; that is, his mercy is touchy-feely, subjective mumbo-jumbo and excessively so.

Allah's mercy is like giving a dog a bath. Everyone gets splashed with water depending on how much the dog wiggles in the tub.

Moreover, Allah's mercy is not only dependent on how Allah feels on a given day, it is dependent on how good you are; that is, whether you are naughty or nice. Like Santa Clause you'd better be good for goodness sake or you're not going to get sugar plumbs after Ramadan.

So, if you want hugs and kisses from Allah, be good . . . real good!

But, the god of the Koran is not the same as the God of Holy Scripture. We must distinguish between the two as one discriminates between fact and fiction.

Second, mercy is part of the LORD God's character, and closely associated with His attribute of justice.

Psalm 89:14 Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

The Lord forgives sinners, not just "good" people; He forgives sins, not just "accidents."

Third, God's mercy is based on the satisfaction of His justice; that is, by the shedding of blood. It is illustrated by the picture of propitiation that took place on the mercy seat in the Tabernacle.

Leviticus 16:14 And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

The mercy seat was the gold lid on the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:17–22), called the kapporet in Hebrew. Above the ark were molded, golden cherubim. It is typified as God's throne as well as an altar.

The LORD God wants to be merciful, but how can He be merciful to lawbreakers?

How can He show mercy until the claims of Divine justice have been satisfied?

The Bible teaches the "soul that sinneth, it shall die" — Ezekiel 18:20.

In His grace, YHWH ordered His people to kill a sacrificial animal as a substitute for the death of sinners, pour its blood into a bowl, and to sprinkle it on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. This was done once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement . . . and blood was shed daily through the people's sin offerings. Thus, the Kidron Valley flowed with blood — blood shed for the sins of the people.

God demands blood for the payment of sin, not silver and gold. What value is precious metals to a Spirit Being? (1 Peter 1:18, 19)

Christianity is a grim, ghastly, bloody religion. Millions of sheep, goats, and bulls were slaughtered on the Temple mount because He demanded the macabre price of blood.

With blood on the altar, God can show mercy to men. Blood is the basis of His mercy, not the goodness of men.

Fourth, with blood on the mercy seat God's proved that justice was satisfied (propitiated), and therefore He could now show mercy to His people . . . His sinful, transgressing, imperfect people.

Blood is the currency of the spirit world, and with blood on the altar, the Great Spirit could act mercifully toward sinners. With sins paid for in blood currency, God could bless His people even though they had been "naughty and not nice."

Notice how peace and mercy are connected to the "blood on the cross."

Colossians 1:2. 20 " . . . Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself "

Romans 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

John Calvin had this to say about the mercy seat:

"God was propitiated towards believers by the covering of the Law, so as to shew Himself favorable to them by hearing their vows and prayers. For as long as the law stands forth before God's face it subjects us to His wrath and curse; and hence it is necessary that the blotting out of our guilt should be interposed, so that God may be reconciled with us."

But, it is even better than this. The kapporet was two cubits long and a cubit and half wide. But, the height of the mercy seat was not so delineated. Why was there no measurement given to define the thickness or height of the kapporet? Possibly, because God is telling us there is no limit to His mercy.

So powerful is blood atonement, God could show mercy toward His people even though their transgressions stacked high into the heavens; that is God's mercy is greater and higher than any of man's sins.

Psalm 108:4 For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds.

Fifth, Jesus Christ is God's Mercy Seat

In reality, the blood of animals could not ultimately satisfy the claims of God's law upon men.

God so loved the world that He sent His Son to be the kapporet (atonement cover) and to shed His precious blood for the sins of men at the cross . . . that whosoever believes in Him should not perish by the claims of Divine justice upon him.

“For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” — Hebrews 9:13-14

Blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat to illustrate to man that Divine justice demands payment for sins in blood. The gospel teaches us that only the blood of Jesus can propitiate a holy God and cleanse the soul. He alone can turn away the wrath of the Court. He alone is our propitiation. He alone is our MERCY SEAT (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

And, this is the difference between Christianity and Islam. Allah's mercy is subjective based on his personal feelings, tastes, and opinions about how good you are. In Christianity, God's mercy is showered on men, but

because His justice has been satisfied by Christ. With His character secure, He acts mercifully toward believers not because they are good, but because His Son is good . . . and became their MERCY SEAT!

Finally, Islam is no different than all the “Santa Clause” religions of the world that teach salvation by works — that God is merciful to those who are good.

You better watch out, you better not cry
Better not pout, I’m telling you why
Santa Claus (Allah) is comin’ to town
He’s making a list and checking it twice
Gonna find out who’s naughty and nice
Santa Claus is comin’ to town
He sees you when you’re sleepin’
He knows when you’re a wake
He knows if you’ve been bad or good
So be good for goodness sake . . .!

Like Cain, Muslims offer vegetables (good works) to Allah . . . but Christianity? Christianity is a very bloody religion. Like Abel, believers rely only on blood to secure their redemption.

Hebrews 9:22 Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" is a verse from the Bible

1 Peter 1:2 . . . unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

Hebrews 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

So, if you want to swim in the deep blue sea of God's mercy, get to know His MERCY SEAT . . . and avoid "naughty or nice" theologies!

So, this Christmas season, let us remember the color red—that it took the pure, holy, innocent red blood of Jesus to secure the mercy of God for us . . . forever!

Merry Christmas!

The Greatness of Christmas

Luke 1:32



♦ He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

Christmas and all of the history of Christ is the greatest event in history.

- It is greater than the discovery of America by Columbus.
- It is greater than the signing of the U.S. Constitution.
- It is greater than some alleged Roswell alien invasion from outer space!
- It is greater than the industrial revolution or the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

It is great because the babe in Bethlehem was a Theophany, the visible manifestation of the invisible God, the invasion of the kingdom of God into history in and through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, the Logos who was with God and was God, declared to be the Son of God – the son of Mary, the Word made flesh the first Christmas day.

The Creator of heaven and earth, the LORD God of creation, was born a human baby . . . a boy with all his little body parts . . . and lived among us as a man.

“God was manifest (ephanerothe) in the flesh,” or
“confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness, Who was manifest in the flesh . . . ” – 1 Timothy 3:16.

The Epiphany⁴, the manifestation, the unveiling of God in human form ought to excite us more than any historical event, human invention, or holiday extravaganza.

The Greek word epiphany (ee-PIFF-any) (επιφάνεια, epiphaneia) means “manifestation”, or “striking appearance”). Theophany, (ἡ) Θεοφάνεια, or *Theophaneia* means “Vision of God.”

Epiphany is a joyful Christian feast celebrating the “shining forth” or revelation of God to mankind in human form, in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Eastern tradition, it is known as “Three Kings’ Day.” The observance has its origins in the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church, and includes the birth of Jesus Christ, the visit of the three Magi (Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar) who arrived in Bethlehem, and all of Jesus’ childhood events including his circumcision, and his visit to Jerusalem at age twelve.

Yes, Christmas is greater than the alleged trip to the moon . . . or the development of the computer . . . or the rise of the modern internet.

Our thoughts about God-incarnate are too small. Let’s expand them. There are jewels still to be found about Him. He is worthy of our prime reflections.

May our meditations about Christ be great, and may the remembrance of the birth of the Savior bless our families this Christmas.

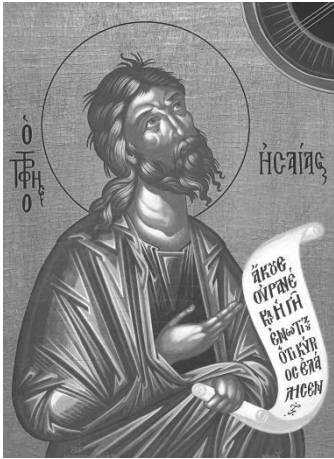
Merry Christmas!

⁴ An online dictionary defines Epiphany this way: “the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12).”

A Christmas Prophecy

Isaiah 9:1-6

The Champion that Ushers in the Golden Age



◆ Before us is a prophecy foretelling the wonder of Christ – a depiction of his unique personality and grandeur of His work.

How do you describe the kingdom of God without being dreamy and idealistic? In this passage, Isaiah describes the Golden Age in the context of war and the impending invasion of Assyria, one of Israel's most fierce and cruel enemies.

Isaiah receives his revelation at the threshold of the Syro-Ephraimite War while Israel and Syria were pressing Judah to form an alliance to resist Assyrian expansion (Isaiah 7:1ff). These were dark, depressing times where the black scarecrow of fear plucked hope out of hearts. Two groups of people emerged: (A) the people driven by fear, the neglect of God, and defiance (Isaiah 8:4, 9-16; 21-22); and, (B) Isaiah and the faithful remnant who feared God and waited on Him during the midnight hours when God hid his face from Jerusalem (Isaiah 8:12, 17, 20).

The chapter divisions in the Bible are not "inspired!" The message in chapter nine should not be separated from the context of chapter eight. Chapter nine is a continuation of God's revelation of "what the LORD said to me (*Isaiah*)" beginning in chapter eight verse one. Chapter eight is the stormy midnight of the nation; chapter nine is the light of dawn.

Isaiah's Gospel: the End of Horror

Isaiah 9:1 Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. (Ellicott's

translation: Surely there is no gloom to her that was afflicted. In the former time he brought shame on the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter he bringeth honor on the way by the sea, beyond Jordan, the circuit of the Gentiles).

Isaiah contains the most sophisticated Hebrew in the Old Testament and is at times tough to translate even by the most competent Hebrew scholars. This is the case here. Therefore, Ellicott's translation is provided.

Chapter eight closes with a description of spiritual darkness wherein afflicted people, cursed their earthly king and the God they neglected (8:21). In fact, the last verse in chapter 8 describes the nation's political crisis in terms of doom and gloom: "trouble," "darkness," "dimness," "anguish," and "darkness." "Darkness" is used twice to emphasize how the sounds of death whistled through the forests of the nation (7:2).

Northern Israel was the region from where rapacious armies⁵ invaded Samaria and Judah. Consequently, northern tribes like Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to feel the sting of war. In New Testament terminology, Zebulun and Naphtali represent the upper and lower region of Galilee.

The first expression in chapter nine begins with "no more" gloom and anguish for the afflicted nation. This is Isaiah's gospel! No more darkness for the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. No more death and destruction and despair. The Sun has risen. What a comfort!!

But, questions remain like "how" "when" "where" and by "who?"

The Dawn Appears

2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

⁵ Syria, Assyria, Babylon, and later the Greeks.

"The people that walked in *the* darkness" of terrifying invading armies are Zebulun and Naphtali. A great light appears. It is contrasted with the dark clouds of war. The Sun peaks over the mountains, and its rays of light spread hope on the land of graveyards and broken dreams. That "great light" is the life and ministry of Christ in Galilee. The perfect tense is used. "The light shined," as if it were already a fact! And, it was a fact - in the mind of God.

Joy of His Victory

3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

A silver age occurred in Israel under the reign of Solomon, but for some reason, joy was lacking. Partially because of Solomon's public works and heavy taxation of the people. At his death, the northern tribes had had enough and petitioned Rehoboam to slash taxes. When Solomon's son refused, the ten tribes seceded from the union of tribes. Kind of like the South seceding from the Union prior to the Civil War over the Morrell tax levied on Southern trade by the North. The miserable result was national autonomy, idolatry, lawlessness, war and devastation. And, Zebulun and Naphtali were the first to feel the sting of God's chastisement on the northern tribes for their idolatry.

A Golden Age is announced. Joy enters the nation once more. The picture is one of happiness and celebration at the end of the harvest. Isaiah provides a second illustration of jubilation -- the joy of a victorious army dividing the spoils of war. This is true joy, spiritual felicity in contrast with the temporal and outward prosperity under Solomon and King Uzziah.

4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.

Reasons for the ecstasy are announced. "Thou" refers to the LORD." A "yoke" refers to bondage. God launched a freedom movement, and it is described as breaking the yoke of tyranny and oppression of a tyrant; as breaking the rod of police enforcement by a cruel and greedy

dictatorship. He compares the joy and festivity to the day when Gideon freed the nation from the rapacious despotism of the Midianites. The sudden change of circumstances from oppression to prosperity and from slavery to freedom gave birth to the joy of independence.

For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. (Elliot: "Every boot of the warrior that tramps noisily, and the cloak rolled in blood, are (i.e., shall be) for burning, (as) fuel for fire).

War is a nasty affair! Before us are images of panic, confusion, broken bodies, and blood-soaked robes! The imagery of victors gathering the spoils of war off corpses continues. With the victory won and peace assured, the weapons of war and bloody garments are collected and burned. Here, God's people are seen as victors not victims (1 John 5:4).

Why such optimism? What kind of leadership could provide anemic Judah with such a victory? How could such a small nation not only survive, but thrive against such a cruel, superior force represented by the Assyrians?

The answer is in the next verse.

Merry Christmas!

The Champion

Isaiah 9:6



◆ For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

There can be no flock without a shepherd; no kingdom without a King; no victory without a victor; no triumph against powerful enemies without a wise, powerful champion. No ordinary military officer could pull off such a victory and usher in the Golden Age as described in 9:1-5. Something else is going on.

How could such a dynamic victory be achieved against such a monstrous foe? Isaiah asserts it was because of a gift -- a very special gift -- the gift of a child! A little boy was born to lead the campaign against Israel's arch enemy. This was no ordinary boy. He was a Son -- a gift of God. The pual verb "given" (יָלַד) emphasizes the intense, extraordinary character of this gift -- "For a child was born . . . but a Son was GIVEN!!"

To whom was this great gift delivered? Isaiah says it was given "to us," the survivors of judgment, the faithful remnant, the elect of God.⁶

What did this Gift achieve? The noun "government" is used only here and could be translated "dominion" or "rule" or "campaign." The text says, "the government was upon his shoulder." The verb "shall be" (יִתְקַן) should

⁶ In this passage, the Golden Age is painted as a victory on an ancient battlefield. At all times relevant, the reader must keep in mind that Isaiah is describing the kingdom of God and the achievements of the Son of God at Calvary in the context of a military campaign led by their Davidic King.

be translated "was upon."⁷ Why did survivors enjoy such a stupendous victory? Because the entire campaign against Israel's terrifying enemy was upon the shoulders of this Commander Son!

The Hebrew word "shoulder" is singular which depicts the strength of this Champion. In not saying "shoulders" (plural), Isaiah hints at the ease this Commander has in ruling the nations.

Isaiah introduces us to this Champion. He has a name bearing lofty titles. Ellicott informs us that, "The kings of Egypt and Assyria with whom his nation had been brought into contact delighted in long lists of epithetic names (e.g., 'the great king, the king unrivaled, the protector of the just, the noble warrior.' Inscription of, Sennacherib in Records of the Past, i. p. 25).' Thus, the series of titles composing the name are designed to show us the excellences of this Champion. Four titles are given, but they compose one Name. Each title takes us deeper into the majesty and mystery of this Hero.

Wonderful-Counselor:

This title could be translated "wonderful in counsel" or "the secrets of a competent counselor." The emphasis is upon the wisdom and strategy that broke the back of the enemy and ushered in the Golden Age. Isaiah doesn't simply want us to merely respect this Champion, but to admire and adore the wonder of His wisdom.

The Mighty God (El Gibbor):

This is a title that describes the power and strength of this Champion. It is one thing to know what to do, and another thing to have the resources to do it. All our struggles are the result of not knowing what to do, or knowing what to do and not having the ability to do it. Here, this Leader seems to possess the power of the gods. He knew what to do and had the power to do it. The title, however, is not "Elohim" but "El," that is, the Champion not only has the power of a god, He is God (El)!

⁷ The verb is an imperfect, but the vav changes the imperfect to a perfect tense or completed action.

The Everlasting Father" or "Father of Eternity" (אָבִי עָר):

This appellation is problematic in that Christian theology does not permit us to blend personalities in the Godhead; that is, Christianity teaches there is only one God in substance, but three personalities in the Divine Being. Isaiah steps on the toes of Christian theologians a little bit here as he does not seem shy about calling the Son "Father."

But, we can resolve this difficulty by looking at the context. This Champion is not all muscle and no heart. He is not a head of state sitting on a cushion of strawberries out of touch with the concerns of the people.

This Commander and Chief led His flock like a loving, caring father provides and protects His children. As Father of the survivors (the remnant), He led with compassion. The expression "everlasting" emphasizes His perpetuity; that is, this Champion is the ultimate, final Leader-Father-figure that saves the people of God.

Prince of Peace (שָׁלוֹם-פְּרִינְס):

This banner can be translated "Captain of Peace." When He entered the war, enemies represented by the Assyrians were devastated and the survivors saved. Peace was obtained because this Prince of Peace was first of all a savage, bone-crushing, sword-swinging Warrior that filled coffins with broken bodies of rebels against God. With the war ended, peace was in the air.

"Peace," what a wonderful word! Everyone wants peace, but there is no peace without the Prince of Peace. Peace and goodwill to men come through Jesus Christ, not the work of the United Nations or acts of state. He is the Prince of Peace because He treads down proud men in rebellion against God's law-order, and gives grace to repentant sinners. *Shalom* is not just the absence of conflict, but restoration to God and His law-word. The *shalom* is a result of political unity organized around this Captain and His command. There will never be world peace as long as there are rebels against God's law-order and His Son. But, peace is available to those who surrender to His authority now (cf. Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21-22; John 16:7, 13; Romans 10:9, 10).

7 Of the increase of *his* government (rule) and peace (shalom) *there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this*

Isaiah's presentation of Judah's Champion is delivered to us in imagery of ancient warfare. This Champion is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who single handedly defeated man's triple enemy: Satan, sin, and death.

The vision is delivered to us in the perfect tense as if in Isaiah's time the final battle had already been fought and the Golden Age achieved.

Because Isaiah was able to enter the mind of God to read the last chapter of history, Isaiah presents the Davidic King and His reign of peace as a fact.

Because we can look back from this side of the cross, we understand that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. With our Lord resurrected from the dead and sitting in session at the right hand of God, this passage makes tremendous sense.

The "increase of his government" and "peace" is a reference to eternal blessings of our Lord's reign procured by His victory at the cross.

"Upon the throne of David" communicates to us that this Champion is the "son of David," the "Messiah," "the King of Israel," the rightful Heir to the throne. This is Christ the King reigning on the throne of true Israel.

But, this is a prophecy wherein the fulfillment is greater than the promise! Christ, by virtue of His resurrection life received the ultimate commission to rule at the "right hand of God." Israel's Prince is not only Israel's King, but "King of the Nations" and Supreme "Ruler of kings on earth" (Acts 2:34; Psalms 110; Jeremiah 10:7; Revelation 1:5).

The expression "to order it" is a reference to moral qualities of the Ruler and His ability to govern with sensibility rather than out of sheer force and might; that is, this is a Captain that exercises true justice. He is the incorruptible Judge, Lawgiver, and King (Isaiah 33:22). With Christ enthroned at the right hand of God, justice is achieved. "from henceforth

even forever" is a reference to the eternal character of His reign. This Golden Age is nothing less than the kingdom of God. Though Isaiah speaks in the past tense as if this has already happened, he completes his prophecy in the imperfect tense, "The zeal of the LORD of hosts shall accomplish this."

"The zeal of the LORD" is holy jealousy at work to preserve that which is precious to Him. His people are His treasure, and He will usher in this Golden Age so their joy may be full. The title "LORD of hosts" is a reference to all the armies of God and the resources of Heaven. Let us not forget that when God sent His beloved Son to the cross to wage war against Satan, sin, and death, it cost Him His Precious All.

In conclusion, Isaiah paints the Davidic King on the canvas of an ancient battlefield as a Champion crushing Israel's enemies and saving the survivors of war. The cruel Assyrians that spread death, destruction, and misery on earth are appropriate symbols of the real enemies of man: Satan, sin, and death.

The Champion that arises out of this nation to crush the adversaries of man is none other than the Son of God. This mysterious personality is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Gift, the Son given to save sinners from their sins. Thus, Isaiah's masterpiece was fulfilled on the landscape of Israel beginning around 29 AD. John explains it this way:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Merry Christmas!

The Wonder of that First Christmas Day

Luke 2:15



♦ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

The Holy Scriptures inform us that while the shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks at night the angel of the Lord appeared to them announcing the good news of the birth of Christ.

At first they were scared out of the wits, but after they collected themselves, they realized that God had appeared to them through the angel; that they were eyewitnesses of the greatest event in the history of mankind.

Immediately, they left their duties for a greater duty. The text says they said one to another,

“Let us go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing . . . ”

What did they go to see? And, what does God want us to see about this Christmas day?

First, they saw the Savior.

The angel announced to them,

“for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, . . . ” (2:11).

Men are in need of Saviors. Saviors from poverty, from physical ailments, deadly diseases, social catastrophes, and the like. But, these Hebrews went to see the Savior who

“shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

To modern man, this seems rather bland and insignificant because he has a shriveled and defective understanding of the concept of sin, its offense to God, and the judgment to come. But, these shepherds ministered near Jerusalem and the temple of God. They understood their need to be saved from their sins. Likewise, we would do well to consider

“the soul that sinneth shall die” and “It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment.”

Only a fool would go to the grave without seeking a Savior.

Second, they saw the Messiah.

The angel announced to them, “for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (2:11).

To modern man with no knowledge of the Scripture, this has about as much meaning as a puddle in the driveway. But, to these Hebrews the angel pointed to a treasure chest of gold.

Israel’s history was a confluence of good kings and bad kings, victory and defeat, sovereignty and slavery, wealth and poverty. As the tides of prosperity retreated, God announced to the nation that He would send them an ultimate Savior King called “the Christ.”

The word “Christ” is a title meaning “anointed one” — a unique ruler holding the office of prophet, priest, king.

All of Israel’s great kings, prophets, and priest where officially inaugurated into their office by an anointing of oil ceremony. These prominent ceremonies were not only a sign of special appointment, but a sign of authority and sometimes indicative of receiving the power of the Holy Spirit to conduct their duties while in office. The most famous of these anointing inaugurations was the anointing of the shepherd David— an event these shepherds knew well (1 Samuel 16:13).

But, all these human kings fell short of true greatness. Their administrations were marked by a mixture of the sweets and the bitters.

Nevertheless, the LORD promised the nation that He would send them the ultimate anointed King who would be their Supreme Prophet, Priest, and King— a Savior who would defeat all their enemies and bring in ultimate prosperity. To them, history was headed toward the kingdom of God and the reign of the Lord Christ (See Psalm 2: Psalm 110; Isaiah 9:1-6; Isaiah 11).

On this holy night, the angel announced to them that the Christ child was born . . . among them . . . and that the babe in Bethlehem, the City of David, was the Lord, Master, King, and Messiah they had been waiting for thousands of years. No wonder they “left their flocks” and sprinted into the village as fast as their sandals would slap.

But, there was more to see.

Third, they saw “the good shepherd.”

The birth of Christ on or around December 25th has been an established fact for two-thousand years of history.

But, some modern men in their pride have disputed this date saying that Shepherds would not have been watching their flocks during the winter time.

But, this is a flawed argument.

Bethlehem is six miles from Jerusalem. The temple services required two sacrificial lambs a day. Dozens of shepherds worked their flocks on the countryside around the Holy City to supply offerings required for the Levitical system. Priests offered lambs twice a day in the temple even in the winter time.

Further, we know that our Lord was present on the Feast of Dedication during the last year of His ministry 30 years later which is recorded in John 10:22.

The Feast of Dedication is called “the Feast of Lights” or “Hanukkah” or “The Feast of Maccabees.”

It was celebrated on the 25th of Kilev as an eight day event commemorating the consecration of the temple by Judas Maccabee.

Because the temple that had been defiled by the Antiochus Epiphanes who in his reign of terror sacrificed a pig on the brazen altar in the temple to honor Jupiter, the temple needed to be cleansed and rededicated to the service of the LORD.

