

**HERE HE COMES!**

**By**

**Ronald Christian**

**Advent Messages To Prepare**

**For  
Christ's Coming  
In New Ways  
To Our Hearts and Lives**



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

**As author of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscript as well as adding illustrations in this book. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessings to many persons.**

## INTRODUCTION

If you wanted to communicate with someone of a different language, how would you try to communicate, if you could not use the vehicle of a common language? You probably would use a lot of so-called 'body language'. You might smile at the other person, or make a gentle bow to him, or use your hands to produce certain shapes or to point in certain directions. Perhaps you might, amidst your frustration, try to communicate through lip movements.

How does the infinite God communicate to finite man? The Bible says that God's ways and thoughts are higher than man's ways and thoughts, as high as the heavens are above the earth! So, how could God possibly communicate to puny creatures like man?

If God could not speak verbally to mankind, how would God communicate to mankind? What kind of so-called 'body language' do you think God might use in an attempt to get His message across to mankind?

God could try to communicate to mankind through Nature. Indeed, God does communicate to mankind through Nature. Listen to the Psalmist: "*The heavens are telling the glory of God; they are a marvelous display of His craftsmanship. Day and night they keep on telling about God. Without a sound or word, silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world.*" (Psalms 19: 1-3, Living Bible)

God could try to communicate to mankind through man's conscience. God communicates a sense of 'right and wrong' even to those who are so-called heathen or pagan people. Romans 2: 12 and following says, "*He (God) will punish sin wherever it is found. He will punish the heathen when they sin, even though they never had God's written laws, for down in their hearts they know right from wrong. God's laws are written within them; their own conscience accuses them, or sometimes excuses them.*" (Living Bible)

Another way that God sought to communicate to mankind was through the Mosaic Law, written on tables of stone (Ten Commandments) when Moses was on top of Mount Sinai.

God further sought to communicate His ways and will through the God-inspired words and personalities of the Old Testament Prophets. No one can deny that God's communication to mankind through the great prophets was most wonderful. The ethical and moral teachings of the prophets are relevant to every age.

But as good and as helpful as God's methods of communication are through the wonders of Nature, through the dictates of conscience, through the commands of the Old Testament Laws, and through the ethical teachings of the Old Testament prophets, we must

acknowledge that all of these forms of divine communication are less than adequate. These forms of communication are rather like the communication of 'body language' between two persons of different races, neither of whom understands the verbal language of the other person! 'Body language' is helpful, but 'body language' without verbal communication is inadequate and sometimes misleading!

How could God communicate best to mankind? If God could come to earth and use mankind's verbal language! A daring idea! How could God possibly 'speak' man's language? Only if God could become a real human and learn to speak real human language! And that is what God did! *"Long ago God spoke in many different ways to our fathers through the prophets (in visions, dreams, and even face to face), telling them little by little about his plans. But now in these days he has spoken to us through his Son to whom he has given everything, and through whom he made the world and everything there is. God's Son shines out with God's glory, and all that God's Son is and does mark him as God."* (Hebrews 1: 1-3, Living Bible)

*"Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God."* (Colossians 1: 15a, Living Bible) Just as a verbal word gives expression to a person's thought, so Jesus is God's thoughts and purposes and plans and will. Jesus is God's clearest communication to mankind, for Jesus is God's very Word! God no longer has to communicate through so-called 'body language' - i.e., through Nature and through Conscience and through the Law and through the Prophets. Jesus has come, and Jesus is God's direct communication to mankind!

Not only did Jesus - God's direct communication to mankind - make clear to a sinful race that God loves them in spite of their sin, but Jesus made it possible for mankind to be reconciled to God! *"For God wanted all of himself to be in his Son. It was through what his Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to him - all things in heaven and on earth - for Christ's death on the cross has made peace with God for all by his blood."* (Colossians 1: 19-20, Living Bible)

*"Christ became a human being and lived here on earth among us and was full of loving forgiveness and truth. And some of us have seen his glory - the glory of the Son of the Heavenly Father."* (John 1: 14, Living Bible) Notes E. Stanley Jones, "This verse the 'Word became flesh' - is the Great Divide. In all other religions it is Word became word - a philosophy, a moralism, a system, a technique, but for all time and all men everywhere, 'the Word became flesh' - the Idea became Fact....The Christian faith is not just a little better than other faiths - a little more moral, more free from contradictory elements, more lofty in its conceptions. It is that, but it is more - it is different in kind. Religions are man's search for God. The Gospel is God's search for man. Therefore, there are many religions, but only one Gospel. Religions are the Word become word; the Gospel is the Word become flesh." (The Word Became Flesh; E. Stanley Jones; page 5, 8)

John proclaimed that *"the true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father."* (John 1: 9, 14)

God created all things good, but man marred the perfect design of God. Through his willful disobedience, man plunged himself into the abyss of sin, corruption, and misery. Man became alienated from his Creator. *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”* (Genesis 6: 5)

The story is told of a naturalist who viewed a procession of ants carrying pebbles to build an ant hill. To the naturalist, the ants seemed to be moving to and fro in great confusion, with little organization. With keen interest the observer watched and wished that he could communicate to the ants so that they would know how to move in an organized method to carry their pebbles. Wishing that he could alleviate them of their confusion, the naturalist suddenly realized that he could communicate to the ants only if he himself would become an ant.

God looked down and viewed man’s rebellion, moral depravity, confusion, and ignorance, and realized that He could only save mankind if He became a man!

The Incarnate Word was fully God. Paul declared, *“For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”* (Colossians 2: 9) Jesus’ disciples, who knew Him most intimately in various circumstances, declared Christ as sinless. Peter wrote that Jesus *“Did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”* (I Peter 2: 22) John declared that *“in him is no sin.”* (I John 3: 5) It is very significant for a Jew to declare a man as sinless. Basic to Jewish thought and theology is the doctrine of the universality of sin. Jesus stood the test of the critical Jewish eye, and was declared as uniquely sinless.

The Incarnate Word was fully man. Paul wrote that Jesus *“took upon Him the form a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”* (Philippians 2:7) The writer of the

Hebrews vividly described the purpose of the Incarnation. *“Forasmuch then as the children (humans) are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.”* (Hebrews 2: 14-18)

*“You know how full of love and kindness our Lord was: though He was so very rich, yet to help you, he became so very poor, so that by being poor He could make you rich.”* (2 Corinthians 8: 9, Living Bible)

Jesus came out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe - all because of His great love for a fallen race of people! He who was invested with the full powers of divinity, He who was co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Spirit - this powerful, eternal Christ became a lowly human!

Says Bishop Sheen about Jesus' humility and earthly poverty, as compared to his eternal glory: "In the filthiest place in the world, purity was born. He who later was to be slaughtered by men, acting like beasts, was born among beasts. He who would call himself the living bread, descended from heaven, was laid in a manger, literally a place to eat...There was no room in the inn, but there was room in the stable...The stable was the last place that the world would have looked for Him. Divinity is always where one least expects to find it. No worldly mind would have suspected that He who makes the sun warm the earth, would one day have need of an ox and an ass to warm him with their breath. That he, who, in the language of Scriptures, could stop the turning about of our tourists, would have his birth place dictated by an imperial census. That he who clothed the fields with grass, would himself be naked. That he, from whose hands came planets and worlds, would one day have tiny arms that would not be long enough to touch the heads of the cattle. That the feet that trod the everlasting hills, would be too weak to walk. That the Eternal Word would be dumb. That omnipotence would be wrapped in swaddling clothes. That salvation would lie in a manger. That the bird which built the nest, would be hatched therein. No one would have ever suspected that God coming to this earth would be so helpless. And that is precisely why so many miss him."

It is tragic that so many people "miss the Christ"! Even at Christmas Time, when everyone should be especially conscious of the coming of God to planet Earth, so many are preoccupied with the temporary and shallow concerns of "Holiday Celebrations" - filled with material pursuits and self-seeking pleasures.

This is a book on the Advent of Christ - God becoming a Man in order to seek and to save a fallen race of people. These messages were first delivered to the precious parishioners of the First Free Methodist Church in Fort Collins, Colorado - sometimes more than once - during the more than 25 years that I served as pastor of this one local church (1967 - 1994). Because the book is divided into thirteen chapters, the layout of the book is designed in such a way that it can easily be used for an adult Sunday School course. The individual chapters contain enough content, and yet are short enough in length, that they could also well serve as material for small midweek study groups within a local Church. There are thought - provoking questions listed at the end of each chapter, to provide class participants an opportunity to review and to discuss the main content of each chapter. Teens, as well as adults, could well profit from the study of these Advent messages - for these messages have ever relevant and contemporary applications in the lives of teens as well as in the lives of adults. After all, because Jesus was fully Human as well as fully Divine (the God-Man), Jesus went through the normal stages of human development - infancy, childhood, adolescence, manhood. No one understands the challenges and pressures and temptations and changes which human beings go through like Jesus of Nazareth.

One dare not sentimentalize the birth of Jesus - saying endearing words about “the sweet little Jesus” in the manger of Bethlehem. For Jesus was born to live sacrificially, and to die a substitutionary death. Jesus was born to die, therefore the Birth of Jesus dare not be isolated as a sentimental event. His sacrificial life and His substitutionary death must always be looked at, along with His miraculous and heart-warming birth if we are ever to understand the true significance of Jesus’ total identification with the fallen human race.

Jesus was God; therefore we know that God cares for us when we sorrow. In fact, God shares our sorrows. God knows what it is to suffer loss.

An embittered father whose son had died, asked a minister, “Where was God when my son died?” Replied the minister, “The same place He was when His own son died.” God suffered the loss of His own Son, so he can share the heartache of every person who loses a loved one.

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and song;  
As the burdens press, and the cares distress  
And the way grows weary and long?

Does Jesus care when my way is dark  
With a nameless dread and fear?  
As the daylight fades into deep night shades  
Does He care enough to be near?

Does Jesus care when I’ve said ‘good-bye’  
To the dearest on earth to me,  
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks  
Is it aught to Him? Does He see?

Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares,  
His heart is touched with my grief:  
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,  
I know my Saviour cares.

Of Christ, it is written, “*Surely he hath borne our grief’s, and carried our sorrows.*”  
(Isaiah 53: 3, 4a)

The sorrow and sufferings of life are many and varied, but Jesus’ life shows us that God is involved in all of them. Take a look at Jesus’ involvement with suffering humanity. “The poor mother of Nain, crying as if her heart would break as she stumbled after the pathetic little procession going out to bury her only son - Christ could not bear it. The leper, the innocent, once joyful life struck down by that slow, dreadful living death - Christ could not bear it. ‘I will: be thou clean.’ The great mass of attractive, lovable men and women caught in the toils of sins that spoilt their lives, and temptations they could not break, and wild regrets that were a misery - Christ could not bear it. And so He died to

free them. And so we can say today, in those most moving words of our hymn, ‘Jesus, Thou art all compassion’.

‘Jesus, Thou art all compassion,  
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;  
Visit us with Thy salvation,  
Enter every trembling heart.’

“But the greatest thing of all is this, that when you see this compassionate Christ, you are seeing God.” (The Gates of New Life, Stewart; page 197)

There is never a sorrow that He doth not share, nor a woe that He does not feel. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Picture Jesus as He made His way into the desert to contemplate, following the beheading of His cousin John. Follow Him to the grave side of His dear friend Lazarus, and listen to His deep moans and sobbing in the midst of Lazarus’ broken-hearted sisters, Mary and Martha. God is not only identified with us in our sorrows, but He is also identified with us in our sins.

An artist once created a most unusual painting of Jesus on the cross. The body stood out in sharp relief against a darkened background. But as one gazed at the painting, a second figure seemed to appear among the shadows. It was as if God could be seen behind the figures of Jesus. The nails that went through the hands of Jesus went into the hands of God. The nail that fastened the feet of Jesus held fast the feet of God. The crown of thorns was somehow on God’s head, too. The artist had made clear his conception that it is through the experience of Calvary that we look into the eternal heart of God. What we see during those hours of torture is a picture of God’s suffering, outgoing love.

It is not only Jesus but God himself who forever identifies with us. There is an infinite concern at the center of the universe for man, whether he be in joy or in pain. It enables one to say, “*If I ascend to heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, thou art there.*” (Psalms 139: 8)

Jesus was called a ‘Friend of Sinners’. Think of the people whom Jesus befriended: the despised Woman of Samaria, Zacchaeus the Thief, Mary Magdalene the woman of ill fame, the demon possessed man called Legion, the woman caught in adultery, the tax collector Matthew who became one of Jesus’ disciples and writer of one of the Gospels.

Of Jesus it is said, “*Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*” (I Peter 2: 24)

***One Solitary Life...***

*He was born in an obscure village.  
He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty.  
He then became an itinerant preacher.  
He never held an office.  
He never had a family or owned a house.  
He didn't go to college.  
He had no credentials but himself..  
Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today,  
He is the central figure of the human race.*

*All the armies that ever marched,  
and all the navies that ever sailed,  
all the parliaments that ever sat,  
and all the kings that ever reigned have not affected  
the life of man on this earth as much as that...*

***One Solitary Life.***

## REIGN OF CHRIST

All glory to God in the sky  
And peace upon earth to be restored;  
Jesus, exalted on high  
Appear our omnipotent Lord!  
Who, meanly in Bethlehem born,  
Didst stoop to redeem a lost race  
Once more to thy creatures return  
And reign in thy kingdom of grace!

When thou in our flesh didst appear,  
All nature acknowledged thy birth;  
Arose the acceptable year  
And heaven was opened on earth;  
Receiving its Lord from above,  
The world was united to bless  
The Giver of concord and love,  
The Prince and Author of peace.

would'st thou again be made known,  
Again in thy Spirit descend,  
And set up, in each of thine own,  
A kingdom that never shall end!  
Thou only art able to bless,  
And make the glad nations obey,  
And bid the dire enmity cease,  
And bow the whole world to thy sway.

Come then to thy servants again,  
Who long thy appearing to know:  
Thy quiet and peaceable reign  
In mercy establish below;  
All sorrow before thee shall fly,  
And anger and hatred be o'er;  
And envy and malice shall die  
And discord afflict us no more

by Charles Wesley

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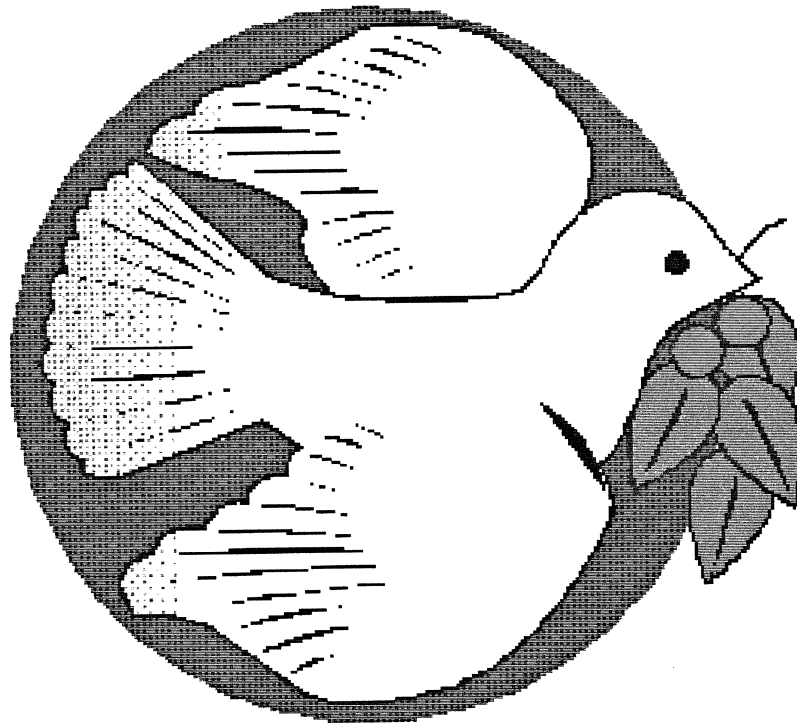
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**CHAPTER ONE**  
**PREPARATION FOR JESUS' COMING**



## CHAPTER 1

**SUBJECT:** Preparation for Jesus' Coming

**TEXT:** *“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law.”* (Galatians 4:4)

**INTRODUCTION:** “The practical value of this study of world conditions at the birth of Christ lies in the discovery that modern conditions are closely parallel. It is the growing conviction, the considered judgment of men who can read the signs of the times that once again in world relations - social, economic, moral, and religious - God's flood tide is coming, and that our generation is seeing what men saw twenty centuries ago, the lines of preparation beginning to converge, beginning to point to a new day of the power of the Son of Men.” (James Stewart)

- I. Political and Social Preparation
- II. Economic Preparation
- III. Moral Preparation
- IV. Religious and Intellectual Preparation
- V. The Coming World Revival and Spiritual Renewal

**CONCLUSION:** The mind and mood of the present day would strongly suggest that God is preparing the way for the Coming of His Son to the hearts of men with unprecedented power and glory. The evidence seems to indicate that we may be ready to see the greatest revival of the coming of Christ to man, that mankind has ever experienced. “Even so, come Lord Jesus!”

# CHAPTER 1

**SUBJECT:** Preparation for Jesus' Coming

**TEXT:** *"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law."* (Galatians 4:4)

**INTRODUCTION:** Jesus' First Coming was not accidental. It was a planned coming - planned by God. The time was ripe for Jesus' coming. The geographical location for Jesus' coming was central - Palestine - linking up the three great continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Further, "it was when all the factors - social, economic, moral, religious - had converged upon him that the man of God's right hand came forth. It was when world conditions were exactly ripe for it that God's supreme revelation in history came." (The Life and Teachings for Jesus Christ; Stewart; pg. 15)

"The practical value of this study of world conditions at the birth of Christ lies in the discovery that modern conditions are closely parallel. It is the growing conviction, the considered judgment of men who can read the signs of the times that once again in world relations - social, economic, moral, and religious - God's flood tide is coming, and that our generation is seeing what men saw twenty centuries ago, the lines of preparation beginning to converge, beginning to point to a new day of the power of the Son of Man. Today, as then, God is matching the hour with the Christ and there is an opportunity now, unprecedented for nineteen hundred years, for Christ's evangel to get a lasting grip. For Jesus and for men the fullness of the time draws nigh." (The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ; 16) (James Stewart)

**PROPOSITION:** God prepared the ancient world for the coming of Jesus. Again, God is preparing the hearts of men today for the coming of Jesus!

Let us note the factors that existed at the time of Christ's coming that helped prepare the world for Christ's coming. Let us further note the similarities between the factors that existed in Jesus' day and those factors that exist in our day which prepare the hearts of men for Jesus' coming in new and glorious ways.

## 1. Political and Social Preparation

World of Jesus' day was united by (1) Roman Peace, (2) Great Roads, (3) Common language - Greek.

Similarly today, the world is as one big neighborhood. Modern means of communication has brought the nations close together. Because of modern means of communication (satellite T.V., etc.), ideas can be spread throughout the world

in a very short time. There is an unprecedented opportunity to communicate the Gospel almost simultaneously throughout all parts of the globe. The world is becoming more and more politically, socially, and geographically prepared for a new day for the power of the Son of Man to be manifested.

## **II. Economic Preparation**

On the surface, conditions seemed prosperous in Rome and Palestine just preceding the coming of Christ. Appearance, however, often deceives and this was true of the economic conditions in Rome and Palestine. Two out of every three men on the streets of Rome were slaves, living in dire poverty, and mere property of the few rich landholders. In Palestine, heavy taxation and a growing overpopulation “made it impossible for the land to provide food enough for its own inhabitants - these things had precipitated a period of unexampled depression among the great bulk of the people.” (Ibid; 19)

Economic depression in Rome and in Palestine among the common populace caused great worry and anxiety and despair. In the midst of the deepest darkness the Brightest Light from Heaven shone forth and the Voice of hope and cheer sounded forth.

Our world increasingly is becoming prepared economically for an unprecedented coming of the power of the Son of God to the hearts of men. “Certain it is that it has been out of some of the most depressed and desperate human situations that the great historic revivals have burst, like the break of a new day.” (Ibid; 19) The majority of the world cannot base any hope or take any comfort from material things, for the vast part of the world’s community wallows in sickness, poverty, disease, and depression. Is there any hope? Christ’s coming to the hearts of thousands of poor people, is showing these people that there is hope! “*The brother who is poor may be glad because God has called him to the true riches.*” (James 1:9) Jesus is coming and will increasingly come to the economically depressed peoples of the world.

## **III. Moral Preparation**

The world that Jesus came to was a world plighted with moral rottenness. “The world was growing old and not even Caesar could make it young again,” says Mommsen about the ancient world. The innocence of youth had faded away “and only the worm, the canker, and the grief were left.” (Ibid; pg. 20) Women and children were treated as things to be used selfishly, and they had no legal rights. Marriages were dissolved on the slightest pretenses. Men openly accompanied mistresses. In the Greek world, prostitution was a widespread and commonly accepted practice. Concerning Roman family life, “Seneca writes that women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married and that women dated the years by the names of their husbands.” (Bar. Ephesians, 202) “It is not too much

to say that the whole atmosphere of the ancient world was adulterous.” (Ibid. pg. 20) The sick, weary, corrupt world into which Jesus came, was ready for a new message and new power - a message of redemption and a power to live clean and righteous.

Today, like as in the world of Jesus’ day, there is a widespread break-down in morals. Immorality, violence, dishonesty, and perversion are deeply woven into the fabric of our society. The moral law of God has been disregarded, and even theologians have invented “situational ethics” and advocated “relativism” in morals. A sickening tolerance has invaded even the churches, and many ministers no longer point the finger at people and say, “Thou shalt not”, but rather pat the shoulder and ask, “Is it meaningful?”

There is a saying: “He who spits against the wind spits in his own face.” “You don’t break the moral laws; you break yourself upon them... If you work with the moral universe you get results - it will back you, sustain you, and you will have cosmic support for your way of life. But if you go against the moral universe, you get consequences - you’ll be up against things, you’ll be frustrated.” (E. Stanley Jones; Word Became Flesh; pg. 71)

Modern man has tried to get a ‘kick’ out of life, and instead he has gotten a ‘kick back’. There is today, however, a growing dissatisfaction with the “ethics of the dust.” In ignoring the North Star of Morality, man is terrifyingly lost and is beginning to cry out for a fixed landmark by which he can once again get his bearings. Jesus Christ alone is that North Star. Jesus Christ is the Hope for Moral Cleansing in an immoral society. Christ alone can give a clear moral sense of Right and Wrong, and He alone can give the power to do Right!

#### **IV. Religious and Intellectual Preparation**

“The old gods of Rome were either dead or dying. To fill the gap, two expedients were tried. On the one hand, a whole new batch of gods imported from the East, outlandish, oriental deities brought in to stir Rome’s jaded senses - till among the philosophers the overcrowding of Olympus, where the gods were supposed to dwell, became a standing joke. On the other hand, the strange phenomenon of Caesar worship appeared; the emperor himself was accorded divine honors. But all expedients failed. What was a whole Pantheon of god’s worth if they had nothing to say to a man with a broken heart? What could the divinity of Caesar say to a soul stabbed with the remorse of sin? When everything had been done that could be done, the hungry hearts of men were hungry still.” (The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ; pg. 20) (James Stewart)

The Jews for centuries had longed for the coming of the Messiah. At the height of this expectation, Jesus came. Jesus used the Jewish and Greek thought categories to introduce the truth regarding God and eternal life. All the gods of Rome and Greece had failed and the Jewish Messianic expectations were high.

The fullness of time had come religiously. The hearts of men were prepared for the coming of the Son of Man.

In many ways, the hearts of men today are prepared as never before for the coming of the Son of Man with unprecedented power. We may be on the verge of a world-wide revival. What evidence is there for such a statement?

Men are turning and will turn to God by the masses in our modern day, because the religious and thought systems of twentieth century man have miserably failed.

Man's modern-day gods have been weighed in the moral and spiritual balances, and have been found wanting.

The religion of Humanism has failed. The belief of humanism can best be expressed by the phrase, "Glory to man in the highest." There is nothing that man cannot achieve, given enough time. Man, says the doctrine of humanism, is inherently good. But the shrine of humanism has been dishonored in the twentieth century. Look what so-called "inherently good men" have produced in the twentieth century - growing crime, devastating wars, racism, hate, pollution, corruption in morals. The serious-minded man is turning from humanism to realism - and that realism is found in Christ.

The religion of scientism is the religion that worships science and claims that science is the cure - all for all of man's problems. The attitude of scientism is expressed by Adam Smith in the beginning days of modern science: "Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition. When we have learned to make sensible use of science the world will not be filled with war, ignorance, prejudice, superstition and fear." (Conversion; E. S. Jones; 25) We almost smile at this naive statement. Science has not only given us unprecedented power to use gadgets, but science has created unprecedented fear. "Some of the makers of the atomic bombs called together the ministers around Chicago and in a two days conference announced: 'Frankly, we're frightened. We can produce the means in atomic energy, but we can't produce the ends for which those means are to be used. Unless you ministers can produce the moral and spiritual ends for which atomic energy is to be used, then we're sunk.' Science turned to religion and cried, 'Save us or we perish'." (Conversation; pg. 25, 26) Worshiping science does not satisfy. Science can tell the 'how's, but it can't answer the 'whys' of life. Only Christ can do that. This is why many great scientists are turning to Christ, and will continue to turn to Christ.

The way of Materialism has failed. America is the richest people in the world, and among the unhappy. The Scriptures are right: "Life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses." The worship of things by adults has "turned off" young people, and has "turned them on to drugs - an equally disappointing substitute. Money does not have in it the ability to satisfy the soul's deep longings. A preacher told of seeing a caterpillar crawling up a "painted stick

in search of a juicy twig only to have to retrace his steps. There are the painted sticks of pleasure, wealth, power, and fame. Men climb them only to have to retrace their steps.” A young man who heard this story, visited the preacher and said, “I have been climbing those painted sticks. I’m a weary man. Is there rest for a weary millionaire?” (Conversion; 20, 21) “Cecil Rhodes ruled the gold and diamond mining industries of South Africa and was one of the wealthiest men in his day. Rhodes was a friend of General Booth (of Salvation Army) and when asked one day: ‘Are you happy?’ Rhodes replied: ‘Happy? Good heavens, No! A rich man can be very poor.’” (Radar News; June 1971)

The way of Positivism has ended in frustration. Positivism is the philosophy which advocates that there is no reality other than that which can be perceived through the five senses of man. Thus, according to positivism, all spiritual reality is ruled out. The way of positivism has failed, for Reality is bigger than the tangible physical universe, and man is more than a physical creature. The soul of man cries out for spiritual reality. Many positivists have turned and will turn to Christ as the only answer to reality.

The philosophy of Atheism and cynicism has not satisfied. “Well known is Mencken’s impious creed: The universe, a gigantic wheel in rapid revolutions; man, a sick fly taking a dizzy ride on the rim thereof; religion, the fly’s delusion that the wheel was constructed to give him the ride.” (The Word of the Lord Came Unto Me Also; pg. 128) The despairing, atheistic view of life is described by Philosopher Bertrand Russell: “Brief and powerless is man’s life. On him and his entire race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way.” (Ibid: 128) When man tries to get along without God, he finds he cannot get along with himself. The philosophy of Nothingness and the way of Atheism leaves man empty and barren and without any life purpose. Many have despaired so much of life that suicide was their alternative rather than agonizing existence. A Harvard doctor said over the radio: “The health of this country is being endangered by aimlessness and lack of purpose.” (Word Became Flesh; 78) Carl Jung, the great psychiatrist, said, “The central neurosis of our time is emptiness.” (Conversion; 19) Christ alone can fill that emptiness and give purpose and fulfillment to life. Therefore, the time is ripe for many atheists and cynics to turn to Christ.

The God of Freudian psychology has miserably failed. Freud based his psychology on the idea of Insight. He believed that if a person was given insight into the self, then that self could be adjusted and restored to health. However, the mental institutions are filled today with thousands who have self-insight, but who are still mentally ill. Many of the leading psychiatrists (Carl Menninger, Carl Jung, and Smiley Blanton) have discovered that man’s greatest need is not mere insight into himself, but rather, the ability to love and to be loved. Says Dr. Smiley Blanton, “After sitting for forty years in my office and dealing with disrupted people I’ve come to the conclusion that they are disrupted because they haven’t loved or been loved.” (Word Became Flesh; 94) Christ is the answer to

man's greatest needs - to love and to be loved. Therefore, the time is ripe for thousands - including psychiatrists - to turn to Christ.

The Social Worker who has sought to heal society's ills only through costly projects of social engineering has miserably failed. "The average length of service of the professional social worker is about seven years." (Conversion; 8) They get discouraged and give up because their efforts don't pay off. Society can only be changed through Christ. The revolutionist seeking to change society through violent means is no more successful, for no revolution excepting the revolution of Christ's love is powerful enough to change human nature and in turn to cure society's ills.

The way of Nationalism and Militarism has also failed. "A Japanese doctor told me (E. S. Jones) that tuberculosis had been ousted as Killer number One in Japan in favor of heart disease and high blood pressure. When I asked him the cause, he replied, 'Spiritual uneasiness.' At the close of the war (World War II) the philosophy of a great people had collapsed - they were not a divine people with a divine emperor who had a divine destiny to rule. That conception of life went down in blood and ruin and left a vacuum. So this sense of vacuum has sent up the blood pressure of a whole nation." (Conversion; pg. 18) Said one of the great statesmen of our time: "I'm fed up." (Ibid; 18) Patriotism and devotion without conversion do not sustain. Christian Victory magazine notes: "In 3100 years only 286 have been without war." "Robert Page, a Washington official, once testified: 'Until human nature is changed, we'll have war.'" Page, who was director of research at the U. S. Naval Research Laboratory, declared: 'World peace will come only when all mankind turns wholeheartedly to God in complete humility and voluntary unconditional surrender.'" (Radar News; June 1971; Ray Brubaker) Many are beginning to realize the limitations of military armaments and are turning to Christ.

The Orient is becoming increasingly ripe for the Gospel of Christ. The Oriental religions are weary and impotent. "In India the gods lose their vitality and vigor every fifty or sixty years and have to be revived by certain reviving ceremonies and rites." Said a Hindu: "Ishwara (God) is growing old and decrepit, and is not of much use to us now." (Word Became Flesh; 6) The refreshing Presence of the Resurrected Christ will increasingly be welcomed in the Orient in the months and years ahead.

There is a new and widespread interest in Jesus Christ today. Witness this in the large number of books about Christ being read and circulated today. Many secular T.V programs feature religious speakers and singers. Popular songs are written about Christ. Amidst the despair of the modern age there is a feeling that the only hope for our age is in some type of Divine Intervention. This is reminiscent of the ancient Jewish Messianic expectation. There is a great spiritual awakening among youth today. Drugs are found by thousands of youth to be

sterile and degrading. Christ is being found to be uplifting and ennobling and transforming.

## **V. The Coming World Revival and Spiritual Renewal**

Many spiritual leaders believe that there has never been as great a revival of interest in and conversion to Jesus Christ, as there is now, in the last years of this millennium and as we come into the third millennium since the time of Christ! There are millions of people around the world whose hearts are tender toward Christ, and whose minds are open to investigate seriously the unique claims of Jesus Christ. It has been estimated by those who make a careful study of the growing worldwide movement of Christianity, that no fewer than 100,000 persons accept Christ as their personal Savior each day, throughout the world! Never in the history of Christianity has there been a faster growth of the Church of Jesus Christ!

Many believe that, amidst this unprecedented growth in converts to Christ, there is happening simultaneously the greatest persecution of Christians that there has ever been in the history of the Church. More Christians have died for the faith in the twentieth century than in any other one century since the time of Christ. In Christian News Magazine (WORLD magazine; Dec. 7, 1996), it is reported that approximately 160,000 Christians were martyred in 1996 alone! There are many Christians who have lost their lives in Central Africa, as a result of the brutal tribal wars. In a Prayer Bulletin, dated Dec. 6, 1996, which I received just today, the Bishops of the Free Methodist Church (of which evangelical denomination I am a 5th generation) just put out an urgent request for prayer because of the atrocities which are happening in Central Africa. The following are a few quotations from that Short Emergency Prayer Bulletin: "Free Methodists in Burundi, Rwanda and eastern Zaire continue to be caught up in the cataclysmic events of these days - war, violence, ethnic struggle and the frantic flight by hundreds of thousands of refugees trying to find safety. A hundred thousand Free Methodists who live in the area are directly affected. Tragic and brutal as well as heroic stories come out as personal news reaches us. There are massive numbers of widows and orphans being produced out of all these awful situations."

I believe that as we approach the Second Coming of Christ, there will be an all-out attack of the kingdom of darkness against the children of God, resulting in the slaughter of millions of believers. But, as we approach the End of this Present Age, I believe that there will be an amazing, "Harvest of Souls" for the Kingdom of God! "Though wrong seems often so strong, God is the Ruler yet!"

Christ is establishing His lordship in the hearts and lives of millions of people of all ages and in all the world's nations! During the last few years of my 27 year long pastoral ministry (as pastor of the Fort Collins, Colorado, Free Methodist Church), I observed and also participated in the amazing movement of the Spirit

of the Living God in the lives of many people. I share here a few examples of the mighty transforming power of Jesus Christ.

About 6 or 7 years ago, a dear friend of mine, Dr. Gil Carbajal, who, at that time was a long-time public school educator, received a call from God to start a Teen Bible Club in the Public School Junior High where he served as the School Counselor. With three or four teens, this Spirit-filled Educator began to meet weekly with these Christian Teens for Bible Study and prayer and a few words of encouragement. It was not long until other teens (both Christians and non-Christians) began regularly to meet together with their beloved public school counselor, Dr. Carbajal, and in a few months there were as many as one hundred teens (and other Christian public school teachers) meeting each Friday morning before the school day began. The Bible Club in this Junior High was so successful that several other public schools adopted this plan and program and started their own Bible Clubs. Today there are hundreds of teens meeting together each Friday morning, to fellowship, to sing choruses, to share burdens, to pray, and to get their “spiritual batteries recharged.” Both Gil and his wife, Linda, (who is a counselor in a public high school) have witnessed firsthand for many years the mighty movement of God in the lives of hundreds of spiritually-open teens!

I have another close friend, Mr. Art Fowler, who has been used of God for many years as witness to hundreds of professional people across the nation - professional athletes, educators, government officials and politicians, doctors and lawyers and law enforcement officers. Through his simple and forthright witness to the saving power of Christ, many hundreds of people have accepted Christ - including truck drivers, policemen, airline stewardesses, celebrities, and even state governors and politicians. I call Art a “modern-day Philip”, for, like Philip (in the Book of Acts), Art often witnesses to total strangers whom he senses the Holy Spirit is leading him to. The manner in which he “finds his contacts” is nothing short of miraculous! Art loves to read biographies of famous people or to read about high profile personalities in magazines (especially PEOPLE’S Magazine). There, as he senses the moving of the Spirit, he will begin “building bridges of friendship” with these people by phoning them, and eventually, he will set up personal appointments with them at which time he usually leads them to Christ. During the last few years since I have known Art, I have heard him share God’s miracles in action through his witnessing, resulting in the salvation of literally hundreds of persons - including the governor of South Dakota (who, a year after Art led him to Christ, was killed in a plane crash). The list of persons whom Art has led to Christ is long, including over 200 patrolmen whom Art has led to Christ (after Art “pulls them over” by flashing his car light at night to get their attention!) Yes, there is only one Art Fowler, and no one should attempt to “pull over” police cars unless he is definitely led by the Holy Spirit to do so. His personal evangelism has been so unusual and fruitful, that Dr. James Kennedy has featured Art Fowler several times on his weekly national television program. We don’t all have the special gift of personal evangelism, nor do we all have the

dynamics and daring personality like that of Art Fowler, but we can all be used of the Lord to help in the great spiritual harvest of precious souls in these days of unprecedented reaping!

During the last decade, I have witnessed a great interest, on the part of Christian parents, in enrolling their children in Christian Day Schools. I heard some time ago that there is something like 33,000 Christian Day Schools in America alone! In 1987, a few persons in our local Church (including my wife and me) had a vision to begin a Christian Day School - even though our Church facilities were very modest and even though there was very little monetary resources available. We started a kindergarten class in 1987, with only eleven students. Under the capable leadership of my wife, Venita Christian, and with the support of a few hand-picked teachers, and through the prayers of several dedicated friends, the Christian School grew rapidly, until there were about 225 students total in all the grades (pre-school thru 12th grades)! No one said it would be easy, but through diligent work, simple believing prayer, and loving cooperation by a growing number of parents and friends, the Christian School "blossomed" and became known in our community of 100,000 as one of the finest and most respected Schools in the city. Academically, socially, spiritually - the School excelled. Again, God's miracle power in action!

There was nothing that thrilled me more, when I served as long-term pastor of the Fort Collins Free Methodist Church (1967 - 1994) than personally witnessing precious persons repenting of their sins and turning their lives over to Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ into the lives and families of seeking souls always spelled divinely-wrought transformation! Even though I never felt I had the spiritual gift of evangelism, I did, as a pastor, take Paul's exhortation seriously: "*Do the work of an evangelist.*" As a young pastor of 22 (in 1967), I determined that, in spite of my natural timidity, I would ask God to discipline me to "reach out in love" to hurting and spiritually-hungry people who desperately needed Christ. Since I grew up in a small local Church (where there were hardly any men in the Church), and since my own father did not become a Christian until very late in his life (about four years before his death), I decided that I would always try to lead both husband and wife to Christ together in their homes in the evenings. I dedicated three evenings a week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday evenings) to go into homes to witness and hopefully to lead some couples (and entire families if possible) to a saving knowledge of Christ. In spite of my fears and hesitations, mistakes and human weaknesses, God saw fit to allow me to be His 'mouthpiece' to speak to hundreds of unsaved persons about their need for Christ. On an appointment basis (what we called 'Salvation by Appointments'); I had the glorious privilege of personally leading several hundred adults to Christ. There is only about 20-40 new converts per year, but over a period of some 25 years the Lord performed many transforming miracles right before my eyes. These included older persons in their 60's, 70's, 80's as well as teens, young adults, and middle-agers. Eight months ago, I had the thrilling experience of a 93 year old lady repeating after me the sinner's prayer, and a few months later I prayed with a

78 year old lady (who, according to her own confession, had not attended Church for 30 years). Less than two months after this woman prayed to accept Christ as her Savior, she died of a heart attack. This woman (who died on November 1, 1996) manifested such glory and joy in her countenance the last moments before she died, that her two children (neither of whom were known for their personal faith in Christ) both testified that they believed the holy angels came and carried away their beloved mother! The woman's son said, "If I ever doubted that there is an afterlife, I no longer doubt it now, after seeing the peace and joy on my mother's face as she died!" This 78 year old woman (who prayed the sinner's prayer only a few weeks before her death) is only one of several older folks whom it has been my privilege personally to lead to Christ. And, of course, there have been several hundreds of young adults and middle age couples with whom I have held hands (around their own dining room tables at the conclusion of a "Salvation By Appointment" Bible Study, as they repeated the sinner's prayer.) After pastoring for nearly 27 years, I left that wonderful pastorate, but I have not left my blessed memories behind of the nights in the homes of hundreds of couples who humbled themselves in my presence as they repented of their sins and turned in faith to the merciful Savior. Some years ago, I recall being in the presence of a family of seven (father and mother and four children and an elderly grandmother, all of whom opened their hearts to the Living Christ!

The Church I pastored so long never was a very large congregation. It grew numerically from about 35 to 350 during the years I pastored, and, because there was considerable mobility in this professionally-oriented, university city, I was actually pastor of many different congregations (for hundreds of people came and went through the years). I felt God's presence so often as I preached, taught, visited, organized, and carried on the multitude of pastoral tasks in a small but growing Church - but I never felt the power of the Spirit's presence as strongly as I did when I was in the hundreds of homes of unsaved people, leading them to Christ through my "Salvation By Appointment" Home Bible Studies. When I left this long-term pastorate, my Church Directory had about 170 names and addresses of families which composed my 'flock'. Out of these 170 families, there were 60 of these families with whom I had personally prayed to accept Christ. Many of the local Church are strongest and most active leaders came from these persons who had been converted and disciplined through our Church's ministries.

Many local Churches throughout America, like our own local Church, have primarily increased in size because of consistent and solid "Convert Growth." Of course, there is nothing necessarily wrong with other kinds of growth in a local Church - biological growth through babies being born to Church members, transfer growth through believers who join your Church after they move to your community from another community, and 'side ways growth' as a result of believers who leave another Church in the same community to join your Church - but the most important growth is "Convert Growth" (i.e. growth as a result of your own Church's soul-winning efforts).

There are still a large percentage (perhaps 50%) of all Churches in America that have 100 or less members, but there is also a growing number of local Churches that number in the several hundreds, and even a growing number of mega-Churches in America (i.e., Churches that number in the thousands).

The growth of the Christian movement in some countries of the world is absolutely mind-boggling! The movement of God in South Korea is well-known, with several thousands of Christian Churches in Seoul, Korea, alone. It seems hard to imagine, but the largest Church in the world is located in Seoul, Korea, and it numbers about 750,000 members. One Church! And there are many Churches in that same city which have 5,000 or more members in them!

The growth of the Christian Movement is so rapid in the continent of Africa, that some believe in a few years that this continent will be basically a Christian continent (and this, despite the fact that there have been very bloody tribal wars in recent years in several African countries).

Millions are turning to Christ in the Latin American countries. Tens of thousands come forward for salvation at the city-wide, massive evangelistic crusades!

Even though the Communists forced all missionaries to leave the mainland of China in the 1940's, it is reported that the growth of the Underground House Church Movement has been phenomenal! No one knows for sure just how many Chinese believers there are in this huge country where persecution of Christians has been severe and brutal, but some leaders estimate that there may be as many as one hundred million believers in China today!

There is a great openness to the Gospel of Christ among the masses of people who one time composed the former Soviet Union! With the new freedom which has been granted Christian believers, following the amazing collapse of Communism, there are encouraging reports of many spiritually-hungry Russian people seeking new meaning and purpose through Christ and the Christian way of life. My own cousin, George Christian, and his wife Drew, have been serving as lay missionaries to the Ukraine for the last four or five years. They were sent to the Ukraine by their local Southern Baptist Church in Texas to pass out 'Food Boxes' by the hundreds, door-to-door to the hungry people in the Ukraine, and to share a simple witness for Christ. The Spirit of God has honored the simple faith and fervent labors of George and Dru, and they have had the joy of leading several hundreds to a saving knowledge of Christ. Recently, I viewed a video of one of these out-door Church services, at which time George baptized 80 new converts! I was both thrilled and amazed as I viewed this baptismal service, for I knew George (with whom I played as we grew up together, just a block from each other) as a cousin who never 'darkened a Church door' and one who knew hardly anything about the Christian Faith! George was wonderfully converted as a young adult, and he married a deeply dedicated Christian wife. After working as

a competent mechanic for about 20 years, and faithfully serving the Lord in his local Baptist Church in Texas, he and his wife felt a strong urge from the Lord to go to the Ukraine. At the time, George was in his late 40's, but he sold practically everything he owned - including his nice house which he himself built - and went to a poverty stricken area of the world to serve his God whom he loved so deeply and for whom he had often witnessed while he served as a mechanic in a Texas city. He and his wife went to the Ukraine with the full blessings of his local Church, and with limited financial support. Even though it has had its challenges and life has not been easy for them, this couple radiates the joy of the Lord in their work, and God has given them "many souls for their labors". They have been used of God to start five new Churches, and they have witnessed to literally hundreds and hundreds of precious Ukrainian people - even though George and Dru do not speak the language themselves. Through translators, George preaches the Word, witnesses to prison inmates, organizes crusades, conducts baptism services, carries on business transactions, and uses his manual skills to build structures. When we were children growing up together (George is five weeks older than myself), he struggled to make it academically in school. He never went to college. But George was a young man who wanted to be authentic. He was not afraid of hard work, and he could do almost anything with his skilled hands. Even though he grew up in a non-Christian home), George had an open mind and a sincere heart. He was a risk-taker by nature, so when he found the Hidden Pearl - Christ Jesus - George became an excited, un-self-conscious, bold, simple witness for Christ. He becomes a "sold out" follower of Christ! He and his wife intend - if God wills - to live the rest of their lives in the Ukraine, to love people and to win thousands of souls to Jesus Christ. When I am with George and Dru, all they want to talk about is Jesus, and God's transforming power! They like to share scores of illustrations of how God has intervened in their spiritual battles with the forces of darkness. They have so many reports of spiritual victory in a land that is desperately hungry for God! They truly are on "fire for God."

There is so much evidence that God is moving in astonishing ways in our world today. Yes, through hundreds of thousands of local Churches in many parts of the globe, millions of followers of Christ are actively engaged in "reaching out in love" to their unsaved neighborhoods. The United States is ripe for a mighty spiritual harvest, and many Churches from many different traditions (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Messianic Churches, Eastern Orthodox) are effectively harvesting souls for Master. Churches are uniting to sponsor city-wide Crusades where millions are experiencing spiritual renewal as they respond to Spirit-anointed evangelists like Billy Graham, as well as many other lesser known evangelists. There are hundreds of new "Church Plants", sponsored by many different branches of the Church of Jesus Christ. There are encouraging signs that many local Churches are beginning, as never before, to take seriously Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19-20)

So-called Para- Church organizations are active and growing, resulting in supporting the work of the local Church. "Trinity Broadcasting Network", begun

by Paul and Jan Crouch, only some 20 years ago (in the 1970's), has grown into a network that now virtually covers the entire globe, with over 500 Christian T.V. stations transmitting the Gospel Message to millions of souls. Millions of souls have come to know Jesus in a personal way, and millions of believers are regularly encouraged, through the multitudes of sermons and Bible lessons and Christian testimonies and Christ-centered music which can be heard 24 hours a day, every day of the year!

“Focus On The Family”, organized and led by Dr. James Dobson, has a staff of about 1200 persons, and the daily broadcast plus all the nearly 70 different ministries which focus on a vast number of various and unique needs of people - all a part of “Focus On The Family” - is being used of God to disciple vast multitudes of believers in the United States and in many other countries! Besides this most popular daily radio program, which features Dr. Dobson and a host of guest speakers who talk about a vast range of relevant topics, there are scores of other helpful radio ministers and speakers. And the availability of Christian music on Christian Radio Stations is greater than ever before. No believer anywhere in America need be without daily spiritual edification, for God’s truth is sounded forth “from the housetops”. With a large number of modern Bible translations, no Christians have any excuse for Biblical illiteracy, and the amount of Christian Books (covering almost every conceivable topic) is absolutely overwhelming! God has surely opened the “windows of heaven, and poured out blessings which are too great to be contained”!

“Campus Crusade for Christ”, founded and led by Dr. Bill Bright, has been used of God as a tool to witness to millions of people in many different countries, not only on hundreds of University Campuses but also in many other varied settings. Several thousand youth and older adults are full-time staff members of this outstanding Para- Church ministry, and each one of these “missionaries” is responsible for finding sponsors who will pray for them and support them financially! Through the use of the “Jesus” Video, there have been many millions of people around the world who have made serious commitments to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord!