On the first day of re-consecration, the priest found only one jar of “holy” “consecrated” oil to light the candelabra in the Holy Place. Being only enough for one day, the priests were stunned the candelabra burned for eight whole days without a refill until a fresh supply of holy oil could be obtained.

The priest considered this a miracle. And, commemorated the event on the 25th of Kislev wherein the feast lasted for eight days. During these eight days, the two giant candelabras in the women’s court would be lit at night time supplying light to the temple, Jerusalem, and the surrounding mountain sides.

Moreover, the Feast of Lights celebrated the triumph of the Jews over Antiochus Epiphanes, Judaism over Hellenization, truth over evil, the worship of YHWH over paganism, and the ultimate triumph of Messiah over Israel’s enemies.

On the night our Lord was born, the 25th of Kislev (honored on December 25th), the shepherds could see the lights glowing from the temple.

Though it was not a Levitical festival ordained by God, our Lord was pleased to be in Solomon’s Porch on the Feast of Lights three years into His ministry around 31-32 AD (John 10:22).

The Apostle John associated Jesus’ discourse on Him being the Good Shepherd with the conflicts on the Feast of Dedication—apparently, a subject of contention that carried over from an early visit erupted upon His arrival at the festival.

Our Lord, in seeking to explain His mission, announced Himself as “the Door of the Sheep,” and “the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:9-11).

So, Who did the shepherds go see on the 25th of Kislev? They went to meet the Good Shepherd, their Shepherd, the Shepherd of shepherds that was going to give His life to save His sheep.

But, He is more than this. Jesus was not only the Good Shepherd that gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11), He is the Great Shepherd of the Sheep (Hebrews 13:20), and the Chief Shepherd who shepherds the under shepherds of the flock (1 Peter 5:4).

Fourth, they saw the Light of the World

As the shepherds tended their flock by night, joy must have filled their hearts as they saw the glow from the panel of lights bursting from the giant candelabras roaring at night. Further, the shepherds were totally stunned by the appearance of the angel where the “glory of the Lord shined around them” and announced the arrival of Christ the Lord (Luke 2:8).

Tethering their excited emotions, the shepherds trotted off to Bethlehem to see the Christ . . . but more than the Christ, they saw the “Light of the world” . . . to never again walk in darkness or stumble again (John 8:12; 9:5; 11:9).

Think of the wonder of this. These Hebrews, in one night, saw the light from the temple mount, the light of the glory of God shining on them, and the Light of World, the babe in Bethlehem!

Fifth, they saw the Lamb of God

Jesus was announced not only as the Good Shepherd, but the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

Think of the power of this? The Shepherds who were shepherds by trade left their flocks at night to go tend the true and ultimate Lamb of God. The hundreds of thousands of lambs that died as substitutes for sins of men were merely shadows and types of THE Lamb of God.

Man is not saved by being good, for there is only One Who is good. God is not keeping a list of “who is naught and who is nice.” Only by the shedding of blood, can man be redeemed (1 Peter 1:18-19).

There is a lamb sufficient to pay for the sins of a man (Genesis 4); a lamb sufficient for the sins of a family (Exodus 10-12). A lamb sufficient to pay for the sins of an entire nation (Leviticus 16); but, then there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world . . . and on this Holy Night the Shepherds saw THE Lamb of God (John 1:29).

On that Holy Night the shepherds saw a baby in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Swaddling was the cheapest material on the market that could be called “clothes.” It was a type of low grade linen the Hebrews used to wrap and bury the dead.

What a “sign!” A babe wrapped in grave clothes. A sign signaling his purpose — a baby born to die — a baby lamb, God’ Son, born to die for the sins of the world. A baby whose sole purpose was to die? Who can grasp the wonder of it?

Sixth, they saw the God-man

The shepherds tended their flock on the 25th of Kislev, circa December 25th. They saw baby Jesus on the first day of the Feast of Lights. The feast lasted for eight days. On the eighth day, Mary and Joseph went to the temple, the last day of the festival, to have Jesus circumcised.

Circumcised? Yes, the Savior was a real baby boy circumcised on the eighth day according to Hebrew law, and circumcised on the eighth day of the Feast of Lights as proof that this baby was truly human.

Thus Christmas is about celebrating the humanity of our Lord.

And, it is also about celebrating the deity of Jesus.

Now let’s go forward 33 years. As the debate raged on the 25th Kislev in John 10, the Jews gathered around Christ and debated Him, “If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus argued that His works were proof of

claim with strict proof of claim that He was the Christ, the Good Shepherd that knows His sheep and gives them eternal life (10:24-30).

In the course of conversation, the Lord said, "I and the Father are one (ev)."

The word "one" is a neuter form of the Hebrew numeral "one" (eis). In using the neuter form, Jesus was saying that He is of one substance with God. He was not teaching He was the Father, or the Father was Jesus. He was not one in personality with the First Person of the Triune God. He shared the same spirit-matter as the Father.

Rather, He claimed to be of the same substance as the Father; to have the same enduring, eternal intransient qualities of what we understand God to be. In claiming to be one with the Father, He was claiming to be God—not a god, but the God, and very God of God. The Jews understood this and for this reason sought to stone him for blasphemy.

The problem, however, for the belligerent Jews was that Jesus not only claimed to be God, His miracles were proof of claim with strict proof of claim that He and the Father shared the same substance—spirit, for God is Spirit (John 4:24).

So, when the shepherds gazed upon the babe of Bethlehem, they beheld God incarnate, their Creator-God (Elohim), the God-man, the Logos made flesh, truly God and truly man, the fullness of deity in bodily form (John 1:1-18; Colossians 2:9).

What a night for these shepherds!

Let us never forget that Christmas is about seeing, knowing, and understanding that baby Jesus is the Savior, Christ the Lord, the Good Shepherd that gives His life for the Sheep, the Light of the World, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and God incarnate Who invaded history and walked among us.

Oh, the Wonders on that First Christmas Day!

Merry Christmas!

Arrival of the King Makers

Matthew 2:1-2

Who are the Magi?



◆ “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born the king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him’” - Matthew 2:1-2.

First, we must dispel myths about the Magi.

There were not three wise men, but many honorable advisors in the procession. The Bible does not tell us how many Magi came to Palestine.

It only says: “Magi from the east came to Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:1), but many believe they had dozens / hundreds of servants, porters, cooks, guides, cavalry and soldiers in their caravan. Some scholars (John MacArthur) estimate there were over a thousand men in this elite convoy.

It is reported that one catacomb painting in St. Peter Cemetery there are two Magi. In the Lateran Museum and in the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus there are three Magi. In the Domitilla Catacomb there are four wise men. One vase painting / mural in the Kircherian Museum in Rome has 8 wise men crowding the house where Jesus and Mary resided. Thus, the Christmas story is bigger and more significant than modern men realize.

The Magi were not kings, but advisors to kings. These Magi were from the Persian-Babylonian Empire, the eastern rival to Rome, coming into Israel - no man's land or the neutral zone. Three previous wars were fought between Rome and Persia in the Middle East. These important figures simply would not have taken on the journey without cavalry.

The Magi did not come to the manger scene but to a house or a barn like cave. (Matthew 2:11); and their names were not Gaspar, Melchior and Balshasar. Origen circa 250 AD was the first to assign them these names. We have no evidence these were their actual names. By the 7th century the most educated in Christendom accept as fact that there were three wise men due to the three gifts. But, this was conjecture and not fact.

A Priestly Class



The word "Magi" comes from the Greek word, *magos* meaning "one of a learned and priestly class." The Persian word used to describe these men in their society was *magush* meaning "magician."

The Hebrew word for *magi* is *chartom* -- a status of professional knowledge seekers or scholars associated with mathematicians, architects, historians, astrologers, and students of metaphysics -- a priestly, scholarly class of people much like the Levites.

Some scholars trace their existence back to the time of Abraham in the Ur of Chaldees. But, this may be stretching it. We know they were a recognized class of elite scholars from the Persia-Babylon Empire. Like the Egyptian priests were protected by the Egyptian Pharaohs, these Median priests maintained a place of tremendous prominence and significance in the Orient.

Daniel 1:20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians (*chartom*) and astrologers (*ashshaph*) that were in all his realm.

Daniel 2:2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians (*chartom*), and the astrologers (*ashshaph*), and the sorcerers (*kashaph*), and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

Daniel 2:27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men (chakkiym), the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers (gezar), shew unto the king;

Nebuchadnezzar promotes Daniel becomes head of the department of the Magi

Daniel 5:11 There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians (chartom), astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers;

Note that it was Gentiles, and not Jews to first shout Jesus is "the King of the Jews" ("King of the Jews" (2:1-2; 27:11). John 1:49.

After the death of Christ, the Christians identified with the Gentile Magi, and NOT the apostate Jews, by worshipping Christ as "King of the Nations" (Jeremiah 10:7; Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 7:13-14; John 12:15; 18:37; Acts 17:6-7; 1 Timothy 6:13-15; Hebrews 1:3-4; Revelation 1:5-6; 17:14; 19:16).

The gospel that "turned the world upside down" preached Jesus as King of the Nations superior to and preferred over the governments of this world.

Acts 17:6-7 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have *turned the world upside down* are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that *there is another king, one Jesus*.

Thus, to Christians, the birth of Jesus is the most important event in history and the Magi from Persia agreed by making a pilgrimage to Israel in their lifetime:

“Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn....Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah, and all from Sheba (Ethiopia) will come bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord” (Isaiah 60:3, 6).

“The kings of Tarshish and distant shores will bring tribute to him. The kings of Sheba and Seba (Yemen) will present him with gifts. All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him” (Psalm 72:10,11).

“This is what the Lord says—the Redeemer the Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.” Isaiah 49:7

A Class of Legislators

In the Levantine world these Magi were trusted advisors to kings. They were learned men competent in law, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, astrology, alchemy, dream interpretation and history. The practitioners of paranormal arts were the first to recognize, honor, and crown Jesus as King of kings.

The Magi in the Bible came “from the east.” (Matthew 2:1) The East at the time of Christ’s birth meant Media-Persia, Assyria and Babylonia, countries we know now as Iran and Iraq. Herodotus identified them with the Medes. While Rome ruled over the west, the Medo-Persians ruled the Orient.

From Daniel, we learn that the Magi were the key officials in eastern governments. From Esther we learn the Magi were the kings legal advisors. A special class of lawyer-like scholars and legislators, they rose to a place of enormous political power by virtue of their unique priestly function, mystical powers of prognostication, and knowledge of astrology and astronomy. During the four world empires (Babylon, Media-Persia, Hellenization, and Roman expansion), they served in a powerful,

influential capacity as legal-religious advisors to Eastern Royalty. Consequently, they earned the reputation of being "wise men."

During the 6th century B.C., the Medo-Persian Darius the Great selected Zoroastrianism, with its emphasis upon astrology and metaphysics, as the national religion. This may account for the Magi's focus on the stars in Matthew 2. With Daniel, once the head of this erudite association, Judaism of Daniel's time merged with the eclectic system known as Zoroastrianism.

A Class of King Makers



Every nation has its means of ratifying a national ruler whether through its congress or governors or Electoral College.

Likewise, the Orient recognized the importance of state confirmation process. For this reason, we call the Magi "King Makers."

Kings in the Medo-Persian Empire were selected by the Magi and had to be approved by them. They were the ruling class of the nation and the king was their Chief Servant; that is, they were the power behind the throne. The king was merely the spokesmen-representative of the wise men to the people.

The code of scientific-religious-legal discipline of the Magi was *the law of the Medes and the Persians* (Esther 1:19; Daniel 6:8). Much like the British Parliament, the Magi-Medes chose, approved, and appointed their kings. One of the qualifications of a Median king was that he had to know *the law of the Medes and Persians*.

Daniel 6:8 Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.

Esther 1:3 In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and

Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him:

Esther 1:13-14 Then the king said to the wise men (chakam), which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;)

Knowing the law of the Medes and Persians was a key requisite for anyone wishing to be a monarch in Persia. *All monarchs had to be approved by the magi and pass their tests to sit in the seat of power.*

Besides controlling the kingly office, historians tell us that the Magi oversaw the judicial branch of government as well; that is, they appointed their kings, legislated statutes, and supervised the judiciary. Esther 1:13 implies that the royal bench of judges was chosen from the Magi – that the Magi acted like the Supreme Court. By this kind of leverage, the Magi were essentially able to control the entire Medo-Persian Empire of the Orient.

The magi appear a number of times in Scripture. In Esther, they are called "wise men" (Esther 1:12-14); Jeremiah introduces us to one called the "Rab-mag" (Jeremiah 39:3); in Acts, Paul encountered "Simon" Magus the magician (Acts 8:9-11), and later in Dr. Luke's account we find Bar-Jesus or Elymas (which means "wise man") the magician (Acts 13:6-11).

During the days of Daniel, both Nebuchadnezzar and the Magi meet the God of Israel. Afterward the dream interpretation in Daniel 2, Daniel was made "ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon" (Daniel 2:48). Furthermore, Daniel saw the future Messiah and no doubt explained his prophecies to the Magi including but not limited to his vision of 70 Weeks.

During the days King Ahasuerus, he consulted the wise men (Magi) about what to do about the Vashti feminist rebellion. These advisors saved the

entire Persian world by issuing the most important law -- possibly the wisest decree ever enacted by legislators: "all the wives shall give to their husbands honor, both to great and small" (Esther 1).

As the Queen of Sheba recognized and commended the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10), the Magi recognized and approved of Jesus as the One having the legal right and proper ancestry to sit on the throne of David ((Matthew 1-2).

This, along with the star in the east, would explain why these King Makers suddenly appear in Matthew's Christmas story. They were there **as public notaries** to officially approve and certify Jesus as "King of the Jews" . . . as King of the Nations.

(Star: probably not a star or constellation or meteor, but the shekinah glory guiding the Magi like the Lord led Israel through the desert with a cloud by day and a fire by night -- Exodus 13:22).

These "king makers" arrived in Jerusalem in their royal-priestly attire with their cone headgear-turbans to see, approve, sanction, commend, induct, "ordain," proclaim, honor, and invest in the new king of Israel; that is, to worship him: the Son of King David, Moses' greater prophet, the Son of God, Israel's Lawgiver, Judge, and King of the Jews / King of the Nations."

Just their presence consented, approved , and ratified Jesus as King of the Nations. As emissaries representing the nations of the world, these Medo-Persians gave their "stamp of approve" to Jesus as the rightful King of Israel. **Their presence and gifts were their seal of authority.**

"Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you" (Jeremiah 10:7).

"For Christ is the end (perfection / consummation) of the law, to bring righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4).

If the Wise Men of the East approved Jesus as King, shouldn't we bow the knee and accept Him as our King? Shouldn't we join the Magi and acknowledge Christ as King of the Nations? To accept Him is eternal life; and, to reject Him is eternal condemnation (John 3:16-18, 36; John 1:10-13).

Merry Christmas!

He Became Poor

2 Corinthians 8:9



♦ . . . the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Unlike the rest of humanity, our Lord had a choice in his station in life.

The text simply says, “He was rich.”

Great things come in small packages. All of Heaven’s wealth is packed into Christ.

Bursting with excitement, the Apostle John in his vision of heaven describes a portion of that wealth:

“and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God . . . And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass” (Revelation 21).

The text also says, “He became poor . . .”

- He was born a King, but lived like a pauper.

- He was born in Bethlehem, the least of the cities of Judah.
- He was born the son of Mary, a maidservant, an insignificant young woman in the social structure of the nation.
- He was born in a stable, not in his house made of marble and brick.
- Mary wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, the cheapest linen on the market.
- His first cradle was a feeding trough (manger).
- He lived in Nazareth, a village held in contempt, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"
- He did not own a horse like other kings, but walked wherever He went.
- He lived on the gifts and donations of widows.
- He never solved a human problem by giving money to people. He had no money to offer.
- When delivering a sermon, he had to borrow a penny just to make an illustration.
- To pay an alleged tax debt created by his impetuous disciple, he sent Peter fishing for a perch with a gold drachma in its mouth.
- To fulfill prophecy, he had to borrow a donkey to make His entry into Jerusalem.
- He owned one robe which was taken from him on the day of his arraignment before Pilate.
- On that day, He was stripped of his clothing and died naked on the cross that you and I might never be naked; never fear; and never be without hope.
- In his death, He was buried in a borrowed tomb.
- The text also says, "that ye through His poverty might be rich."

- He lived and died in poverty so we might share His wealth in the Celestial City whose foundation is built on diamonds and rubies . . . but more importantly, it has

“the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22).

Let us never forget on this Christmas day, “that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that YOU through his poverty MIGHT BE RICH.”

Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Merry Christmas!

Stop Using the Word “Christmas,” says this Priest



♦ An Irish priest in the U.K. says Christians should stop using the word, “Christmas.”

“CHRISTIANS should stop using the word Christmas because it has been hijacked by “Santa and reindeer.”

“I’m just trying to rescue the reality of Christmas for believers by giving up ‘Christmas’ and replacing it with another word.

“I’m all for Christians choosing to celebrate Christmas by going out for meals and enjoying a glass of wine, but the commercialization of anything is never good.”

Father O’Donnell, a registered psychologist and author, as well as a priest, added he did not intend his statement to be a criticism of non-Christians.

He said that unless Catholicism addressed the reality of what Christmas has come to mean

“secularization and modern life will continue to launder the church”.” (<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/881201/Stop-saying-Christmas-Priest-warns-Christians-to-abandon-the-word>).

He has a point.

It’s time for Christians to fight for the reason of the season.

John 2:15-16 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things

hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise"
or Christmas a season of commerce.

The great question is "How?" not "If."

Saying, "Happy Holidays" doesn't measure up either because it concedes total victory to the secularists.

Somehow, pleasing Christ has got to become a greater priority than pleasing man.

John 8:29 . . . for I do always those things that please him.

John 12:43 For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

The word "Christmas" is synonymous with the wonder event of our Lord's birth. Let's not be ashamed to celebrate it in December.

Merry Christmas!

Christmas Humbles Us All

Luke 1:46-52



♦ . . . For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden . . .

It's A Very Merry Christmas

He is the One in charge and
He is moving dynamically in
our time.

Consider the Power of the First Christmas Message:

Look at the wonderful words of the mother of Jesus:

My spirit rejoices in God my Savior . . . He Who is mighty . . . He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

Mary's Magnificat also called "Mary's Canticle" stirs us to remember the wonder that God entered history in and through the Christ child; that the Creator became a living soul in flesh and blood; that He was conceived, born, circumcised, and lived among us as a living, breathing man.

Mary was familiar with Israel's marvelous history and how God humbled Pharaoh and delivered the nation from the armies of Egypt at the Red Sea.

But, nothing prepares men for the intensity and immensity of salvation and judgment wrapped up in the womb of Mary. Yet, the mother of our Lord seemed to grasp the enormity of her miraculous conception and the significance of the birth of the Son of God; that the Judge of all men was here, not only to save His people, but to crush the proud.

Not only did God take this humble handmaid and place her on the center stage of world history exalting her as the queen of all mothers, her son

would be the cause of the rise and fall of many mighty men sitting on thrones possessing great wealth and power.

Mary's son is now exalted to the right hand of the Father on High.

Herod the Great, Pontius Pilate, and Annas the high priest have met their fate and passed into the history books.

We come now to our time where new actors appear on stage in the human drama working its way toward the dynamic conclusion of the kingdom of God.

As this devotion is written, in the year of our Lord 2017, we witnessed the truth of Mary's pronouncement on how His arm has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts bringing down the mighty from their thrones.

Consider how in the fall of 2017 Americans saw proud pillars in Hollywood and the media tumble like towers of clay brick during an earthquake: Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, Kevin Spacey, Russell Simmons, Andrew Kreisberg, Morgan Spurlock, Dustin Hoffman, Louis C.K., John Lasseter (Disney), Roger Ailes, Roy Price, Charlie Rose, Matt Laurer, Mark Halperin, Chris Matthews, Michale Oreskes, Glenn Thrush and over 100 more.

We have seen the humbling of politicians like Bill and Hillary Clinton, George H.W. Bush, John Podesta, Anthony Weiner, Huma Abedin, Sen. Al Franken, Rep. Bobby Scott, Rep. Trent Franks, Rep. John Conyers Jr., Rep. Ruben Kihuen, Rep. Ruben Kihuen, FBI Agent Peter Strzok and James Comey.

More importantly, Christmas humbles us all as we realize that we are all flesh and blood, sinners in need of a Savior, having an appointment with death, and "after this the judgment."

Some men come off "their high horse" voluntarily and cast themselves at His feet; others have to be removed from their imperious thrones by the hand of Providence and forced to bow the knee to the Theme of Mary's Canticle.

Christmas attracts thinking men causing them to wonder at the birth in Bethlehem where the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; that He lived, died, rose on the third day, and is now exalted to the right hand of the Father. History is HIS story and our fates are in His hands.

Mary said she rejoiced in “God her Savior.” Surely, God is Savior, and not man! “Salvation is of the LORD,” proclaimed Jonah. But, one wonders how much understood that this Savior God was in her womb, the Word who was “with God and was God.” Oh, the wonder of it all!

Let us rejoice with the virgin over the Son . . . and let us be humble . . . or stumble.

Merry Christmas!

It's a Cold, Lonely, Christmas Day

Galatians 3:13



◆ Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree:

It's a cold, lonely Christmas Day.

An old woman, with children all grown and children of their own, has carefully placed an artificial tree on a satin draped antique stand, in her humble living room, to commemorate the birth of Christ long, long ago.

The old down-swept Douglas Fur proudly displays lightly frosted pine needles. On top is a frayed six-inch angel dressed in rayon white, adorable red cardinals looking tucked to keep warm, tiny white lights sharing their rays of hope, and small greeting cards – reminders of loved ones now passed.

Underneath are two dolls: Raggedy Ann with her distinctive red curly hair, flower-print, blue denim dress and white apron; and, Andy, with his red and white checkered shirt, royal blue knickers, and those bodacious, stripped under socks enhanced with black booties – a reminder of the woman's happy memories Christmas past.

Beside the tree are tokens of love – small presents – none costing more than a few dollars, lovingly wrapped in red ribbons and bows, to share with her husband, her friend.

Huddled together, invigorated by the tiny tree, the old couple smiles, clasp hands and prays, thanking the Lord for their happy times, on this cold, lonely, Christmas Day.

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Merry Christmas!

The Dirty Stable

By Brooky Stockton

(December 2018)



◆ On this chilly, wintery night, a tiny flickering candle exposes unswept stable stalls.

A poor family sprawls on a haystack aside livestock, resting together in a crude, make-shift nursery!

Urine-soaked compost ground into powder, a distinctive stench of ammonia, hay, and silage rise from the stable floor.

Be careful where you step!

Oh, so dirty!

The bearded man on the straw wears unlaundered, sweat-stained, country vestments splotted with soil and dust.

His cloak is too smudged and worn to suggest wealth.

Oh, so dirty!

The pensive mother with purity in her eyes wears a stained, linen dress, draped with a woven, weathered, wool shawl.

Nestled delicately on unhygienic hay, she convalesces from the stress of child birth.

Oh, so dirty!

Next to her lies a newborn infant on a saliva-stained feeding trough,
glutted with short twigs of dried chaff, and carefully swaddled in cheap
linen.

A *mandere* for a royal throne!

Oh, so dirty!

In the distance coos a twitter-warble swallow; near -- a milking goat with
shaggy hair hanging from her shank; the old cow dripping mucous from
wet nostrils moos while chewing the cud; a matted ewe and lamb nestled
on straw; a long-eared donkey with a dusty, hirsute coat, and dried tear-
stains crusted to its cheeks while napping with a-hoof tethered to a
wooden post; and, a few chickens clucking,

Embrace this silent night.

But, oh so dirty!