The well-attended week-long seminars, conducted by Mr. Bill Gothard, have brought great insights into both the basic and the deeper concepts of disciplined Christian Living. Many lives have been permanently changed as a result of attending one of these week-long seminars.

“Insight for Living”, the daily half hour radio broadcast which features popular preacher, Charles Swindoll, is probably the most popular preaching ministry on Christian radio today. His helpful expository messages and Bible Study Booklets and literally dozens of books which he has authored, bring unusual “insights” into the meaning and application of God’s Word to millions of believers. He is indeed a most skilled and compassionate teacher of the Word!

Evidence that God is moving in special ways among the thousands of broken and confused men (husbands and fathers) in America today is seen in the amazing growth of the movement called "Promise Keepers" which was founded in 1990, when University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney first gathered 72 men together. From that initial gathering of a small group of men, a fast-growing movement has now expanded into several states, with nearly a million men who attended one of about 25 different regional conferences throughout the United States in 1996. Who knows how many more men will be touched by this Spirit - impelled movement, in the next several years! I have personally had the privilege of participating as a learner and worshiper in a Promise Keepers' Conference each summer, since its beginning. I was one of 4200 men who attended the first large conference. I heard Coach McCartney express his vision for tens of thousands of men to be reached through his new movement called "Promise Keepers." The second year, the 4200 expanded to 20,000 men in attendance in Boulder, Colorado. The third year, there were about 50,000 men who attended the Promise Keeper Conference in Boulder. Then, before long by 1995, there were 13 different regional conferences (Promise Keeper Rallies) which touched about 500,000 men! This last summer, there were about 25 regional conferences, with several hundred thousands more men attending! On October 4, 1997, there was an estimated one million men who gathered together on the Washington, D.C., mall for the "Standing In The Gap" solemn assembly, to express deep repentance and a desire for National Healing! At each of the great Promise Keeper Conferences, held in large stadiums, I witnessed literally thousands of men going forward on the first night of the week-end, to give their lives to Christ - following a powerful evangelistic message. Some of the nation's best speakers shared messages on the following day - practical messages which were designed to impact the lives of men in their various responsibilities as husbands, fathers, employees, Churchmen, and public witnesses. I have often knelt with thousands of men at these Promise Keepers' Conferences, to make a deeper dedication of my life to Almighty God. On Saturday Evening, after a long day of listening to multiple speakers of various races, Coach McCartney would deliver the last powerful message of the week-end, at which time he would challenge the 50,000 men (or more) to a life of deep dedication to God and a life of fervent love for the brethren of all races and ethnic backgrounds. McCartney's recurring theme has been God's uniting love and compassion which thousands all man-made differences of race and culture and backgrounds and status. Who would ever have guessed that God would use a football coach as the man who would "spearhead" one of the greatest men's movements in the history of the Christian Church!

Yes, it is true that no person is wise enough to predict with certainty when Jesus will return to earth the Second Time. Jesus Himself said that no man - not even the Son - knows the exact time when God shall send Jesus back to earth - the Second Coming. But, while no one knows when Jesus shall actually return in Bodily form to bring a close to this present age, we can say with certainty that Jesus is coming in our own day to the hearts and minds of countless numbers of men and women, youth and children, in new and wonderful ways. As the world

of ancient times was prepared in so many different ways for the coming of Jesus in physical form the first time, so God has prepared our present - day world as never before for the coming of Jesus in a spiritual way to countless numbers of people. May each one of us personally prepare our own hearts for Jesus' coming in new and glorious ways! Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!

“Heaven’s arches rang when the angels sang,  
Proclaiming Thy royal decree;  
But of lowly birth didst Thou come to earth,  
And in great humility.  
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus -  
There is room in my heart for Thee!”

**CONCLUSION:** The mind and mood of the present day would strongly suggest that God is preparing the way for the Coming of His Son to the hearts of men with unpredictable power and glory. The evidence seems to indicate that we may be ready to see the greatest revival of the coming of Christ to man that mankind has ever experienced. “Even so, come Lord Jesus!”



**CHAPTER 2**

**CHRISTMAS IS FOR SINNERS**



## CHAPTER 2

**SUBJECT:** Christmas Is For Sinners!

**TEXT:** *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”* (I Timothy 1:15)

**INTRODUCTION:** Said Jesus on one occasion, just prior to his death: “For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37) What is the truth of which Jesus testified when He came into the world?

- I. Jesus testified to the truth of man’s sinful and helpless condition.
- II. Jesus testified to the truth of His personal identification with the lost.
- III. Jesus testified to the truth of man’s need for deepest repentance and genuine conversion.

**CONCLUSION:** Christmas is for sinners -- for respectable sinners with so-called respectable sins and also for repulsive sinners. Everyone stands on the same level at the foot of the cross. Christmas is a good time to receive forgiveness and go on your way rejoicing!

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### I. Jesus testified to the truth of man’s sinful and helpless condition.

Make no mistake about it! Jesus was sinless, but every other person is sinful and in need of forgiveness. Jesus said to His accusers, “Which of you can condemn me of sin?” In Jesus there was no sin at all. Even though He was tempted in all points as we are, yet He never once yielded to the allurements of sin. Jesus’ every thought, action, and motive was pure!

To the self-righteous critics who were eager to stone the woman who was caught in adultery, Jesus said, *“You who are without sin, you cast the first stone!”* (John 8: 7) Every one of these men left, for all knew they were sinful! Said Jesus to the self-righteous persons of His day: *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”* (Matthew 23: 27-28)

A spirit of self-sufficiency and pride is one of the terrible characteristics of sin which Jesus often recognized in His dealings with mankind. To the self-righteous Pharisees who prided themselves in their religious achievements, Jesus said, *“I have come into the world to give sight to those who are spiritually blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.”* The Pharisees who were standing there asked, *“Are you saying we are blind?”* *“If you were blind, you wouldn’t be guilty,”* Jesus replied. *“But your guilt remains because you claim to know what you are doing.”* (John 9:39-41, Living Bible)

Notes Barclay, “The man who is conscious of his own blindness, and who longs to see better and to know more, is the man whose eyes can be opened and who can be led more and more deeply into the truth. The man who thinks he knows it all, the man who does not realize that he cannot see, is the man who is truly blind and beyond hope and help. Only the man who realizes his own weakness can become

strong. Only the man who realizes his own blindness can learn to see. Only the man who realizes his own sin can be forgiven.” (Barclay’s John Vol. 2: pg.50)

## **II. Jesus testified to the truth of His personal identification with the lost.**

Jesus said that He came into the world to seek and to save the lost, to give his life as a ransom for sinners. Jesus was called a “Friend of publicans and sinners.” Jesus pictured Himself as the Shepherd in search of the lost sheep.

Said Jesus, “*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*” (Mark 2:17) Even before Jesus was born, the angel spoke to Joseph about Jesus’ birth and his mission: “*You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*” (Matthew 1:21)

If Jesus was born to die, if Jesus came into the world to redeem His people, if Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, this means that Christmas is for sinners - for those who are helpless, hurt, lost, and wicked!

Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew 1 demonstrates Jesus’ identification with sinners. Jesus has some ‘black sheep’ in his family tree. He didn’t try to hide this fact. Tamar was an adulteress! Bathsheba was the woman whom David seduced and took deceitfully from Uriah and with whom he committed adultery! Rahab was the harlot of Jericho! All of these women were sinners and yet they were part of Jesus’ ancestry! The inclusion of these sinners in Jesus’ genealogy shows Jesus’ mission of redemption! (Note Matthew 1)

The gift of myrrh which one of the Wise Men from the East presented to the Christ child is a strange gift to give to an infant. Myrrh is used to embalm dead bodies. Giving this gift to Jesus symbolizes the fact that Jesus was born to die - to die as Saviour for sinners! “*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*” (John. 3:17)

If Christmas is for sinners, then Christmas is not for me if I claim no need for forgiveness for my sins!

Jesus’ identification with sinners was at the deepest level - even to the point of dying on a cross for sin. Jesus became mankind’s ‘sin bearer’ when he died on the cross. So much did He identify with mankind’s problems (sins) that God turned His face away from Jesus while Jesus died on the cross. Jesus became the ‘personification of sin’ and, because God is so holy that He cannot even look at sin, Jesus felt terrible rejection even by God. Jesus cried out from the Cross, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!*”

### **III. Jesus testified to the truth of man's need for deepest repentance and genuine conversion.**

Said Jesus to a very religious Jewish leader (Nicodemus), *"With all the earnestness I possess I tell you this: Unless you are born again, you can never get into the Kingdom of God."* (John 3:3, Living Bible)

*"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' 'But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.' 'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'" (Luke 18: 9-14)*

The purpose for which Christ came (Luke 5:32), and the central message of the Gospel (Acts 3:19) is that men must repent and turn to God if they are to live. God's absolute requirement for salvation is Repentance: *"God commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* (Acts 17:30b)

To repent is to change one's mind regarding sin, from one of clinging to sin to one of abhorring sin. A change of mind regarding sin results in a change of direction, from one of following evil ways to one of pursuing godly ways. Repentance is a moral U-turn, turning ones back on sin, and turning one's face toward the Saviour. Turning to Christ is the essence of Biblical Faith and is the positive result of genuine repentance. Repentance and faith must work together if true conversion is to result. Repentance is the proper attitude toward your sin, and faith is the proper attitude toward your Redeemer. Faith is putting yourself in the care of Christ who is able to change your life. Faith is a transfer of trust for salvation from yourself to Christ, who alone can save you!

But you may say, "I am a Christian and you are saying that Christmas is for sinners. Does that mean that Christmas is not for me, a Christian?"

I would answer first that it is great that you are a Christian. A Christian is one who is saved from his sins. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1) If one habitually and willfully sins, it is true that he is not a Christian. (I John 3).

But even if you are a Christian, you can identify with your need for daily forgiveness of willful isolated sins, and sins of ignorance, and sins of omission. Repentance is not a once-and-for-all experience, but repentance is a life-time attitude towards all sin (willful or ignorant). Because Christmas is for sinners, and

because all of us need forgiveness every day, we can all identify with the purpose of Christmas - Christians and non-Christians alike.

At Christmas time, we must not have a holier-than-thou attitude towards the unchurched and the unsaved, towards those outsiders who will make their way into our Church at Christmas time and Easter time. Let us be grateful that those sinners who visit our Churches twice a year at least instinctively recognize the fact that Christmas is for sinners - sinners like themselves.

It is only as sinners - unbelievers - see this spirit of humility in Christians that they will turn to our Christ and to our Church.

The following illustrates what we are trying to say. Writes Nancy Covert Smith in her book *Journey Out of Nowhere*, "One afternoon I picked up a woman at the mental health day care center. I was on FISH call (FISH is an organization of Christians who work together to provide emergency help) and she needed transportation home. She was a tall woman, red-haired, loud-spoken. After she had crawled into the car and we had started, she said:

'You'd better be scared. I'm a mental patient.'"

"I know.'

'Well, aren't you scared I'll hurt you?' She looked at me through a haze of cigarette smoke. 'But I was in the hospital.'

'I smiled, 'So was I. 'We were like two children trying to outdo each other.

"I had shock treatments,' she said.

"So did I.'

"I had seven.'

"I had fourteen,' I replied.

"She looked at me a few minutes, and then she grinned. 'You win. You were sicker. Now let's talk.'" (*Journey Out of Nowhere*, Nancy Covert Smith, Word; 1973)

Says Robert Andrews who relates this incident, "After I read this I couldn't help but wonder what might happen this Christmas if the following similar scene were to take place. He was a tall man, red-haired, loud-spoken. I saw him on the street and began talking to him about visiting my Church.

"You'd better stay away from me. I'm just a bum."

"I know."

"Well, aren't you afraid I'll contaminate you or ruin your reputation?" He looked at me through a haze of cigarette smoke. "I'm a real bad sinner."

"So am I." We were like two children trying to outdo each other.

"I've done thousands of immoral things."

"I've committed thousands of sins of pride, self-righteousness and neglect. I've been a hypocrite."

“He looked at me a few minutes. “You win. You’re as bad as I am. Let’s talk.”

Please don’t misunderstand what I am trying to say. It is true that Christmas is for sinners, but we are not encouraging Christians to declare, therefore, that Christians are only saved in their sins rather than from their sins. Where sin abounds, grace super abounds. The atonement of Christ is able to cleanse from all sin - original sin and volitional sins (sins caused by wrong choice). We are not suggesting that because Christmas is for sinners, that Christians have a ‘sin-fixation’ rather than a ‘grace-fixation’.

We are not to become preoccupied with sin and self, but we are to become preoccupied with the Saviour, with His power to cleanse from all sin. It is true that we must be aware of our sins - our sins of commission, our sins of omission, our sins of ignorance - but we must not fix our attention on our sins. We must glance at our sins, but we must gaze at our Saviour.

Says Dr. A. J. Muste, “In Neo-orthodoxy when we became obsessed with human helplessness and human corruption instead of being caught up in the transcending of them by the grace of God, we are still preoccupied with self, still self-centered and therefore still self-righteous. If we do not end with the experience of the grace and power of God as that which overcomes and blots out our preoccupation with our sinful selves, we are but giving another demonstration of the pretension and corruption of man, not of the grace of God.” (Quoted by E. S. Jones in “Growing Spiritually’ pg. 11)

However, even Christians need daily forgiveness. No one comes up to the perfect standards of God. Our attitude as believers must be an attitude of humility and confession. It is only as we continue to have a broken and a contrite and humble spirit that we can have forgiveness on a continuing basis. John wrote, “*If we continue to confess our sins, faithful is He and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned and are now in a state where we do not sin, a liar we are making Him, and His word is not in us.*” (I John 1:9, 10) (Wuest)

**CONCLUSION:** Christmas is for sinners - for respectable sinners with so-called respectable sins and also for repulsive sinners. Everyone stands on the same level at the foot of the cross. Remember, “*He hath visited and redeemed his people.*” (Luke 1:68)

Confess your sins at Christmas time. Christmas is a good time to receive forgiveness and go on your way rejoicing. Whatever your sins are today is the day to confess them. Jesus came to save His people from their sins.

# CHRISTMAS IS FOR SINNERS

## Questions

1. Even though Jesus, as a man, was tempted in all points as other humans are tempted, did he even once yield to temptation and to sin?
2. Cite scriptures which indicate Jesus' accurate evaluation of mankind's sinful condition. (Note Matthew 23:27-28)
3. Why is a spirit of humility an absolute prerequisite for spiritual healing? (John 9:39-41)
4. Why can it be said that 'Christmas Is For Sinners'?
5. Why was the strange gift of myrrh, which one of the Wise Men gave to Jesus, so significant as a symbol of Jesus' mission on earth?
6. As it relates to Jesus' identification with lost mankind, what significance do you attach to Jesus' words from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"?
7. If repentance is one of the absolute requirements for salvation, how would you describe and define 'Repentance'? (Luke 5: 32; 13:3; 18: 9-19; Acts 3: 19; 17:30)
8. What is the relationship between 'Faith' and 'Repentance', as these words relate to conditions for personal salvation?
9. Give your interpretation of the following statement: "Everyone stands on the same level at the foot of the cross."

## CHAPTER 3

### HOW DO YOU REACT TO CHRIST?



Joy to the World

## CHAPTER 3

**SUBJECT:** HOW DO YOU REACT TO CHRIST?

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 2:3-12

**TEXT:** *“What think ye of Christ?”*

**INTRODUCTION:** Christ is ever contemporary and confronts every age with His presence and demands. He is the Living Christ who confronts every person in every age and seeks entry into each life. All men today, who meet Christ, react to Him in one of three ways.

- I. Herod represents those who react with hatred and hostility.
- II The Chief Priests and Scribes Represent Those Who React With Indifference.
  - A. Some are indifferent because they believe the Church has been a failure.
  - B. Some are indifferent because of their present preoccupation with the cares of life.
  - C. Some are indifferent because they attempt to be neutral to Christianity.
- II The Wise Men Represent All Who React To Christ With Adoring Worship.
  - A. The Wise Men sought Christ and found Him.
  - B. The Wise Men offered gifts to Christ.

**CONCLUSION:** How will you react to the Christ of Bethlehem who is also the Christ of the Ages? To react with hostility is futile; to react with indifference is tragic; to react with adoration is safe and wise.

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All men today, who meet Christ, react to Him in one of three ways. Herod the king, the priests and scribes, and the wise men each represent one of the three types of reactions to Christ.

**PROPOSITION:** Herod the king represents all those who react to Christ with hatred and hostility. The chief priests and scribes represent all those who react to Christ with complete indifference. The Wise Men represent all those who react to Christ with adoring worship. (Barclay’s Mt. pg. 21) Let us note each of these reactions.

### **I. Herod represents those who react with hatred and hostility.**

Let us look briefly at what kind of man Herod the king was. Notes Barclay, “He could be generous. In times of difficulty he remitted the taxes to make things easier for the people; and in the famine of 25 B.C. he had actually melted down his own gold plate to buy corn for the starving people. But Herod had one terrible flaw in his character. He was almost insanely suspicious. He had always been suspicious, and the older he became the more suspicious he grew until, in his old age, he was, as someone said, ‘a murderous old man.’ If he suspected anyone as a rival to his power, that person was promptly eliminated. He murdered his wife Mariamne and her mother Alexandra. His eldest son, Antipater, and two other sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, were all assassinated by him. Augustus, the Roman Emperor, had said bitterly that it was safer to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son. Something of Herod’s savage, bitter, warped nature can be seen from the provisions he made when death came near. When he was seventy he knew that he must die. He retired to Jericho, the loveliest of all his cities. He gave orders that a collection of the most distinguished citizens of Jerusalem should be arrested on trumped up charges and imprisoned. And he ordered that the moment he died, they should all be killed. He said grimly that he was well aware that no one would mourn for his death, and that he was determined that some tears should

be shed when he died. It is clear how such a man would feel when news reached him that a child was born who was destined to be king.” (Barclay’s Matthew pg. 19, 20)

Herod tried to destroy Christ but was unsuccessful. Men can never destroy Christ or his message. The message of the Gospel may be either accepted or rejected, but it can never be eliminated. It is like a flame that can never be extinguished or quenched.

Men try to put Christ out of their minds, but their conscience betrays them and continues to speak out for Christ and the right. A later Herod than the one who tried to eliminate the Christ child, killed John the Baptist. When Herod saw Jesus, his conscience began to bother him, for he thought Jesus was John the Baptist. Said Herod about Jesus, “This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.” (Matthew 14:2) Herod’s refusal of the Light and rejection of the Gospel resulted in tragic consequences. Through a series of political maneuvers against Herod, the Roman Emperor Caligula finally “took Herod’s province from him, with all his money, and banished Herod to far off Gaul to languish there in exile until he died.” (Barclay’s Matthew pg. 108)

The messenger may be eliminated, but Christ and his Gospel can never be destroyed. Andrew Melville was a reformer in Scotland. The Earl of Morton who was the regent of Scotland threatened the life of Melville and said, “There will never be quietness in this country till half a dozen of you be hanged or banished from the country.” Melville fearlessly replied, “Tush! It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or in the ground...God be glorified, it will not lie in your power to hang nor exile His truth.” The truth cannot be destroyed, although it may be rejected. It will always inevitably triumph and the rejecter will eventually suffer because of his rejection of the truth.

Rev. Wurmbrand, who writes about the persecuted Church behind the Iron Curtain, says, “The secret police persecuted the Underground Church very much, because they recognized in it the only effective resistance left. And just the kind of resistance, the spiritual resistance, which if left unhindered, would undermine their atheistic power. They recognized, as only the devil can, an immediate threat to them. They knew if a man believed in Christ he would never be a mindless, willing subject. They knew they could imprison men, but they couldn’t imprison faith in God. And so they fought very hard.” (Tortured For Christ, pg. 17)

Why do men seek to destroy Christ and his messengers? It is because Christ reveals things as they are. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrew 4:13) Barclay well describes what the light of Jesus does. “It strips away the disguises and the concealment; it shows things in all of their nakedness; it shows them in their true character and their true value...The externals, the disguises, the

outer wrappings and trappings are stripped away; and everything stands revealed in the naked and awful loneliness of what it essentially is.” (John, pg. 25)

Men are hostile to Christ and seek to destroy him because Christ exposes the secret and wicked areas of a man’s life. Men hate Christ because Christ will not let them have their own way.

How revealing are the words of guilt as spoken by Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth: “What, will these hands ne’er be clean. Here’s the smell of blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh...Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale!”

With hatred for Christ and Christianity, many people have tried to silence the voice of conscience, and have pronounced it as a burden imposed by society’s moral laws and standards. Conscience is a creation of society and must be relieved of society’s impositions and limitations. Anxiety comes when the repressed desires of sex and hostility clamor for attention and expression, but must be denied because of an overly sensitive conscience. Conscience then is pictured as the cruel tyrant, and source of all problems. Relax the conscience of its strict role of accuser and give free expression to the deeply suppressed desires, and all will be well.

“The alternative view is that anxiety comes, not from acts which the individual would commit but dares not, but from acts which he has committed but wishes that he had not. It is, in other words, a ‘guilt theory’ of anxiety rather than an ‘impulse theory’.” (The Crises in Psychiatry and Religion, pg. 26) The conscience poses as the Voice of God, and when the conscience is repressed or offended or denied, then anxiety arises and guilt results. One who offends his conscience or his sense of moral oughtness, many times reacts with hatred and hostility to God, for God is the Voice of Conscience.

The humanist senses no need for a Saviour, for he senses no moral responsibility for sin. Deny sin and one denies his need for a Saviour.

Jesus came to save people from their sins, that is, to provide atonement for sins through a substitutionary death.

The humanist denies any need for an atonement. He is repulsed by the idea of a ‘bloody’ religion. The Bible makes it clear that there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood, but the humanist, who denies the existence of sin, denies the need for remission of sins.

Humanism asserts that man was born with innate goodness. Thus, the humanist creed is, “Glory to man in the highest!” The humanist glories in man and worships man.

“Walt Whitman was one of these. Glory to man in the highest was his theme. The difference between the old artists and him is this: They painted one head with a halo of ‘gold-colored light’ about it, but he gave a halo to all.” (Sangster’s Special-Day Sermons; pg. 11)

The humanist questions the need for religion at all, believing that science will someday replace man’s religious superstitions, and be able to solve all of man’s problems. However, if man needs religion at all, it must be a religion without revelation. Thus, for the humanist, there is no need to bow the knee to a Creator God.

“Walt Whitman was their poet. He said he loved the cattle and all dumb beasts because they did not kneel down and say their prayers.” (Ibid; pg. 10)

The humanist, in contrast to the Wise Men who humbly worshiped the Christ Child, refuses to worship anyone or anything except his own human nature. The humanist declares man as his own Master.

W.E. Henley represented this self-sufficient rebellion:

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

.....

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate;  
I am the captain of my soul.

(Quoted by Sangster in ‘Sangster’s Special Day Sermons; pg. 10)

Comments Sangster, “The vanity of it. The master of his fate and the captain of his soul.” (Ibid; 10)

The believer, in contrast to the humanist, acknowledges the need for a Saviour. Our Christmas carols declare the saving purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world. Note a few.

### **O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given.  
So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming, But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive him still,

The dear Christ enters in.  
O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in, Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel.

### **HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING**

Hark the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.”

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace.  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness.  
Light and life to all he brings,  
Risen with healing in his wings.  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
Born that man no more may die.

### **SILENT NIGHT**

Silent night, holy night,  
Son of God, love’s pure light;  
Radiant beams from thy holy face,  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

### **WHAT CHILD IS THIS, WHO, LAID TO REST:**

So bring him incense, gold and myrrh,  
Come, peasant, King to own him;  
The King of Kings salvation brings,  
Let loving hearts enthrone him.  
I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways of my own  
mind; and in the mist of tears I hid from Him, and  
under running laughter.  
Up visited hopes I sped; And shot, precipitated,  
A down Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase, and unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instance,  
They beat - and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet -

“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”  
(Francis Thompson’s “Hound of Heaven”)

## **II. The chief priests and scribes represent those who react with Indifference.**

Comments Barclay, “They were so engrossed in their Temple ritual and their legal discussions that they simply completely disregarded Jesus. He meant nothing to them. There are still those who are so interested in their own affairs that Jesus Christ means nothing to them.” (Barclay’s Mt. pg. 21)

### **A. Some are indifferent because they believe the Church has been a failure.**

As I was getting a haircut one day, a barber said to me, “My experience with Church - going, professing Christians has been very unpleasant, so I decided I wouldn’t have anything to do with the Church.” One university student said to me, “I was once a very active member of a Protestant Church, but because I saw corruption and hypocrisy in the Church, I decided the Church was not for me. I don’t believe in any organized Church. I believe that science will probably someday have all the final answers to man’s problems. It may be a thousand years from now, but nevertheless science will have the final word. Look what progress science has already made. Someday Christianity will probably look simple and be archaic. What we need in Western Civilization is a liberal religion, merely as an agent of change. If you classify me as anything, I suppose that you could classify me as an agnostic. I can’t say that I believe in Christ, and I’m not sure that there is such a thing as heaven or hell.” One distant relative of mine said, somewhat bitterly, “There are a lot of Churches, and it doesn’t make any difference to me what Church one belongs to. All have to live their own lives, and therefore, I don’t care what other people do. Every Church has its good and its bad, and you can go to Church if you want to, but you don’t have to if you don’t care to.”

To each of these encounters, I reacted in a similar manner. To each of these men I pointed out that it is not the Church that can save, but only Christ. Although there is the superficial and hypocritical elements within the organized Church, that there can also be found the genuine and the noble within the Church, cannot be denied. It is to Christ alone that we each must answer, and therefore each individual must personally experience the forgiveness of God.

Some are indifferent because of failures they have seen within the Church

-- but what a poor excuse. One does not judge the medical profession on the basis of a few quack doctors, or one does not condemn all lawyers, simply because there are some dishonest lawyers. One is deceiving himself if he judges Christ and Christianity on the basis of some failures that have been observed within the Church.

- B. Some are indifferent because of their present preoccupation with the cares of life.

The wife of one university student replied to me when I asked her if she was attending Church, "No, we are not attending Church now. I have uncles who are Methodist ministers, but since my husband is a student, we don't have time to get involved in Church now. In the future, after my husband gets out of school, we plan to begin coming to Church. It's nice of you however to visit us here in Aggies Court."

Many are the excuses for not taking Christ, and not taking time for the Church. Not only is the preceding excuse given, but others similar to it are given. Some say they are young and want to have their share of fun in life and that they will consider Christ and the Church when they become older. In back of many excuses is the false delusion that there is plenty of time in the future to consider God.

Says Barclay, "There is a fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship". They were talking to Satan, the chief of the devils, about their plans to tempt and to ruin men. The first said, "I will tell them that there is no God." Satan said, "That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God." The second said, "I will tell men that there is no hell." Satan answered, "You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin." The third said, "I will tell men that there is no hurry." "Go", said Satan, "and you will ruin men by the thousand." The most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time. The most dangerous day in a man's life is when he learns that there is such a word as tomorrow." (Barclay's Matthew pg. 350, 351)

The Bible's exhortation is wise: "We ought, therefore, to pay the greatest attention to the truth that we have heard and not allow ourselves to drift away from it. For if the message given through angels proved authentic, so that defiance of it and disobedience to it received appropriate retribution, how shall we escape if we refuse to pay proper attention to the salvation which is offered us today?" (Hebrew 2:1-3)

- C. Some are indifferent because they attempt to be neutral to Christianity.

Some consider it a great virtue to adopt a policy of neutrality, and to be tolerant to every religion. Christ dogmatically asserted that He was the Only Way to God. Only through the name of Christ can man approach God (Acts 4:12). An indecision to follow Christ and an attempted neutrality, automatically becomes a decision against Christ. Said Jesus: “*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*” (Matthew 12:30) “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*” (Matthew 6:24) Joshua could well have been speaking to our generation when he said, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” Christ will not share any other allegiances; He demands all. He is dogmatic in His claims, and all inclusive in His demands. Pilate attempted to be neutral in his reaction to the Christ but he was unsuccessful. His cowardice was a vote against Christ, and resulted in gross injustice. The guilt that was on his hands was too great for him to wash it off with water. The blood of Christ was on his hands.

Says R.V.G. Tasker: “Jesus does not expect men to find it easy to make the right decision. He realizes that just because absolute obedience and absolute faith are demanded, many will make excuses. If God could be allowed to reign along with others, the decisions would be easier, but that cannot be: so there will be many pretexts for avoiding the challenge altogether.” (The Nature and Purpose of the Gospels, pg. 75)

### **III. The Wise Men represent all who react to Christ with adoring worship.**

#### **A. The Wise Men sought Christ and found Him.**

The wise men only found Christ after they diligently sought for Him. “Where,” they asked Herod, “is the newly born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in its rising and we have come to worship Him.” (Matthew 2:2)

Centuries before, God spoke through Jeremiah and said, “*Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*” (Jeremiah 29:13) Our seeking must be genuine; our asking must be sincere; our knocking must be persistent. God will only be found when we seek him with our whole heart. One cannot be pretentious, proud, or half-hearted, and expect to find Christ. The Wise Men were not satisfied until they found the Christ-child. Their searching was in earnest. To find the Child was their only concern.

“An alcoholic told me he had saved eighteen alcoholics, got them straight, but he himself would fall again and again into drinking bouts.

In the midst of his own failure he never gave up working to help others. Then one day he was lying in bed reading ABUNDANT LIVING, when suddenly the light dawned. He knew he was a changed man. He went to the telephone, called up a friend, and said: 'It's happened. I'm free.' And he was. He has never touched alcohol since. Now he works with the leisured heart." (Conversion; E. Stanley Jones)

Jesus' parable of the lost coin well illustrates the necessity for diligence in ones search for God. In the parable, the precious pearl which was found in a field caused the finder to sell all that he had in order to purchase that gem. Full surrender is essential if one is to be a disciple of Christ and find peace in life. He who persistently is hypocritical in his asking will never find God and in the end be condemned by God. The following poem was engraved on an old slab in the Cathedral of Lubeck, Germany:

Ye call Me Master and obey Me not,  
Ye call Me Light and see Me not,  
Ye call Me Way and walk not,  
Ye call Me Life and desire Me not,  
Ye call Me wise and follow Me not,  
Ye call Me fair and love Me not,  
Ye call Me rich and ask Me not,  
Ye call Me eternal and seek Me not,  
Ye call Me gracious and trust Me not,  
Ye call Me noble and serve Me not,  
Ye call Me mighty and honor Me not,  
Ye call Me just and fear Me not.  
If I condemn you, blame Me not.

(Anonymous (Taken from Christ in Poetry, pg. 327)

#### **B. The Wise Men offered gifts to Christ.**

"When they came into the house, they saw the little child with Mary, His mother and they fell down and worshiped Him; and they opened their treasures, and offered to Him gifts." (Matthew 2:11 Barclay)

The essence of true adoration is self-surrender and presentation of ourselves to God.

"Who answers Christ's insistent call  
Must give himself, his life, his all,  
Without one backward look.

Who sets his hand unto the plow,  
And glances back with anxious brow,  
is calling hath mistook.  
Christ claims him wholly for his own;  
He must be Christ's, and Christ's alone."  
(By John Oxenham, - taken from Christ in Poetry)

When one considers the supreme sacrifice of Christ, he becomes "lost in wonder, love, and praise," and is constrained to say, "Here, Lord, I give myself to thee, tis all that I can do."

When one bows in adoration to Christ, he acknowledges that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

"O Thou great Friend to all the sons of men,  
Who once appear'st in humblest guise below,  
Sin to rebuke, to break the captive's chain,  
To call thy brethren forth from want and woe!--

Thee would I sing. Thy truth is still the light  
Which guides the nations groping on their way,  
Stumbling and falling in disastrous night,  
Yet hoping ever for the perfect day.

Yes; thou art still the life; thou art the way  
The holiest know, - light, life, and way of heaven;  
And they who dearest hope and deepest pray  
Toil by the truth, life, way that thou hast given;  
And in thy name aspiring mortals trust  
To uplift their bleeding brothers rescued from the dust."  
(By Theodore Parker - taken from Christ in Poetry, pg. 338, 339)

**CONCLUSION:** "What think ye of Christ?" That is the question that every man must answer. All men who confront Christ must react in one of three different ways. One's reaction to Christ will either be hostile, indifferent, or adoring.

One may react with hostility to Christ and attempt to eliminate the truth. However, the truth can never be destroyed, and God's pursuit of love is persistent and conquering.

One may react with indifference to Christ and attempt to avoid Christ or His claim. To assume an attitude of indifference is really out rightly to reject Christ.

One may react with adoring worship to Christ. To worship Christ means to present one's self completely to Christ as a token and gift of love and adoration.

How will you react to the Christ of Bethlehem who is also the Christ of the Ages? To react with hostility is futile; to react with indifference is tragic; to react with adoration is safe and wise.

## HOW DO YOU REACT TO CHRIST?

### Questions

1. Describe briefly the kind of man King Herod was, as revealed by his actions and reactions to others, that easily explains the reasons why he would be insanely jealous when he heard about the birth of the Christ Child.
2. Tell with what degree of conviction you believe the following statements: “The message of the Gospel may be either accepted or rejected, but it can never be eliminated. It’s like a flame that can never be extinguished or quenched.”
3. From your own experience and observations, share an example which illustrates the truth of the following statements: “The truth cannot be destroyed, although it may be rejected. It will always inevitably triumph and the rejecter will eventually suffer because of his rejection of the truth.”
4. Why do you think people try to destroy Christ and Christ’s messengers? (Note John 3:19-20; Hebrew 4:13)
5. In an attempt to silence the “Voice of Conscience”, what do some persons, bent on living a life of evil, say about their conscience, in an attempt to rationalize their evil behavior?
6. What is the difference between the “guilt theory” and the “impulse theory” of anxiety, in the face of moral decisions?
7. From your own experience, can you identify in any way with God’s persistent, yet loving, pursuit of you, as described in the poem by Francis Thompson, entitled “The Hound of Heaven”?
8. How do you respond to those non-Christians who declare that they are not believers because they have observed that the “Church is a failure and Christians are hypocrites”?
9. To those persons (non-Christians) who are preoccupied with their own worldly pursuits and who believe they have plenty of time in the future to consider “religion and God and the Church”, what do you believe would be important for you to say? (Note Hebrew 2:1-3)
10. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “An indecision to follow Christ and an attempted neutrality, automatically becomes a decision against Christ.” (Note Matthew 12:30; Matthew 6:24)

11. From your study of the Life of Jesus in the Gospels, tell why you believe the following statements accurately or inaccurately describe the difficulty of a human decision to follow Jesus as the Lord of their lives: “Jesus does not expect men to find it easy to make the right decision. If God could be allowed to reign along with others, the decision would be easier, but that cannot be: so there will be many pretexts for avoiding the challenge altogether.”
12. What are the conditions which a non-Christian must meet, in order truly to “find Christ” and to experience the forgiveness of sins and intimate fellowship with God? (Note Jeremiah 29:13)
13. Tell with what degree of conviction you identify personally with the following statements: “Our seeking must be genuine; our asking must be sincere; our knocking must be persistent. God will only be found when we seek him with our whole heart. One cannot be pretentious, proud, or half-hearted, and expect to find Christ.”

Do you believe a sinner may call upon Christ to save him, even though the motives and desires within the seeking sinner may not be altogether “pure” or “righteous”? Give an illustration of a person who became a believer, even though his motives for “coming to Christ” might be considered questionable.

14. Is it possible for a believer to be so committed to Christ as his Lord, that he (as a believer) can declare that he is “truly free” and that he is serving Christ with a “leisured heart” (as E. Stanley Jones states)? What does it mean for a believer to have a “leisured heart”?
15. Is it possible for a person truly to adore God without that person honestly surrendering himself to God? Why or why not? Tell if you agree with the following statement: “The essence of a true adoration is self-surrender and presentation of ourselves to God.”



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS**



## CHAPTER 4

**SUBJECT:** The Genealogy of Jesus

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 1: 1-17

**TEXT:** “*But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons.*” Galatians 4: 4-5)

**INTRODUCTION:** History has experienced no greater event than the coming of Christ. The course of all history has been shaped largely under the influence of the lowly Nazarene.

- I. Importance of Genealogy:
  - A. To provide proof of a pure lineage (For A Jew)
  - B. To appreciate the ‘Personalism’ of the Bible (For A Christian)
- II. Symbolism of Genealogy
  - A. Three sections in the genealogy
  - B. Symbolic meaning of the three stages
- III. Significance of Genealogy
  - A. The barriers between male and female are down
  - B. The barriers between saint and sinner are down
  - C. The barriers between Jew and Gentile are down

**CONCLUSION:** The genealogy is important for it establishes the fact that Jesus is the Son of David and thus emphasizes the Messiahship of Jesus - the Promised Seed of David and the Hope of Israel. It also shows the ‘personalism’ of the Bible, that God is interested in individuals as well as crowds, which Jesus’ life demonstrated.

The three sections of the genealogy symbolically demonstrate the three stages of human history: (1) “Man was born for greatness”, (2) “Man lost his greatness”, (3) “Man can regain his greatness”.

This genealogy is mainly significant in that it shows the universality of the Gospel. Christ is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Salvation is offered to both male and female, to both Jew and gentile, and even to the despised outcast.

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**INTRODUCTION:** History has experienced no greater event than the coming of Christ. Historians acknowledge the greatness of Christ by choosing Christ’s birth as the dividing point in history. An event is either dated as B.C. or A.D., thus showing that Christ is the focus of all history. The course of all history has been shaped largely under the influence of the lowly Nazarene. More books have been written about Christ than any other character.

The world is deeply indebted to the Gospel writers - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is Matthew and Luke that tell us about Jesus’ birth and early childhood. Matthew tells us that it is to the world that the Christ child was given.

**PROPOSITION:** Let us look at the very opening account of Matthew’s Gospel and seek to better understand the life and ministry of Christ, who came as a mere babe of lowly birth. Matthew’s opening genealogy has something to teach us. Let us look at it in terms of (1) The Importance of the Genealogy, (2) The Symbolism of the Genealogy, (3) The Significance of the Genealogy.

I. Importance of Genealogy:

A. To provide proof of a pure lineage (For A Jew)

To an American reader, a book would be considered dull and drab if it began with a long list of names, telling the genealogy of the main character. “But,” says Barclay, “to a Jew this was the most natural, and the most interesting, and indeed the most essential way to begin the story of any man’s life...The reason for this interest in pedigrees was that the Jews set the greatest possible store on purity of lineage. If in any man there was the slightest admixture of foreign blood, he lost his right to be called a Jew, and a member of the people of God.” (Matthew, page 1, 2)

Because the book of Matthew was originally written mainly for Jewish readers, it was important to establish the pure Jewish lineage of Jesus and to trace his genealogy back to Abraham. The uniqueness and greatness of Jesus’

genealogy is seen in the fact that King David was one of Jesus' ancestors. This is significant because David was the greatest of all Israelite kings and his kingdom was considered to be the ideal kingdom in Israel's history. At the time Jesus was born, the Jews were expecting God to send a Deliverer to restore to Israel the glory which she once knew under the rule of David.

Israel's oppression, defeat, and captivity did not stamp out Israel's hope of eventual and ultimate victory over her enemies. Comments Barclay, "It was the dream of the common people that into this world there would come a descendant of David who would lead them to the glory which they believed to be theirs by right." (Matthew, page 6) Jesus' genealogy is traced back to David and thus seeks to present Jesus as the long-looked-for Messiah, Deliverer, and 'Anointed One' who would restore to Israel her lost glory. This genealogy points to Jesus as the Christ - the Hope of Israel.

#### B. To appreciate the 'Personalism' of the Bible (For A Christian)

Barclay quotes from Dr. Paul Tournier who has a paragraph in one of his books on what he calls the personalism of the Bible. "*God says to Moses, 'I know thy name' (Exodus 33: 17). He says to Cyrus, 'I am the Lord which call thee by thy name' (Isaiah 45: 3).* These texts express the essence of the personalism of the Bible. One is struck on reading the Bible, by the importance in it of personal names. Whole chapters are devoted to long genealogies. When I was young I used to think that they could well have been dropped from the Biblical Canon. But, I have since realized that these series of proper names bear witness to the fact that, in the Biblical perspective, man is neither a thing nor an abstraction, neither a species nor an idea, that he is not a fraction of the mass, as the Marxists see him, but that he is a person." (Barclay's Hebrews, pp.60, 61)

Throughout Jesus' ministry, he was always concerned with individuals. It is true that He was moved with compassion for the multitudes, but His compassion went beyond the multitudes to the lone individual. He saw each person as unique and worthy of His personal attention. Even in the midst of the crowd, He took time for the individual. In the midst of a crowd, Jesus healed the woman who was sick of an incurable disease for twelve years. Jesus spotted the curious Zacchaeus even when the crowds thronged him, and Zacchaeus became the object of Jesus' special attention and love within the privacy of Zacchaeus' home. The healing of a blind man near Jericho vividly shows Christ's personal compassion. "*And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David,*

*have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood, and commanded him, that he should be brought unto him.” (Luke 18: 35, 40)*

There is no problem too small, but what Jesus is interested in it. Jesus' heart is touched for your grief. He does care when the nights are long and the days are fraught with care. He cares for each individual and desires to fold you to His loving bosom. It is important for us to know that Jesus cares for individuals, and the genealogy of Jesus helps us to realize the 'personalism' of Jesus.

## **II. Symbolism of Genealogy**

### **A. Three sections in the genealogy**

Barclay notes the three stages in Jesus' genealogy. "The first section takes the story of history up to David. David was the man who welded Israel into a nation, and who made the Jews a power in the world. The first section takes the story up to the rise of Israel's greatest king. The second section takes the story down to the exile to Babylon. It is the section which tells of the nation's shame, and tragedy, and disaster. The third section takes the story down to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the person who liberated men from their slavery, who rescued them from their disaster, and in whom the tragedy was turned into triumph." (Matthew, page 5)

### **B. Symbolic meaning of the three stages**

Each of the three sections in the genealogy symbolically represents one of the three stages in the history of humanity and, indeed, the history of every individual.

1. First Stage - The first section of the genealogy which is from Abraham to David is the section of Israel's greatness. It represents the first stage in man's history - the stage of man's greatness. As Barclay says, "Man was born for greatness." Man was created in God's own image, and as such was made only for greatness and fellowship. Man had sweet and blessed communion with his Creator and was meant to enjoy His presence forever. Innocence, uprightness, strength, and obedience characterized man's beginning. God communed with man in the coolness of the day. As the crown of

God's creation, God gave man superior intelligence and permitted man to subdue the earth. Man's body was strong, his mind was superb, and his spirit was unblemished.

2. Second Stage - The second section of this genealogy is from Solomon to the exile and portrays Israel's decline and decay. It represents the second stage of man's history - the Fall. "Man was born for greatness" but "Man lost his greatness." As Billy Graham says, "The Bible presents man as being in rebellion against God. This began when in an overt act of self-will; our first parents rebelled against divine law. In this experience man ruined his divine image, became alienated from God, and started on a course of action that produced civilizations and cultures saturated with crime, lust, hate, greed, and war. The earth is a planet in rebellion." (World Aflame, pg. xv) G. K. Chesterton once said of man, "Whatever else is true of man, man is not what he was meant to be." (Barclay's Matthew, page 4) Man fell from the height of splendor to the depth of despair, from the beauty of perfection to the vileness of distortion, from the joy of fellowship to the anguish of separation, from the freedom of innocency to the bondage of guilt, from the strength of health to the weakness of disease, from the glory of life to the corruptness of death, from the richness of an heir to the poorness of an outcast, from the fullness of knowledge to the shamefulfulness of ignorance.

Man is an estranged creature, haunted by loneliness and paralyzed by fear. Man is alienated from God, from his fellowman, and from himself. Man was made for greatness but is wallowing in despair. Man was made for communion, but is plagued by feelings of separation and rejection. Man was made to only enjoy peace, but hears constantly the clamor of disharmony. Man was made for love, but is too often a creature of hate. Man was made to be integrated, but is a bundle of frayed nerves. Man was made for God, but is a rebel in rebellion against God's perfect will. When man rebelled against God's commandments, man died. Man's sensitivity to fellowship became annulled by sin. Man's innocence became blemished by guilt, and his capacity for nobility became shriveled by self-centeredness. Man's nature is corrupted by sin. Every area of man's activity feels the pollution of sin. Man's will is rendered so weak that he is unable to subdue the passions of his flesh. Man's knowledge is so inadequate that he is unable to discover and pursue the pathway which leads to righteousness. Man's nature is warped, twisted, and corrupted.

3. Third Stage - The third section of this genealogy is from after the

exile to the coming of Christ. Christ is the one by whom Israel could have regained her true greatness. This section represents the third stage of man's history - Redemption and Reconciliation. "Man can regain his greatness." (Barclay's Matthew, page 4) Christ is merciful and full of grace, and therefore seeks to make the undeserving child of hell a child of heaven. Christ came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 10:10) He came to rescue the perishing, to restore the downtrodden, to befriend the lonely, and to heal the sick in soul. He came not to condemn, but instead to save (John 1: 17). He came to "save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) The Just One died for unjust, fallen humanity, that He might make man righteous. Christ came to make an integrated life out of a shattered life, to make a strong character out of a shallow life, to make a confident and radiant life out of a guilt-ridden life. Through Christ man can come once again to know greatness.

Says Barclay in summary, "In his genealogy Matthew shows us the royalty of kingship gained; the tragedy of freedom lost; the glory of liberty restored. And that, in the mercy of God, is the story of mankind, and of each individual man." (Barclay's Matthew, page 4)

### **III. Significance of Genealogy**

This genealogy is particularly interesting since the name of four women appear in it. It is even more interesting to note the character and circumstances of these women. Rahab was a harlot of Jericho, Ruth was a Moabite and not a Jewess, Tamar was an adulteress, and Bathsheba was the woman whom David seduced and took from Uriah through murder.

The appearance of these names in Jesus' genealogy shows something very significant and foreshadows what was accomplished through Christ's ministry. (Barclay notes the significance in his comments in Matthew, volume 1; page 7, 8)

#### **A. The barriers between male and female are down**

During the day in which we live there is little public discrimination between male and female. However, during Jesus' day this was not so. The Jews had a very low estimate of women. Every morning each Jewish man thanked God in his prayers that God had not made him "a Gentile, a slave or a woman." A woman was the sole property of her husband or father and was not treated as a person but rather as a thing to be used for her husband's advantage. She was almost the same as a slave, and could be quickly and easily divorced by her

husband for almost no reason. She had no legal rights, and thus could not herself get a divorce.