Why Bethlehem?

Why this child?

Why this night?

Why this dirty stable?

A pregnant woman traveling 90 miles
rocking and bobbing on the back of a burro?

A daughter of a king resting in a stable on a bed of hay?

A virgin birthing a son attended by sheep and goats?

Oh, so dirty! So, very, very dirty!

The Lord made the light to shine in the darkness,
and He brought us to this dirty stable, to see His Holy Son.
A Christ who saves believing sinners from their dirty sins.
“Oh, how God loves us!” smiled the shepherd.
Merry Christmas!

Celebration of Christmas

Matthew 2:10



◆ When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

In our day, there are many Scrooge-like voices growling at every light and Christmas tree erected for the season, but they are astray and should be ignored.

Our founding fathers instructed Americans on how to celebrate the 4th of July by holding mock funerals for “the king;” by dressing up ships and galleys in the harbor” with festive gala; by bold discharges of canon fire (fireworks), and with joyful shouts of freedom.

Likewise, with Christmas.

Since Christmas is a celebration of the greatest miracle in history, **it is perfectly appropriate for Christians to “deck the halls with bows of holly,” colorful lights, and holy nativity scenes.**

If some frown on all this joy, dump a glass of cold water on them . . . and then smile!!

Merry Christmas!

Seven Shocking Statements Surrounding the Birth of the Savior

Luke 1:28-31



♦ . . . the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth . . .

Modern man is fascinated with reports about aliens, flying saucers, and encounters of the third kind . . . but, nothing compares with the invasion of the Son of God into history on the first Christmas morning.

Everything about the birth of Christ is wonderful . . . even shocking.

However, because of modern commercialism surrounding the season, we may forget the wonder of the events surrounding the birth of

our Lord.

Consider these seven shocking facts about the Christmas story.

First, the shock that a virgin would give birth to a son.

Luke 1:28-31 " . . . the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.

Luke 1:37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

A virgin having a baby? “Impossible” says the skeptic!

Well, the news stunned Mary also! And Joseph! She understood biology and the facts of life. “Stunned,” may be an understatement. The angel had to assure her that she was not dreaming or hallucinating; that with God nothing is impossible!

Further, a virgin having a son rattles the modern scientific mind surrounded by colleges swarming with millions of PHDs head high in dissertations.

If there is no God, the skeptic is correct. But, if there is a God, an impregnation by the Holy Spirit is more than feasible. It is a fact that Mary is the holy mother of Jesus.

The virgin birth was a biological-theological necessity. In order for Jesus to save the world from sin, He had to be the holy Son free from the power of sin that corrupts human nature.

Atheists are exposed as hypocrites. While they won’t believe in the virgin birth—that Jesus’ life came from a single cell, they assert without evidence that all life came from gyrating rocks in some Paleozoic hot springs billions of years ago — something really absurd.

Second, the shock that Mary’s report was true . . . and, not a myth or a lie to cover up deep sin.

Matthew 1:20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

The word “fear” summarizes the whirlwind of conflicting emotions that breached the heart of Joseph on the day he found out Mary was with child.

Think of the mental state of Joseph. His espoused wife, whom he trusted, whom he believed was pure, announced to him that she was pregnant.

Who can imagine his disbelief, anger, frustration, and sense of betrayal. Her account ripped through his soul like a Caribbean typhoon following Mary's announcement to him?

Joseph was not only stunned by the announcement that his bride was pregnant, he was shaken by a dream wherein an angel confirmed to him that not only was Mary's account true, but that her "baby bump" was the result of the work of the Holy Spirit and not the result of her indiscretion with another man.

Third, the shock of the baby's purpose.

Matthew 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Grammatically, "He" is the pronoun subject—a reference to Jesus. "Save" is the active verb. And, "his people" is the object of verbal action.

Blood being the currency of the spirit world, this Savior was born to die . . . born to die for the sins of His people . . . born to pay the blood-price of redemption:

"for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22).

Men define enemies as political or criminal. In the Mediterranean world, Caesar was regarded as a savior from political upheaval and social disorder.

In this text sin is announced as the main enemy of mankind and Jesus as the Champion of humanity — a shocking revelation to the Greek world, and a truth that stumbles modern society.

People feel the need to be delivered from financial troubles, health problems, and marriage difficulties . . . but from sin?

Few today sense the need to be saved from the horrors of Adam's transgression, but those who do, Jesus is the Answer. He is the One Who does the saving. He does not come to deliver men from psychological, dissociative disorders such as ADD, BDD, and BDP, but from sin.

Fourth, the shock that this baby was the LORD God.

Luke 1:41-43 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: 42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. 43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Elizabeth, along with all Jews, ritually cited the Shema which contained the paramount truth that the LORD is Elohim, the one and only God of Israel (Deuteronomy 6:4).

But here, Elizabeth perceives that the baby in the womb of Mary was the LORD incarnate, the God-man, the Creator of heaven and earth.

What a jolt for Mary to hear these words for the first time! Moreover, the Apostle Paul explains the incarnation as the “mystery of godliness . . . that God was manifest in the flesh . . .” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Fifth, the shock that angels appeared . . . to Mary . . . to shepherds and not to statesmen.

Luke 2:8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Who among us has ever seen an angel? For us to come face-to-face with an angel would be shocking. Furthermore, can you think of anything that has happened in your life time that would attract the attention of angels? Anything? But, angels fell from heaven like shooting stars with great interest and power to assist the birth and mission of Christ (1 Timothy 3:16).

No matter how many stories we hear about encounters of the third kind, NOTHING compares to the invasion of the Son of God into space and

time!! Angels appeared at this unique time in history . . . and Renaissance Art reflects this cherub phenomenon.

The birth of Christ is undoubtedly the greatest event in history. However, only about a dozen people knew about it.

God entering history in the Person of Christ was NOT announced by angels to Caesar or Herod or the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. This pivotal event was hidden from the worldly wise man and revealed to simple shepherds.

Moreover, the angel did not announce the birth of the Savior to politicians, the affluent, or to government employees . . . but to common, “blue-collar” shepherds. Christ is for the regular man, not for the sophisticated elite — a shock to the ancient world as well as modern man who looks to the State as the agent of change.

Be humble or stumble!

Sixth, that salvation is in a Person and not a system.

Luke 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,

When Simeon saw the baby in Mary’s arms, he called Jesus, “Thy Salvation.”

Salvation is not in the government or the presidency or some religious system, but in a Person, the Person of Christ. Salvation is not in some religious works program. Salvation is a gift of God; that is, Jesus is God’s gift to humanity.

What a shock to men then and now who look for salvation in some new politician or political world order.

Seventh, the shock that this baby would be the King of kings.

Matthew 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

The Magi recognize Christ as King of the Jews — a shocking statement in a time when the nation saw Herod as the only, legitimate king of the Jews. No wonder Herod was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

To the devout Hebrew mind, the LORD God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, was the true King of the Jews.

In addressing Christ as King of the Jews, the Holy Spirit show us Jesus as Israel's Lawgiver, Judge, and King (Isaiah 33:22); that He is the King of the Nations (Jeremiah 10:7); the Lord of Lords (1 Timothy 6:15); and, the Prince of the Rulers of the Nations (Revelation 1:5).

Just as the church looks to Christ as its Head, the nations are under duty to look to Christ as their Ruler, Authority, and King; that is, to see themselves as accountable to him — a radical position so shocking, modern politicians scramble to resist.

That senators, representatives, judges, and presidents should surrender to the authority of Christ the King ascended to the right hand of God is more than these tiny, little minds can bear.

So shocking was this truth in the first century, it “turned the world upside down” . . . or is that “right side up” (Acts 17:6-7)?

It is still shocking. For this reason we do not hear politicians, presidents, congresswomen, or judges admit they are accountable to this King.

Maybe, this is why He appeared to humble shepherds and not to proud civil rulers.

Merry Christmas!

Jesus, Born in a Police State

Matthew 2:12



◆ And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Christians can't seem to handle the real Jesus.

Churches seem hell-bent on rescuing Jesus from being interpreted as a "right-wing" extremist.

Pastors are much more comfortable painting a pastoral scene of a sweet Jesus in a manger who wanted to bring peace to the Roman world rather than a Jesus in conflict with the religious-political

powers of His day.

Our Lord was born in a police state saturated with Roman soldiers. Shortly after his birth, Herod the psychopath ordered his soldiers to go door-to-door to jab all the newborns with a sword.

He spent much of his time in Galilee evading Sanhedrin detectives and their overreaching law enforcement officers:

"When the wicked rise, men hide themselves" (Proverbs 28:28).

Jesus didn't eat Honey-roasted, Sun-kissed, Boo Boo Bear cereals for breakfast.

He didn't come to smoke a peace pipe and dispense Ritalin to hyperactive men anxious about their soul.

He didn't adopt a "bio psychosocial model" of human behavior.

He didn't mix eastern mysticism, Greek philosophy, or use psychotherapy with His gospel of the kingdom to challenge people with their self-image problems. He simply said, "Go and sin no more."

From cradle to grave Jesus confronted authoritarian power mongers that sought to control the thoughts and behavior of men.

When Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” he was addressing those who lived in a police state with Caesars, Herods, and their Roman legions.

If our Lord had been born today in America today, he would face the modern police state . . .

- Health Department officials would have ordered the sheriff to arrest Mary for having a home birth, endangering the child’s health by sleeping in a barn, not vaccinating the child, or not registering the child’s DNA in some government bio-data bank.
- The cops would arrest Jesus’ parents for hiding illegal migrants from Babylon and not informing the Jerusalem police of their whereabouts.
- The police state would send a troop of social workers and psychologists to evaluate the mental health of Mary and Joseph. Possibly, they would arrest Mary and Joseph, Pro-life advocates, for protesting post-birth infanticide.
- Health officials would have ordered Joseph to vaxxinate Jesus with an mRNA-DNA altering blood-clot drug to insure he would never live to see his 12th birthday. Vaccine free, the Jerusalem media would accuse Jesus of causing all the diseases in Israel.
- The Border Patrol would arrest His parents for entering another country (Egypt) without a vaxxine passport . . . for carrying cash . . . or doing business with gold and silver currency instead of FRNs.
- The health department would sanction Jesus for being baptized in the dirty Jordan River and for not purchasing a \$200,000 government approved baptismal tank with wheel-chair access . . . or for letting a dove perch on his shoulder without paying the county pet fee.

- The local police would arrest Jesus for not having a license to preach . . . or traveling without a passport . . . or destroying the environment by cursing a fig tree . . . contributing to global warming by calming a storm . . . or feeding the people without a permit.
- The cops would arrest Jesus after His first sermon for disturbing the peace at the synagogue while blaming Him for creating a riot (Luke 4).
- The police would arrest Jesus for preaching in public places without permission and for not preaching in a some government approved free speech zone located ten miles from population centers.
- The feminists would accuse him of sexism for running a boy's only club.
- BLM would accuse Jesus of being racist for not including African-Americans in his group of disciples.
- The IRS would charge Jesus with the crime of "structuring" his ministry business and paying people in cash.
- State officials would arrest Jesus for not turning His ministry into a 501-c-3 corporation accountable to the IRS.
- Scientists would ban him from universities because Jesus did not believe in evolution or think science is the answer to all of man's problems.
- The cops would arrest Jesus for being anti-gay, anti-transvestite, and anti-Lesbian.
- The police would arrest Jesus for practicing medicine without a license or for making claims that He could cure incurable diseases.
- The LGBTQ community would accuse Jesus of being homophobic because he excluded them from the kingdom of God.
- Politicians would slander and smear Jesus for consorting with prostitutes in order to discredit his ministry.

- The media would smear Jesus of being a pedophile because he permitted children to sit on his lap.
- The teachers association would demand Jesus be arrested for not having a teaching certificate.
- The lawyers would indict Jesus for practicing law without a license.
- The police would arrest Jesus for serving meals without an official state "Food Handler Card" . . . or conducting religious services in a city suburb without a city permit.
- The IRS would arrest Jesus for instantaneously manufacturing wine and serving alcohol at a wedding without a BATF license.
- The police would have arrested Jesus for disturbing the peace and for brandishing a weapon (whip) in the banking center at the temple (John 2).
- Economists would call for the arrest of Jesus for interfering with commerce because He didn't think money was the answer to all things.
- Liberals would hate Jesus because he spoke the truth and was not politically correct.
- Humanists would censor Jesus because he excluded them from heaven saying, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father, except through me." (John 14:6)
- Politicians would denounce Jesus because he did not believe that all religions are a way to God: ""For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many." (Matthew 7:13)
- Congress would impeach Jesus because He condemned legislators for nullifying God's law by their man-made statutes (Matthew 15).
- Jews would accuse Jesus of anti-Semitism because he did not practice Judaism or think Jews are a super race approved of God.

- The liberal media would demand Jesus be impeached because he believed in only two genders, male and female.
- The police would arrest him for confronting government officials: “You are of your Father the Devil . . . ”
- The court would order the cops to arrest Jesus for obstructing justice in relation to the woman caught in an act of adultery.
- The cops would arrest Jesus for riding a donkey without a license and not wearing a saddle belt.
- The IRS would arrest Jesus for not paying taxes to Caesar.

Our Lord was never politically correct, seldom in conformity with public policy, and always theologically abrasive.

Do you want to follow Jesus — the real Jesus of the Bible? True Christianity is not for passive, effeminate, sissified wussies.

Think differently this Christmas. Release your grip on the error that the Lord came to bring peace to the world. Allow His Spirit to free you from the propagandized message of a sugar-sweet Jesus and a candied mother that controls Him.

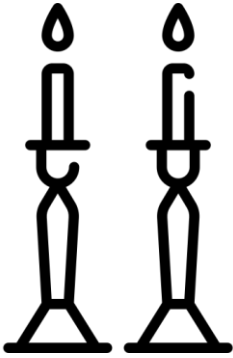
“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34).

“I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law” (Luke 12:49-53).

Merry Christmas!

First-day Sabbath and Circumcision

Acts 7:8



◆ And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so *Abraham* begat *Isaac*, and circumcised him the eighth day; and *Isaac* begat *Jacob*; and *Jacob* begat the twelve patriarchs.

Luke 2:21

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called **JESUS**, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

The term “first-day of the week” is better translated “the First-day Sabbath” (Acts 20:7:1 Corinthians 16:1-3)

According to tradition, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day. The shepherds tended their flock on the 25th of Kislev, circa December 25th. They saw baby Jesus on the first day of the Feast of Lights. The feast lasted for eight days.

If He was born the first day of the Feast of Dedication (John 10); then He was circumcised on the last day of the Feast.

Jesus rose from the dead on the eighth day after Palm Sunday or on the First-day Sabbath.

Paul boasted that he was circumcised on the 8th day or the First-day Sabbath (Philippian 3:5).

Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day (Acts 7:8).

John the Baptist was circumcised on the eighty day -- a First-day Sabbath for him (Luke 1:59) – a man devoted to God and ordained to be Israel’s true High Priest during the ministry of Christ.

John the Baptist was the son of Zechariah the High Priest who received a special visitation by Gabriel the Archangel – something never before experienced by a high priest – a sign or hallmark event testifying to the special , exclusive, superlative ministry of John the Baptist whose purpose was to introduce the Son to the world -- to testify to the appearance of the Christ-child, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the greatest event in human history – the presence of the Messiah, the unique, Son of God, the God-man on earth as the Lamb Who would take away the sins of the world.

All Jewish boys were circumcised on the eight day as required by law.

Looking down at their little male member, circumcision reminded men of their dedication to the service of the LORD God . . . and the need to be circumcised in heart – to be cleansed from sin – to be holy.

In the Old Testament era **only** men were circumcised, but in the New Testament era the Spirit calls **both** men and women to be spiritually circumcised – to be free of sin and to be devoted to the Lord God.

Paul informs us that who place their trust in the Savior experience spiritual circumcision – a cleansing – a circumcision by Christ.

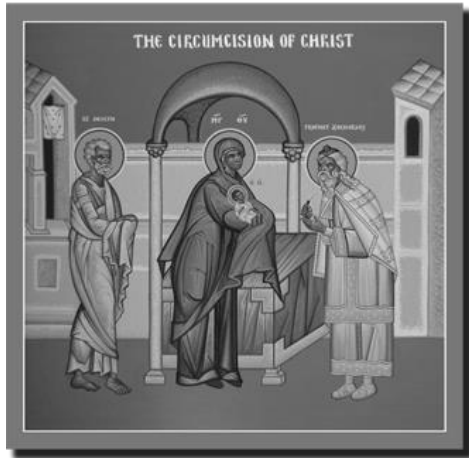
“In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (Colossian 2:11).

Thus, Christmas is a reminder that all men need to be cleansed from sin and that Jesus came to save His people, men and women, from their sins – that those who are spiritually circumcised are the true people of God!

Merry Christmas!

The Great Feast of Christ's Circumcision

Luke 2:21



◆ **And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.**

Before us is the gospel. It is good news that Jesus was circumcised.

It pleases God for His children to celebrate all the events of His Son on earth because the visitation of our Lord was the most important matter in human history – God

becoming a man.

All Orthodox churches consider it a “GREAT FEAST”. It is a dogmatic feast in that the Eastern Churches ordered their congregations to celebrate the circumcision of Christ every year because it contains truth essential to the orthodox faith that must never be forgotten or compromised.

The celebration of the Great Feast occurs on the first or second Sunday after Christmas; that is, celebrating His birth and His circumcision go hand-in-hand.

Let us consider the Gospel of the Circumcision of Christ.

Introduction to the Great Feast

That Jesus was born on or around December 25th was well accepted by the church so that when the Eastern Church memorialized the birth of Christ on December 25th in the 4th century, it was immediately accepted in the east and west.

The celebration of Christmas on December 25th is grounded on the premise that John the Baptist was conceived on or near September 25th, and born the following year on or near June 25th; that Mary being

pregnant with Jesus met with her aunt Elizabeth sometime after March 25th or Early April while Elizabeth was six months pregnant.

Christmas was formalized in the East under Chrysostom, circa 386 AD. Because a December date for the birth of Christ was undisputed by the Mediterranean Churches, the memorialization of the birth of Christ on the 25th of December was immediately accepted. No one had any reason to believe something contrary to this date.

Furthermore, there is a good argument that Christ was born on or near the 25th of Kislev, the first day of the Feast of Lights or Feast of Dedication. And, it was on the last day of this nine day feast, the Lord was circumcised. Thus, celebrating our Lord's circumcision in early January is very appropriate.

The Significance of the Great Feast

(1) The circumcision of Christ is about the gospel of Jesus' humanity.

The circumcision of Christ which occurred eight days after His birth confirms the humanity of our Lord – Luke 2:21. It is gospel!

It causes us to consider the seedless conception of the Savior from the Virgin Mary – a true and supreme miracle.

The Feast of the Circumcision of Christ remains a perpetual rebuke to the Gnostics who shunned the material world, and embraced the spiritual world; who denied the humanity of Christ, and embraced only a "spiritual redeemer."

But, you don't circumcise phantom spirits. You can only circumcise living, breathing, flesh and blood, infant males. Our Savior was totally human, a baby with a little nose, two eyes, ten fingers and toes. He became one of us . . . a man . . . an anthropos!

As a man on a pilgrimage through time, He followed the prescription of circumcision given to Father Abraham. While Christ pre-existed in the presence of the Father as God of God, He was also the son of Mary, a true man, a Hebrew, a Son of the Covenant, a baby boy under the rites of circumcision. Here we have Christ assuming the nature of man and

following the path of infancy to perfect manhood here on earth in space and time. The Great Feast commemorates the marvelous truth that God was in Christ on earth; that the God-man was among us to save His people from their sins.

(2) The circumcision of Christ is about celebrating Jesus as our human Savior.

This is the day He publicly received the precious name, “Jesus.”

On this day, Virgin Mary complied with the instructions by the angel in Matthew 1:21-22 to call him “Jesus”- the name predetermined by the Father before the Christ was born—a name given to the child before Mary and Joseph lived together and consummated their marriage.

The name “Jesus” means “Savior” and enlightens us with the brightness and glory of His mission. “Jesus” is an English word for the Greek word *Iesous* which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Joshua,” or “Yeshua,” which means “Jehovah is Salvation.”

(3) The circumcision of Christ is about celebrating the power of His name.

He is not only Sweet Jesus, He is Powerful Jesus. He not only has the name “Savior,” He is a Savior that saves!

Consider the spiritual and moral power of our Lord. He was the innocent, sinless, flawless, perfect lamb in heart, mind, and soul with no sin in Him.

Consider His saving power. Matthew records His purpose predicted by Isaiah the prophet.

Matthew 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

He is the Savior—and, saving one man is no small task. Consider the bone-crushing power involved in washing away all the sins of all His

people at cross and His command for the dead “to rise” and when Peter said to the lame man, “In the name of Jesus rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6).

Consider His political power. Born into history is the God-man, the true Israel, the King of the Nations, the Master and Benefactor and Lord of mankind. The preaching of Jesus as King turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

(4) The circumcision of Christ is about celebrating His purpose on earth.

It is good news that God was at work to save His people.

Simeon could say on this day, “My eyes have seen thy Salvation.” (2:30).

Salvation is not in a system of religion, it is in a person. Salvation is not in government, it is in the Son of God “who shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

Salvation was in a Theanthropic Person, not an event, angelic being, or acts of the State. God did not send an angel to redeem man. No animal was sufficient to supply the price of redemption. He sent His beloved Son, the Second Person of the Triune God to become an anthropos.

(5) The circumcision of Christ is about remembering God’s Turtledove.

Christ is the fulfillment of all OT sacrifices.

Mary, in giving birth, was considered unclean. She needed to bring an offering for her purification. While every act of man is defiled by sin, the offerings on this day reminded the woman that her pain in child birth was due in major part to her sin in relation to the fall of man (Genesis 3).

On this day, Mary offered up two turtle doves as required by the law for her purification and dedication not knowing that her son was God’s Turtledove who would die for her; shed his blood for her. The shedding of His blood would fulfill all the sacrificial types in the Old Testament offered for sins. Jesus is the ultimate lamb, goat, bull and turtledove Who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

(6) The circumcision of Christ is about recognizing our Lord’s immutable state of absolute purity which circumcision illustrated.

The cutting away of flesh typified being separated from the sins of natural man. Circumcision acknowledged the fall of man; that sin was in the world, and that men must either master it or be mastered by it.

The Dictionary defines purity “as the condition or quality of being pure; freedom from anything that debases, contaminates, pollutes.” The word “pure” is used over 97 times in the Bible. The Hebrew sense of the word simply means “an emptying out or being clean” implying that one is void of all the vices that the Ten Commandments forbids: idolatry, unfaithfulness, deceit, covetousness.

His circumcision was more than a ritual symbol. It bore witness that He was the anti-type of the purity circumcision symbolized. This baby was pure, free from sin, and full of goodness. What was a sign to all Israelites and anemically achieved among the saints was marvelously actualized and perfected in Christ.

Here is a man that never swore, cursed, lied, or slandered others. He never thought ill of man or told their secrets to others. He had no sin, knew no sin, and did no sin. He was pure but not naive; holy, but not isolated. Like fresh snow that delights the eye or pure water that satisfies our thirst, the Lord was pure; i.e., free from all the vices and corruption common to men.

(7) His circumcision is about recognizing Jesus’ perfect holiness and dedication to God typify by the act of circumcision.

While purity has to do with freedom from defilement, holiness has to do with devotion to the will of God.

God’s ideal man is one who is wholly devoted to righteousness. One who is dedicated in the inner man to the will of God is called “holy.”

Circumcision, therefore, was an outward, external Hebrew symbol of being devoted to the things of God.

Luke 2:23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)

Since the LORD redeemed the firstborn of Israel by the blood of the lamb, all firstborn males were redeemed (purchased) and set apart for the service of the LORD. (Exodus 11:5).