The appearance of women in Jesus' genealogy shows that God considers women important, so important that women are named in the ancestry of the Son of God! Jesus came to destroy the despicable attitude of contempt that the ancient world manifested toward women. We can see the tenderness of Jesus as he wept with Mary and Martha over the death of Lazarus. We can see the winning love of Jesus which He patiently manifested to the despised Samaritan woman. We can see the heart of compassion as we see Jesus restore to life the son of the woman of Nain. Jesus cared for all - both male and female - and was not influenced by the hostile and indifferent attitudes towards women of his day.

Barclay notes that "A. W. Verrale, the great classical scholar, once said that one of the chief diseases of which ancient civilization died was a low view of women. Christ introduced a new and noble view towards women. He made no discrimination. Paul reflected Christ's attitude when he wrote, *'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus!'*" (Galatians 3: 28)

#### B. The barriers between saint and sinner are down

The religious rulers of Jesus' day prided themselves in their righteousness and looked upon publicans and sinners as the untouchable filth of the world. This high wall of discrimination between saint and sinner was shattered by the life and message of Christ. Christ said that He came to seek and to save the lost and that He came not to heal the healthy but to heal the diseased. Said Jesus, "Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." (Luke 15: 7)

Christ takes the despised woman of Samaria and makes her an honored messenger of love. Christ takes a demoned-possessed outcast, and makes him a respectable citizen. Christ takes a high-browed Pharisee and makes him a humble and faithful follower. Christ takes a doubting Thomas and makes him a flaming evangelist. Christ takes a thieving Onesimus and makes him a faithful servant. Christ takes an adulterous outcast and makes her a pure and respectable lady. Christ takes the dying thief and makes him a son of paradise. He takes the guilt-ridden publican and makes him a free and justified believer. Christ restores a wandering prodigal to the stature of full sonship. Christ breaks the shackles of sin and sets the prisoner free. Christ seeks and finds the lost sheep. He applies his healing salve to the sores of sin, and

restores the downtrodden to wholeness and health. Christ came to seek and to save the lost. *“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”* (John 3: 17)

### C. The barriers between Jew and Gentile are down

Christ came to break down all racial barriers. Let it be noted that not all in Christ’s genealogy were Jews. Ruth was a Moabite and the law laid it down, *“An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever.”* (Deuteronomy 23: 3)

The Jews hated all Gentiles and considered them only good as “fuel for hell”. When Paul addressed the Gentile Christians in Ephesus he reminds them what Gentile people were considered before the time of Christ. *“Do not lose sight of the fact that you were born ‘gentiles’, known by those whose bodies were circumcised as ‘the uncircumcised’. You were without Christ; you were utter strangers to God’s chosen community, Israel, and you had no knowledge of, or right to, the promised agreements. You had nothing to look forward to and no God to whom you could turn.”* (Ephesians 2: 11, 12)

This dividing wall of hostility and enmity was brought to an end by the cross of Christ. Says Paul about Christ: *“For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity between us. By this sacrifice he removed the hostility of the Law, with all its commandments and rules, and made in himself out of the two, Jew and Gentile, one new man, thus producing peace. For he reconciled both to God by the sacrifice of one body on the cross, and by this act made utterly irrelevant the antagonism between them. Then he came and told both you who were far from God and us who were near that*

*the war was over. And it is through him that both of us now can approach the Father in the one Spirit.”* (Ephesians 2: 14- 18, Phillips)

**CONCLUSION:** The genealogy is important for it establishes the fact that Jesus is the Son of David and thus emphasizes the Messiahship of Jesus - the Promised Seed of David and the Hope of Israel. It also shows the ‘personalism’ of the Bible, that God is interested in individuals as well as crowds, which Jesus’ life demonstrated.

The three sections of the genealogy symbolically demonstrate the three stages of human history: (1) “Man was born for greatness”, (2) “Man lost his greatness”, (3) “Man can regain his greatness”.

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# THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

## QUESTIONS

1. Why, to a Jew, is genealogy so very important?
2. What significance did the fact that King David was one of Jesus' ancestors, have for Matthew's readers?
3. For a Christian reader, what significance do Biblical genealogical lists have?
4. What evidence is there from Scripture that, in spite of the vast multitudes of human beings in our world today, Jesus Christ cares personally for you and wishes to minister to your own personal burdens and hurts? (Note Luke 8: 40 - 48; Luke 18: 35 - 43; Luke 19: 1-10)
5. What are the three sections in Jesus' genealogy, as recorded by Matthew in Matthew 1: 1- 17, and what do each of these three sections symbolize?
6. Who, according to your understanding, is responsible for the "Fall of Man" in the Garden of Eden - Man or God? Give your reaction to the following statement: "Whatever else is true of man, man is not what he was meant to be."
7. What evidence is there from Scripture that "Man can regain his greatness" which he lost in the Garden of Eden? (Note Romans 5: 8 - 21; I Corinthians 15: 21 - 22)
8. How does the appearance of the names of Rahab, Ruth, Tamar, and Bathsheba foreshadow what was accomplished through Christ's ministry?
9. Describe the popular attitude towards women, and how women generally were treated, during the time of Jesus.
10. In contrast to the contemptible attitude towards women in New Testament times, what was Jesus' attitude toward women? (Note John 11: 1 - 45; John 4: 1 - 39; John 8: 1 - 11, Luke 7: 11 - 16; Luke 7: 36 - 50; John 19: 25 - 27; John 20: 11 - 18).
11. What is your personal reaction to abuses and to discriminations against women in our modern-day world, both in and outside of the Church?
  - a. Your reaction to wife abuse in cases of domestic violence?

- b. Your reaction to single mothers, whose inadequate income as single parent, brings great financial hardships in raising several small children?
- c. Your reaction to men who have divorced their wives, and who neglect or refuse to pay “child support” to their former wives who are raising their children?
- d. Your reaction to women whose husbands have died, and who, as widows, are very lonesome and in need of fellowship and of material relief?
- e. Your reaction to young unwed mothers who are being “counseled” to abort their babies?
- f. Your reaction to women who have gravely sinned by aborting their children, and who are now full of guilt and shame and who are deeply depressed?
- g. Your reaction to professionally trained women whose employers refuse to give them salaries which are equal to those which are paid to equally trained and experienced male employees?
- h. Your reaction to those crude and lust-filled men who find “delight” and “fun” and “sport” in sexually harassing women who work for them?
- i. Your reaction to ecclesiastical officials and denominational leaders who refuse to ordain dedicated Christian ladies who have definitely sensed a divine call to preach and to pastor a local Church?

What responsibility do Christian men in general and Christian husbands in particular have, in protecting and defending and ennobling women in the general public and women specifically within the Christian Church and Christian Family?

- 12. What, according to the New Testament Gospels, is Jesus’ attitude towards “down-and-out”, despised sinners? (Luke 15: 7; John 3: 17)
- 13. What significance do you attach to the fact that not all in Jesus’ genealogy were of the Jewish race?
- 14. How is the lot and place of Gentile persons described, before Jesus’ coming, according to Ephesians 2: 11, 12?
- 15. What hope did Gentile people (non-Jews) find, as a result of the coming and the ministry of Jesus Christ? (Note Ephesians 2: 14 - 18)

## CHAPTER 5

### THE MEANING OF THE INCARNATION



## CHAPTER 5

**SUBJECT:** The Meaning of The Incarnation

**SCRIPTURE:** John 1: 1 - 14

**TEXT:** *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (John 1: 14a)*

**INTRODUCTION:** This is the meaning of the Incarnation - God has stepped out of the picture (Universe) and become a man to live and to die for mankind. Jesus showed us the kind of God that rules the universe - a God who loves and who has come to redeem.

**PROPOSITION:** At Christmas Time we sing of the coming of Immanuel or Jesus - and Immanuel means ‘God with us’, or ‘God in us’, or ‘God for us’. It means that Eternity has invaded Time, that God has become a man.

- I. God with Us
  - A. In Sorrow and Pain and Loneliness and Poverty
  - B. In Joy
  
- II. God in Us
  - A. To Convict
  - B. To Forgive
  - C. To Cleanse
  - D. To Comfort
  - E. To Keep
  
- III. God for Us
  - A. In Making Decisions (small and great)
  - B. In Meeting Satanic Attacks
  - C. In Carrying Out Life’s Tasks

**CONCLUSION:** God has stepped out of the picture and is with us now - through the power of the Spirit!

## CHAPTER 5

**SUBJECT:** The Meaning of the Incarnation

**SCRIPTURE:** John 1: 1 - 14

**TEXT:** *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (John 1: 14a)*

**INTRODUCTION:** “E. Stanley Jones has told a story of a little boy who stood before a picture of his absent father, and then turned to his mother and said wistfully, ‘I wish Father would step out of the picture.’” (Sangster’s Special - Day Sermons; page 17)

This is the meaning of the Incarnation - God has stepped out of the picture (Universe) and become a man to live and to die for mankind. Jesus showed us the kind of God that rules the universe - a God who loves and who has come to redeem.

“The Christian faith is not just a little better than other faiths - a little more moral, more free from contradictory elements, more lofty in its conceptions. It is that, but it is more - it is different in kind. Religions are man’s search for God. The Gospel is God’s search for man. Therefore, there are many religions, but only one Gospel. Religions are the Word become word; the Gospel is the Word become flesh.” (E. S. Jones; page 8 of ‘Word Became Flesh’)

**PROPOSITION:** At Christmas Time we sing of the coming of Immanuel or Jesus - and Immanuel means ‘God with us’, or ‘God in us’, or ‘God for us’. It means that Eternity has invaded Time, that God has become a man.

### I. GOD WITH US

“The greatest thing of all is this, that when you see this compassionate Christ, you are seeing God. This is the comfort which the Advent tidings bring - and it is all in that one word Immanuel: for Immanuel means ‘God with us’, with us in Jesus, God going through the darkness with you, God saying, ‘My friend, you must not carry the trouble alone any longer - cast it down at My feet: I will take it and carry it, and the hardest part shall be my part.’ The word Immanuel means that where we, with all our poor human words of comfort, break down utterly, God begins. Immanuel means that when you feel nobody wants you, God does. Immanuel means that when your heart is crying to every would-be comforter, ‘Ah, you don’t understand, you can’t see things from my side of them, you are outside’ - Immanuel means that God is right inside. Immanuel means God with you and in you, God making the pain a sacrament, the conflict a crusade, and the broken dreams a ladder up to heaven. And so, through Christ, God speaks home to the heart of Jerusalem.” (The Gates of New Life; page 197, 198; James Stewart)

## A. In Sorrow and Pain and Loneliness and Poverty

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained  
Too deeply for mirth and song;  
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,  
And the way grows weary and long?

O yes, He cares; I know He cares,  
His heart is touched with my grief;  
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,  
I know my Saviour cares.

Jesus is called ‘a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief’. He feels and he knows every burden you carry. The Bible exhorts you “*To let all your anxieties fall upon him, for his interest is in you.*” (I Peter 5: 7, Moffatt.)

When Jesus’ friend, Lazarus died, and Jesus saw Lazarus’ sisters in great grief, ‘Jesus wept’, and not only wept, but did something about the problem - He raised Lazarus to life.

“The poor mother of Nain, crying as if her heart would break as she stumbled after the pathetic little procession going out to bury her only son - Christ could not bear it!” (Stewart; page 197) So Jesus raised him to life.

An embittered father, who had lost his son in the war, asked a minister: ‘Where was God when my son died?’ Replied the minister, ‘The same place He was when His own son died.’ There is no experience that God can’t understand.

God is with you in loneliness, for Jesus understands what it means to have his one-time follower’s leave and forsake him. Jesus went through His trial all alone - with even his disciples leaving him. You need never walk alone. Jesus said, ‘Lo, I am with you always.’

God is with us in times of poverty. Jesus experienced the depths of poverty. Born in a manger, working hard, long hours in a carpenter shop to ‘make ends meet’ for the family that he was to provide for, after Joseph died, while Jesus’ brothers and sisters were still young - these are experiences that enable the poor to so closely identify with Jesus. Said Jesus, “*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath no where to lay his head.*” (Matthew 9: 20) Jesus left the ‘ivory palaces’ of heaven, and emptied himself on earth for man. “*For ye know 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.*” (II Corinthians 8: 9)

### B. In Joy

Jesus identifies with us in our joys. In fact, Jesus enjoyed life so much, that his sour critics called Jesus a wine-bibber. *“The Son of man came eating and drinking (showing jolly spirit) and they (the critics) say, Behold a man gluttonous, and wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”* Jesus often ate and dined at sinners’ homes.

Jesus showed gaiety of spirit at the wedding at Cana of Galilee, and wanted the guests and hosts to be so happy, that he changed water into wine, to save the hosts (who were probably poor people) embarrassment and shame.

The spirit of Jesus is reflected in the writings of Jesus’ followers: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.”* (Philippians 4: 4) *“And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”* (I John 1: 4) *“Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”* (Ephesians 5: 18, 19)

## II. GOD IN US

### A. To Convict

If it were not for the mercy of God’s conviction of sin and of our need for Christ, no man would be saved. God is in every man to create a need for Christ. “John Nelsen, weighed down with a deep sense of sin, went to hear John Wesley. Though unknown to the field preacher, Nelson felt that Wesley was aiming his message directly at him, as one standing alone before a preacher. ‘As soon as he got up on the stand, he stroked back his hair, and turned his face towards where I stood, and I thought fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance struck such awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it make my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock: and when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me. When he had done, I said, “This man can tell the secrets of my heart”’.” (Mavis; Personal Renewal Through Christian Conversion; page 45)

### B. To Forgive

God is in us to forgive us all our sins. *“As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”* (Psalms 103: 12) God has hid our sins in the sea of forgetfulness, never to remember them against us

again. Says God, *“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”* (Hebrews 6: 12)

I believe the most important word of the English language is “Forgiveness”.

#### C. To Cleanse

*“Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin...Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”* (Psalms 51: 2, 7)

William Carvosso, saintly class-leader in the Methodist Church for over 60 years, had prayed earnestly for ‘inward holiness’. The Spirit directed him to the promise in Ezekiel 36: 25 - 27. At length, one evening, while engaged in prayer meeting, the great deliverance came. ‘I began to exercise faith, by believing, “I shall have the blessing now.” Just at that moment a heavenly influence filled the room; and no sooner had I spoken than refining fire went “through my heart - illuminated my soul -scattered its life through every part, and sanctified the whole.” I then received the full witness of the Spirit that the blood of Jesus Christ had cleansed me from all sin. I cried out, “This is what I wanted! I have now got a new heart.”...O what boundless happiness there is in Christ, and all for such a poor sinner as I.” (Entire Sanctification; page 73)

#### D. To Comfort

Jesus said, *“I will not leave you as orphans.”* The Holy Spirit is in us to enable us to cope successfully with life. He enables us to ‘Brave Life Together’. The Spirit imparts courage and rest and power. There is rest for the weary. Said Jesus, *“Come to me and I will give you rest - all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke. Wear my yoke - for it fits perfectly and let me teach you; for I am gentle and humble, and you shall find rest for your souls; for I give you only light burdens.”* (Matthew 11: 28)

“True comfort of Christ is a strong, bracing, reinforcing thing. It is like a wind to a boat that has been becalmed. It is like the gift of a job to a man who has been for years out of work. It is like the clasp of a friend’s hand in a time of need. This is certainly the root idea of the word ‘comfort’ in the New Testament ; and when Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit as the ‘Comforter’, He is really giving a promise that God will stand by a man in the day of his need, and brace his heart and nerve his arm, and make him more than conqueror.” (Stewart page 193; in The Gates of New Life.)

“A very sensitive and dedicated Christian, after a deep disappointment in some of her trusted colleagues, threw herself on her bed and cried, ‘O Jesus, if it weren’t for You I’d not be a Christian five minutes’. He held her steady through that letdown.” (Word Become Flesh; page 339; E. S. Jones)

#### E. To Keep

The Holy Spirit is in us to keep us from sin and evil. *“The Lord is faithful; he will make you strong, guard you from satanic attacks of every kind.”* (II Thessalonians 3: 3) Declared Paul: *“I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to safely guard all that I have given him until the day of his return.”* (2 Timothy 1: 12) *“His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4: 7)

Jesus said, *“Lo, I am with you even until the end of the world.”*

Says E. Stanley Jones: “For sixty years I’ve thought of one subject, have spoken about that one subject, and have written about that one subject - that one subject, a Person, Jesus Christ. After thinking and talking about one subject for sixty years, one should be bored and should want a moral holiday, want to get away and think of something else. On the contrary, I was never so excited, so exhilarated, so full of surprise as now. Something new breaks out from Him every day, a surprise around every corner, horizons cracking, life popping with novelty and meaning - and value. The Truth is making me free, free to find more Truth and yet more Truth. And so on forever and forever.” (Word Became Flesh; page 51). “The testimony of Evan Hopkins can help us.” The year of his deeper crisis was 1873. In 1913 - just four decades later - he was at Keswick. He opened one of his addresses by saying: ‘I think I ought to be the most thankful man in this tent, because I am privileged to testify that the blessings last. It has lasted with me forty years. I shall never forget that sacred spot where the first consecration meeting was held, in London in May, 1873. I had been converted thirteen years, brought to the Lord through a coast guardsman, and I had learned the need of my own heart during those years. At the time that I refer to I was immensely stirred to seek this blessing. We had heard about it and there in Curzon Chapel, Mayfair, under the gallery, sixteen well-known Christian people met together...this was just the beginning of the movement, and I ought to be one of the most thankful men in this tent, because of God’s gracious keeping power for forty years. I want to bear testimony to that fact, and give Him all the glory. There have been many failures. I am not glorying in self, but what was revealed to me that day - the all-sufficiency of Christ - as precious to my soul as it ever was.’” (Prayer and Life’s Highest; page 87; Rees)

### III. GOD FOR US

The Bible asks the important question, ‘If God be for us, who can be against us’? ‘Immanuel’ means that God is for us.

#### A. In Making Decisions (small and great)

God promises: *“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”* (Psalms 32: 8) *“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”* (Proverbs 3: 6)

#### B. In Meeting Satanic Attacks

*“The Lord is faithful; he will make you strong and guard you from satanic attacks of every kind.”* (II Thessalonians 3: 3) *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as in common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* (I Corinthians 10: 13)

*“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”* (Luke 22: 31, 32)

Said Jesus: *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”* (John 16: 33)

#### C. In Carrying Out Life’s Tasks

“Susanna Wesley had a prayer: ‘Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the Church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in Thy presence.’” (Barclay’s Matthew, Vol. 2, page 180)

God is for us, in helping us to carry out our daily tasks. One college youth was having difficulty disciplining himself to do his college studies, and he made this a special subject of prayer, and discovered that he was able to do a much greater job.

Brother Lawrence, who worked as a monastery cook in the 17th century, was a simple man who learned to take God with him in the simplest tasks of life. He wrote:

“Lord of all pots and pans and things....  
Make me a saint by getting meals  
And washing up the plates!”

He further testified: “The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if

were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.” (Practicing The Presence of God; page 6)

“Mrs. Billy Graham admits ‘that I do most of my praying “on the hoof”. She says that sometimes a busy homemaker simply cannot get down upon her knees often. ‘ but to know that you can wash dishes, iron, clean, shop, drive, and in whatever you have to do Jesus Christ is there beside you, urging you to talk over your problems with him - that is a joy and a comfort it is impossible to describe.’” (*Alive To God Through Prayer*; Donald Demaray, pg 89)

“After thirty-five years of service, the superintendent of nurses in a Philadelphia hospital retired. Her service had been outstanding because of her radiant personality, her thoughtfulness, her self-forgetting service, her courage and her hope. A banquet was held to honor her on her retirement. Hundreds of persons, doctors, nurses, other hospital personnel, former patients and friends gathered to do her honor. Speeches gave glowing tribute to her service. Then she arose, and told of an incident that took place thirty-five years before that changed her life. It was the last year as a student nurse. At Christmas time she found the schedule of duty did not permit her to get away from the hospital, while other girls had Christmas leave. She was homesick and irritated, and her attitude was reflected in everything she did. On Christmas Eve, a little boy was brought into the ward where she was on duty. The day after Christmas she was going about her duties, when she entered the room to help the little boy.

Suddenly the lad spoke up and said, ‘I guess you never heard of the baby Jesus, did you?’ She was stunned by the remark and snapped, ‘Why did you say that?’ The little boy looked up from his pillow and said, ‘Cause you couldn’t look so cross and sad if you had heard of the baby Jesus!’

The now-retired superintendent of nurses said she ran from the ward. In the seclusion of her own room, she fell on her knees and promised God that as long as she was a nurse, she would never give any patient reason to think that she had never heard about Jesus. The incident, she said, changed her life. Her devotion to her work, and her enthusiasm for her task were dated from that hour, now sacred in her hall of memories.” (Sermon Builder; page 13, 14 of Dec. 1972)

**CONCLUSION:** Remember - ‘Immanuel’ has come - God with Us (in sorrow, pain, loneliness, and poverty), God In Us (to comfort, to forgive, to cleanse, to comfort to keep), God For Us (in making decisions, in meeting satanic attacks, in carrying out life’s tasks).

God has stepped out of the picture and is with us now - through the power of the Spirit!  
Glory!

# THE MEANING OF THE INCARNATION

## Questions

1. From your knowledge of World Religions and of Christianity, give illustrations to demonstrate the truth of the following statements: "Religions are man's search for God. The Gospel is God's search for man. Therefore, there are many religions, but only one gospel."
2. Based on the fact of the Incarnation, do you really believe that there is a Personal Divine One who truly understands your own heartbreaks, perplexities, loneliness, pain, hardships, poverty, broken dreams, and disappointments? (Read I Peter 5: 7 in as many translations as possible, and share with other believers how this promise has given great comfort to you during a crisis in your own life). Tell with what degree of conviction you believe the following statement: "There is no experience that God can't understand."
3. What evidence is there from an observation of the life of Jesus and the writings of Jesus' followers, that God is pleased when believers are full of joy, pleasure, and happiness? (Note John 2, Philippians 4: 4; I John 1: 4; Ephesians 5: 18, 19)
4. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "God is in every man to create a need for Christ."
5. Would you agree that the most important word of the English language is the word "Forgiveness"? Why or why not? (Note Psalms 103: 12; Hebrews 8: 12)
6. Have you, as a believer, ever had an experience when you felt that the precious "blood of Jesus" was deeply cleansing your inner motives and desires, enabling you to become more committed to Christ and more compassionate toward your fellow men? (Note Ezekiel 36: 25 - 27; I John 1: 7)
7. What is the root idea of the word 'comfort' in the New Testament?
8. Share as many Scriptural promises that you can which assure you of "God's Keeping Power" - i.e., God's ability and desire to keep you safe from evil and to preserve you blameless in godly character until God calls you Home to Heaven. (Note II Thessalonians 3: 3; II Timothy 1: 12; Philippians 4: 7)
9. In spite of all your personal mistakes, failures, shortcomings, and sins, can you today personally testify to God's faithfulness in keeping you secure in His love - amidst all the changes and chances of your past experiences?

10. Share from your personal experience, times and ways in which God has given you divine guidance amidst life's decisions, both large and small. (Note Psalms 32: 8; Proverbs 3: 6)
11. Share a time in your life when you sensed the protecting presence of God, amidst sore trials and pressing temptations. (Note II Thessalonians 3: 3; I Corinthians 10: 13; Luke 22: 31, 32; John 16: 33)
12. Tell to what extent you identify with the prayer of Suzanne Wesley:

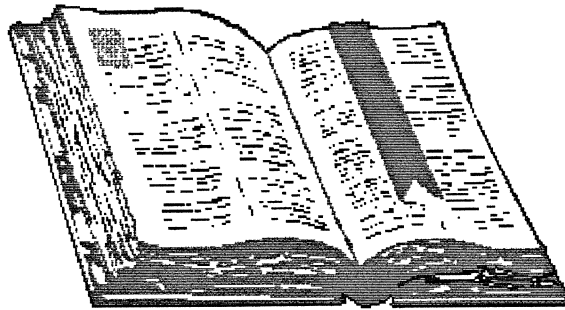
“Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the Church or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in thy presence.”

Have you sensed the reality of God's presence just as greatly while you perform your daily routine jobs, as you have during the times of your Holy Communion in God's sanctuary? What “holy disciplines” are you developing in your Christian life which are helping you to “practice the presence of God?”

Besides your practice of the “discipline of the Quiet Time” of daily devotions, are you learning regularly and consciously to pray to God throughout the routine of your daily responsibilities - in other words, learning to “pray on the hoof”?

## **CHAPTER SIX**

**HERE HE COMES - PATIENTLY PREPARE!**



## CHAPTER 6

**SUBJECT:** “HERE HE COMES” - ‘PATIENTLY PREPARE’!

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2: 22-38

**TEXT:** “*Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.*” (Luke 2: 25)

**INTRODUCTION:** There are two sides of the Christian life. There is the Active side of the Christian life. Here we achieve, venture, preach, sing, organize, administer. The other is related to passive side of life. Here we submit, endure, suffer, wait. I propose to you that waiting upon God is usually more difficult than achieving for God! And yet, waiting is all - important, for expectant waiting is necessary if God is to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ to us in new and powerful ways.

- I. WHY IS WAITING SO DIFFICULT FOR US?
  - A. Because we are basically impatient.
  - B. Because we look at time from a human viewpoint instead of from God’s viewpoint.
  
- II. WHY IS WAITING SO IMPORTANT?
  - A. Because God has His own timetable
  - B. Because some great revelations and gifts from God can only be received by the one who is more mature in his walk.
  - C. Because waiting upon God raises our level of expectations, desires, and anticipations, making the fulfillment of the promise all that more sweet and wonderful.
  - D. Because God’s voice cannot be heard unless one is still and quiet, in a waiting, expectant mood.
  - E. Because waiting is evidence of faith - evidence that we believe in the vision God has given to us and that we believe that vision will be fulfilled in God’s own time and way.
  
- III. WHAT IS THE RESULT OF WAITING EXPECTANTLY UPON GOD?

**CONCLUSION:** Simeon and Anna were determined to know God’s Son, and therefore they waited patiently and persistently! Learn to attend to God’s whispers! Prepare to receive God’s Son into your life in new and exciting ways!

vital for God forever.” (Mastery; page 298)

**PROPOSITION:** If a new revelation of Jesus in our lives cannot come without expectant waiting, we must ask some important questions regarding ‘Expectant Waiting’.

**F. WHY IS WAITING SO DIFFICULT FOR US?**

**A. Because we are basically impatient**

In some non-western cultures children and adults are trained to be patient, unrushed, and meditative, slow in movements, but such training is rare in our Western Civilization. We are an ‘instant’ society. ‘Instant’ oatmeal’, ‘Instant’ coffee, ‘Instant’ potatoes, ‘Instant’ meals in the form of T.V. Dinners and add-only-water cake mixes. We grow impatient if the fast-food places don’t serve us fast enough! We are not trained to wait on people or to wait on service from people. We want something and we want it immediately! We are a very impatient society. Long years of practice don’t appeal to us. We want quick results with little input. There are many who are looking at ways to ‘Get-Rich-Quick’! Our young people who have been caught up in the hurly-burly of modern life are even turned off to ‘slow’ music. Compatible with their life-style of rush and hurry and speed and ‘immediacy’, many youth cannot stand slow, soothing classical music! It must be the fast beat, the kind of music that puts the body in motion that raises the pulse rate, that is so loud and fast that one cannot understand the words! Children get all the toys they want when they want them - no waiting, no anticipation, no denials. Get it all and get it now! A poor way to develop discipline through denial and patience through waiting! We are in the space age - the age of speed. A hard age to develop patience with old people who are very slow in their physical movements and sometimes slow in their comprehension because of mental handicaps!

Why is it so hard to Wait upon the Lord, silently, passively, receptively, alone? Because we are living in a society which hates silence, slowness, solitude! Christians who are bred in such a society will have to work at developing these important qualities, for without these qualities - no new revelation of Jesus in their lives!

We live in an activist society, a society where meditation, quiet, busyness solitude, patient waiting are lost arts. In our society busyness is more important to us than productivity. We Americans think that Doing is more important than being. We think that Talking is more important than Listening.

We think that Quantity is more important than Quality. (For instance, we build many cheap houses quickly rather than a few quality houses built slowly.) We think that fast-moving Youth are more important than the slower moving but experienced Aged. Even in industry today, if you are over 50 and cannot move as fast as the 25 year old, you may lose your job to the faster, but less experienced, youth. (Let us remind ourselves that the greatest period in life may well be the last period of life. It was so with Moses. The first 40 years of life were years of formal education. The second 40 years of life were years of patient preparation, in the desert. The last 40 years of his life were years of unusual productivity - the years when he fulfilled his life mission of leading the people of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land!)

Remember, Simeon was an old man when the greatest revelation of God came to him. And remember, Anna the prophetess, was 84 when she received God's greatest revelation to her!

### **Slow Me Down, Lord**

Give me, amidst the confusion of my day,  
the calmness of the everlasting hills.  
Break the tension of my nerves and muscles  
with the soothing music of the singing streams  
that live in my memory.

Help me to know  
the magical restorative power of sleep.  
Teach me the art of taking minute vacations...  
Of slowing down to look at a flower,  
to chat with a friend,  
to pat a dog,  
to read a few lines from a good book  
Slow me down, Lord,  
and inspire me to send my roots deep  
into the soil of life's enduring values,  
that I may grow  
toward the stars of my greater destiny. Amen.  
(Daily Readings From W. E. Sangster; page 368)

B. Because we look at time from a human viewpoint instead of from God's viewpoint.

God is not slow to fulfill His purposes as some men count slowness. God's timetable is the right timetable. He is never too late, for God sees the 'end from the beginning'. He knows when men are prepared for His fuller revelations. He knows when the fullness of time is for new gifts of knowledge and insight and revelations to be given to us. Someone has said that God is the God who always answers 'in the nick of time'. From man's viewpoint perhaps, but not from God's viewpoint, for God is never rushed and He is never too slow. He is right on time. But because we human beings are living in the dimension of time and see things from time's perspective, we grow impatient with God! Our timetable is different from God's, but God's is the right timetable.

## II. WHY IS WAITING SO IMPORTANT?

### A. Because God Has His Own Timetable

If God's timetable is the only right timetable, then it is all-important to wait upon God's proper time. *"Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord!"* (Psalms 27: 14) Good advice to us, for we tend to grow discouraged when our prayers are not quickly answered or when our projects are frustrated! Wait upon God for His timing! *"Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way, and he will exalt you to possess the land."* (Psalms 37: 34) If you wait on the Lord, you will possess new knowledge of God's ways, God's purposes, God's plan for your life! *"The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their food in due season."* (Psalms 145: 15) Food means physical, spiritual, intellectual, social sustenance. God will give the soul who waits expectantly upon Him, all the food he needs! 'Due season' speaks of God's timetable which is the right timetable. God is never too late! Others may think He is late and give up on God. Some grow hopeless and feel that God's promises will never be fulfilled. But God likes to surprise people with His own timing! God's promises to Abraham were late in being fulfilled, but they were not too late. Abraham and Sarah became parents of the promised child when they were very old. Earlier, Abraham had grown impatient with God's timetable, and therefore he took Hagar his handmaid and she bore Abraham a son. But it was ahead of God's timing. Hagar's son was not the promised son!

Remember, in the fullness of time God reveals Himself. Simeon and Anna knew this, so they were willing to wait long and patiently upon God. And they were not disappointed, for God, in His own time, fulfilled His promise to them!

In the Book of Acts we learn that the disciples had to wait for ten long days before the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. "If Jesus had said 'go', He had also said 'tarry' and 'wait'. For ten days they did nothing but tarry and wait. They might have been champing at the bit, eager to be off to tell the Good News of His Resurrection. But it would have been half-baked if they had. For not only were

they to tell of His Resurrection - they were to illustrate it....People were to feel the Resurrection through these resurrected lives. So the best thing they ever did was not to do. For ten days they were quiet and receptive.” (Mystery; Jones; page 297)

It is important for us to work for the Lord, but it is equally important for us to wait expectantly upon the Lord. “Jeremiah said out of much tribulation that ‘it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord’. Both hope and quietly wait! Some rush on with their work for God, and, meeting disappointment, get discouraged...The saint both hopes and quietly waits. Not all he has to endure robs him of the patience of hope, for he knows that God will have His way in the end.” (Daily Readings; page 203; Sangster)

Waiting upon the Lord is an antidote against discouragement. Isaiah wrote, “*They that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*” (Isaiah 40: 31) “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*” (I Corinthians 15:58) “*And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.*” (Galatians 6: 9) Waiting on God gives birth to hope which neutralizes discouragement during difficult times. Waiting upon God enables us to look beyond the problems of the present to the promises that are to be fulfilled in the future!

#### B. Because Some Great Revelations and Gifts From God Can Only Be Received By The One Who Is More Mature In His Walk.

We tell children to wait for some gifts, for we believe that until they are older they will not be able to properly receive and appreciate them. We tell a child that he must wait until he is older before he can drive a car. We tell a young adolescent that he must wait until he is older before he is ready to be married. We tell a high school graduate that he ought to wait and go to college before he gets a job or tries to enter a profession. We tell a young worker that he will have to wait to mature and to gain experience before he can have the better job or the executive position. Even within God’s Church, the Lord has directed ministers to mature before they can even be considered for some offices, like deacon or elder or Bishop.

*Let them also be tested first; then if they prove themselves blameless let them serve as deacons.*” (I Timothy 3: 10) “*He (a bishop) must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.*” (I Timothy 3: 6)

Some revelations from God can only come to those who have long prepared, fasted, waited, expected, and matured. It is not insignificant that God revealed the person and purpose of Jesus to ones who had long prepared for that special and great gift of revelation. For many years Simeon and Anna had waited upon the Lord at the holy Temple. Of Anna it is said, "*She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.*" (Luke 2: 37) God had matured Simeon and Anna to the point where they were able to receive a great revelation from God. The long waiting, praying, expecting were necessary to prepare them for God's greatest revelation. Not even Joseph and Mary recognized the person and mission of Jesus like Simeon and Anna. "*And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him (Jesus).*" (Luke 2: 33)

Why is waiting so important? Because some of God's special gifts and revelations can only be given to more mature Christians who have learned to wait upon God.

C. Because waiting upon God raises our level of expectations, desires, and anticipations, making the fulfillment of the promise all that more sweet and wonderful.

The farmer's harvest is more meaningful because he has had to wait for the harvest. "*Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain.*" (James 5: 7)

A man's wife is more meaningful to him because he had to wait for weeks or months during the dating and engagement period before the wedding day.

The child's toy is more meaningful to him because he has had to wait for it.

The teen works and waits patiently to earn enough money before he can buy that dream car. How much more meaningful the car is to him because he had to work and wait for it!

What if God immediately gave us everything we desired without us ever having to wait for His gifts? Would we not, like a child, be spoiled and tend to take everything for granted? Do we not appreciate the fulfillment of God's promises even more because we have had to wait for their fulfillment? Is not the anticipation of waiting to open a gift under the Christmas tree about as great as the actual opening of the gift?

Is not the waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises part of the process of perfecting our character? Is not the communion and fellowship with God which we experience in prayer, while waiting for an 'answer', just as important as the actual 'answer' to the prayer? For prayer is not for the purpose of simply getting things;

prayer is for the purpose of ‘making’ us, through communion with God, while God is taking time to give us ‘things’.

D. Because God’s voice cannot be heard unless one is still and quiet, in a waiting, expectant mood.

Simeon heard the voice of God because he was quiet in God’s presence. This is not to say that it is easy to hear the voice of God in the silence. William Sangster said he once got a letter from a man of seventy-three who wrote, “I have tried for years to hear the voice of God. I have never heard it. Is it all illusion?” Comments Sangster, “He does not know how to listen. He seems to expect a human voice. To quote the poet to him and say ‘God speaks in silences’ won’t help him; it sounds silly....There begins the difficulty. Many voices sound within our mind. People who have never practiced listening in the silence are astonished, when they begin, at the pandemonium of voices inside. At times it sounds like Babel. Fear, hope, memory, ambition, all find voice inside us and sometimes they even talk together, and the high skill of this interior listening is to learn how to know the voice of God from all the other voices...It isn’t simple. One must be prepared for patience and practice, and resolve never to use the words ‘God said to me...’ or ‘I was guided....’ (or any similar expression) without great care and reserve.” (Daily Readings page 9)

I have known of persons who declared that God spoke to them and yet it was obvious from the directions they received that the voice they heard was not the voice of God.

But even though it may not be easy to hear the authentic voice of God amidst all the other ‘voices’, it is possible and vitally necessary to learn to hear the voice of God in the silence of our meditation and prayer. Simeon heard the voice of God’s promise: “*And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.*” (Luke 2: 26) God had spoken. Simeon waited long. God fulfilled His promise to Simeon in due time!

“The prophets often said ‘Thus saith the Lord’. They claimed to have received special messages from God. The saints often claimed that God spoke to them - sometimes in quite precise terms.” (Ibid; page 9)

What is the voice of God like? Elijah learned! When Elijah the prophet was hiding from Jezebel in a cave, “*the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice.*” (I Kings 19: 11-12) The ‘still small voice’ was the voice of God! But

how can we hear the 'still small voice' of God if there is no stillness, no solitude, no quiet time, no waiting?

Waiting is important because God comes and speaks to us in his 'still small voice' when we wait quietly and expectantly! To listen for God's voice is all-important! Our waiting is more than mere waiting. Simeon waited but his waiting was the waiting of a heart that was devout, righteous, and earnest. He was a single-minded, devout soul, fixed on God, not a double-minded soul, worldly-oriented and easily distracted. He concentrated on God's promises. He looked for the consolation of Israel, expecting God to deliver and to comfort Israel in God's own time and way.

*Are we, like Simeon, longing and looking for God to deliver us and to comfort our people and nation in God's own time and way? If we, like Simeon, are centered on God, we too will know that the Holy Spirit is upon us (Luke 2: 25), that we are 'inspired by the Spirit' (Luke 2: 27). The Spirit is a mighty aid to the seeking and waiting soul. "The Holy Spirit helps us with our daily problems and in our praying. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how to pray as we should, but the Holy Spirit prays for us with such feeling that it cannot be expressed in words." (Romans 8: 26, Living Bible)*

We must identify with Simeon in our quest for God. "Why not give this quest for the awareness of the Divine an unhurried trial? Is there, in all this universe, anything more important to you than to know God? Can you expect to know him in scamped moments? Are you willing to meet his conditions when he says, 'Ye shall seek me and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart?' Give time to it, plenty of time. Go into the silence for long periods but also into the company of those who claim to know him. Put yourself to school to the Bible. Be found regularly at worship. Hold in your mind the picture of God revealed by Jesus and just think and think on him. Don't lose heart if the hours go by and nothing seems to come. The hours are not being wasted. Persist! Faith will grow

in you. The glad day will come when you also will say, 'I know him whom I have believed'" (Can I Know God?; Sangster; page 23, 24)

The practice of waiting persistently and expectantly will produce great fruit in your life - you will come to know God inwardly and intimately!

E. Because waiting is evidence of faith - evidence that we believe in the vision God has given to us and that we believe that vision will be fulfilled in God's own time and way.

For instance, a woman, engaged to be married to a man who is overseas in the military service, shows her faith in the man and in his promise to marry her, when she waits patiently and persistently for him to return for the wedding day.

Simeon believed so firmly in God's promise that he would see the Christ before he died, that he was willing daily to wait upon the Lord for the fulfillment of the promise.

Waiting demonstrated faith and hope. *“Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”* (Romans 8: 24, 25) *“Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”* (James 5: 7, 8)

Waiting on the Lord demonstrates our faith in the Lord, that the Lord will fulfill His promises and give realization to our hopes.

### **III. WHAT IS THE RESULT OF WAITING EXPECTANTLY UPON GOD?**

When we wait upon God patiently and expectantly, and continue to claim God's promises, we will 'see Jesus' and we will understand the true nature of Jesus' saving mission.

The person of Jesus and the purposes of Jesus will be known to us more than ever before.

Is there any greater revelation to us than that of 'seeing' with the eyes of faith the Lord Jesus - seeing His 'person' and seeing His saving purpose?

To see Jesus is to see everything else, for everything in life centers on Jesus. To see Jesus clearly is to see everything else rightly! Failure to see Jesus results in everything else in life becoming hazy! If one does not see Jesus clearly, one cannot correctly see God, one cannot correctly see himself, one cannot correctly see others! To see Jesus clearly is to see everything else concretely!

*To recognize the person of Jesus-that He is indeed the fulfillment of God's promise to the world - is to recognize the purpose of Jesus- that is, that He is the 'light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory to thy people Israel'.*(Luke 2: 32)

One who waits upon God comes to understand the purposes and plans of God. For a mere mortal to be 'let in' on God's master plans, is to be given the greatest privilege of all! What a gift - to be given the plans of the Master Architect of the Universe! Simeon's waiting and praying was all worthwhile, for, when others failed to see the saving mission of Jesus, Simeon and Anna were among the very few to whom the mission was revealed. When Jesus came, Simeon and Anna were prepared to see and to recognize the Saviour of the world! Why? Because they had long prepared for this important day. Their eyes were opened to behold the Saviour, because for long years their ears had been opened to God's voice in prayer and their hearts had been opened to God's thoughts through quiet meditation.

No one can 'see' Jesus or 'see' His saving work today with any depth unless his heart is prepared through long prayer and meditation. Jesus is only revealed to prepared people - people like Simeon and Anna who had long waited and prayed and fasted, in the Temple.

Jesus will reveal Himself to you in new ways if you learn to wait upon Him! Do you have your Quiet Times daily? Do you wait upon Him daily in prayer, training your ears to listen for God's 'small, still voice'? Have you trained your mind to meditate upon God's Word each day? Do you have a mood of expectation and anticipation as you long for the fulfillment of God's promises in your personal life? Are you learning to wait patiently and persistently upon God?

Are you prepared to 'see' God in the way God wishes to reveal Himself to you? I ask this question because many overlooked the presence of Jesus when He came the first time. Simeon and Anna and only a few others recognized Jesus when He came. Why? Because Jesus' coming was in such a common way! He was born like other babies are born, and He was presented in the Temple for the rite of circumcision and purification like any other Jewish male baby. Nothing out of the

ordinary, and yet Simeon, in the most ordinary of circumstances, recognized Jesus!

Why do the multitudes today not recognize Jesus' presence? Because their hearts are not prepared to see Jesus among the commonplace things of life! Jesus can only be seen by humble people, humble folks like Simeon and Anna, whose preparation was sufficient to receive God's revelation of His Son. God reveals Jesus among the simple, routine things of life - things like the smile of a friend, a loving letter from a relative, a hymn in the Church service, the hug of a child, the kiss of a companion, the tug on your heart during your daily devotions, the testimony of a new Christian, the kind act of an employer, the sermon of God's minister, the exquisite sunset after a long day, the 'still small voice' during worship service.

Are you surprised that people do not recognize the presence of Jesus in the world today? Notes William Sangster, "I do not think so - if we remember that men are always more attracted by the spectacular than the truly great. If God had come to earth in a chariot of fire, multitudes would have knelt before him. But He was born as we are born and His coming was marked only by a few. If He had moved among men in dazzling apparel, with a glance of flame and a voice of thunder, He would have subdued kingdoms, but He came in the dress of a common workman, spoke with a Galilean accent, and so blended the sublime with the normal that only the few saw that the sublime was there...the unusual and the ostentatious are always more attractive than that which is truly grand....I once stood at sunset with a group of friends waiting for a firework display. It was to begin at dark. While we waited I looked behind me and saw the sun sinking in a sea of glory, and I said to them, 'Look at the sunset!' Nobody looked. They were waiting for a common squib...Many people are making the same mistake today. They are seeking at a distance the God Who stands at the door of their heart...I believe that some of you have only to quiet the deafening noises of the world and you will hear Him say, 'Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known Me?'" (Sangster's Daily Reading; page 125)

"God is constantly seeking to meet us in the common and unexpected moments of life. He does not wait for what we are pleased to call the 'grand moments' but He will make the common place the grand. We walk about blind to the glory that is around us because we do not expect to find it there. We mortgage the joys of the present, the quiet homely joys of humdrum days, to our anticipations of some distant time of overwhelming happiness of a kind that never comes to most people. God has not concealed our happiness in some fabled El Dorado. It is all around us if we would only learn to see it in common things." (Ibid; page 185)

Why do some people find Jesus and others don't? Because, as we have been noting, some people, like Simeon and Anna, have prepared their hearts to look for Jesus in the commonplace things of life and others have not prepared their hearts to see Him. Simeon and Anna found Jesus at the very place where they had often and routinely gone - at the Temple.

**CONCLUSION:** Why do some people find Jesus and others don't? Because some persevere in their quest for Jesus. Simeon and Anna were determined to know God's Son, and therefore they waited patiently and persistently!

"That is where discipline comes into the holy life; not the toilsome, straining; failing effort to be good; but the faithful attending on God to receive.... There can be no continuance of the holy life in the soul of any man who does not continually wait on God. Only those who 'attend the whispers' of His grace can hear Him 'only speak'." (Sangster; Ibid; page 188)

Learn to attend to God's whispers! Prepare to receive God's Son into your life in new and exciting ways!

## HERE HE COMES - PATIENTLY PREPARE

### Questions

1. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “The Passive side of the Christian life - the side where we submit, endure, suffer, wait - is far more difficult than the Active side of life - the side where we achieve, venture, preach, sing, organize, administer.”
2. Give your response to the following advice from E. Stanley Jones: “Choose to loaf in God’s presence and then you’ll be forever busy in His service. Be silent to God for a day, yea, ten days if necessary, and you’ll be vocal and vital for God forever.”
3. Share illustrations from modern life which documents the truth of the following statements: “We live in an activistic society, a society where meditation, quiet, solitude, and patient waiting are lost arts. Society in general believes busyness is more important than productivity, that Doing is more important than Being, that Talking is more important than Listening, that Quantity is more important than Quality, that fast-moving youth are more important than slower-moving older people!”
4. Share an experience from your own personal life which illustrates the truth of the following statement: “Because we human beings are living in the dimension of time and see things from time’s perspective we grow impatient with God!”
5. Share illustrations, both from Biblical history and from more recent times, of persons who learned to wait patiently for God to fulfill His promises to them. (Note Genesis 21: 1-5; Luke 2: 22-38) Concerning the importance of ‘waiting upon the Lord’, share which of the following Scriptures mean most to you: Psalms 27: 14; Psalms 37: 34; Psalms 145: 15; Isaiah 40: 31; I Corinthians 15: 58; Galatians 6: 9.
6. Why do you think that God revealed to Simeon and Anna more about the person and the mission of Jesus, than He revealed to Joseph and to Mary? (Note Luke 2: 33)
7. Do you believe that waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises is part of the process which God uses to perfect our Christian character? What do you think would tend to happen in our lives, if God immediately gave us everything we desired, without us ever having to wait for His gifts?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements by William Sangster: “The high skill of this interior listening is to learn how to know the voice of God from all other voices. It isn’t simple. One must be prepared for patience and practice, and

resolve never to use the word ‘God said to me....’ or ‘I was guided...’ (or any similar expression) without great care and reserve.”