Exodus 13:2 Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.

Physical circumcision symbolized holiness to God. Though all Hebrews males fell short of perfect holiness, holiness found its perfection in Jesus the God-man.

Jesus was truly holy. He was the antitype of the symbol of circumcision. He was the New Testament reality of the Old Testament ritual.

The Savior was not only 100 % pure, He was 100% devoted to the will of God. He was the prototype of the burnt offering totally devoted to will of His Father.

Circumcision was a sign of detachment from the carnal and devotion to the spiritual; a sign of forsaking the temporal to pursue the eternal; a sign of turning from the natural to the supernatural; a sign of rejection of the flesh and admission and empowerment by the Spirit; a sign of repudiation of sin and devotion to God's law-order; and, a sign of being in a covenant (contract) relationship to the LORD God of Israel.

Christ is called God's Firstborn (Colossians 1:15-17)—a reference to His preeminence, not birth in time. Unlike Israelite males who were ceremonially holy, the Son of God was actually holy in aspect of His being. His seedless conception insured freedom from Adam's sin (purity). Only Jesus could say, "I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart." (Psalm 59:8).

Think of it! There was one man among us Who was free of Adam's depravity, and Who was totally, completely, wholeheartedly dedicated to the will of God. What a marvel, and what joy He must have brought to the Father.

(8) His circumcision is about celebrating Christ as the Mediator of the New Covenant.

His circumcision was a statement of His covenant relationship to the Father.

When God works among men, He makes covenants with them. When God made a covenant with Abraham, he ordered that Abraham and all his male descendants be circumcised (Genesis 17).

In the Old Testament, the English phrase “make a covenant” is most often a translation of the Hebrew term *kārat berît*, which literally means “cut a covenant.” The verb *kārat* means “cut off, cut down,” and the noun *berît* means “covenant,” which is related to the words pact, contract, compact, treaty, alliance, and league.

To Hebrews, circumcision meant that a man was under the Law of the LORD God; that is, circumcision was the sign that a man was under duty to obey the law of his King; that he was to be a servant of His Majesty. Jesus was the man who obeyed the law on our behalf so that we can say, “We are saved by the doing and dying of Christ.

Jesus is the Mediator of God’s Covenant (Hebrews 9:15). As Mediator, He is God’s Representative to men, and man’s Representative to God. Our Mediator is a man that understands the weaknesses of our humanity.

Hebrews 4:15 – We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 10:12 – But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;

(9) The circumcision of Christ is about remembering His devotion to the law of God.

Circumcision was THE LAW! It was not an option or great suggestion.

When Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the temple to be circumcised, they fulfilled their covenant duty to the LORD God.

When Christ was circumcised, the law was already incised in his heart; and where law ruled, grace reigned hand-in-hand with perfect law.

Paul said that our Lord was “the end (telos) of law” (Romans 10:4); that is, He fully, perfectly, fulfilled all the requirements of the law for righteousness in His life and death. He did for Israel what Israel could not do for itself. Unlike Israel who disobeyed God in their time of testing, Christ obeyed the law fully. He obeyed God’s law on Israel’s behalf. In his life, He was Israel’s Representative that fulfilled Israel’s covenant responsibilities to God (Romans 5:20). In His death, he removed the curse of covenant breaking by becoming a curse for them (Galatians 3:1-14).

Mary was under command to offer two turtle doves for her purification in child birth. Little did she know that He was the Turtle Dove that would have His neck rung and his blood shed to wash away her sins at the cross. Simeon could say, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation . . . a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel” (Luke 2:30-32).

John announces, “And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” The Greek script reads “grace anti grace;” meaning “wave upon wave of grace;” or, an endless supply of grace to meet the needs of sinful man.

The text says, “His father and mother were amazed the things said about Him” at his circumcision (2:32), and one who understands the circumcision of Christ will be no less astonished.

“Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel” (2:24); that is, our destiny is determined by our reception or rejection to the One Who was circumcised on that day. Salvation is based upon our acceptance of His offer to represent you and I as the God-man before Heaven’s Tribunal.

Let us keep ‘THE GREAT FEAST’ with wonder and joy.

Merry Christmas!

The Four Dreams of Joseph

Matthew 1-2



◆ Let us consider the four dreams of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Mary was given one revelation from an angel and Joseph had four revelations from God in the form of a dream.

We all have dreams, but none like Joseph experienced.

Our dreams contain vague, unclear impressionable images that crisscross our psyche during the night, but Joseph's four dreams contained words so clear and precise, so relevant to his conflicted circumstances, he knew with certainty, they were from God.

Revelations from God are rare. They are not only rare, but limited to Biblical times. It appears the season of revelation by means of dreams and visitations of angels closed with the apostles following the Christ event. No, that does not mean that God is not at work in our lives to do his will. It simply means the canon of revelation is closed. Beware of any man who says, "God told me . . ." The greatest among us walk by faith in the sure Word of God.

First Dream

Matthew 1:18-22 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privetly.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear

not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

In Biblical times, once a couple became engaged, they were considered husband and wife – unlike modern trends, engagement was a legal contract, a binding agreement in Biblical times.

What a shock to Joseph to “see Mary’s baby bump” and to find out from Mary herself that she was with child by the Holy Spirit. We can only imagine the thoughts and doubts racing through his mind about the state of Mary and her sanity.

The Scripture tells us that Joseph was a righteous man leaning toward a quiet, private divorce. Knowing all this, the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream to relieve his stress and to verify Mary’s story. Not only so, the Lord directed Joseph to name the child “Jesus” (Savior) because he would save his people from their sins.

Notice the Spirit called Joseph “the son of David” — a subtle hint to Joseph causing him to reflect on the Davidic promises: Genesis 12:1-5, Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89; Isaiah 7; Micah 5:2, et al.

The text refers back to Isaiah 7 where God promised a virgin, Isaiah’s young wife, would bear a son to verify that a prediction to King Ahaz would come true. This prophesy had a fulfillment in Isaiah’s time, but who could imagine a pure, unmarried woman would have a child . . . but, not any child, but the Son of God. *That is, the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joseph’s day was greater than the promise in in Isaiah’s time.*

Among many reasons, the Savior had to be born of a virgin in order to be free of the Adamic curse which is passed on to children through the Father.

Consider also that the Spirit knew the thoughts of Joseph and he knew the character of the man. How gracious to inform us of the good qualities of Joseph. By accepting the duty to raise the Son of God, Joseph became a candidate for the greatest father on earth award; that is, to raise a child that was not his own.

Second Dream

Matthew 2:13-14 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

The day after God warned the Magi of Herod's evil intent in a dream, the Magi packed their camels and left Bethlehem. No doubt they shared God's warning to them with Joseph. The next night, God spoke to Joseph and ordered him to leave Bethlehem immediately.



Note that God spoke to Joseph, not Mary; to the husband, and not to the wife. Though Mary was the blessed virgin, she was under the leadership and coverture of her husband. She was not the head of the home. Thus, the directive was given to the man, and not to the woman.

Notice in the icon above that Mary is wearing a scarf or head covering — a symbol that Mary and Joseph were committed to God's law-order, the headship of man over the family. The "head covering" along with "bread" and the "wine" became a sacred symbol in the church (1 Corinthians 11:1-16).

Notice Mary's chin is tucked, a symbol of humility, and that her eyes are closed, a symbol of reverence.

Who can imagine the abrupt departure . . . waking up, packing, and scrambling south to the border of Egypt over a hundred and thirty miles south of Bethlehem. Who can imagine the thoughts racing through the minds of Joseph and Mary as they fled the nation of Israel to a foreign country.

As the story unfolds we learn that Herod, a psychopath full of political phobias, ordered his soldiers to go door-to-door and jab all the young children them with a sword. The presence of reckless, murderous madmen in politics is nothing new.

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

So clear and authoritative was this dream-revelation, Joseph acted immediately. Oh, that we might be as quick to obey the Word of God.

Third Dream

Matthew 2:19-2 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

After Herod's death, four months after Christ was born, God ordered Joseph to return to Israel.

This excursion to Egypt fulfilled another promise: "Out of Egypt I have called my Son." The promise related to Israel leaving Egypt during the Exodus event, but its greater fulfillment referred to Jesus being called out of Egypt. Much of the history of Israel was a type of the suffering and accomplishments of our Lord; that is, our Lord's birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection cast a long shadow over the history of Israel. So much so, the history of Israel mirrored the Christ event.

Fourth Dream

Matthew 2:22-23 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

In arriving back in Israel after the death of Herod, Joseph and Mary learned that Herod's proud son ruled Judea. Knowing that fruit does not fall far from the tree, fear gripped their hearts. The question of where to settle scrambled through their minds. In order that Scripture might be fulfilled and as a matter of safety, the Spirit ordered the holy couple to settle in Nazareth. While Joseph and Mary had freedom to make many decisions, nothing essential to our Lord's mission was left to chance.

Thus, the four dreams of Joseph, show not only God's care of this couple, but that each event in Jesus' sojourn on earth was a fulfillment of prophesy. As such, he provided proof of claim that he was indeed the Son of God Who would save His people from their sins.

Merry Christmas!

Mary, the Magnificent

Luke 1:46-55



◆ “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their

hearts;

He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

On this cold Christmas morning (2022) I am sitting down with an open Bible and a hot cup of coffee with cinnamon yum yums thinking about the beauty of Elizabeth and Mary (Luke 1) in contrast to the odious women manufactured by the millions in the United States Public School System (Proverbs 30:23).

Where have all the sweet, innocent women disappeared to in this country?

The secular, humanistic works of John Dewey and odious women like Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Hillary Clinton seem to dominate the affections of mindless Americans.

Have you ever noticed in Christian art how the majority of paintings regarding Mary show her with her head covered, her chin down, and her eyes closed? These painting portray Mary as submissive to God, humble, and reverent.

How beautiful are the words of Mary, “Behold the handmaid (servant) of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38).

Mary is truly magnificent: magnificent in purity, spiritual heritage, innocence, simplicity, submission, peace and trust.

Consider her greatness: a Hebrew of Hebrews, a daughter of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; a descendent of Judah, a descendent of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and David – a true Israelite indeed; that is, she was a pure, virgin princess in the royal family of King David – a young woman filled with the Spirit of God.

Many a Christian woman has been inspired by Mary and sought to imitate her pure devotion to the Lord . . . but that spirit does not seem present among modern women.

How many women in America graduate from the public school system who aspiring to be a “handmaid” of the Lord?

It seems like young girls today want to be like Taylor Swift, Jennifer Lopez, and Britney Spears. Hideous women like Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris are held up as political role models.

In Spain, the ideal young woman is Aitana López – a physically perfect, soulless CGI model. Aitana López doesn’t complain, doesn’t get ill and can work 24/7 – no wonder she’s the most popular celebrity in Spain. Fiction and fantasy has replaced the “handmaid of the Lord.”

Name one woman you know that considers herself a servant of the Lord peacefully submitted to the unexpected reversals of Providence – an unexpected pregnancy, a financial reversal, poverty, hardship, and rejection by the Head of State (Herod)?

For that matter, how many pure, masculine men do you know who have unconditionally subjected themselves to be a “servant of His Majesty”?

If Mary is not our model as a servant, who is?

Oh, that all of us would be able to say with Mary, "I am Thy servant," "be it unto me according to thy word."

Merry Christmas!

Mary's Magnificat

Luke 1:46-55



◆ In Luke 1:46-55 we read Mary's song of praise to God which she cited after she arrived at the home of Elizabeth. It has come to be known as Mary's Magnificat due to the first word of its Latin translation: Magnificat anima mea Dominum. Or as our English versions read: My soul magnifies the Lord.

Luke 1:46-55

"And Mary said:

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

For the Mighty One has done great things for me.

Holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,

From generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones

But has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things

But has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,

Remembering to be merciful to Abraham

And his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.'"

The Context:

Mary's song flows spontaneously from her heart after she arrived at Elizabeth's home while Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John the Baptist.

But that's just the immediate setting in which Mary burst into praise.

Consider the larger context of her song: It was a time of great concern for Mary. She faced a chilly, unpredictable future. Though not always practiced consistently, Jewish law demanded adulteresses be stoned. Unwed, teenage peasant girls were easy targets and often humiliated by the local community.

Matthew informs us that Joseph was so distraught, He planned to divorce Mary quietly. His discreetness was a manly attempt to protect her from public ridicule. So certain was Joseph that Mary had played the whore, God sent an angel to inform him otherwise. In a dream, the angel revealed to him that Mary was truly a virgin with a special purpose; that she was carrying the Messiah, the Son of God, the Hope of the World in her womb.

It would be an error to think of this song as coming from a radiant teenage girl bursting with enthusiasm about being a mother in Nazareth. She sang this song with trembling knees, a stuttering tongue, and shaking fingers due to the prejudices of her home town, the rigid ethos of the people, and the uncertainty associated with Nazarene poverty.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German Theologian recognized the revolutionary nature of Mary's song. Before being hung by the Nazis for alleged subversion, Bonhoeffer spoke these words in a sermon during Advent 1933:

"The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings . . . This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols. It is instead a hard, strong, inexorable song about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind."

Though spoken in somber circumstances among family members, this song flows from the courageous heart of a simple teenage girl who saw with the eyes of faith that she was the mother of Israel's Messiah — the King destined to rule the world, to save the righteous, and to punish the wicked.

So powerful is this song, it has been banned from being sung in church by governments trembling at its implications. Her words about bringing down potentates and God's preference toward the poor were dangerously revolutionary to many regimes.

Enemy Love website exposed the world's hostility to Mary's Magnificat:

“During the British rule of India, the Magnificat was prohibited from being sung in church. In the 1980s, Guatemala's government discovered Mary's words about God's preferential love for the poor to be too dangerous and revolutionary. The song had been creating quite the stirring amongst Guatemala's impoverished masses. Mary's words were inspiring the Guatemalan poor to believe that change was indeed possible. Thus their government banned any public recitation of Mary's words. Similarly, after the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo — whose children all disappeared during (1974-1983) — placed the Magnificat's words on posters throughout the capital plaza, the military junta of Argentina outlawed any public display of Mary's song.

Let's avoid a dreamy reading of this passage and examine why so many rulers have seen her song as subversive and revolutionary.

Luke 1:52 “He hath put down the mighty from their seats (thrones), and exalted them of low degree.”

In verse 52, the word “might” (*dunastas*) is translated “of great authority” in Acts 8:27. We get the English word “dynasty” from this Greek word. Paul applies *dunastas* to Christ as “the blessed and only potentate (*dunastes*)” (1 Timothy 6:15). The point of the statement is that God smashes political dynasties.

“their seats” is better translated as “thrones” associated with the citadels of power.

Up until this time, the world was bullied by despotic kings, princes, and Caesars. But, with the conception of Christ in the womb of Mary, and the birth of John to his Father Zacharias, history pivoted “on a dime.”

With the forerunner on earth, the kingdom of God intersected history, not to take global dominion of the earth, but to save sinners and to provide proof of the eschatological hope and judgment to come.

Kings are dethroned; beggars are made sons of God. That the Lord favors the poor and shows contempt for pompous-princes strikes a blow to the heart of kings. Men endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights limit the powers of every government on earth. It makes sovereigns of ordinary men.

Knowing the promises of the Savior-King-Messiah and with the eye of faith, Mary announced the defeat of God’s enemies (Satan, sin, and death) as well as the crushing collapse of pompous rulers and kings to come.

All czars, kaisers, kings, parliamentarians, califs, dukes, emperors, khans, maharajahs, mikados, pharaohs, queens, satraps, shahs, sheiks, sultans, and presidents have been defeated and dethroned by virtue of the resurrection and ascension of Christ to the throne. Stripped of their royal robes, they too will stand naked before the Great White Throne for judgment.

Another King arrived in history and the destiny of the world is in His hands. “Kiss the Son,” (Psalm 2) ye kings, lest you be destroyed by the ominous wrath of God that leaks from the Throne of God before the final day of judgment (Romans 1:18).

Tremble still, you kings; Rejoice all who are poor. God favors the humble.

Merry Christmas!

Little Known Facts about Mary's Magnificat

Luke 1:46-55



◆ If you've grown up involved in a church community, you're probably familiar with Mary's Magnificat.

But even if that's the case, there are many surprising insights to be gleaned from this song.

For example, did you know that . . .

- The Magnificat has been part of the Church's liturgy since its earliest days. For centuries, members of religious orders have recited or sung these words on a daily basis.
- It is the longest set of words spoken by a woman in the New Testament.
- It is the first Christmas carol ever composed.
- Parts of Mary's Magnificat echo the song of Hannah (found in 1 Samuel 2:1-10) and are also reminiscent of the anguish of the prophets.
- In the past century, there were at least three separate instances of governments banning the public recitation of the Magnificat.
- Its message, they feared, was too subversive. (Enemylove).
- There are actually two Magnificats in the Bible: Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1; and Hannah's Magnificat in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

- The first use of the term “Messiah” is in Hannah’s Canticle; that is, Hannah birthed the hope of a Messiah (2:10), and Mary birthed the fulfillment of that hope.

Merry Christmas!

Mary's Revolutionary Hymn

Luke 1:52



◆ “He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.”

Christmas is a day we celebrate the birth of the King of Kings, the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the displacement of earthly dynasties and humiliation of earth's rulers.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer recognized the subversive nature of Mary's Song. He read the Magnificat and then spoke these words in a sermon during Advent in 1933:

“The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings. . . . This song has none of the sweet, nostalgic, or even playful tones of some of our Christmas carols.”

But, how is this accomplished?

Government is necessary in a trifling sense, but not essential for quality of life. Government service is one of the lowest, nethermost occupations imaginable.

Government servants are humbled and put in their place when . . .

(1) When Christians call men to surrender to the kingly authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 99:1 The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.

Isaiah 33:22 For the LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our King. It is He who will save us.

Romans 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

(2) When Christians proclaim the fact of the King's birth in Bethlehem.

Matthew 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Matthew 21:5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

John 1:49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

(3) When Christians proclaim the fact of the King's triumph over death. Jesus, not death, is Lord.

Romans 14:9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

(4) When Christians proclaim the fact of the exaltation of the King to the right hand of God.

Luke 20:42 And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

Acts 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

(5) When Christians proclaim Christ as king, not just in theory, but in fact!

Act 17:6-7 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

(6) When Christians proclaim the message that Jesus is King now and that mayors, governors, and parliaments must surrender to His authority in now time.

Luke 19:38 Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.

1 Timothy 6:15 He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ...

Revelation 1:5 Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Revelation 19:16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

(7) When Christians call mayors, governors, and federal officials to surrender to His authority.

Philippians 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

(8) When Christians stop kowtowing to every whim and wish of mayors, governors, and federal persons.

Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men."

(9) When Christians claim their status as kings; and, speak, dress, and behave like kings with dignity and honor.

Revelation 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

(10) When Christian stop believing the Constitution is the supreme law of the Land and proclaim the King's law as the Supreme Law of the Land.

Titus 1:3 But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior;

Revelation 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

In the 1980s the government of Guatemala recognized the subversive nature of Mary's Song. The government found Mary's proclamation — that God is especially concerned for the poor — to be so dangerous and revolutionary that it banned any public recitation of Mary's words. India and Argentina have done the same (Washington Post).

May the Lord raise up men and women as pure and perceptive as Mary, the Mother of our Lord.

Remember Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).

Merry Christmas!

Mary as God's Ideal Woman

Virgin Mary

Luke 1:38



♦ **And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.**

A lesson on womanhood from Mary as portrayed in Christian Art.

Halo effect = symbol of respect, saintliness

Blue = symbol of a gift from heaven, of angelic attention

Scarlet = royalty, dignity, honor

White = purity, virginity, holiness, unmolested



Hannah, Christian Art, Crosswalk

Headcovering = submission to God's will

Eyes down = reverence, thoughtful contemplation,

Chin down = humility

Light on the face and black background = light to a dark, immoral world

Q: Here is God's ideal woman, yet what American

girl wants to be like Mary: saintly, pure, holy, humble, and submissive to God's will? Most want to be like the latest hip-hop star.

The Feminist



“Girl Strong” = feminist propaganda myth

Red Scarf = man-like practical hair protector
– no ornamentation, no charm

Eye lids bent down = determination, anger,
combative

Eyes open: being all you can be; don't mess
with me, I know

Chin up = pride, superiority, doubtless



Muscular Arms: victory

No smile = unhappy, discontent

Arm up = conquest, determination,
victory

Hair showing: freedom,
independence, self-reliant

Arms up = conquest, outrage



Mouth open: commanding, combative,
argumentative demanding, angry, vocal,
loud, and in your face.

Sign: a woman with a cause, protest,
demanding

Hair style: freedom, unrestrained,
independent, self-reliant



Hair style: freedom, independent, self-reliant, lack of submission, single and unmarried.

Mouth open: loud, combative, argumentative,

Tongue out: unrestrained, undisciplined, barbaric, no charm

Tattoo: idolatrous and spiritually perverted, godless, unholy

Lots of skin showing: immodest, lack of love or respect for men

May the Lord raise up holy, pure young women like Mary.

Zachariah's Christmas Message

Luke 1: 67-80



◆ This is a hymn, the Second Christmas Carol dedicated to Mary's Child.

Zachariah Meets Mary and Jesus

Luke 1:56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

It is not clear whether Mary left before or after the birth of John. She may have stayed till Elizabeth gave birth and left shortly thereafter.

In her coming to the house of Elizabeth, Zachariah met Mary and her child in a preliminary way.

The Aaronic couple must have listened with mesmerizing interest to Mary's account of her encounter with the angel, the angel's pronouncement regarding the miracle of her pure, immaculate conception, that she was carrying the Son of God in her womb, that he would be given the throne of David, that he would establish the everlasting kingdom, the personal disclosure that with God nothing is impossible, that Joseph doubted and planned to divorce her privately, and that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

Zechariah knew nothing about the teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ; but, he was a rare man in that he was a man filled with the Spirit who recognized the Person of Christ.

We can only imagine how Zachariah marveled and compared Mary's encounter with the angel to his own encounter with an angel in the temple only months before.

Zachariah becomes a father

57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son.

Elizabeth conceived after the Feast of Tabernacles in late September or early October circa 3 / 4 B.C.. She gave birth to John the Baptist in late May or June 2 / 3 B.C. Tradition informs us that John was born in Ein Karem, a neighborhood in or near Jerusalem, AKA Beth Hakerem (meaning "House of the Vineyard")

58 And her neighbors and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her.

59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John.

61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.

62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called.

Zachariah Names his son "John"

63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John (the Lord is a gracious giver). And they marvelled all.

Zachariah Speaks for the first time in nine month

64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea.

66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

Zachariah's Prophecy

Almost every phrase in Zechariah's hymn has its counterpart in the psalms or the prophets. For nine months he could not speak. Forced to meditate on the Holy Scriptures, he shares his private thoughts — thoughts about the Messiah and the destiny of his son rooted in the promises of His Word.

Let us learn a lesson: when chastened by God spend time thinking about Scripture.

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

After nine months of being mute and unable to talk, Zachariah first words begin with praise to God and not a complaint about being nine-months speechless. His pronouncement is the Second Christmas carol following Mary's Magnificat.

The word "prophecy" means "to speak with Divine inspiration," "to declare a truth that can only be known by the breath of God." Prophecy is related to the Age of Revelation and ceased after the Apostolic Era. While good Christian men can share acute insight into Scripture, there is no such thing as breath of God "prophecy" among us today. The age of inspiration-revelation ended in the first century when the canon was closed. Those claiming to utter prophecy today are liars and deceivers.

The text is careful to inform us that Zachariah, though having been severely chastened, was filled with the Spirit and that his words were "God-breathed." As a man filled with the Spirit, he did not talk about the Spirit. He did not talk about Himself or his experiences. Further, he did not even use the pronouns "I" or "me." He proclaimed the wonder of Christ, the Redeemer. And, he announced the destiny of his son as the fulfillment of Isaiah 40 to his neighbors and friends.