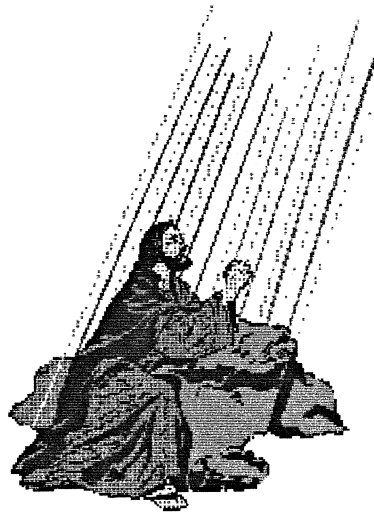
How is the ‘voice of God’ described in I Kings 19: 11-12?

9. After reading the following paragraph, share what things you personally plan to do during the next few weeks, in attempt to come to know God better: “Can you expect to know him in scamped moments? Are you willing to meet his conditions when he says, ‘Ye shall seek me and find me when ye shall search for me with all your heart?’ Give time to it, plenty of time. Go into the silence for long periods but also into the company of those who claim to know him. Put yourself to school to the Bible. Be found regularly at worship. Hold in your mind the picture of God revealed by Jesus and just think and think on him. Don’t lose heart if the hours go by and nothing seems to come. The hours are not being wasted. Persist! Faith will grow in you. The glad day will come when you also will say, ‘I know him whom I have believed.’”
10. Share how ‘Waiting’ can be a demonstration of one’s strong faith in God. (Note Romans 8: 24, 25; James 5: 7, 8)
11. Share how God has revealed Himself to you, in the most ordinary of circumstances (as in the case of Anna and Simeon). Tell to what extent you identify with the following statement: “God reveals Jesus among the simple, routine things of life - things like the smile of a friend, a loving letter from a relative, a hymn in the Church service, the hug of a friend or child, the kiss of a companion, the tug on your heart during your daily devotions, the testimony of a new Christian, the kind act of an employer, the sermon of God’s minister, the exquisite sunset after a long day, the ‘still small voice’ during a worship service.”
12. Are you surprised that people do not recognize the presence of Jesus in the world today? Share examples that illustrate the truth of the following statements: “Men are always more attracted by the spectacular than the truly great. If God had come to earth in a chariot of fire, multitudes would have knelt before him, but He was born as we are born and He came in the dress of a common workman. He so blended the sublime with the normal that only a few saw that the sublime was there. The unusual and the ostentatious are always more attractive than that which is truly grand. God is constantly seeking to meet us in the common and unexpected moments of life.”



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **HERE HE COMES - BELIEVE**



## CHAPTER 7

**SUBJECT:** “HERE HE COMES” - BELIEVE!

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1: 26-28

**TEXT:** *In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”* (Luke 1: 26-28)

**INTRODUCTION:** God meets us in the commonplace events of life most of the time, but there likely will be a few times in our lives when God reveals Himself in rather dramatic and unexpected ways, all for the purpose of deepening our faith in God and increasing our love for God.

**PROPOSITION:** Here He comes! Jesus is coming! So believe and receive!

**I. DIVINE INITIATIVE - HUMAN CONFUSION (v. 25-29)**

- A. Divine Initiative (v. 26-28)
- B. Human Confusion (v. 29)

**II. DIVINE REVELATION - HUMAN AMAZEMENT (v. 30-34)**

- A. Divine Revelation (v. 30-33)
- B. Human Amazement (v. 34)

**III. DIVINE REASSURANCE - HUMAN SUBMISSION (v. 35-38)**

- A. Divine Reassurance (v. 35-37)
- B. Human Submission (v. 38)

**CONCLUSION:** God takes the initiative to reveal His shockingly wonderful plans to us, causing a human response of confusion or bewilderment. God’s plans are challenges to man’s ability to trust and believe and obey. In the midst of human bewilderment comes God’s reassurance and God’s call to submission and trust.

## CHAPTER 7

**SUBJECT:** “HERE HE COMES” - ‘BELIEVE’!

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1: 26-28

**TEXT:** *In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”* (Luke 1: 26-28)

**INTRODUCTION:** “Here He Comes” - that is the proclamation of Advent or Christmas. Jesus is the God who comes to mankind! He is the one who makes His abode with mankind.

Have you ever wished that God would come close to you, would reveal Himself to you in intimate and wonderful ways?

“God is constantly seeking to meet us in the common and unexpected moments of life. He does not wait for what we are pleased to call the ‘grand moments’ but He will make the common place the grand. We walk about blind to the glory that is around us because we do not expect to find it there. We mortgage the joys of the present, the quiet homely joys of humdrum days, to our anticipations of some distant time of overwhelming happiness of a kind that never comes to most people. God has not concealed our happiness in some fabled El Dorado. It is all around us if we would only learn to see it in common things.” (Daily Readings; 185, Sangster)

God meets us in the common things of life. A minister tells of a time when he went to view outdoor fireworks with some friends. While the fireworks went off, the minister was fascinated with a most glorious sunset, and he sought to draw the attention of his friends to the exquisite sight. But the friends were so preoccupied with the view of the man-made fireworks that they did not once turn around to view the God-made sunset. They were so fascinated with man’s manufactured beauty that they failed to meet God that night in the commonplace things of life - things like an evening sunset.

Do you wish to meet God and as a result become a man of greater faith, full of belief? Then meet God in your daily Quiet Time. Meet Him in the routine of mundane duties. Meet Him in the beauties of nature. Meet Him in the struggles of life, common to all men. See Him in a sunrise or a sunset. Hear Him speak to you in a grand sweep of music, or in the chirping of a bird, or in the coo of an infant. God will come to you in the round of daily events and speak to you in the commonplace things of life.

God meets us in the commonplace events of life most of the time, but there likely will be a few times in our lives when God reveals Himself in rather dramatic and unexpected ways, all for the purpose of deepening our faith in God and increasing our love for God.

God came to a young Jewish woman in a rather dramatic way. Doubtless, God had come to Mary on many occasions during her daily walk with God, but on one special day, unexpectedly, God came to Mary to reveal a special message to her.

In studying the divine-human encounter, as related in our Scripture, there is a clearly discernable pattern, a pattern that is often repeated in Scripture.

There is a divine action, followed by a human response. Here is the pattern as illustrated in Luke 1: 26-28.

<u>Divine Action</u>	<u>Human Response</u>
1. Divine Initiative (1: 26-28)	1. Human Confusion (1: 29)
2. Divine Revelation ( 1: 30-33)	2. Human Amazement (1: 34)
3. Divine Reassurance (1: 35-37)	3. Human Submission (1: 38)

**PROPOSITION:** Here He comes! Jesus is coming! So believe and receive!

## **I. DIVINE INITIATIVE-HUMAN CONFUSION (1: 26-29)**

### **A. Divine Initiative (1: 26-28)**

“God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth.” These words reveal the kind of God we serve. God is always the God who acts. God is not passive; He is active. God is not complacent; He is caring. God always takes the first step towards mankind. God always acts according to His divine purpose. God does not simply wind the clock and then let the clock (the world) run on its own. He, the Winder of the clock (the Creator of the world), is intimately involved in the running of the clock (the running of the world).

Look at a few examples of God’s initiative.

God’s Creative Initiative (Genesis 1: 1)

God’s call of Abraham (Genesis 12: 1) - *‘The Lord said to Abram, “Leave your country.”’*

God’s call of Moses (at the fiery Bush) - Exodus 3: 2.

God’s call of Gideon (Judges 6: 11, 12)

God’s call of Amos (Amos 7: 14, 15)

God’s call of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1: 4-8)

God’s call to Paul (Acts 9: 3-6)

It is when you least expect God's call that God's call may come to you - when you are preoccupied with your own affairs and plans, when you feel least qualified to carry out the task God assigns to you.

*"This is what the Lord says, he who made earth, the Lord who formed it and established it - the Lord is his name: 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great unsearchable things you do not know.'"* (Jeremiah 33: 2, 3)

While you are calling upon the Lord in your prayers, daily and routinely, nothing may seem to be happening. But one day, unexpectedly (like as in the case of Mary), the Lord will come to you in an unusual way to reveal Himself to you, all for the purpose of blessing you and deepening your faith in the living God.

Do you lack faith and belief? Then just keep praying, keep walking in all the 'light' of truth you presently have, and the day will come (like it did to Mary) when the Lord God will reveal Himself wonderfully and surprisingly to you.

#### B. Human Confusion (1: 29)

When the Lord breaks through to you and speaks to you, your initial response may be like Mary's: "Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be." (Luke 1: 29)

Initial confusion is not an unusual human response to God's divine message. I feel sure that Abram was confused at first when God told him to leave his country and people to go to an unknown land. (Genesis 12) When God called to Moses out of the fiery bush, "*Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.*" (Exodus 3: 6) When God's angel appeared to Gideon and announced to Gideon that the Lord was with him, Gideon responded in great confusion: "*But sir, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our father told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.*" (Judges 6: 13) When God called Jeremiah to be His prophet, Jeremiah's response was one of reticence, of confusion: "*Ah Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.*" (Jeremiah 1: 6)

When God took the initiative to reveal Himself to Saul the Persecutor, Saul was totally 'taken off guard', confused and baffled! "*He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked.*" (Acts 9: 4, 5)

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, her response was not unlike the response of many before and after her who have been encountered by the living God: “*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.*” (Luke 1: 29)

When God comes in unexpected ways and at unexpected times to reveal Himself and His message to you, it will not be surprising if you at first react with confusion, questions, wonderment.

The message which God wants to give you may be so wonderful that you at first shake your head in unbelief!

The Lord is getting you ready for a new revelation in your life which, if you accept it, will result in deepening your faith and belief in the living Christ. Don't allow your initial confusion to keep you from experiencing the full blessing of the new revelation of God to you. Say to yourself, when the Lord comes to you in new and strange ways: “*My soul, wait thou only for the Lord, for my salvation cometh from the Lord.*” (Psalms 62: 5)

## **II. DIVINE REVELATION - HUMAN AMAZEMENT (1: 30-34)**

### **A. Divine Revelation (1: 30-33)**

It was while Mary was confused and ‘greatly troubled’ that God’s angel spoke to her: “*Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.*” (1: 30)

Amidst human confusion, divine comfort is offered. Human confusion soon gives way to human amazement, at the announcement of the divine message! When God catches your attention dramatically, He has a dramatic message to share with you. Again, let it be emphasized that God, for the most part, reveals Himself to His people in what might be called the regular and routine and commonplace ways. Never minimize these regular revelations to you - revelations through the beauties of nature, through the warm affirmations of a friend, through the moving stanzas of a musical, through the smile of a child, through the exhortations of a sermon, through the inspirational paragraph from a Christian book, through the challenging impact of a Scriptural passage, and on and on. Yes, God reveals Himself to us in so-called commonplace events, but there may be times, as in the case of Mary, when the Lord shall come to us in rather shocking ways. You probably will be just as confused as Mary was when the Lord comes to you in special and unexpected ways.

Just remember: the Lord never comes to you in order to baffle you, but in order to bless you! Your confusion will give way to comfort if you hold steady and listen for God’s message!

Think of the wonderful content of God's message to Mary. *"But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the*

*throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."* (Luke 1: 30-33)

*"Do not be afraid, Mary."* Fear is one of man's paralyzing problems. Often the Lord comes to us and says, *"Fear not."* When God calls us to a new realm of responsibility, we sometimes are filled with fear - fear of the unknown, fear of failure, or many other fears. It was so with Joshua, the successor of Moses. Joshua had big shoes to fill, and he was afraid when God gave him the task of leading the Hebrew people into the land of Canaan. The Lord told Joshua to *'Fear not': "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous."* (Joshua 1: 6, 7a)

*"You have found favor with God."* God comes to you because He loves you and wants to bless your life, not because you are perfect or sinless. Mary was a devout young Jewish girl, perhaps in her late teens, a girl whose affections were fixed on the living God. Any person, young or old, whose life is centered in God, whose daily devotions are filled with delight, whose desires are godly, is greatly favored of the Lord. Not that we can earn God's favor, but only he whose life is open to God can be filled with God. If you seek God in your daily life consistently, you can expect God to reveal Himself to you someday dramatically.

Someone said that the soul gets on by a series of crises. There is a day-by-day walking with God, sometimes with little feeling and with seemingly slow progress. And then suddenly and unexpectedly a new vision or revelation will come to you from God. A sudden turn of events, or a new miracle, or a new insight into God's Word, or a new decision which has lifetime results, or a new call into Christian service - these are the revelations which come to God's people which show that they *"have found favor with God."* (Luke 1: 30)

*"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."* (Luke 1: 31-33)

No woman has been more favored than Mary. She was given the honor of carrying and giving birth to the Son of God! Mary was chosen to become a tool for God's great saving purpose. His name would be *'Jesus'*, which means

'Saviour'. He will be the 'Son of the Most High'. He will reign on his father David's throne. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Mary's Son, a Kingdom which shall last forever and composed of all true believers of all ages.

God's special revelations to us are all concerned with God's saving purposes which He desires to accomplish in our world, using us as His instruments to accomplish those redemptive purposes.

So, anyone who claims to have a special revelation from God which is characterized by selfishness can be quickly 'set straight'. God never reveals anything to anyone that is contradictory to his saving purposes, purposes which are clearly outlined in His Holy Word - the Bible!

God may have a special revelation to give to you as He did to Mary, but the content of that revelation will always be the content of salvation - perhaps a special call to take the Gospel to a certain obscure area of the world, or a call to start a Christian Day School, or a call to communicate the Gospel by setting up home Bible studies with unsaved friends, or some other kind of saving purpose.

#### B. Human Amazement (1: 34)

When God reveals Himself to you in special ways, you may be just as amazed as Mary was. Mary responded, "*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*" (Luke 1: 34) You, too, may respond to God's special call to you: "God, how can this be? Surely your request is impossible for me to fulfill!"

When God told Moses that He was sending Moses to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses responded with as much amazement as Mary manifested when Gabriel told her she was to give birth to Jesus. Moses responded "*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*" (Exodus 3: 11)

The Lord came to Gideon and said, "*Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?*" Gideon responded with great amazement: "*But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.*" (Judges 6: 15) Amazement mixed with feelings of deep inferiority and inadequacy!

When God reveals the content of His call to you, you can expect to respond with amazement. You will, like Mary, feel overwhelmed and perhaps even say "How can this be? This assignment is humanly unaccomplishable!" Mary, a virgin, could not bear the Son of God without a miraculous conception! You and I cannot fulfill God's call without divine intervention!

### III. DIVINE REASSURANCE - HUMAN SUBMISSION (1: 35-38)

#### A. Divine Reassurance (1: 35-37)

When the content of God's special revelation is shown to us, the inevitable human response will be amazement, for we know that the assignment cannot be fulfilled, short of a divine miracle! It was when Mary was filled with amazement and unbelief that God's angel gave reassurance to Mary. *"The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.'"* (Luke 1: 35-37)

It is the Holy Spirit who is the source of power to accomplish the otherwise unaccomplishable! Just as the Holy Spirit empowered Mary and overshadowed her, so the Holy Spirit will do the same for us when God calls us to work for Him.

The Holy Spirit accomplishes the miracle, in this case, the miraculous conception of Jesus whose life and ministry would be holy. The miracles that God accomplishes through our obedient cooperation, will also be wonderful. The results will be holy and sacred. The impossible is possible with God! The weak are strong in God's strength! That which is foolish in the eyes of men is wise in the eyes of God!

God is always ready to reassure our hearts, to strengthen our wills, to quiet our fears, to still our doubts.

One way in which God chooses to reassure our hearts when we are tempted to doubt His power or are tempted to center on our inadequacies, is to direct our attention to persons in whose lives He is working similar miracles as the miracle He wishes to accomplish in our own lives. As a part of His reassurance to Mary, God's angel directed Mary's attention to Elizabeth. *"And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."* (Luke 1: 36-37)

What a great encouragement it is to us, when we are struggling to believe God for a new and great miracle in our lives, to look at another person who is a living illustration of God's miraculous power in action. The miracle God wishes to accomplish in my life will be unique from that in any other person's life, but to get my eyes on God's miracles in any form gives a great impetus to my ability to believe God for the special miracle He wishes to work in my own life.

## B. Human Submission (1: 38)

Luke 1: 38 reveal Mary's submission to God's plan. *"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."* In spite of the miraculous nature of God's revelation, Mary was convinced of its reality and therefore submitted in humility to God's will

*"And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'"* (Luke 1: 38)

Mary believed and so must we when God reveals Himself to us!

Abraham believed God and God rewarded him in amazing ways. Moses reluctantly obeyed God and went to Pharaoh, and, as a result, God used Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan. Gideon was slow to submit to God's will, but God was forbearing and Gideon finally obeyed decisively and became God's instrument for a decisive victory over the Midianites. Mary was quick to submit herself to God, and she became one of God's greatest instruments for His saving purposes.

How are we brought to a new level of belief in our lives? First, by learning to see God in the commonplace things of life and learning to respond to God as He reveals Himself in our devotional life, daily and routinely. Second, by responding obediently to God's special calls and revelations in our lives, as illustrated wonderfully in the submission of Mary to God's special revelation to her.

**CONCLUSION:** Here is the process: God takes the initiative to reveal His shockingly wonderful plans to us, causing a human response of confusion or bewilderment. God's plans are challenges to man's ability to trust and believe and obey. In the midst of human bewilderment comes God's reassurance and God's call to submission and trust.

When God confronts us with His plans and challenges, we can either harden our hearts in unbelief (like those did in Nazareth who heard Jesus preach, Luke 4: 28-30), or we can open our lives in humble submission to God's leadership like Mary did when she was told that she, a virgin, would conceive and bear a Son whose name would be Jesus!

Walk humbly with thy God daily and then someday, perhaps when you least expect it, God will come to you with a special plan or a special miracle or a special blessing - all of which, if you accept them, will result in a deepening of your faith and belief in Jesus!

Experience God's miracles in your life - this will expand your faith and deepen your belief immeasurably! That's what Christmas is all about! Experiencing God in the commonplace daily events of life will someday result in experiencing Him in some unusual way.

## CHAPTER 7

### Questions

1. Give your personal reactions to the following quotation: “God meets us in the common things of life. Meet Him in your daily Quiet Time. Meet Him in the routine of mundane duties. Meet Him in the beauties of nature. Meet Him in the struggles of life, common to all men. See Him in a sunrise or a sunset. Hear Him speak to you in a grand sweep of music, or in the chirping of a bird, or in the coo of an infant. God will come to you in the round of daily events and speak to you in the commonplace things of life.”
2. How does Luke 1: 26 show that God is not passive but active, that He is not complacent but caring, that He is the God who always take the initiative in seeking mankind? Give other examples from Biblical history when God took the initiative to communicate to mankind.
3. From your own experience, share how the following statement reflects the truth regarding the nature of God’s special calls: “It is when you least expect God’s call that God’s call may come to you - when you are preoccupied with your own affairs and plans, when you feel least qualified to carry out the task God assigns to you.”
4. Give examples from Biblical history that illustrate the typical reaction of one who receives a special call or revelation from God. (Note Luke 1: 29; Genesis 12; Exodus 3: 6; Judges 6: 13; Jeremiah 1: 6; Acts 9: 4, 5) When God comes to you in new and perhaps ‘strange’ ways, what (according to Psalms 62: 5) should your response be?
5. How does God comfort His children (and thus alleviate their fears), following the new revelations of Himself to believers? (Note Luke 1: 30)
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If you (like Mary) seek God in your daily life consistently, you can expect God to reveal Himself to you someday dramatically!”
7. For what purpose does God give ‘special revelations’ of Himself to people?
8. Tell to what extent you personally identify with the following statements: “All of God’s revelations are calls to accomplish the humanly unaccomplishable! Mary, a virgin, could not bear the Son of God without a miraculous conception! You and I cannot fulfill God’s call without divine intervention!” Give an illustration of a personal call or divinely given assignment, the fulfillment of which was dependent upon divine empowerment.

9. Ponder the following statement: “One way in which God chooses to reassure our hearts when we are tempted to doubt His power or are tempted to center on our inadequacies, is to direct our attention to persons in whose lives He is working similar miracles as the miracle He wishes to accomplish in our own lives.” (Note Luke 1: 36, 37)  
Can you think of friends whose testimonies (regarding God’s miracle in their lives) have served as sources of inspiration to you, to enable you to build your own faith in God’s power to work miracles for you?
  
10. With what attitude should we respond to God when He calls us to special assignments or when He reveals new and amazing plans for our personal lives? (Note Luke 1: 38)

**CHAPTER EIGHT**

**HERE HE COMES - REJOICE**



## CHAPTER 8

**SUBJECT:** “HERE HE COMES” - ‘REJOICE’!

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1: 39-55

**TEXT:** “And Mary said, my soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” (*Luke 1: 46-47*)

**INTRODUCTION:** To attempt to be really happy at Christmas time without personal knowledge of the Christ of Christmas is about like a hungry man attempting to be satisfied by looking at the menu in a fine restaurant without partaking of the food which the restaurant’s menu describes.

**PROPOSITION:** The Christ who came in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 1: 54-55), is the Christ who is the source of all rejoicing. Christ brings unspeakable joy, for He is the agent of personal transformation and of societal transformation. There can be no rejoicing without personal knowledge of the Christ of Christmas. We are not only to personally enjoy the Christ of Christmas ourselves, but we are to be the bearers of joy to others because of the Christ who indwells our lives.

- I. SOURCE OF REJOICING - THE INDWELLING CHRIST (1: 39-45)
- II. SUBSTANCE OF REJOICING - REVOLUTIONARY POWER OF CHRIST (1: 46-55)
  - A. Inward Revolution (vss. 46-55) - Based On God’s Mercy
  - B. Outward Revolution (vss. 51-53) - Based on God’s Justice
    - 1. Moral Revolution (v. 51)
    - 2. Social Revolution (v. 52)
    - 3. Economic Revolution (v. 53)
  - C. Historical Confirmation (vss. 54-55) - Based On God’s Integrity

**CONCLUSION:** During the Christmas season, do you have a basis for rejoicing? Yes! For Christ has come to the earth. He dwelt in our midst for some 33 years, living a sacrificial life, dying a substitutionary death, and rising victoriously from the grave! He is still in the world, in the power of His Holy Spirit! He seeks to indwell every human being. He is coming to you today! Make room for Him! Gladly invite Him in! Let Him transform your life personally.

Then, knowing Him personally, rejoice in your soul and leap for joy, for the Christ who has come to change you personally is in the process of transforming society as a whole! He has come to change it morally - He scatters those who are proud in their hearts (v. 51). He has come to change it socially - He casts down the mighty and exalts the humble (v. 52). He has come to change it economically - He fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty (v. 53).

Rejoice, for God has kept His promise to Abraham ( vss. 54-55). The transforming Christ has come - so welcome Him and let Him CHANGE your life during this advent season!

## CHAPTER 8

**SUBJECT:** “Here He Comes” - ‘Rejoice’!

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1: 39-55

**TEXT:** “And Mary said, my soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” (*Luke 1: 46-47*)

**INTRODUCTION:** To attempt to be really happy at Christmas time without personal knowledge of the Christ of Christmas is about like a hungry man attempting to be satisfied by looking at the menu in a fine restaurant without partaking of the food which the restaurant’s menu describes.

**PROPOSITION:** The Christ who came in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 1: 54-55), is the Christ who is the source of all rejoicing. Christ brings unspeakable joy, for He is the agent of personal transformation and of societal transformation. There can be no rejoicing without personal knowledge of the Christ of Christmas. We are not only to personally enjoy the Christ of Christmas ourselves, but we are to be the bearers of joy to others because of the Christ who indwells our lives.