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

Filled with the Spirit, his first words were about the LORD God and his favor upon the people.

“Blessed” (eulogetos) is an adjective describing the Lord God. We get the English term “eulogy” from this Greek word which means to praise that which is highly respectable, rare, and precious.

The word “visited” (episkeptomai) means “to look upon.” For four hundred years the prophetic voice had been silent as if the face of God had turned away from the people. Zechariah’s announcement that God was looking upon his people was like rain in the Arabian desert.

The word “redeemed” (lutrosis) means “to set free” by a ransom. The verb “to perform redemption” is an aorist. Zachariah speaks as if it was an accomplished fact. Little did any know that the remnant in Israel were about to be redeemed by the blood of Mary’s precious child (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Zachariah’s Word about the Christ-Child

69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

The term “horn of salvation” is a symbol of strength. It is a favorite metaphor of Hebrews because it refers to the power of cattle, goats, and rams. Hannah was the first to connect her “horn” to the term “messiah” (anointed) (1 Samuel 2:1, 10).

Here the horn is a metaphor for Jesus who came “to save his people from their sins.” Zechariah informs us that the Christ-child will use His power to save Israel and to fulfill the Messianic hope grounded on Davidic promises.

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

From the Prophet Abel to the Prophet Zechariah, the “holy prophets” predicted a time when God would raise up His “Anointed” to restore paradise and to usher in the kingdom of God. This Hope had arrived in Mary’s child (Luke 11:50-51).

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

Zachariah's claim that Mary's baby would save God's people from their enemies has its roots in Deuteronomy 20:4; Psalm 18:48; 44:7; 59:1; 68:20; Isaiah 40; Ezekiel 13:21.

Zachariah was probably thinking of deliverance from Rome, but Christ came to conquer the bitter enemies of humanity: Satan, sin, and death.

Fulfillment is greater than the promises; that is, Christ not only came to save the believing among Israel, but the elect from sea to sea; to not only free men from political oppression, but to save their soul from the oppression caused by sin.

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

"To perform the mercy" informs us that our redemption and salvation has its origin in the mercy of God and not the measure of man; that is, "even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God loves men not because they are worthy, but because his name is Wonderful; not because of who they are, but because of Who He is – a God of love.

73 The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,

The word "oath" is a synonym for the word "covenant" in verse 72 – a reference to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17. The "Seed" promised to Abraham arrived in Mary's womb.

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, 75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

The elect have many enemies: seen and unseen, known and unknown, heavenly and earthly, spiritual and material.

When Zachariah uttered the words, "to be delivered out of the hand of our enemies," he was probably thinking of a restored theocracy, righteous rulers, and political freedom. Indeed, political freedom occurs where Christ is King in the hearts and minds of people. While men are in need of

political freedom, their greatest need is to escape from the greatest slave master of all:

“Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:44).

The man who puts his hand into Christ’s hand to walk with him will discover the way of peace while being delivered from gnawing lusts that imprison the man.

A prayer: *Order my steps, O Lord, and set me free from the clutches of my enemies.*

The term “serve” includes obedience, honor, worship, and holy employment. The end of all studies in Scripture, in law, and in Christ’s accomplishments in history is for the purpose of serving him without fear. All service to Christ is out of thankfulness, not necessity.

Men find it difficult to serve a holy God without fear. In Samuel 6, Uzzah touched the ark and immediately died. Angels hide their face in His presence (Isaiah 6). Isaiah saw holy light coming from the sanctuary and thought he was a dead man (2 Chronicles 26). Uzziah was struck with leprosy for entering the temple proper. Serve God without fear? How can the sons of Adam who live in the shadows of death serve the God of light? How can debtors serve God without seeking merits?

The answer, of course, lies in the “Horn of our salvation,” His mighty work of propitiation at the cross (blood), and the powerful benefits we receive when we trust Him: justification, regeneration, reconciliation, forgiveness, identification, the Holy Spirit, and sanctification.

“Holiness and righteousness” limit the kind of service acceptable to God; that is, casual, carefree, reckless acts are forbidden. Service that respects His law and honors His character glorifies the Father and the Son.

Service in conformity to Scriptural instructions is acceptable. Being freed from the brutal will of our enemies and having peace with God through Christ enables us to happily serve the Lord. Without the Horn of Salvation, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a holy God. Because Mary’s child saves believing men by His accomplishments at the cross and

His intercessory work at the right hand of the Father, people of faith can serve Him all the days of their life graciously and without fear of punishment.

1 John 4:18 – There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Zachariah's Word about his own son, John.

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

Can you see in your mind's eye, Zachariah looking tenderly upon his only son, God's gracious gift to Elizabeth and him, and declaring the child's destiny? John was not appointed to lowly, inferior work for some government, but to be "the prophet of the Highest" – a title repeated in earlier pronouncements (1:32, 35). The verse echoes two great prophecies by combining the "going before the LORD" of Malachi 3:1, with the "preparing the way" of Isaiah 40:3.

Zachariah announces his child's purpose as the forerunner of the Messiah. When John arrived, our Lord declared John more than a prophet, but that he was the greatest manly-man to have ever lived (Matthew 11:11).

Think of John's lineage: Zachariah and Elizabeth were Levites – descendants of Aaron; Zachariah was a priest, but more than a priest. He was elected as a "High Priest" during the Feasts of Tabernacles. John, therefore, was not only a priest, he was the de jure High Priest of Israel introducing the nation to the Lamb Who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

Consider the deplorable state of the people who had lost sight of the true nature of salvation. Wrapped up in dreams of political deliverance from Rome, they needed God's prophet to show them Christ Who came "to save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Man's enemies are Satan, sin, and death. John's purpose was to turn men's eyes away from hope in government to the true Hope in Christ the Son of God — a Savior who redeems men from the penalty and power of sin; a Savior Who paid the price for transgressions so that men could be forgiven and set free from guilt.

Note that God did not save this little baby from being beheaded by Herod, the Roman-appointed king of the nation.

78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

Again, Zachariah informs us this salvation is not due to man's merits, but the mercy of God. Jesus is God's Mercy Seat, Sacrifice, and High Priest.

"Visited us" (epishketomai) should be translated as the face of God "looking" tenderly toward the needs of fallen humanity.

The English term "dayspring" is a beautiful translation of the Greek word *anatole* – a reference to the dawn or sunrise kissing the morning sky. Jesus is the Light of the World, the Water of Life, the Horns of the Sun, the Sunrise and Sunshine for every man seeking salvation.

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Sitting "in darkness" and the "shadow of death" refers to man's fundamental problem. He is going to die.

Is there any hope that death can be overcome; that a sinner can be just before God (Job 25:4)? Yes. This Horn of Salvation was born a real man, died for our sins, and literally, tangibly, physically rose from the death. In so doing, He solved man's fundamental problem. And, He provided proof of claim with strict proof of claim by appearing to the apostles and over 500 men that He is the "resurrection and the life" (John 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:1-12).

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

Luke closes with the fundamental facts of John's life. A Levite, a son of Aaron, a Nazarite son of a high priest in Israel with Samson-like moral strength, he separated himself from the world and unto God by living in the desert until it was time for him to introduce the nation to its Savior-Redeemer.

Merry Christmas!

Christmas: Jesus' Qualifications to be King in Israel

Matthew 2:1-2



◆ Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

Christmas is a time when world looks at the birth of Jesus born King of the Nations. But, it was the Persian wise men, the magi or the king makers, that first sanctioned Jesus and recognized his qualification to be the King of kings . . . to be inducted into that elite club . . . the ruling class in the international community.

In America, we have a meritocracy and a ratification process for a candidate to assume the duties of public office that includes registration, campaigning, voter approval, vote tabulation, Electoral College, ratification by Congress, and taking an oath of office.

Likewise, all countries have qualifications for office and so does the Biblical office of king:

(1) Jewish kings had to be in the line of David.

Kings are born into privilege. All others are usurpers or candidates due to a leadership vacuum.

Christ was king by virtue of his birthright. A privilege handed down from the father-king to a son-prince; from King David through Solomon to King Jesus.

In this case, we can trace Christ's legal right to be king from King David-Solomon to Joseph (through legal adoption). See the rights of inheritance regarding the daughters of Zelophehad – Numbers 27; Deuteronomy 10:13; Proverbs 17:2; and adoption rights in John 1:10-13.

(2) Jewish kings had to prove their lineage in order to have lawful claim to office.

Because Jesus was adopted by his “step father” Joseph, He inherited the legal right to be king (Matthew 1), and because His mother Mary was the daughter of David through Nathan, he was the biological descendent of David (Luke 3).

Thus, the marriage of Joseph a son of David to Mary daughter of David through Nathan solved the dilemma of the Jeconiah Curse that placed a prohibition on any of his sons to sit on the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:28–30).

(3) Kings must have superior character and training.

Jesus was qualified to be king by virtue of His superior, moral character. Born of virgin by the power of the Spirit, he was removal from the Adamic curse. He had no sin; knew no sin; and did no sin. Moreover, he passed the moral test for leadership in Matthew 4, not to prove He did not sin, but to demonstrate He could not sin.

(4) In relationship to Israel, the ultimate King-Messiah had to meet the tests and credentials of Messiah proclaimed by Israel's prophets – something that was not within his control.

The prophets announced specific facts about the coming Messiah. Jesus was the rightful king because His birth, personhood, character, and lineage fulfill prophecy. See the word “fulfilled” in Matthew 2; and Isaiah 9:6.

(5) Jewish kings had to have Heaven's approval; that is, there was a Divine certification process.

Jesus was the rightful king on the grounds He was declared the Son of God by His Heavenly Father, acknowledged so by Mary, Elizabeth,

Zachariah, Simeon, and Anna: attested by the Magi; approved by Israel's de jure high priest-forerunner, John the Baptist, and anointed by the Spirit at his baptism-ceremony-coronation (Deuteronomy 17:15; Matthew 1:21; 3:17).

(6) In exchange for the public trust, Jewish kings had to make a commitment to know and uphold the law (Deuteronomy 17:18-20; Psalm 40; 110).

In the case of Persian king coronations, the candidate-king had to know the law of the Medes and Persians and be approved by the ruling class, the aristocracy of the nation, the Magi Priesthood.

In Jesus' case, the law of the LORD God was written on his heart and accompanied by an oath (See Psalm 110). Due to his pre-existence, He was the Source of law, the subjective representation of law, and the perfection and consummation of law (Exodus 20:1; Psalm 40:8; Romans 10:4). When Jesus asked the ruling class of Israel if they could identify a moral flaw in His character that would disqualify him from office, they responded negatively by unanimous silence (John 8:45-47).

(7) Kings must be recognized as a de jure king and be certified by proper earthly authorities.

Jesus was the rightful king due to the fact that King Makers from among the Gentiles investigated Christ, sanctioned, and coronated Him (Matthew 2). This priestly class from Medo-Persian recognized and approved Jesus as Royalty. It was these Gentile authorities who were the first to declare Jesus "the King of the Jews" and NOT THE JEWS! These ruler-priests were the witnesses, public notaries, and the ones that certified his legal qualifications to be King of the Jews — a necessary requisite for all rulers including our Lord.

(8) Kings must be approved and go through a coronation process (1 Samuel 10; 16; Psalm 110).

In the case of Christ, he was approved and sanctioned by the Persian Magi King Makers, Holy Scripture, and Angels (Luke 1), John the Baptist (John 1) and later by the Spirit at His baptism (Matthew 3).

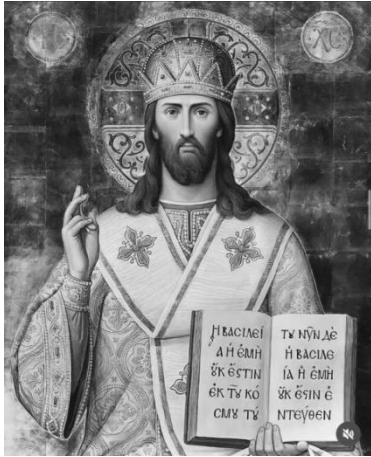
(9) King-Rulers are necessary to administer justice and to destroy the enemies of law. De jure kings have political rivals and rule “in the midst of their enemies” (Psalm 110:2).

In contrast to the coronation of Christ by the King Makers, we have the negative response of Herod, an Idumean from Edom, a descendent of Esau, the de facto king appointed by the Romans, who was threatened by the de jure, pure-blooded Son of David, King of the Jews, the Lord Jesus Christ – a negative proof that Jesus was King (Matthew 2:1-2).

Merry Christmas!

The Gospel of King Jesus

Acts 17:6-7



♦ . . . these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also . . . and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, (King) Jesus.

When is the last time you heard the rallying cry, "Jesus is Lord?"

It is a duty of every Christian to examine the gospel he preaches to see if it conforms to the gospel that "turned the world upside down" in the first century.

Since Jesus burst out of the chains of death to escape the winding grave clothes, men began to realize that since He defeated death, He must be Lord of all.

"From the mount of Olives, the place where in dread conflict His garments were rolled in blood, He has mounted in triumph to His throne." (Charles Spurgeon)

Christians have the hope of a resurrection morning because there was a rising again for Him.

In the Book of Acts Jesus is preached as the hope of sinners. He is referred to as "Savior" two times and "Lord" ninety-two times.

Titles like "King" and "Lord" and "Master" refer to authority.

Because all authority in heaven and earth is given to Him, Christian have de jure power to conduct kingdom business here on earth (Matthew 28:18-20).

In the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as "Lord" 747 times. The Title "Lord Jesus Christ" is referred to 11 times in 2 Thessalonians and 9 times

in 1 Thessalonians for a total of 20 times in Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians.

Clearly, the riveting emphasis of apostolic preaching was that Jesus is the ascended Sovereign.

In the Old Testament, the name YHWH in Hebrew and LORD in English is used 6,832 times. Sovereignty and authority thunder through the centuries because of His powerful name. It was the LORD who created heaven and earth; the loving King Who gave the law to Israel, and the One whom the prophets obeyed. Clearly, the core of the OT gospel centered on the hub, "The LORD reigneth" (Psalm 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1).

The final message the apostle John left to the world in closing out the canon of Scripture was the trumpet, thundering announcement,

"Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" (Revelation 19:6).

Can you hear the roaring, rumbling, crushing thunder of the LORD's reign?

The modern gospel, however, is NOT about Jesus' thundering authority to split the sprawling cedars of man's pride, but about "fire insurance" against the terrors of hell and how you can prosper by faith.

The gospel that "turned the world upside down" did not proclaim health and wealth but a chariot-riding king with sword in hand, King Jesus (Acts 17:6-17).

The gospel of the kingdom announced the King had entered history to crush man's enemies with the hammer of His holiness: Satan, sin, and death.

This Victor-King defeated death through his death, burial, and resurrection and was seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:30-32).

While He is called "the Savior" and the "Christ," the gospel that stunned the Mediterranean world was that Jesus is "the Prince of the kings of earth" (Revelation 1:5) greater than Herod and greater than Caesar.

He claimed authority "over all flesh" at the most in opportune time, hours before His death, and then proved it by His resurrection from the fetters of death (John 17:2).

He commissioned his disciples to go into the nations proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom . . . but not before He assured them that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Him (Matthew 28:18-20).

Paul taught that to enter the kingdom of God one had to embrace Jesus as Lord (Roman 10:9); that the whole purpose of His death, burial, and resurrection was that He might be Lord both of the living and the dead (Romans 14:9)

Because He has authority over all men, He calls all men everywhere to repent and bow the knee to His authority (Acts 17:30-31).

If the winds and sea obey Him (Matthew 8:27), He is to be obeyed by all men including kings and statesmen.

In the 17th Century, the State taught citizens to believe in the "crown right of kings."

In modern times, the State media apparatus teaches government has the golden scepter to rule the world and that men need to kiss the ring of the finger of some State potentate in order to achieve the socialist utopian agenda of equality, prosperity, and democracy.

But, there is no Utopian peace without the Prince of Peace.

The gospel that turned the world upside down and conquered Western Civilization did not proclaim government as god, or Caesar as king, or the Roman City State as the hope of the world. It proclaimed Christ as King!!

There is no law without a king, and King Jesus has His law. The West seeks to practice the rule of law v. the king is law; however, there is no law without a Rex (See Exodus 20:1-3). Because there's only one King and one the law, we must work toward is the law that comes from King Jesus. In this sense, Christians believe in THE KING IS LAW or Rex Lex!! Once man recognizes One King, **then** we can work toward Lex Rex. Selah.

DUX LUX REX LEX Cross. The rough English translation is "my King, my Leader (Commander), my Light, and my Law" in reference, of course, to Jesus Christ. Word order makes little difference in Latin.

Rex, Lex, Lux, Dux is Latin Christian meaning "My King, My Law, My Light, and my Commander": Jesus is Rex (King), Lex (Law) Lux (light), Dux (Leader or Commander).

The gospel that turned the world upside down taught "another Rex, King Jesus."

The Apostolic Declaration that launched the gospel from Jerusalem into the Mediterranean world acted on a commission sealed by Lord's signet ring procured by His ascension to heaven's throne:

"We ought to obey God rather than men" - Acts 5:29

The Historic Battle-Cry of the Christian Church became:

"AND HE HATH ON HIS VESTURE AND ON HIS THIGH, A NAME WRITTEN, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." - Revelation 19:16

Notice how the consciousness of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430), refers to Christ as King:

"Let these and similar answers (if any fuller and fitter answers can be found) be given to their enemies by the redeemed family of the Lord Christ, and by the pilgrim city of King Christ (Augustine, "City of God").

Do you want to enter the kingdom? Then kiss the signet ring of King Jesus and take your place at his feet under His scepter.

The gospel that "turned the world upside down" did not shout "Hail Caesar, we who are about to die salute thee," but that there is another king, King Jesus who is enthroned in the celestial city.

The last time men ceased the truth that there is "no king, but King Jesus" a nation was born (1776)!

But, things have changed.

Americans as a whole no longer believe in "no king but King Jesus." Rather, their hope has shifted to a government of men . . . a government of the people, by the people, and for the politicians.

Isn't it time for believers to reflect on the authority of Christ and what the Scripture means when it announces our Lord as "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS?"

Men cannot find life until hope is shifted away from the City of Man to the City of God, from "Hail Caesar" to "Jesus is Lord."

Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus (acknowledge His authority), and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Merry Christmas!

Appendum

Christ as King in regards to Catholic Theology:

Denver Newsroom, Nov 20, 2021 / 13:47 pm (CNA).

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, celebrated this year on Nov. 21, also is referred to as the Feast of Christ the King, Christ the King Sunday, or Reign of Christ Sunday.

While the concept of Jesus Christ being King is as old as the Gospels, the feast is fairly recent in the Roman Catholic calendar.

The feast was introduced in the Western liturgical calendar in 1925 by Pope Pius XI, via the encyclical "Quas Primas."

Pope Pius XI was about to close the Jubilee year of 1925 in the context of the growing secularist nationalism that followed the fall of European kingdoms after World War I, and decided to establish the solemnity to point to a king "of whose kingdom there shall be no end."

Surprisingly, the first parish in the world to be consecrated in honor of Our Lord Christ the King was established by Pope Pius XI not in Europe, but in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1926.

“The 225 worshippers who attended Our Lord Christ the King’s first Mass on December 5, 1926, embodied the essence of what it means to be ‘church.’ With neither bricks nor mortar to call their own, this gathering of believers placed their faith in Providence and celebrated early liturgies in humble surroundings,” reads an account posted on the parish’s website. “There was no electricity for the first Eucharist, so the room was illuminated by headlights beamed from parked cars. Pastor Father Edward J. Quinn, a former World War I chaplain, used his Army Mass kit.”

The current church, built in the 50’s, was designed by famed church architect Edward J. Schulte in what is known as a “Brutalist” style.

Our Lord Christ the King Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1926, an earlier church building became the first church in the world to bear the name Our Lord Christ the King. Courtesy of P.J. Daley

Christmas Grace

Matthew 1:1-20

Five Women Who Found Grace

A Christmas Message



◆ Today, I want to talk about sex, incest, prostitution, and adultery, that is, I want to talk to you about the Christmas story – a story of five women in the genealogy of Christ who experienced the grace of God.

Because of her co-conspiracy and cover up in the murder of Duncan, Lady Mac

Beth developed a neurosis. So deep was the stain of guilt on her conscience, she tried to wash the blood off her hands with water every quarter of an hour.

Inside each of us is the knowledge of good and evil. Our conscience screams because of the sins we have committed against God. Can anything silence the trumpet of the guilt and the pounding drum of condemnation that awakens us at night and wearies us during the day?

In the Christmas story we have a message of grace that can bring rest to the soul and silence the squawking conscience.

In Matthew's account of the birth of Christ, he provides for us a genealogy of Christ. His ancestry informs us that He is gracious and that He accepts sinners.

Five women are mentioned in this account, and every one of them represent a gracious inclusion into the family of God:

Tamar (Genesis 38)

The text says, "Judah was the father of Boaz and Zerah by Tamar" (1:3).

So fowl is the weather surrounding the story of Tamar, most preachers are embarrassed to read the story in public, including me. It offends the sensitivities even of the most callous among us.

Unlike Isaac and Jacob who married well, Judah was forced to choose a wife for his sons among vulgar Canaanite women. He chose Tamar for his eldest son, Er. But, Er was so wicked, the Lord slew him. Tamar was then given to Er's younger brother Onan, who refused to perform the duty of a kinsman redeemer for the family by impregnating Tamar, and the Lord took his life.

Judah had a third son, Shelah, but he was not old enough to marry and so Tamar had no choice but to return to live in her father's house.

After Shelah came to maturity as a man, Judah was afraid to give Shelah Tamar to wife because she seemed like a curse on the family. He was afraid that what happened to Er and Onan might happen to Shelah. So, he kept postponing his responsibility -- the duty of providing a kinsmen redeemer for his son. All of this sex and clan marriage seems grossly explicit to the modern mind, but the sexual duties of a kinsmen redeemer was a holy, biblical obligation (Deuteronomy 25:25).

Seeing that Judah neglected his duty, Tamar took matters into her own hands. Dressing as a prostitute, she placed a veil over her face, lured Judah to her bed, arranged a price, and performed the act of a common whore. Judah, naïve about the identity of Tamar, copulated with her. A few months later, Judah heard a report about the pregnancy of Tamar, and arranged to have his daughter-in-law burned for harlotry. When Tamar pulled back the curtain of truth, she exposed Judah as the father by producing his walking staff and personal treasures. Everyone was stunned! Convicted of his dual sins, neglect of duty and incest, Judah said about Tamar, "She is more righteous than I."

This earthly, sensual, steamy story of lust, rebellion, prostitution and incest is so slimy one wonders how in the world could the Spirit of God even mention Tamar in the genealogy of Christ. Why would the Spirit want the world to know that sweet Jesus was a descendant of an incestuous union? Shouldn't his line be pure and holy?

Oh, marvelous grace that saves a wretch like me! In the midst of this death, sex, and seduction there is something admirable about Tamar's faith. Widowed twice and neglected by a weak father-in-law, she could have prowled through the neighborhood and lured another virile young man to her side. But, Tamar was not that kind of woman.

For some reason, despite the wickedness of her first two husbands, she developed a love and attachment to the family of Jacob. Despite their weaknesses, she saw that the Lord was with this family. Because God was drawing her to Himself, she desperately wanted to be a part of it.

Forsaking her own culture, she took radical steps to insure her place among the Israel of God. In grace, God gave her two sons. One of them would carry the messianic hope. Out of Perez came kings and princes: David, Solomon and Nathan, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. Though we cannot approve of Tamar's method of deceit, the end of her faith was noble and she was received by grace in the Lord's family. Would to God we had more people like Tamar that would radically seize the opportunity to be a part of the family of God . . . for "The kingdom comes violently, and the violent seize it" (Matthew 11:12).

Oh, the grace that Christmas reveals!

Rahab

While Tamar played the role of prostitute once, prostitution was Rahab's occupation. Rudyard Kipling coined the phrase, "Prostitution is the world's oldest profession." Considered the lowest form of earning a wage, a prostitute is despised for her trade by honorable men and women.

Prostitutes work streets near trash-strewn allies behind the whitewashed self-storage buildings on the edge of town. These dark places carry the stench of urine, and there only the occasional car buzzing along expressways overhead breaks eerie silence. Except for an occasional homeless man pushing a shopping cart full of bulging black garbage bags toward the underpass, prostitutes work alone. A 33-year-old prostitute usually has deep sunken black eyes, the haggard look of sixty year old woman, and braless breasts that sag beneath a skintight black body suit.

Rahab was of this sort. Turning her residence in Jericho into a tavern, lusty men frequented her cat house for a round of cheap beer and sex. Who can imagine such a life? Furthermore, not only was Rahab a harlot, she was a Canaanite and her city was targeted for demolition by Israel's army. Marked for slaughter, all that she prized was destined to be burned.

But, there was something wonderful about this woman. She possesses a spark of faith that shined like a candle in a dark cave. When the spies were discovered, she defied her king's order and hid the undercover special reconnaissance foreign military personnel--simply called "spies."

She believed the Lord was with Israel and that the condemnation of her people was just. "I know the Lord has given you the land," Rahab told the spies. She had more faith than the spies who entered the land 40 years before.

Like a spider lives in a king's palace, Rahab slinked her way into the Lord's house by securing a covenant with the spies. Not only did she believe her city would fall and that Israel would be victorious, she had a faith that worked. She told her mother and father, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews about the judgment to come. On the Day of Judgment, twenty to thirty people were crammed in her home to find protection and safety based on her covenant of grace with Israel's finest. Her faith heard the condemnation, believed in the judgment, received the spies, worked to protect God's people, entered into a covenant with Israel, evangelized the lost, and found a home with God's people.

Years after the destruction of Jericho, Rahab was loved by a Jewish man who accepted her as one forgiven by the Lord. A child of God, she became Salmon's bride. They bore a Jewish son named Boaz, a noble, wealthy man destined to be a blessing to everyone living in Bethlehem and to all with a stake in the kingdom of God.

Rahab did not know at this time that she would be a great grandmother of the King David, and a trophy of grace in the lineage of Israel's Hope. No wonder the Spirit was proud to showcase this woman who was an object of God's love.

One night in a church service a young woman felt the tug of God at Her heart. She responded to God's call and accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. The young woman had had a very rough past, involving alcohol, drugs, and prostitution. But, the change in her was evident. As time went on she became a faithful member of the church. She eventually became involved in the ministry, teaching young children. After a while, this faithful young woman caught the eye and heart of the pastor's son. The relationship grew and they began to make wedding plans, and this is when the problems began.

You see, about half of the church membership did not think that a woman with a past such as hers was a suitable mate for a pastor's son.

The church began to argue and fight about the matter. Then, they decided to have a meeting. As the people made their arguments and tensions increased, the meeting was getting completely out of hand. The young woman became very upset about all the things being brought up about her past.

The pastor's son could not bear the pain it was causing his young, faithful wife-to-be. As she began to cry, the pastor's son stood to speak. "I challenge every one of you to think carefully about what is happening here tonight. It really is NOT my fiancée's past that is on trial here. What all of you actually are questioning is the ability of the blood of Jesus to wash away sin. Today you have put the blood of Jesus on trial. So, what is your verdict? Does the blood of Christ wash away sin? . . . or not?"

Tears welled up in the eyes of every Christian in the auditorium. The whole church began to weep as they realized that they really had been slandering the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Too often, even as Christians, we bring up the past and use it as a weapon against our brothers and sisters, or even against ourselves. Forgiveness is a foundational part of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. If the blood of Jesus could not cleanse the soul of every single person, then all of us would be in a world of hurt.

As the old hymn says, "What can wash away my sins? NOTHING, but the blood of Jesus." End of case!!! (Author unknown)

Ruth

Ruth was a Moabite. Moab was a descendant of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter. Incest was so despicable, God pronounced a ten generation curse on the offspring of these twisted sexual relationships (Deuteronomy 23:2ff). Further, the Moabites were objects of God's wrath because they worshipped the god Chemosh and sought to seduce Israel with harlotry through the false prophet of Balaam (Numbers 22-24).

It was into the region of Moab east of the Dead Sea that Elimelech and Naomi journeyed to find prosperity during a season of famine in the land of Israel. In Moab, their two sons married Moabite women, Orpha and Ruth. But tragedy struck. Elimelech died and soon afterwards his two sons perished. Could anything be worse--three impoverished widows bonded together by a heavy chain of sorrow?

With all her dreams and hopes smashed, Naomi made the hard decision to return back to Bethlehem, a broken, shekel-less widow. The Lord dealt so severely with Naomi she urged her daughters to stay in Moab after her departure. But, Ruth refused:

"Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. 17
"Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

Why would Ruth cling to Naomi? From all appearances, the woman was just "bad luck:" A famine, poverty, three marriages, three deaths, three widows, three funerals, and destitution.

Though pierced with the dagger of death, I think Ruth saw in Naomi that dignity of character and nobility of Spirit she could not find in all of Moab. Though she did not understand, there was a beauty about Naomi that could only be explained by Naomi's faith in the LORD.

Though the LORD dealt harshly with her, Ruth believed He was good and kind and gracious. She would rather serve this poor, old widow under God's care than serve in a palace of the king of Moab. The worst of life under YHWH was better than the best of life under the god Chemosh. Like Moses before her, she was "choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." Would it be worth it?

Leaving her family in Moab, Ruth found a way to survive by gleaning in the field of Boaz. There, Ruth found protection beneath the wings of YHWH. Under the eye of providence Ruth worked with nobility, reaped an abundance of barley, found protection in the fields of Boaz who had a heart willing to perform the duty of a kinsmen redeemer, to marry Ruth, and to care for Naomi. While today this sounds odd, even immoral, it was completely consistent with Old Testament law.

In Deuteronomy 25:5–6, God provided for levirate marriage to insure the continuation of the family line. Levirate stems from Latin and means "husband's brother." Ruth, a Moabitess, had no obligation to submit to the law of Israel. Yet she humbled herself under it and, in effect, asked Boaz, a man much older than she, to perform the service of the *goël*, "kinsman-redeemer," by marrying her according to Mosaic law, so she could bear a son to carry on her husband's name.

Placing a Moabite woman in the Messianic line highlights the fact that Jesus came to redeem all because He is not willing that any (Jew or Gentile) should perish (2 Peter 3:9). "God so loved the world" (John 3:16) is not just New Testament theology – it is a biblical rule!

Like everyone who comes to God, Ruth is a trophy of His divine grace. Despite her lineage, she embraced the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and David, the greatest king of Israel who ever lived (other than Christ, Himself) was far fewer than ten generations removed from his Moabite heritage (Numbers 25 and Deuteronomy 23:3). Oh, the wonders of grace.

The story of Ruth reveals another truth as well. It illustrates a beautiful picture of God's redemption of mankind through Christ, our kinsman-redeemer. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sinned, plunging all

humanity into estrangement from God. God promised to redeem that which was lost (Genesis 3:15). Hence God had to become man so He could become a near-kinsman and purchase back what was His to begin with: “ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:5–7).

When He came to earth in the incarnation, Jesus assumed the form of a man. The word for "form" is the Greek word *morph*, the root for the English word *metamorphosis*. Jesus has always been God; but He morphed, or changed, His outward appearance to take on the appearance of a man. But that wasn't enough. He then took on the form of the lowest kind of man—a slave, or bondservant. A bondservant willingly professed his loyalty and love for his master by publicly allowing an ear to be pierced with an awl (Ex. 21:5–6). From that moment on, he was forever identified with and bound to his master.

Bathsheba

She was the beddable, eye-catching wife of Uriah the Hittite, the faithful soldier of David. The lonely, shapely woman took a bath in full view of the king's balcony. Surely, she knew that David would gaze on her soft form and be stirred by his manly lust. Though warned by her conscience, she ignored the Seventh Commandment and gave in to the king's lusty aggression. Like so many weak women, Bathsheba lacked the strength and resolve to say, “No!” Craving the love of a man she forsook the love of the Lord. Locked in the grip of passion, she broke her vows and slipped into a bed of adultery. She never dreamed that she would become pregnant, and be caught up in a web of lies, murder, and deceit.

Bathsheba's story is David's story. She too was stricken with guilt. She too tried to cooperate with the cover-up plan. Her conscience haunted her day after day. Widowed one day, and married the next seemed too smooth and waxy. Everywhere she went in the court, she received the angry, dubious eye. Everyone knew, even the Lord.

When Nathan pointed his bony finger at David and exposed his sin, he exposed the sin of Bathsheba as well. When God forgave David, he also

forgave Bathsheba. So forgiven were David and Bathsheba, that their son Solomon was loved by the Lord and placed on the throne of David. When God forgives, He fully forgives. What marvelous grace!

Mary

The fifth woman mentioned in the Lord's genealogy, is Mary the mother of Jesus. The object of grace and favor, Mary was the chosen vessel to carry the Son of God. But, she seems so unqualified to be the mother of the Messiah. She was a descendant of King David, but at this stage in history the power of Israel's monarchy had so diminished, this princess was merely a common girl with no prestige, or power, or wealth.

All the energies of the Davidic Monarchy were leveled by the political upheavals in Israel reducing the king's descendants to paupers. Mary did not have the wisdom of age, for she was just a teenager. Mary did not possess great skills, for she was very young. Mary did not have great talent, for she was a common girl. Her only virtue was purity.

Think of it! The last woman in this genealogy was a pure, undefiled virgin--totally qualified to be the Theotokos or "God-bearer" figuratively speaking.

When informed that she would carry the Holy Child before her marital union with Joseph, her standing in the community was in great jeopardy. However, Mary surrendered to the Lord saying, "May it be done to me according to your word."

Jesus existed before the world began. The One who scattered the constellations across the heavens, could have been born into any family on earth. But, he chose this family. And, what a family! Simply put, the family of our Lord contains adulterers, fornicators, harlots, and incestuous relationships. In other words, they were poor, ordinary, simple folk.

If there is one lesson these women provide in the Christmas story is that Jesus receives sinners. Oh, the grace of God!

No matter what you have done, there is forgiveness waiting for you. Despite your sin, you can find love and acceptance in Christ. But, you cannot become a member of this family by being born in a Christian nation or Christian family. You cannot become his child by joining a church or by turning over a new leaf, but you can only become a child of God by turning from your sin and trusting the grace God provided for you in the birth and death of His Son.

Merry Christmas! Jesus is God's Christmas Storm.

Addendum

There is more to Christmas than any man realizes.





Coach Joe Mazzulla on the One Royal Family



♦ Consider this great Christmas retort by Joe Mazzulla, Coach of the Boston Celtics”

Reporter: What do you think about the royal family . . . Prince William . . . Kate. . . Philip . . . Andrew. . . ?

Joe Mazzulla: What? I only know of one royal family: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

Interview over!

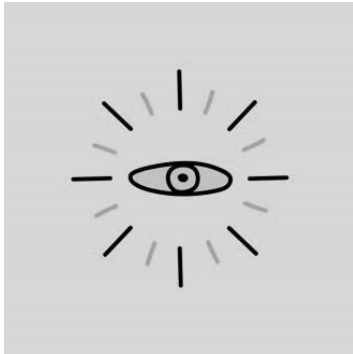
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/rdzo2Zkrv](https://connect.xfinity.com/appsuite/#!!&app=io.ox/mail&folder=default0/rdzo2Zkrv)

Oh, that all of could think this way for the glory of God!

Merry Christmas!

The Curse on Jehoiakim and His Son Jeconiah

Jeremiah 22:28–30



◆ This chapter is one of the most powerful negative examples regarding the seriousness of rejecting God's Word.

There are three main characters in this account: Jeremiah, Baruch the scribe and servant of Jeremiah, and king Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the great Revival King. Moreover, there are at least ten other officials mentioned in this account. Baruch is

mentioned no less than 16 times in this chapter; and, God gave Baruch personal instruction in Jeremiah 45.

Note the dates of the Last Kings

Jehoiakim (Josiah's 2nd son) = Eliakim; reigned 11 years (609-597) -- a much despised king died a donkey's death (Jeremiah 22:19). During his reign Babylon conquered Judah in 606-605 B.C.

Jehoiachin (Josiah's grandson, and Jehoiakim's second son). He is also called Joiachin or Jeconiah or Coniah. He only reigned 3 months (597). A comparison of 2 Kings 24:8 with the Septuagint (Greek) of 2 Chronicles 36:9 indicates that he was 18 years old when he began to reign.

Zedekiah (Josiah's third son, brother of Jehoiakim, and uncle of Jeconiah) is also called Mattaniah . He reigned 11 years (597-586). He is not the brother of Jehoiachin as in 2 Chronicles 36:10; cf. 1 Chronicles 3:16 where it is stated that Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) had a son named Zedekiah; 2 Kings 24:17 rightly identifies Zedekiah as uncle to Jehoiachin.

The last kings of Judah before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians were:

- **Jehoahaz:** Reigned for three months in 607 BC. (?)
- **Jehoiakim:** Reigned for 11 years from 606 to 597 BC.
- **Jehoiachin:** Reigned for three months in 597 BC.
- **Zedekiah:** The final king of Judah, placed on the throne by the Babylonians after the exile of his nephew Jehoiachin (597-586 BC)

Moreover, know that the chapters in Jeremiah are not arranged chronologically but topically.

God orders Jeremiah to write down His revelation on a scroll in an original instrument

1 And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

The "fourth year of Jehoiakim" takes us to 606-605 B.C. - the first year of the Babylonian captivity.

2 Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day.

The scroll contained a message of judgment not only for Judah but all the nations in the Levant.

A word from God! How rare and precious -- more valuable than silver and gold! The fact that it is written down in writing expresses its certainty, veracity, and authority. God did not reveal His Word to the Chinese, Arabs, or Italians. He chose the ancient Hebrew nation as the vessel to carry His Word to the world. Modern so-called "Israel" is a nullity.

So powerful was this message, it reached the ears of the king and his officials. Most pastors preach all their life and never produce an epistle that reaches the president or his cabinet. Consider the power of Jeremiah's scroll.

3 It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.

The message from God was difficult, but filled with hope -- that men might seriously hear the Word of God, turn from their evil, seek His face, and find forgiveness. "Hear" (shema) is the most basic, fundamental command in the Bible (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). Yet, listening to God is something the natural man cannot do.

Baruch writes a copy of the original scroll to read before the temple / civil scribes.

4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book.

Baruch is a young Levitical scribe that assisted Jeremiah in publishing an accurate copy of this word from God - letter for letter, word to word, and yod to yod. This was no sloppy, half-hearted, casual task.

Jeremiah orders Baruch to go to the temple and to read the scroll to the temple officials

5 And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD:

We don't know the reason Jeremiah was restrained and unable to personally go to the temple.

6 Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD'S house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities.

The fasting day was a special, dogmatic fast day approved by the king for the people to seek God regarding what to do about Babylonian control over the nation. This is NOT the Day of Atonement, but a November - December fast day in the Hebrew Calendar during the 9th month.

7 It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people.

Baruch takes the scroll to the temple to read it to the people and officials in the Lord's House.

8 And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the LORD in the LORD'S house.

9 And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the LORD to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem.

This would be in November / December circa 605 -604 B.C. Apparently, the people with the king's authority proclaimed a fast to appeal to God to do something regarding the Babylonian subjugation of Judah which had continued for over a year.

The fast day was a BIG DAY on the calendar for these people!

Oh, the irony of it all! The people proclaimed a prayer / fast urging the LORD to do something about their political captivity . . . and He did! Yet, when God spoke through Jeremiah / Baruch neither the people as a whole or the king in particular could tolerate what God had to say on the matter of their captivity. They wanted independence when God had ordered servitude.

10 Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the higher court, at the entry of the new gate of the LORD'S house, in the ears of all the people.

Gemariah was the son of Shaphan the scribe. Shaphan was used of God to inform King Josiah that Hilkiyah the Priest had found an unused, dusty scroll containing the Torah and other Historical Books that make up the Tanach / Old Testament. Shaphan read the scroll to Josiah, and Josiah

ripped his clothes and then sought the LORD on what to do to avert judgment. Now Shaphan's son Gemariah is serving in the temple - civil court.

Michaiah the scribe reports the words of Baruch to the king's cabinet.

11 When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book all the words of the LORD,

12 Then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber: and, lo, all the princes sat there, even Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes.

Mentioning the names of these scribes and princes informs us this account is a fact and not a myth. This is not a "Once upon a time . . ." story but a real, valid historical event.

13 Then Michaiah declared unto them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people.

14 Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, unto Baruch, saying, Take in thine hand the roll wherein thou hast read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the roll in his hand, and came unto them.

Jehudi appears to be Jehoiakim's Chief of Staff.

Baruch reads the scroll to the officials in Jehoiakim's cabinet

15 And they said unto him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch read it in their ears.

These officials heard the Word of God secondhand from Micaiah; now, they hear it firsthand from Baruch.

16 Now it came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words.

The reading of God's Word produced conflicted feelings in the people including doubt, slight belief, rebellion and anger. The officials became alarmed for themselves and their nation.

17 And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How didst thou write all these words at his mouth?

This is a good question: by what authority and in what manner did you obtain this word? They had no duty to rumor, hearsay, grapevine chatter, opinion, myth, shoulda-woulda-couldas, fiction, speculation, or presumption.

18 Then Baruch answered them, He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book.

Baruch answered their great question with simple truth: "Jeremiah, the prophet, dictated these words to me."

The officials took the copy of Jeremiah's scroll and ordered Baruch to go into hiding

19 Then said the princes unto Baruch, Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be.

These officials knew the depraved-character of Jehoiakim, the de facto king, and that he might give the order to his "goon squad" to arrest and murder Baruch and Jeremiah.

20 And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king.

Jehoiakim heard the report from reliable men, and then heard the message a second time when Jehudi read from the scroll copy.

21 So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king.

22 Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him.

A "fire on the hearth" was small pan of coals burning in the king's chamber during the cold winter months in Jerusalem.

Jehudi reads the scroll to King Jehoiakim and he orders the scroll to be burned in the brazier.

23 And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.

There is no doubt Jehudi read the facial expressions of Jehoiakim and burned the scroll with the approval of the king. What a horrible response to the Word of God. The king didn't even maintain a superficial respect for His Word.

The Spirit's commentary on the officials who approved of the burning the Word of God

24 Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. The fact these princes showed no emotion informs us that psychopaths ruled the nation.

Jehoiakim (and his cabinet) was so unlike his father Josiah who heard the Word of God, tore his clothes, repented, and beseeched the Lord for grace and mercy (2 Kings 22).

Three Levitical scribes carefully and rightfully objected to king's rash order.

25 Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them.

These three scribes feared God and with great courage begged the king not to commit the abominable sin of rejecting and destroying the Word of God.

We have here a marvelous example of the doctrine of intervention that requires inferior officials to confront higher officials when they employ unlawful policies.

Application: Always maintain custody of your original documents sent to government officers, agents, and judges. Only send them a certified copy of the original.

Jehoiakim orders his officers to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch

26 But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them.

Listing of the names enforces the view that this is factual history.

God orders Jeremiah / Baruch to write a second copy of the scroll

27 Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying,

28 Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned.

29 And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast?

"Thus saith the LORD" is the authoritative enacting clause of the sure word of Scripture – that initial statement the states the authority under which something becomes law.

The LORD's Curse on Jehoiakim and his son, Jeconiah / Coniah / Jehoiachin.

30 Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.

Rejecting the Word of God has serious consequences. The king rejected God and the LORD rejected Jeconiah's sons from ruling in Israel.

This judgment frustrated the Davidic promise that (Jesus) the Messiah, the biological Son of David would sit upon the throne.

See the full application of this curse on Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim -- judgment known as the Jeconiah Curse, Jeremiah 22:28-30 -- a curse that afflicted the Messianic lineage -- a curse that prevented any son of Jehoiakim or Jeconiah from occupying the throne of David -- a curse that prevented any biological son of Joseph to sit on the throne of David -- a curse that was overcome in Joseph's marriage to Mary (daughter of.

The curse on Jehoiakim was completed in God's curse on Jeconiah (chapter 22). Jeconiah ruled only three months before he was deposed (597 B.C.); that is, his reign was dissolved before it was really started.

31 And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not.

The Second Copy of the Scroll, its addendum, and execution

32 Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.

The Word of God is not only sufficient for the people, but for all men and all kings. Not only do people have a duty to obey God's Word, government officials have a duty to surrender themselves to the authority of the LORD God.

What a terrible thing it must be to despise and reject the Word of God -- the greatest of all sins:

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation"
(Hebrews 2:3).

God was so angry with Jehoiakim, He decreed that no son of Jehoiakim / Jeconiah would ever sit on the throne of David as the de jure king of Israel. The "Jeconiah Curse" was introduced to Jehoiakim and finalized in Jeremiah's prophecy to his son Jeconiah (Jeremiah 2:28-30).

Jehoiakim despised God's Word and destroyed His scroll; and, God in turned despised his dynasty. Jehoiakim burned God's Word and now Jehoiakim is burning in hell.

When Jehoiakim died, his officers simply threw his dead body over the wall to rot like the body of a jackass - Jeremiah 22:19. No funeral, no mourning, no sorrow, just discarded like the carcass of a dead animal.

Under God's law every first born ass (donkey) had to redeemed by a lamb or killed (Exodus 34:20) -- a giant illustration that the unclean-sinner must be redeemed by the blood of Christ or face eternal damnation. Jehoiakim was a ass of a man that was discarded like the carcass of a dead-donkey.

John 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

There is good news here. Luke inform us that Mary was the physical descendant of Nathan the, son of David (Luke 3) -- Joseph, being the physical descendent of David had a legal right to be king, but because he was the biological grandson of Jehoiakim, he was prohibited from ruling as a king. In Matthew and Luke, we learn that Jesus was the biological son of David through Nathan and Mary which enabled him to escape the curse and to fulfill the Davidic Promise.

Thus, Jesus is the de jure King of Israel, the legitimate son of David, and rightful heir to the throne.

Merry Christmas!

Notes:

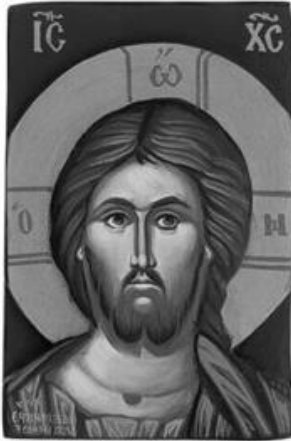
(1) This passage explains the reason for the Babylonian Captivity -- the Jewish rejection of the Word of God / Law of God.

(2) This passage explains the reason the Jews became the monotheistic people on earth. Before the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews were the most polytheistic nation on earth. After the Babylonian Captivity, the people became the monotheistic people on earth because saw in their mind's eye that Jeremiah had so accurately predicted their future, that their political reversals could only be the result of one, true God who not only knew their future, but had the power to make prophecy come true.

(3) This passage explains the Christmas story and the differences in the genealogy of Joseph with the right to be king, but a curse on his biological line that prevented his physical descendants from personally from being king, and Mary with a genealogical connection to David through Nathan which qualified her Son, Jesus, to fulfill the Messianic promise that one of David's biological sons would sit on the throne of David forever (2 Samuel 7:811f; Matthew 1; Luke 3; Acts 2:25-32).

Merry Christmas to the Exiles in Babylon

Psalm 89:28



♦ “My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him.”

This psalm is entitled “Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite.”

Strong’s says the word “maschil” refers to a poem of contemplation or instruction.

“Ethan” is proclaimed the author of this psalm. He was from the family of Ezrahites

— grandsons of Judah: Ethan, Heman, Zimri, Calcol, and Dara mentioned in 1 Chronicles 2:6 — Judah-Tamar, Perez, Hezron and Hamul. The sons of Zerah: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara, five in all.”

If these were the persons referred to, then the period of the composition of these psalms was early in the history of Israel — before David. But, this doesn’t seem plausible. Most likely it was written by a grandson with the same name who composed this psalm sometime around the exile.

Compare with 1 Chronicles 2:6-12.

David was a precious, powerful king and the Hope that the Messiah, David’s Greater Son, was the Expectation of Israel — a hope choked in the dust of the Babylonian Exile.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was the darkest period in the history of the nation. The deportation to Babylon threatened the precious promises made to David. His “crown” had been “profaned” and “cast to the ground” (89:38-44). Though this promise appeared to be completely abrogated, Ethan underscores the Davidic Promise as still in effect!!

Ethan, a descendent of Judah, rises in faith to instruct the defeated Jews that God will, in some miraculous way, fulfill the Davidic Covenant.

In one sense, this is Ethan's "Christmas Message" to the captives during their long winter in Babylon. It shows the miracle of Christmas, the anticipation of the Messianic Promises given to David. Ethan romances the diamond of the Messianic Promise against the black velvet of the Babylonian captivity.

To appreciate this psalm one must perceive the wonder of the Messianic Promise given to David (2 Samuel 7:1-17) and the thundering threat the Babylonian Exile had on this precious Pledge. Dark, thick, clouds with thunder and lightning rolled in like a hurricane during the captivity forecasting death and doom over the Messianic Hope.

Luke 1:28-32 And the angel came . . . and said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

Matthew 1:6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias . . .

Matthew 1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

Matthew 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Acts 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:

Ethan's Christmas Message to the Exiles in Babylon

The Diamond Promise Made to David Regarding the Messianic Hope (1-37)

Psalm 89:1 <Maschil of Ethan the Ezrahite.> I will sing of the mercies of the LORD for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.

The mercies of the Lord encompass the coming of Christ and the “sure mercies of David” (2 Chronicles 6:42, Isaiah 55:3-9, Psalm 132:1, Acts 13:34).

Yes, the exile dumped cold water on the fire of the Messianic Hope, but it did not nullify God's faithfulness, mercy, or ability to fulfill His promise to David!

“sing of the mercies of the LORD” is Ethan's way of instructing the defeated Israelites to walk by faith (in the Promise and Power of God) and not by sight (in the chains of captivity).

2 For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.

Ethan assures the people that the Davidic Promise is written in Heaven . . . that it is as unshaken and unvacillating as the sun, moon, and stars.

3 I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant,

“covenant” and “sworn” refer to God's oath to raise up the Messiah through David. David was the “chosen” one; that is, the promise is inextricably, indivisibly, and intrinsically bound to the eternal, indestructible, unchanging character of the LORD.

4 Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah.

Terms like “establish for ever” and “build up” and “to all generations” confirm the immutability of the Promise. Ethan pounds his finger on 2

Samuel 7 saying, “God said it. It must be true. It will be done! He is under an oath to fulfill this promise.”

5 And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, O LORD: thy faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints.

Yes, the captivity cast shadows of doubt over the Messianic Promise, but this Promise is proclaimed by the invariable heavens testifying to the unchanging nature and eternal faithfulness of the LORD.

6 For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?

Ethan appears to apologize for comparing the faithfulness of God to faithfulness of the heavens, but it was the best he could do. In reality nothing can be compared to the fixed, invariable, permanent, eternal, enduring, uniform, persistent, unwavering, lasting, and undeviating character of God. Israel’s circumstances had changed for the worse, but God does not change for better or worse. Therefore, His promise to David was still in effect!

7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

Ethan instructs his brethren that they are not to fear there is a breach in the promise because of their bitter circumstances, but to fear God and to rely on His faithfulness.

8 O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?

Because He is the “LORD God of hosts,” the God of Heaven’s and earth’s armies, His power will resurrect the buried Promises and fulfill them; that is, all His power is still available to fulfill the Messianic Hope.

9 Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.

If God can still the waves of the raging sea, He can calm the political storm that walloped Israel where the tsunami of judgment swept them

away to Babylon; that is, He can bring Israel back to the land. And, He did!

10 Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.

“Rahab” refers to a storm or a mythical sea monster — a metonym for Egypt or Pharaoh.

He broke Rahab and led Israel out of Egypt to the Holy Land; and, He can do it again from Babylon!

11 The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them.

If God can dispose of the heavens and the earth as He wills, He can intervene in the muddled world of politics to fulfill His covenant with David.

12 The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.

Because He created the north and south and everything in between, He controls all that is going on in Babylon. In the end, Mount` Tabor and Mount Hermon will rejoice in the coming Messiah. And, they did in our Lord’s visitation to earth in His day.

Mt. Tabor in the west and Mt. Hermon in the east, both objects of majesty and grandeur, were created by God. Since He controls what he creates, He controls not only Israel, but Babylon. As the mountains honor His majesty and power, so the exile in Babylon will end up glorifying the LORD.

13 Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand.

Utilizing anthropomorphism as a literary device, Ethan assures His defeated people that they are still in the palm of His hand; still under His power; that His hand is still in control of international affairs.

14 Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

Since justice, mercy, and truth are the foundation of His throne, God will use His position and power to fulfill the Messianic Promise.

15 Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.

Those among His people who hear the joyful sounds of His justice, mercy, and truth will smile in the face of death and walk in the light of His powers . . . and, not live in despair because their circumstances changed with the exile.

16 In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.

Their joy was not in their circumstances in Babylon, but in the Name of the LORD God . . . in His character . . . in His righteousness and faithfulness.

17 For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted.

“glory” = ornament; and “horn” speaks of the power of a king.

This is Ethan’s way of instructing his brethren to rejoice in the strength of the Lord and not worry about their weakness in figuring out how to return to the Holy Land. Eventually, in God’s timing, He will exalt our cause. The Messiah will appear and deliver the people.

18 For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king.

Ethan informs his people that the LORD is their defense; that the Holy One of Israel is their king . . . not Nebuchadnezzar . . . that the King of Israel is in control of world affairs and not the governments of this world.

19 Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people.

Ellicott and Benson agree that the “holy one” refers to Nathan, the Prophet, who delivered the Messianic Promise to David.

Ethan reminds his people that God gave the Messianic Promise to David through Nathan the Prophet and other prophets by means of dreams and visions.

20 I have found David my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him:

Saul was chosen by the people. David was chosen by God.

It was God who found David among the sheepfolds, taught him, and anointed him to be king of Israel. David did not obtain power by political prowess or the lawless methods of assassination, but by the election of God — an inference that the Lord would usher in His Messiah in the land of Israel in His time; that is, the Jews will return to Palestine and rebuild the nation.

21 With whom my hand shall be established: mine arm also shall strengthen him.

Since God chose David, and appointed him to be king over the nation, it was God who strengthened him, protected him, and provided for him. Therefore, God will do what is necessary to fulfill His Promise to David. And, He did on that first “Christmas” morning (Luke 1:28-32).

David was a type of Christ. What He did for him, He will do for His Greater Son, the Messiah.

22 The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him.

“exact” (nasha) is a commercial term relating to usury or the exaction of a debt.

Babylon will not profit or exact a profit by its extortion of Israel. Though treated as slaves in Babylon, God would not allow the Babylonians to treat them as debtors or act as debt collectors trying to extract a debt one cannot pay.

God’s purposes are not weakened, threatened, hindered, or frustrated by the belching and boasting of government officials or the ups and downs

on the sea of politics. Nebuchadnezzar's deportation of Jews to Babylon did **not** disrupt the LORD's Messianic Agenda. "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

23 And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. 24 But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted.

Beating "down his foes" is a reference to destroying David's enemies.

Ethan reminds the people that God made a promise to David to defend him and protect him, and that He will defend and protect the promises made to David even though he is now dead. The protection he provided for David, He would provide for the Jews in Babylon. Since Babylon is an enemy, the remnant could expect to see God's plague upon this Euphrates nation sometime in the future.

25 I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers.

Ethan uses a commercial metaphor of exacting payment of debt like a creditor pushing a debtor into "the sea" or "to the rivers" to demonstrate that no matter how ruthless Israel's creditors become "exacting debt to the last inch" of a man's capacities, God will protect, preserve, and provide for His people . . . even in usury- driven Babylon.

"rivers" = the Mediterranean Sea, Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.

26 He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. 27 Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.

David was a type of our Lord Jesus Christ Who is called God's Firstborn (Colossians 1:15-18).

"firstborn" – a reference to David being the first and foremost of Israel's faithful kings . . . of the earth's great kings . . . a man beloved in the eyes of the Lord . . . a man favored above all the earth's kings.

David accomplished a touching conquest over all these territories because He looked to God as His Father . . . a foundation upon which Christ expanded His theology of God, our Father Who art in Heaven.

28 My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him.

A reference to the “sure mercies of David” — the grounds of confidence and unshaken assurance that God will do what He promised to David. And, He did in the birth of the Savior in Luke 2.

29 His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

“His seed” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father — a fulfillment of God’s Promise to Eve, Abraham, Jacob, Judah, David, and Mary.

First, God gave the Promise to the whole world through Eve (Genesis 3)

Second, God narrowed the Promise to a nation through Abraham (Genesis 12).

Third, God identified the Promise coming through a tribe — the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49).

Fourth, God narrowed the Promise to come through a family — the family of David (2 Samuel 7).

Fifth, the Messiah was born to a virgin, a daughter of Nathan, the son of David (Luke 3) and inherited His right to be king from His stepfather, Joseph the son of David and Solomon (Matthew 1).

30 If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; 31 If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; 32 Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. 33

Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.

A reference that God would be faithful to David and His promises regardless of the failure of his sons to keep God's law; that is, the sins and failures of the latter kings before the exile did not and could not prevent God's intent to bless the line of David till the Messiah arrived in history.

Luke 9:35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying,
This is my beloved Son: hear him.

**34 My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips
35 Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David.**

Ethan reminds the people that God is not a covenant breaker; that in this case, the covenant to David came wrapped up in the red ribbons of unconditional promises . . . and dressed up in swaddling clothes.

When God takes an oath, it cannot be broken; that is, He puts ALL His integrity, truth, and power behind all His promises . . . especially the "sure mercies of David."

Matthew 1:22-23 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

**36 His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me.
37 It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah.**

His seed refers to the Abrahamic seed — a reference to the world being blessed by the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who could have foreseen the coming of Christ, His birth through Mary, His death at the hands of Pilate, His resurrection from the dead, and His

glorious ascension as a Faithful Witness to execute judgment on His enemies from the right hand of the Father? That the throne in Jerusalem would be transferred to heaven; that David's greater son was the eternal Son of God, Savior, and Judge of all mankind; that is, the fulfillment was greater than the promises.

Ethan romances the diamond against the black velvet of the Babylonian captivity.

Velvet = the dark cloud of the exile that hid the hope of the Davidic Promise

In the first part of this psalm Ethan revisits the bright Promises given to David. In this section, he contrasts these sunbeam Promises with the doom and darkness of the destruction of Jerusalem, the exile, and the Babylonian captivity — a perspective from the bewildered, confused, doubting eyes of the captives in exile — midnight darkness indeed.

But, Ethan was not disconnected from reality. He wasn't plukin' harps on Fantasy Island singing, "All You Need is Love." He too was trying to shake off the dust of defeat, of being homeless, faithless, and hopeless in a foreign land, under a foreign king, under foreign law. Reality smacked him in the face every day and his brethren were quick to remind Him that their circumstances in Babylon provided all the evidence they needed to conclude that God had forsaken them. Only by reading and re-reading the inspired Scriptures could Ethan conclude the Messianic Promises were true and that their material circumstances were a lie.

Oh, the cold darkness that preceded the birth of Christ: The curse on Adam, Noah's flood, the confusing birth of Ishmael, the mistreatment of Jacob, the incest of Judah and Tamar, Israel's enslavement in Egypt, wars against the nation, Athaliah's infanticide of the royal nursery, the Jeconiah curse, the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the 70 year exile in Babylon, the difficulty of the return and rebuilding of the temple, the rage of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Hellenization of Israel, the madness of Herod the Great and His slaughter of infants in Bethlehem. How Jesus the Messiah was born in history at the right time,

in right place, and to the right family with His genealogy intact and free of Adam's curse is a miracle of history. Merry Christmas, indeed!

38 But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed.

Ethan now speaks for the captives. In their minds God had forsaken them . . . in anger. Anger, yes; but, forsaken, no.

39 Thou hast made void the covenant of thy servant: thou hast profaned his crown by casting it to the ground.

In the mind of the survivors, God nullified, broke, and abrogated His Promise to David . . . to the prophets . . . to the nation.

40 Thou hast broken down all his hedges; thou hast brought his strong holds to ruin.

In the minds of the captives, God removed His protection from the nation and the land . . . even destroying its defenses.

41 All that pass by the way spoil him: he is a reproach to his neighbours.

Consider the destruction of Jerusalem and its archaeological ruins.

In the eyes of the captives, they lost everything of value — their personal assets, houses and possessions; their capital city, temple, religion, and nation. In their minds, they were plundered by every pickpocket, petty thief, porch climber, prowler, and pillager on earth.

42 Thou hast set up the right hand of his adversaries; thou hast made all his enemies to rejoice.

Oh, the shame of sitting in despair, despondency, depression, and dejection watching your enemies rejoice, party, sing, boast, swagger, dance, skip, and frolic over their victory.

43 Thou hast also turned the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in the battle.

From the eyes of the captives, God abandoned their soldiers to join the forces of the enemy. Their swords missed their mark; their arrows hit the dirt instead of the enemy . . . a work of God against the people.

44 Thou hast made his glory to cease, and cast his throne down to the ground. 45 The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame. Selah.

The glory, reputation, and fame of the nation were smothered in Babylon's siege of Jerusalem. Israel was truly decimated, defanged, depleted, and defeated.

The Intense Plea for God to Restore the Messianic Hope

Though Israel's defeat was real and substantial, Ethan leads the nation to rely upon the God who struck them.

46 How long, LORD? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy wrath burn like fire?

The question is not "if" they will recover, but "how long" till they recover. God's wrath burned for 70 years against the nation, and then the ambers of wrath died out in 536-519 B.C.

Remember, Israel's 70 years of servitude to Babylon (606-605 B.C. to 539-536 B.C.) -Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10; and the 70 years of desolation — a forced sabbatical rest (589-586 B.C. to 519-516 B.C.) – 2 Chronicles 36:19-21.

47 Remember how short my time is: wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? 48 What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.

The meaning is clear. My time on earth is short. Soon, I must die. If I am to see your promises fulfilled, it must happen soon.

All men are mortal. All die. There comes a time when the promises of God to men die with the man. Act now . . . in my time so I may rejoice in Your Hope. This is my time, my day, my short life. Show yourself true to Your promises in my hour of need.

49 Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?

A question on every Jewish exile's mind was where is the kindness, mercy, and love you promised to David . . . to us. . . to the sheep of your pasture? Darkness abounds; show me the light. It's cold; where is the warmth of your love?

50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of thy servants; how I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all the mighty people; 51 Wherewith thine enemies have reproached, O LORD; wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed.

The reason for the above question (49) rested in their painful circumstances. Instead of honor, they felt disgrace; instead of respect, they felt shame; instead of comfort, they felt pain; instead of light, they were surround by darkness; instead of joy and freedom, they felt the cold rattling chains of slavery. Therefore, the psalmist prays that God might remember their affliction and restore them to a place of favor . . . of honor . . . and of peace.

"footsteps" – Where ever I go, what every I do, I hear the mocking and taunting of my oppressors . . . I feel the heavy breathing of my enemies down my neck . . . sneering at my faith . . . and criticizing my God.

"They have reproached my footsteps"; that is, they have followed me with reproaches – treading and marching along behind me insulting my religion. What advantage is it to be a God-fearing man?

52 Blessed be the LORD for evermore. Amen, and Amen.

Out of darkness and doom, out of defeat and discouragement comes a feeble rebuke of unbelief: "Blessed be the LORD for evermore."

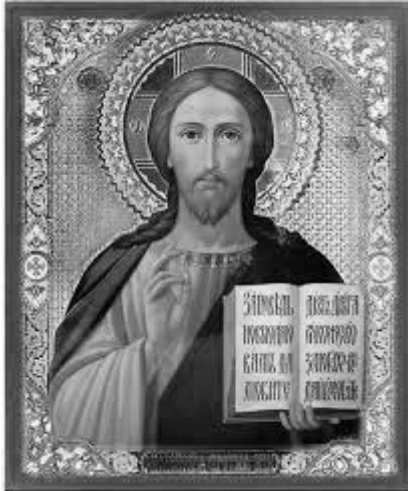
Out of the Euphrates Valley come the faint sounds of the remnant, Amen, and Amen! The Psalmist is not alone! There are many others that believe God is true and that the blessed Promises Regarding the Messiah will be fulfilled; . . . and, they were on Christmas Day circa December 25, 2 B.C.

"Out of the darkness, white lilies grow."

Merry Christmas — our Lord is the Miracle of History.

The Mystery of Godliness

1 Timothy 3:16



◆ 5 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

Paul identifies six parts of the "mystery of godliness" held up by the Pillar of Truth.

Therefore, this brief seeks to answer the question, "*What is the mystery of godliness?*"

Without Controversy

The word "controversy" comes from the Greek word *homologoumenos* which means *to perceive, understand, grasp, observe, and see*.

We get the word *homiletics* (studies on how to preach) from this term. It works as an adverb modifying the being-verb "is" meaning *undeniably, certainly*.

The word "without controversy" acts like our English legal terms "notwithstanding," "undeniable," "indisputable," "irrefutable," or "unassailable."

That is to say, any argument contrary to what he is about to state admits no dispute and has no standing. Metaphorically speaking Paul is saying, "you can take what I am about to say to the bank. It is as true as true can get."

Great is the mystery

The Greek word "mystery" (musterion) does not refer to something difficult or impossible to understand. Rather, it informs us of something hidden or concealed in the Old Testament that has manifested itself to mankind, namely, the arrival of the Christ in history.

Great (Mega)

While we use the term "great" frequently, very few things are really great! But, **GREAT** is the mystery of godliness.

The Greek word for "great" is *mega*. A superlative adjective, it identifies the wonder and superior quality of a thing. We use this Greek word as a prefix to many English terms: megabyte, megawatt, megastar, megabuck, megavolt, megalomania, megaflop, and many more.

Keep this word in mind as the apostle reveals *six facts about the indivisible MEGA mysteries of godliness that form the pillar of truth (3:25)*.

Godliness

The term "godliness" refers in a general sense to the heart of the gospel, the eye of God, true religion, piety, and sanctification.

The term "godly" usually refers to acts of piety or to being God-like in habits and character. But, this is **not** the stress of the word "godliness" in this text. In this passage "godliness" (eusebeia) is a noun and **not** an adjective; a fact, and **not** a fantasy; a reality and **not** a theory; the absolute gospel and **not** a nice story; the God-man, and **not** a myth;

Having listed the character qualities that should mark pastors and deacons, the apostle is **not** referring to the Christian's duty to be godly in verse 16. Rather, he shows us *the Source of Godliness* by using the genitive case. Paul points to a person in history -- Someone Who actually existed -- Someone Who is our Banner for righteous living. Any other Model is idolatry.

Paul takes us on a journey to the core of Divine concerns, the invasion of the kingdom of God into history through the Son, "the real McCoy," the prototype of godliness, the source and display of God-like attributes, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Savior is not like Theos, He is Theos; He does **not** resemble God; He is very God of God!!

John 1:1, 14 "In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God (Theos), and the Word (logos) was God (Theos) and the Word (logos) was made flesh and dwelt (skenoō = tabernacled) among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten (monogenēs = one of a kind) of the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 10:30 "I and *my* Father are one ."

[Note: The word "one" in this text is a nominative, neuter, adjectival pronoun. The text does not refer to our Lord being one in personality with the Father, but having *the same substance* as Father, being very God of God as a spiritual being-- the neuter referring to substance and not personality. No other being in the universe can make this claim, but with Christ, the claim came with proof of claim.]

Thus, the core of "godliness" in this text is not about our duty to perfect holiness, but about the marvelous history of Christ: His incarnation, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and session at the right hand of the Father -- the pillar of the gospel -- that God was among us in the Person of His Son. Great is the mystery of *Theos* becoming *anthropos* -- something more significant in history than alleged encounters of a third kind.

Six Historical Facts about the Mega Mystery of Godliness

1 Timothy 3:16



♦ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

The six verbs in this section are all aorist passives ending with the same sound (theta, eta -- the "uh" sound). They form a rhythmic cadence like a military hymn.

You can almost hear the apostle pounding a railroad spike at the beginning of each strophe while he sings the wonders of this mega mystery: ephaner θ a (bam), edikio θ a (bam), oph θ a (bam), echaruch θ a (bam), episteu θ a (bam), and anelamph θ a (bam).

When it comes to godliness, the best among us are like the solar panels on a Mars Rover covered with dust, but Jesus? The Son does **not** shine as example of Godliness. He **IS** the essence of Godliness. He does **not** mirror the sunlight of holiness, the nucleus of holiness that lights the cosmos burns eternally within the Core of the Savior. He **IS** to mankind what the Sun is to God's creation.

Theos was in Christ and Christ was Theos at His birth, baptism, temptation, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and present exalted reign at the right hand of God.

(1) The first fact regarding this mega mystery is the incarnation of Christ -- the day that God became a man.

"God was manifest in the flesh" (KJV) or the alternative, "Who was manifest in the flesh" or "He was manifest in the flesh" (ESV and others).

Because the first rule of interpretation is to "secure the text," we must diverge here to wrestle with a textual problem. The KJV translated the text as "God was manifest in the flesh" while the NASB and ESV and others translate the text as "Who" or "He was manifest in the flesh."

Without bogging the reader down in the detail of textual criticism, the reader should know that the original Greek was written in Uncial letters (uppercase without space between words). Over time, ancient manuscripts wore out and developed smears and smudges. This is the case here. Moreover, translators often abbreviated words like Θς for Θεος Theos, "God"

Earlier manuscripts use the term "He who was manifest" and not "God was manifest." However, we must consider the theology surrounding the textual variance. John is very clear the "Word (logos) was with God (Theos) and was God (Theos) . . . and that the "logos became flesh" (John 1:1, 14).

Because Jesus is Theos, I tend to sustain the legitimacy of the KJV translation, "Theos was manifest in the flesh . . ." But, in comparing ancient texts, the proper translation appears to be, "He was manifest in the flesh" (Robertson, Metzger, Aland and Aland).

Getting past the textual variance, let's move on to the truth of this passage.

The GREAT mystery is that God / Elohim / the LORD of the Old Testament became a man; that is, Theos appeared on earth, in space and time, as a living, breathing, flesh and blood human being -- a man (anthropos) called "the Christ," or Jesus of Nazareth.

Forget alien sightings and invasions. Nothing in history compares to that day when Theos entered history in and through the Son in Bethlehem around 2 BC.

That Theos appeared in a human body with a human nature is the MEGA TRUTH of the gospel. This fact became the pillar of the gospel, and the theme of Renaissance Christmas Art and historical Christmas carols.

(2) The second fact regarding this mega mystery is that Christ was "justified in the Spirit . . ."

The legal, court-room word "justified" means "to declare righteous," or to declare authentic, genuine, or real." In law, we demand verification, confirmation, validation, authentication, endorsement, and certification of all kinds of truth claims, real estate transactions, and money matters involving controversy.

What could be more controversial than Jesus is God, born of a virgin, died for our sins, and rose from the dead?

Any megalomaniac can claim to be God, but where is the evidence?

Pursuant to the *Administrative Procedure Act* (5 USCS 556 (d)) the proponent of a rule or order has the *burden of proof*.

Hearsay, wishes, hopes, presumption, theory, and opinion are **not** accepted as facts in a court of law.

Rule 301. Presumptions in Civil Cases Generally

In a civil case, unless a federal statute or these rules provide otherwise, the party against whom a presumption is directed ***has the burden of producing evidence*** to rebut the presumption. But this rule does not shift the burden of persuasion, which remains on the party who has it originally.

Our Lord not only claimed to be God, He provided proof of claim with strict proof of claim -- even infallible proof of claim (Acts 1:3).

His miracles were His credentials. Only God can turn water into wine, heal the sick, and walk on water. Out of death, the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead vindicating His claim that He is God, that He is Lord over the grave.

Over 500 witnesses testified to a real, tangible, historical encounter with the living Christ. Thus, the phrase "justified in the Spirit" announces lawyer-like verification for Divine assertions.

That Jesus is God is an absurdity . . . without substantial proof of claim. The miracles of our Lord and especially His resurrection from the dead is the Spirit's proof of claim -- His legal verification that Christ is indeed Theos, very God of God, in human flesh.

Romans 1:4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, *by the resurrection from the dead*:

C.S. Lewis, the great English literary genius said it like this,

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to" (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity).

(3) The third fact regarding this mega mystery is that before, during, and after His resurrection, He was "seen of angels . . ."

Can you think of anything on this earth that might be of interest to angels?

To my knowledge, I've never encountered an angel. And, I can't think of anything in the edifice of American politics that would attract angels: The Declaration of Independence, WWI, WWII, 9-11, the Ethernet?

But, the day that God became a man excited the angelic mind. The incarnation was like the Super bowl of history and every angel wanted a ticket to the main event.

So GREAT was the Divine visitation to earth, Angels fell from skies like falling stars with wonderment and willingness to assist Christ in the grandeur and glory of His advent, temptations, ministry, crucifixion, and guardianship of His tomb. See: Luke 2:9-13; Luke 22:43; Luke 24:4; Hebrews 1:6; Matthew 4:11; John 20:11-12.

The modern mind would do well to take an interest in that which captures the attention of angels.

(4) The fourth fact regarding this mega mystery is that before, during, and after His resurrection, He was "Preached unto the Gentiles . . ."

The Apostle places preaching of the historic Christ among the "great" (mega) things which constituted the "mystery" of Divine truth.

By preaching, the Apostle is not referring to well-prepared sermons, but the factual reporting of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ with conviction and confidence as the newsworthy event in the hostile climate of the first century. This "preaching" was the opposite of fake news by the fake media as it was characterized by formality, gravity, and authority (Strong).

Consider the adversarial environment in which these historical events took place. It would have been natural for the early disciples to go *sub silentio* and remain mute. But, they didn't. The only ones remaining silent were the hostile witnesses (the Pharisees). The disciples possessed a conviction that what they saw and heard was as real as a smile that brightens your day. They could not help but proclaim the facts of Christ's victorious history. That these fantastic claims were preached at all was a miracle of miracles. After all, you could get jailed, stoned, or crucified for

preaching a message that challenged the authority of Caesar. Stephen comes to mind (Acts 6:1ff; 4:12; 17:6-7).

The message was not only preached to Jews, it was preached to all the nations hugging the Mediterranean -- the world jury hearing the facts of the Case.

Before our Lord's advent, a wall of partition divided the Jewish and Gentile world. In Christ's gospel, we find that the playing field for salvation was leveled for Jews and Greeks, rich and poor, men and women, slaves and free men. What Jewish man in his right mind would extend this gospel of hope to Gentiles? None, unless the message had been justified by the Spirit!

No wonder Paul listed the preaching of this gospel as a mega event in the first century! See Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 1:26-27; Colossians 4:3.

(5) The fifth fact regarding this mega mystery is that before, during, and after His resurrection, He was "believed on in the world . . ."

Jesus said to his disciples, "You are my witnesses . . ." (Acts 1:8) . . . and, witnesses must be cross-examined and directly interrogated to test the credibility of the witness and the truth of his testimony.

The gospel message was not preached in "safe zones" or "free speech cages" in back alleys or in government-approved amphitheatres. It was preached to juries in the market places of the Roman world *mano y mano* among Jews and Greeks competent to judge faith claims and to cross-examine the witnesses.

The Apostles announced the hope of salvation among the Gentiles. . . . and the reasonable, serious Romans and Greeks examined the evidence for the resurrection of Christ and believed the gospel.

While extraordinary claims demand proof of claim, they ***do not*** demand extraordinary evidence. This disciples used the same rules of evidence that we use today. What did you see? What did you hear? What did you feel and touch? (1 John 1:1-3).

The early disciples considered themselves witnesses of the Christ event. They were not fideists who believed faith operated apart from facts and reason.

Thomas said he would NOT believe until he could place his fingers in the wounds of Christ. Thomas was not being an ornery doubter or skeptic. He was a normal, empirical man who rejected the fantastic and hearsay claims regarding a resurrected human being. The burden of proof rested on the claimant and he refused to believe until he could personally verify the claim with his five senses (John 20:24-29).

The Apostle identifies faith ("believed") in this incredible message as something remarkable among pragmatic, coherent, thinking men prone to shun outrageous claims. Belief in this mystery shows the accuracy of the testimonies and the power of the truth to convince the most skeptical but honest mind.

(6) The sixth fact regarding this mega mystery is that before, during, and after His resurrection, He was "received up into glory."

Concerning the ascension, Paul identifies it as the punctuation mark of the great mega mystery of all time.

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus was taken up into heaven in the sight of his disciples. His ascension and session at the right hand of the Father as the exalted Christ ended the earthly history of our Lord.

While the story provides a nice ending to an incredible event, people do not normally levitate off the earth without some modern rocket-propulsion system. Even though such an event is highly improbable, the witnesses said this is the way Jesus left earth (Acts 1-2:30-32).

Thus, the ascension of Christ and His session at the right hand of God not only concludes the historical account of the great mystery of godliness, the Bible pictures it as a kingly coronation where the triumphant Savior receives a golden crown. Having accomplished eternal redemption for all mankind, He now sits on the eternal throne as "Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

With this good news, you don't want to be a person who is absorbed in science fiction, extraterrestrials, and alien-invasion theories to annihilate the human race only to miss THE ONE, TRUE, HISTORICALLY, VERIFIABLE VISITATION of Theos in history in and through His Son. Forget aliens and super terrestrials! Investigate the Christ event!

The context of this passage is the previous verse:

1 Timothy 3:15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Every Christian church has the potential to be a "pillar and ground of the truth."

Paul anticipated a delay in his visit to Timothy, and informs him of his purpose in writing his letter: "that thou mayest know," a *hina clause* with a subjunctive holding out the possibility that Timothy and his readers might come to a full knowledge on how men "ought" (de) to behave themselves "in the house of God."

The "house of God" would be a church gathering, not a church building. A true church doesn't practice social distancing. Healthy Christians don't self-quarantine.

The word "conduct" or "behave" comes from the Greek word *anestrephe* which means to "turn upside down" or "turn up and down."

Christianity has a code of conduct which is accurately portrayed in chapter 3:1-14. A true believer changes his ways, his dress, his attitudes, his demeanor, and his habits when he or she takes up the cross to follow Christ.

Paul established Christian ethics consistent with the law of the LORD God (Romans 13:10).

He commands believers to put off the old and put on the new in Ephesians 4:21-24.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul orders men to remove their headwear and for women to veil themselves when meeting in the house of God . . . to remember the headship and history of Christ and the cross (1 Corinthians 11).

In 1 Timothy, Paul exhorts devout men to pray with clean hands (2:8). Women are commanded to dress modestly and take on the role of a student.

In chapter three, the apostle lists the virtues that must mark elders and deacons in pursuit of Divine interests.

In chapter four, Paul exhorts Timothy to avoid (Jewish) myths (fake history) and to train himself in godliness (4:7). If Godly commands like these were put into practice, it would turn the average American church upside down . . . or is that "right side up?"

If you want to be Godly, don't look in and in and in. Forget **New Age meditations** influenced by Eastern philosophy, mysticism, yoga, Hinduism and Buddhism. Rather, look at the glory of our Lord.

"But we all, with open face beholding (present middle participle) as in a glass *the glory of the Lord*, are changed (metamorphoo) into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

"*Looking unto Jesus* the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Change comes when we see and treasure the mystery of godliness of the Lord Jesus.

Merry Christmas!

The Apostles' Creed: 12 Drummers Drumming



The following article was produced by David Werning, August 12, 2021, on "Our Sunday Visitor," a Roman Catholic website.

It is produced here in its entirety because it is a quality work with much helpful information. But, the article needs slight scrutiny because of its

"Roman Catholic" leanings in a couple of areas.

The Christmas Carol, the "12 Days of Christmas," was a code song that Christians sang in times of persecution – both Catholic and Protestant.

The text that reads, "On the 12th Day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, 12 drummers drumming" is code for the 12 Articles of Faith iterated in the Apostle's Creed. Keep in mind the Apostle's Creed had NOTHING to do with the "Roman Catholic Church," and everything to do with what true Christians believed flowing out of the Apostolic Age.

The Apostle's Creed presents twelve fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Regardless of one's denominational affiliation, it is difficult to see how a person can be a "True Christian" without adhering to this faith statement; that is, the Apostle's Creed states the facts of the gospel all Christian have believed since the first century.

This creed belongs to the (universal) "Holy Catholic Church." All true Christians believe the Apostle's creed making them a part of the "Holy Catholic Church" – not the "Roman Catholic Church." Not all Christians belong to the (contorted) "Roman Catholic Church," nor are all "Roman Catholics" part of the one, true "Holy Catholic Church."

The Origin and Meaning of the Apostles' Creed

[My comments in blue.](#)

Apostles

The early Church handed on the apostolic faith received from Jesus through Gospel stories and brief formulas (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5). The formulas were intended primarily for candidates for baptism; they would memorize and practice what they were taught. As the Church spread throughout the known world, and as the membership grew, the need for a common language to express the Church's faith became crucial. The creed developed to meet this need.

Fundamentally, the creed is a profession of faith in God as revealed by Jesus, so it includes articles about each of the three persons of the Trinity and the principle truths that follow this belief. In short, the creed summarizes what Christians believe and have believed since the time of Christ. ([An excellent, true observation](#))

The creed is also a rule or measure of faith since its articles are rooted in Scripture and Tradition. Communities of faith around the world can be confident in their profession when they adhere to the creed espoused by the whole Church. The creed also acts as a safeguard to the Faith, defending it against challenges and heresies.

In fact, to meet challenges that appeared over time, the Church developed different versions of the creed (CCC, No. 192). The creeds of different eras "help us today to attain and deepen the faith of all times by means of the different summaries made of it" (CCC, No. 193).

The use of the singular is justified, then, in the sense that all the creeds list the basic, fundamental truths of the faith.

The two creeds best known today are the Apostles' Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, commonly known as the Nicene Creed. The primer below focuses on the Apostles' Creed. The Nicene Creed, written in the fourth century, has much of the same content as the Apostles' Creed.

“The Apostles’ Creed is so called because it is rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostles’ faith” (CCC, No. 194). [Amen!](#)

A quaint legend states that each of the apostles provided one article, so it has traditionally been separated into 12 sections. Another tradition divides the creed into three sections, one for each person of the Trinity.

Hippolytus, in his treatise “Apostolic Tradition” (c. A.D. 215), provides what may be the earliest version of the Apostles’ Creed. It’s in the form of questions and answers, clearly designed for the celebration of baptisms in Rome. It also shows up in a letter to Pope Julius I from Marcellus, bishop of Ancyra (c. A.D. 340). Rufinus of Aquileia in his “Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed” (c. A.D. 404) accepts it as the common creed, though he distinguishes his version from Rome’s by introducing the clause “descended into hell.” By the seventh century, the Apostles’ Creed was known throughout the Church.

It may be that versions of the Apostles’ Creed were known prior to Hippolytus, but there is no evidence of that. Yet, as the primer will demonstrate, the language of the Apostles’ Creed pertaining to Jesus reads like a refutation of Docetism, a heresy hanging in the air during the second century that denied the full humanity of Christ.

Article 1. “I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth ...”

Creation

The first article grounds and informs the other 11. During the first 200 years of Christianity, people outside the Church scoffed at the idea of one God who was all-powerful and the source of everything. Many gods were taken for granted then. Today, some people simply dismiss the notion of a god altogether. Nevertheless, the creed proclaims that there is one God and there are no others. Jesus taught the same: there is one God and him alone (Mark 12:29-30; cf., Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

This one God is “the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” As “Father,” God is both the source of all and the loving sustainer of

creation. In other words, he both transcends his creation and is intimately involved with it. As “Creator of heaven and earth,” God brought all into being; out of nothing he created the angels, the universe, the planets, and human beings. Therefore, whereas creation is not God, it does bear the mark of his hands (cf. Genesis 1-2).

But what about the Son and the Holy Spirit? Does their inclusion later on in the creed undermine the teaching of one God? Not at all.

Again, one needs to remember that the creed summarizes the apostolic faith, which clearly taught that God is one God in three persons (cf. Mt 28:19). Even the structure of the creed in three parts proclaims the Trinity. Certain works are attributed to one person or the other, but Father, Son and Holy Spirit remain one (cf. CCC No. 316). The creed may not spell out every facet of the Faith, but it provides a bulwark for teachings that follow from its assertions.

Article 2. “... and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord ...”

The titles for Jesus in this article could be applied to other people in certain contexts. However, Scripture applies all three to Jesus in a unique way, declaring his divinity.

The name “Jesus” was a common name in first century Galilee, and it appears in the Old Testament a few times (as “Jeshua,” a transliteration of “Jesus”). The name means “God saves,” which is understood literally through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

“Christ” comes from the Greek for “Messiah,” which is Hebrew for anointed. In one sense the title could be applied to kings and prophets “anointed” for a special mission for God. “Christ” also meant the Savior of Israel, for whom the people longed. Peter, inspired by God, names Jesus the Christ: “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

“Son of God,” like “Christ,” was used for people who were in relation to God, such as the people of Israel. However, the creed names Jesus as the “only Son of God,” clearly distinguishing his sonship. Jesus would often speak of an exclusive relationship with the Father. Indeed, he

distinguished God as “my father” versus simply “your father” when talking to the disciples (cf. Jn 20:17). ([Nicely stated](#))

It follows that if Jesus is divine, he is also “Our Lord,” a word that clearly points to his divinity since it was a transliteration of the tetragrammaton (YHWH), which referred to the God of Israel. Since Jesus is “Lord,” his followers owe obedience and adoration to him as God.

Article 3. “... who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary ...”

Incarnation of Jesus

Having established Jesus’ divinity, the creed considers next the Incarnation — how Jesus assumed human nature (cf. Luke 1:31-38, when Mary consents to giving birth to the Savior of the world).

The world needed a savior because human beings had turned from God. God responded by sending Jesus, who is fully God, to become fully human. God accomplished his will with the free cooperation of Mary, but he did so through the power of the Holy Spirit rather than through the agency of a human male. Mary’s virginity and the Holy Spirit’s action reinforce that Jesus is true God and true man. ([Well stated without crossing the line into modern Catholic Theology about Mary as the Mother of God.](#))

The benefits of the Incarnation for humanity cannot be exhausted: forgiveness of sins, salvation, a model for human behavior. Perhaps most inspiring is that we share in Jesus’ “sonship” through his incarnation: “... when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman ... so that we might receive adoption” (Gal 4:4-5). ([The term “adoption” refers to the status of believers as “sons of God.”](#))

Article 4. “... suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; ...”

Crucifixion

The jump from Jesus’ birth in Article 3 to his passion and death in Article 4 may seem quite a leap. Why not include details of his teaching and

healing ministry? The answer, once again, is that the creed is a summary of faith, not an exhaustive account.

However, as already mentioned, a creed is also a product of its time, and the Apostles' Creed clearly defends against Docetism. The Docetists rejected that an all-powerful God would share humanity with his creatures; it seemed beneath the dignity of God. So the creed goes out of its way to list the historical figure of Pontius Pilate and to name explicitly the humiliations and sufferings Jesus really endured, all of which can be verified through extra-Biblical sources like the Jewish historian Josephus.

Article 5. "... he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; ..."

Doubting Thomas

Looking at and touching the Evidence

As truly man, Jesus experienced death. As truly God, Jesus went to "hell" in order to announce the good news of salvation. However, by "hell" the creed does not mean only the place of the damned, but also the realm of those people who were deprived of the vision of God until the coming of the Savior (cf. CCC, No. 633). Jesus announced the good news of salvation to the "righteous" dead (cf. Acts 3:15; 1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Peter 3:18-19, 4:6) and opens the gates of heaven to them through his resurrection.

On the third day, Jesus appears as the resurrected Lord to his apostles and other disciples. The witness of Scripture is clear on the Resurrection (cf. Mark 8:32, 9:9-31, 10:34). The stories of the empty tomb and Jesus' appearances are well known, and the authors of the New Testament handed on the Resurrection stories as the truth which they experienced personally (cf. Dei Verbum, No. 19).

Article 6. "... he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; ..."

Before Jesus' ascension into heaven, as he spends 40 days with his disciples, sharing meals and preaching about the kingdom of God, he displays the powers of his risen state. For example, coming and going

without regard to time and space at Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:31) or when he appears to the apostles in the upper room despite locked doors (cf. John 20:19).

The Catechism ([of the Holy Catholic Church](#)) notes that Jesus' ascension is closely linked to his descent via the Incarnation.

"I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father" (Jn 16:28).

Being "seated at the right hand of God the Father" declares Jesus' power as God. Moreover, just as he was concerned for his sheep on earth, Jesus continues to intercede for mankind from heaven (cf. CCC, No. 662).

[\(Agreed\)](#)

Article 7. "... from there he will come to judge the living and the dead."

As Lord and God, Jesus has the right to judge each of us. The Apostles' Creed here merely repeats the clear words of Jesus, when he says he will be the final judge (cf. Mt 25:31; Jn 5:22). Yet far from inspiring dread, the judgment of Christ should give us a sense of peace. Jesus did not turn away from us when we were dead in sin; rather he offered himself in our place to save us. His love and care, which are manifested in the remaining articles of the creed, can give us the confidence to follow him now on earth so we may follow him to heaven at our death.

Article 8. "I believe in the Holy Spirit ..."

Holy Spirit

The Apostles' Creed mentions the Holy Spirit only briefly. Is it because it's harder to understand "spirit" than "father" and "son?" Perhaps, but it's more likely that the Church during the first two centuries had a powerful experience of the fruits of the Holy Spirit via the growth of the Church. The creed, therefore, points directly to the Scriptures. Jesus promised that his Spirit would remain with his disciples (cf. John 14:16-17) just as the same Spirit remained with him during his earthly ministry (cf. John 1:29-34). The memory of Pentecost, when the Spirit filled the apostles and others and established the birthday of the Church (cf. Acts

2:1-13), would also have been strong. It's not surprising that a creed as early as the Apostles' Creed would simply affirm a belief that many of the faithful already believed firmly. This would not be the case a couple of hundred years hence. ([The Nicene Creed clarified the doctrine of the Holy Spirit](#)).

Article 9. "... the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints ..."

All Saints

One can see the promise of the Church in God's words to Abraham, to make "of [him] a great nation" (Genesis 12:2; cf. 15:5-6). Jesus "inaugurates" this "catholic" (or universal) Church through his life and establishes it on the rock of Peter (Lumen gentium, No. 9). Jesus gives Peter and the other apostles the Eucharist, baptism and the other sacraments, and he asks them to baptize the nations in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew 28:19).

([Use of the title "Holy Catholic Church" is not the popish "Roman Catholic Church" in Italy. God forbid. The holy catholic church composes all believers until the rapture.](#))

The "rock of Peter" most likely refers to Peter's confession and identification of Christ rather than Peter the alleged "first pope."

Use of terms like "Eucharist," "sacraments," "purgatory," "charisms" and "communion" expose the fact the author is looking at this section of the Apostle's creed through the lens of the "Roman Catholic Church (16th century)" in juxtaposition to the Catholic faith of the first three centuries.)

The Church includes all those holy ones — the saints — who live in communion with God and each other: those in heaven, in purgatory and on earth. Communion also means sharing the gifts of God in common: the Faith received from the apostles, the sacraments, individual *charisms* and love (cf. CCC, Nos. 946-962). ([Purgatory is machination of man, not a Biblical doctrine.](#))

Article 10. "... the forgiveness of sins ..."

The forgiveness of sins is tied directly to the words of Jesus, who told the apostles, “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20:23). Jesus also clearly tied forgiveness of sin to baptism (Mt 28:16-20). The Church celebrates this grace from God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. ([Another “Roman Catholic” predilection. Nevertheless, that God forgives sins is fundamental to the Christian gospel– Matthew 1:21](#))

Article 11. “... the resurrection of the body ...”

Ascension

The creed also affirms the resurrection of the body based on the clear testimony of Scripture. The whole point of God’s plan of salvation was that we might share in the resurrection of Christ. Perhaps the strongest statement regarding belief in the Resurrection comes from St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty [too] is our preaching; empty, too, your faith. ... For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised” (1 Corinthians 15:13-14, 16).

Article 12. “... and the life everlasting. Amen.”

The conclusion of the Apostles’ Creed could not end on a more positive note.

Christians believe in life everlasting based on the witness of Scripture and the constant teaching of the Church. St. Paul, who had a unique experience of the risen Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:8), grasped the essential meaning of God’s gift of salvation:

“For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. ... I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, [for] that is far better. Yet that I remain [in] the flesh is more necessary for your benefit” (Philippians 1:21, 23-24).

For Paul, as it is for every believer, union with Christ already exists on earth. For the faithful person who passes through death, the union is deepened.

The reader who has persevered through this primer may profess the creed with a better understanding of what he or she is saying. It may even prompt one to investigate more fully all the details; it's a good thing to do whether we're talking about the Faith or a cell phone agreement.

Even though David Werning looks at the Apostle's Creed through the lens of Roman Catholic tradition, we ought to be grateful for this excellent work. He does an admirable job of declaring the faith delivered to us by the Apostles (Stockton).

Merry Christmas!

References

Holy Scripture

1 Peter 3:15	70	Luke 2:11	84
1 Timothy 3:16	277, 280	Luke 2:14	58
2 Corinthians 1:20	95	Luke 2:15	148
2 Corinthians 8:9	163	Luke 2:21	117, 190
Acts 17:6-7	232	Luke 2:25-32	62
Acts 7:8	188	Luke 2:36-38	65
Ephesians 1:4-6	33	Luke 2:7	29
Galatians 3:13	171	Luke 3:23-38	22
Isaiah 53	105	Matthew 1	72
Isaiah 9:1-6	139	Matthew 1:1-19	16
Isaiah 9:6	143	Matthew 1:1-20	238
Jeremiah 22:28-30	251	Matthew 1:18	41
John 1:1-4, 14	38	Matthew 1:21	35
John 20:31	48	Matthew 1:23	97
Luke 1: 67-80	219	Matthew 1-2	198
Luke 1:28-31	177	Matthew 2:1	26
Luke 1:32	44	Matthew 2:10	176
Luke 1:38	216	Matthew 2:12	183
Luke 1:46-52	168	Matthew 2:1-2	155, 228
Luke 1:46-55	203, 206, 210	Matthew 2:2	108
Luke 1:52	212	Psalms 89:28	262
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Luke 19:14	56	Romans 16:20	67

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