### SOURCE OF REJOICING - THE INDWELLING CHRIST (Luke 1: 39-45)

The presence of Mary (who was pregnant with the Christ child) was the source of Elizabeth’s rejoicing. The presence of Christ in our lives will be an unspeakably great blessing to those lives that surround us. Christ spiritually in us is the source of blessing to others, just as Christ physically in Mary was the source of blessing to Elizabeth. Mary was the bearer of the Christ; we as believers are the bearers of the Christ, for Christ lives in us. One of the great evidences of Christ’s presence within us is the manifest joy which we bring to others who feel Christ’s wonderful presence when they are in our presence.

Christians, by their very presence, should bring peace where there is discord, joy where there is sorrow, calm where there is crisis, hope where there is despair. Do other Christians, like Elizabeth, leap with inner joy when they are in your presence? Do you bring sunshine where there is darkness? Do others seek out your presence? Are you a healing salve to others when they are with you? Do others, when they are in your presence, sense in you the spirit of Christ, the spirit of joy, the spirit of positive faith? Do others feel good about themselves when they are in your presence? Do you bring out the best in others when they are with you? Is there in others, like as in the case of Elizabeth, a spontaneous and joyous response of gratitude, when they are in your presence? Do others feel favored to be in your company? When others are with you, do they feel like exclaiming in a loud voice, “Blessed are you

among mankind, and blessed is the joy and peace and hope and love which you bear in your soul and which you share from your heart!”

Mary was literally and physically pregnant with the Son of God. The Son of God who was being formed in Mary’s womb was the source of exultant praise and overflowing joy in Elizabeth. When the Son of God - Jesus - is being formed in our lives as believers, we too, like Mary, will bring joy and gladness to the many ‘Elizabeth’s in our lives - fellow believers who sense that Jesus is the source of our joy which we desire to share. Something will leap inside the bosoms of others when they come into our presence.

Even non-believers will take note that we are different when they meet us. My brother-in-law (a public school teacher) was greeted by a fellow teacher - a non-believer - one morning at his school. The non-believer asked my brother-in-law “What is the good word this morning?” Quickly my brother-in-law responded, “Jesus!” I cannot say that that non-believing teacher leaped with joy at that response, but he ‘sat up’ and took notice that my Christian brother-in-law was different!

I have known many mature believers in whose presence I have felt an overflowing joy and gladness and appreciation. I felt something leaping inside me when I came into their presence-they signaled peace, joy, hope when I was in their company.

Let me share only one among many such persons who elicited such a response of joy within me. His name is C. B. Archer. It was several years ago now that he came to Fort Collins to hold a Prayer Conference in our Church. For years, C. B. Archer has been one of God’s mighty prayer warriors, encouraging thousands to fast and to pray, writing and distributing prayer tracts, speaking to hundreds on the subject of prayer, and most of all practicing prayer in his own life. He was in our home and Church for only a couple of days, but I shall never forget the impact his life had on mine. He was a humble, gentle, soft-spoken man, but a man mighty in prayer and awesome in presence. I felt that I was in the very presence of one of God’s greatest warriors. He talked to me about the power of prayer, encouraged me to experiment with fasting and prayer gave me many fine pamphlets on prayer which he had himself written. Kneeling beside him at our Church altar during those hours caused something inside me to leap with praise, admiration, joy, and hope! I felt secure in God’s love when I was in his presence. His countenance betrayed the fact that he had often been in the presence of the Holy One that he had often touched and tapped heaven’s powerful resources. For years, C. B. Archer maintained correspondence with hundreds of people through his Prayer Bulletins and tracts. C. B. Archer was so possessed with Jesus that, in his presence, something leaped within me with joy - an experience perhaps akin to that of Elizabeth.

Someone defined a saint as a person in whose presence you find it easy to believe in God! In Mary's presence, Elizabeth found it easy to praise God!

Jesus is the source of all rejoicing!

## II. SUBSTANCE OF REJOICING - REVOLUTIONARY POWER OF CHRIST (Luke 1: 46-55)

### A. Inward Revolution (vss. 46-55) - Based On God's Mercy

What was the basis for Mary's exultant joy and uninhibited praise? God's mercy which extended to her – is the same mercy that is extended to all those who fear Him (v. 50) in every generation. How did God manifest His mercy to Mary? By Him being mindful of her humble state. *“For He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed.”* (Luke 1: 48) To be mindful of someone is to take notice of that person and to do something for him. God looked upon Mary's state of humiliation and obscurity and did something about her state. God's pitiful feelings of mercy issued forth in powerful actions. *“For the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name.”* (Luke 1: 49)

God's mercy is not deserved or earned but given as a free gift to undeserving sinners. Mary was favored by God, not because of her unusual spirituality, although I believe Mary was in a spiritually sensitive and humbly receptive condition - a condition conducive for the Spirit's special work in her life.

It is true that there are human conditions which must be met if divine mercy can be received. *“His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation.”* (Luke 1: 50)

God's mercy is offered to all, deserved by none, and received only by those who fear him (v. 50). To experience God's mercy is to know God's transforming power. The Mighty One will do great things for him! (v. 49) God's mercy cannot be experienced by those who have no reverential respect for the living God.

Mary's basis for rejoicing was her personal, spiritual transformation - wrought by the power of God!

When you humble yourself before God and allow God to express his mercy toward you, you will see the Mighty One doing great things for you (v. 49).

B. Outward Revolution (vss. 51-53) - Based on God's Justice.

The substance of rejoicing is based on the knowledge of God's personal transforming power. The substance of rejoicing is also based on the knowledge of God's corporate transforming power in society.

The God whose MERCY is demonstrated in personal transformation ("*the Mighty One has done great things for me*" - v. 49), is also the God whose JUSTICE is demonstrated in societal transformation. He is the God who does great things in individual lives (v. 49). He is the God who also does great things in the corporate world of society (vss. 51-53).

There is a great basis for rejoicing when one observes the mighty acts of God, both as God shows mercy to individuals and as God executes justice in corporate society.

If there is a God-wrought, personal transformation in which one can rejoice, there is also a moral, social, and economic revolution in society's corporate life in which one can also rejoice.

1. Moral Revolution (v. 51)

*"He has performed mighty deeds with his arms; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts."* (Luke 1: 51)

What is one cause of dismay and discouragement in the lives of believers? When wrong seems to go unpunished and right seems to go unrewarded.

God is the great leaver! The proud shall be brought low and the humble ones shall be exalted. "*Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" (Proverbs 16: 18) "*Fret not yourself because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb.*" (Psalms 37: 1, 2, NASB) "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" (James 4: 6; I Peter 5: 5)

When proud man prospers and the humble man suffers adversity, justice seems to have been destroyed. When inequities abound and evil prevails, the godly can take heart, for the mightiest acts of the

proud and violent will seem as naught when the Lord has "scattered those who are proud in their innermost thoughts."

We live in a moral universe, and therefore immorality cannot prevail. Wrong will be punished and right will be rewarded. The Bible says, *“Be sure your sins will find you out!”* The Great White Throne Judgment in the hereafter will be the final place of reckoning, but because we live in a moral universe, this present life is the place of moral reckoning as well. *“Blessed are the meek (the humble) for they shall inherit the earth.”* The earth belongs to the morally right! Those who live for God have a good life both here and hereafter. Those who live proud lives of disobedience and sin have a miserable life both here and hereafter. So the godly person is a winner, both in time and in eternity. The evil person is a loser, both in time and in eternity. Life renders its own verdict, either for good or for bad, depending upon one’s response to the living God!

God sets Himself against the proud but He exalts the humble. God has the final word in the moral realms of corporate life.

## 2. Social Revolution (v. 52)

*“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”* (v. 52)

Not only does Jesus right the wrongs within the moral arenas of life, but Jesus also levels all social and class distinctions. The obscure are elevated to importance and the powerful are reduced to humility. The wealthy and poor are treated with equal justice. Labels of distinction are removed and badges of honor are disregarded.

This is not to say that leadership is dismissed as unimportant. Nor is it to say that the reality of racial and class differences is ignored. But it is to say that, because Christ died for all, all persons (regardless of race or class or age or status) are equally important to God. While there will be wide differences in intellectual, social, and economic achievements, there is no caste system in God’s kingdom! *“In this new life one’s nationality or race or education or social position is unimportant: such things mean nothing. Whether a person has Christ is what matters, and he is equally available to all.”* (Colossians 3: 11, Living Bible)

Christians have a basis for rejoicing because Christ loves and accepts all persons, regardless of social status.

## 3. Economic Revolution (v. 53)

*“He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”* (v. 63)

The revolutionary Christ has a lot to say about economics! “A non-Christian society is an acquisitive society where each man is out to amass as much as he can get. A Christian society is a society where no man has to have too much while others have too little, where every man must get only to give away.” (Barclay’s Luke; page 16)

To each according to his need, and from each according to his ability - this is the Christian’s economic ethic.

All are to work if they are able to work, in order to provide, not only for their own needs, but also for the needs of others. “*If anyone is stealing he must stop it and begin using those hands of his for honest work so he can give to others in need.*” (Ephesians 4: 28, Living Bible)

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, concerning their call to aid the financially-depressed believers in the Jerusalem Church, “*Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: ‘He that gathered much did not have too much and he that gathered little did not have too little.’*” (2 Corinthians 8: 13-15, NIV)

Wesley summarized the economic viewpoint of Christianity when he laid down a simple formula for financial stewardship: “Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.”

“*He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.* (Luke 1: 53) The greedy will be emptied; the giving will be filled! This is the law of economics in the Kingdom of God. He who tries to save his wealth will lose his wealth; he who gives will receive. “*If you give, you will get! Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use to give - large or small - will be used to measure what is given back to you.* (Luke 6: 38, Living Bible) “*One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*” (Proverbs 11: 24-25)

Both the financially rich Christian and the financially poor Christian have a basis for rejoicing, because of the revolutionary principles of Christianity regarding economics. “*A Christian who doesn’t amount to much in this world should be glad, for he is great in the Lord’s sight.*

*But a rich man should be glad that his riches mean nothing to the Lord, for he will soon be gone, like a flower that has lost its beauty and fades away, withered - killed by the scorching summer sun. So it is with rich men.”* (James 1: 9-11, Living Bible)

C. Historical Confirmation (vss. 54-55) - Based On God’s Integrity

Thus far we have noted that the source of all rejoicing is Christ, and that the substance of all rejoicing is understood in terms of the revolutionary nature of Christianity. There is the inward revolution of Christianity in terms of personal transformation, based on God’s mercy, and there is also the outward revolution of Christianity in terms of societal transformation, based on God’s justice. God changes society - morally (v. 51), socially (v. 52) and economically (v. 53).

The revolutionary nature of Christianity is seen not only in the demonstration of God’s mercy personally (v. 46-50), and in the demonstration of God’s justice corporately (v. 51-53), but it is seen also in the demonstration of God’s integrity historically. *“He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”* (Luke 1: 54-55)

Christ is the personal transformer of individual lives. He is also the agent of revolutionary changes in society - morally, socially, and economically. But the question may arise: “Why has God chosen to be both merciful and just in His transactions with mankind?” It is because God is a God of integrity. He always keeps His word! What He says He will do. He always does! God promised to Abraham that Abraham would be given a son who would be the means of blessing the entire world - a son who would bless the descendants of Abraham. That promise was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ!

Thus, the appearing of Christ (with all of His benefits to mankind both personally and socially), is the result of the redemptive purposes of God which are fulfilled because God is a God of integrity! If there were no historical fulfillments of God’s promises, based on God’s integrity, there would be no personal and societal transformations, based on God’s mercy and God’s justice. Because Christ came in the fullness of time in fulfillment of promises made to Abraham and to others, (v. 54-55), we can today enjoy the blessings of personal transformation and societal reclamation - morally, socially, and economically!

**CONCLUSION:** During the Christmas season, do you have a basis for rejoicing? Yes! For Christ has come to the earth. He dwelt in our midst for some 33 years, living a sacrificial

life, dying a substitutionary death, and rising victoriously from the grave! He is still in the world, in the power of His Holy Spirit! He seeks to indwell every human being. He is coming to you today! Make room for Him! Gladly invite Him in! Let Him transform your life personally.

Then, knowing Him personally, rejoice in your soul and leap for joy, for the Christ who has come to change you personally is in the process of transforming society as a whole! He has come to change it morally - He scatters those who are proud in their hearts (v. 51). He has come to change it socially - He casts down the mighty and exalts the humble (v. 52). He has come to change it economically - He fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty (v. 53).

Rejoice, for God has kept His promise to Abraham (vss. 54-55). The transforming Christ has come - so welcome Him and let Him CHANGE your life during this advent season!

## CHAPTER 8

### QUESTIONS

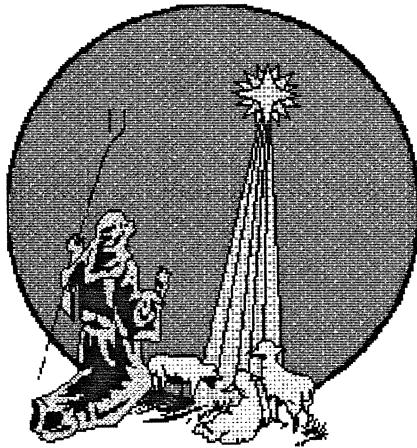
1. Why is it that, for many people the Christmas season is not a happy time but instead a time of great sadness?
2. Tell with what degree of conviction you believe the following statements reflect reality in the lives of believers within the 'community of faith'.  
  
"The Son of God who was being formed in Mary's womb was the source of exultant praise and overflowing joy in Elizabeth. When the Son of God - Jesus - is being formed in our lives as believers, we too, like Mary, will bring joy and gladness to the many 'Elizabeth's' in our lives - fellow believers who sense that Jesus is the source of our joy which we desire to share. Something will leap inside the bosoms of others when they come into our presence."
3. Here is a definition for a 'saint' - "A saint is a person in whose presence you find it easy to believe in God?" What is your definition of a 'saint'?
4. Why do you believe Mary was 'favored' by God and selected to become the mother of Jesus? (Note Luke 1: 46-49) According to Luke 1: 50, what condition must a person meet if he intends to receive mercy from God?
5. When the proud man prospers and the humble man suffers adversity, i.e., when inequities abound and evil prevails, how should the godly man respond? (Note Luke 1: 51; Proverbs 16: 18; Psalms 37: 1, 2; James 4: 6; I Peter 5: 5)
6. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: "The Great White Throne Judgment in the hereafter will be the final place of reckoning, but because we live in a moral universe, this present life is a place of moral reckoning as well. So the godly person is a winner, both in time and in eternity. The evil person is a loser, both in time and in eternity."
7. According to Luke 1: 52, what affect does Christ have in the social life of our world (in terms of races and classes)?
8. Tell why you agree or disagree that the following statements accurately interpret Luke 1: 53 - "A Christian society is a society where no man dares to have too much while others have too little, where every man must get only to give away. To each according to his need, and from each according to his ability - this is the Christian's economic ethic." (Ephesians 4: 28, 2 Corinthians 8: 13 -15)

9. Amplify and explain the significance of the following statement by John Wesley (which he gave as a brief summary of Biblical financial stewardship): “Make all you can, Save all you can, Give all you can.”
10. Cite Scriptural proof to document the truth of the following statement: “The greedy will be emptied; the giving will be filled.” (Note Luke 6: 38 and Proverbs 11: 24-25)
11. On what basis can both the financially rich and the financially poor believer equally rejoice? (Note James 1: 9-11)
12. According to Luke 1: 54-55, what action on the part of God made it possible for God to be merciful in His personal transformation of individuals and just in His reclamation of society - morally, socially, and economically?



## **CHAPTER NINE**

**HERE HE COMES - BEHOLD!**



## CHAPTER 9

**SUBJECT:** “HERE HE COMES” - ‘BEHOLD’!

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:67-75

**TEXT:** *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people.”* (Luke 1: 68)

**INTRODUCTION:** God is the Author of salvation and, therefore, God is to be praised. Jesus is the Agent of salvation. He is the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming of God’s Anointed One whose mission to earth is a saving mission. Jesus is the believer’s protector, rescuing man from all his enemies. Jesus is the believer’s enabler, enabling believers to serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness all their days.

**PROPOSITION:** ‘Behold’ God’s salvation, made possible through the coming of Jesus. Thank God for that salvation! Enjoy protection from all the enemies of your soul! Allow God to enable you to live a life without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all your days.

- I. PRAISE FOR SALVATION (Luke 1: 68)
- II. PROPHECY OF SALVATION (Luke 1: 69-70, 72-73)
- III. PROTECTION THROUGH SALVATION (Luke 1: 71, 74a)
- IV. PURPOSE IN SALVATION (Luke 74b-75)
  - A. What Is The Motivation For Serving Christ?
  - B. What Is The Mode In Which One Serves God?
  - C. What Is The Measure Of Service?

**CONCLUSION:** If Jesus is the fulfillment of man’s ancient longings, the redeemer from man’s sins, the strength of man’s salvation, the protector from man’s enemies, and the enabler for man’s call to holy and righteous living, then Christ is all-sufficient for you today! Behold the Saviour and His saving purposes today!

## CHAPTER 9

**SUBJECT:** “HERE HE COMES” - ‘BEHOLD’!

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 1:67-75

**TEXT:** *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people.”* (Luke 1: 68)

**INTRODUCTION:** Have you ever asked yourself the all-important question of life: *‘What is my ultimate purpose for living?’* Or another question: *‘What is the purpose for which God gave me a son or a daughter?’*

Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, recognized the fact that John, his newborn child, was to fulfill a very important purpose in life. *“And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”* (Luke 1: 76-79)

Later, it was to be this same John who would see Jesus coming to him one day and he would declare, *“Behold! The Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world!”*

Zechariah was taking note of the Saviour who was soon to be born to Mary, and he was so overwhelmed with a sense of God’s saving purposes to be fulfilled in Jesus, that he declares in a Song (Luke 1: 67-79) the glories of that salvation.

Let us together, with Zechariah, ‘Behold’ the Saviour and His saving purpose as related especially in Luke 1: 67-75.

- I. Praise For Salvation (Luke 1: 68)**
- II. Prophecy Of Salvation (Luke 1: 69-70, 72-73)**
- III. Protection Through Salvation (Luke 1: 71, 74a)**
- IV. Purpose In Salvation (Luke 74b-75)**

God is the Author of salvation and, therefore, God is to be praised. Jesus is the Agent of salvation. He is the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming of God’s Anointed One whose mission to earth is a saving mission. Jesus is the believer’s protector, rescuing man from all his enemies. Jesus is the believer’s enabler, enabling believers to serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness all their days.

**PROPOSITION:** ‘Behold’ God’s salvation, made possible through the coming of Jesus. Thank God for that salvation! Enjoy protection from all the enemies of your soul! Allow God to enable you to live a life without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all your days.

## **I. PRAISE FOR SALVATION (Luke 1: 68)**

*“Praise be the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.”* (Luke 1: 68)

Salvation is always the subject of praise, for salvation is the work of God alone. No man can save himself. Man is bound in sin until God takes the initiative to loose him from that bondage. God’s ‘address’ is praise. God inhabits the praises of His people! Men ought always to praise the Lord, for God is the God of salvation. His purposes are all saving purposes. It is not His will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3: 9) *“This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all men - the testimony given in its proper time.”* (I Timothy 2: 3-6)

*God has mercy on all men* (Romans 11: 32). Jesus is the Bread of life, sent by God to earth. Said Jesus about Himself: *“If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”* (John 6: 51)

## **II. PROPHECY OF SALVATION (Luke 1: 69-70, 72-73)**

In the fullness of time - at the right time in history - God sent His Son to earth to redeem His people. ‘Redeem’ means ‘to set free’. Israel, God’s people, often felt themselves enslaved by foreign armies. There were few times in their long history that Israel as a people were not either threatened or actually oppressed by powerful surrounding tribes or nations, such as Philistines, Midianites, Assyrians, Babylonians, and finally the Romans. Israel seemed constantly to be at the mercy of the superpowers which surrounded her. As a strategically-located nation, she was often used as a stepping stone for warfare between the larger nations. Israel often found herself crying out to God for deliverance from her enemies.

When Zechariah declared that God had come to redeem his people, he looked to the Messiah - the Anointed One from God - as the champion of justice and the grand deliverer for Israel. Declared Zechariah, *“He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago).”* (Luke 1: 69) To David, God promised: *“Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”* (2 Samuel 7: 16) God’s covenant with David is summarized in Psalms 89: 20-37. Note a portion of this Psalm: *“I (God) will maintain my love to him (David) forever, and my covenant with*

*him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure....Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness - and I will not lie to David - that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun: it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.”* (Psalms 89: 28, 29, 35-37)

Jesus is the great Son of David who sits on the throne of David, ruling not one nation, but all the nations. Genealogically-speaking, Jesus is the descendant of David. Spiritually-speaking, Jesus rules the hearts and the lives of all human subjects who compose the Kingdom of God. The day will come when all shall bow their knees and declare with their tongue that Jesus is the Lord of lords - and king of Kings. At that time the covenant made to David concerning a Son who would reign forever in David's line, will be totally fulfilled. All the kingdoms of earth shall surrender to the Kingdom of God.

The coming of Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God and signaled, not national victory of the Jews over the oppressing Romans, but spiritual victory for every man who willingly will submit to the kingship of Jesus!

The coming of Jesus was the fulfillment of the covenant made to David (v. 69). His coming was also the fulfillment of the covenant made to Abraham. *“He has raised up a horn of salvation for us...to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham.”* (Luke 1: 72, 73) The Covenant God made with Abraham about 2000 B.C. was a covenant of salvation. To Abraham God promised: *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* (Genesis 12: 2-3)

The coming of Jesus with his worldwide mission of salvation is the fulfillment of God's promise made to Abraham. Indeed, all people on the earth are blessed through the greatest descendant of Abraham - the Lord Jesus Christ! Salvation is offered to all through Christ - the greatest Son of Abraham. The universal offer of salvation is extended to the human race - a blessing that is all-inclusive. Only those who exclude themselves from the kingdom of God through deliberate rejection and unbelief, miss the blessing of salvation, intended for the whole human race. All who exercise saving faith - the same kind of faith that Abraham exercised when he believed God and took

God at His word - is included in the Kingdom of God and is considered true sons of Abraham.

### III. PROTECTION THROUGH SALVATION (Luke 1: 71, 74a)

The protection which God's salvation offers to His people Israel and to all peoples is not necessarily a physical protection. Jesus did come to provide "*salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us...to rescue us from the hand of our enemies.*" (vss. 71, 74a) History, however, proves that God's salvation was not always salvation from external enemies. Indeed, the Jewish nation was not spared the wrath of Rome, as evidenced by the destruction of the Jewish Temple in A.D. 70. Israel, as a nation, was not granted salvation from the hand of cruel Roman oppression in the first century, and history shows that the Jewish people have suffered incalculable agony at the hands of many other nations during the many centuries following the first century.

Also, history shows (as Jesus' predicted) that Christians, who have embraced Jesus' salvation, have suffered greatly. Christians have not always been physically protected from the hand of their enemies. Indeed, history shows that some Christians "*were tortured and refused to be released...Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword, etc. etc.*" (Hebrews 11: 35, 37)

*Jesus said to His followers: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be give what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."* (Matthew 10: 16-20)

"*Salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us*" (v. 71) is a guarantee of protection, but not necessarily physical protection. God's salvation through Christ guarantees protection from man's real enemies - the enemies of sin and Satan and eternal death.

As Luther wrote:

"Let goods and kindred go,  
This mortal life also;  
The body they may kill;  
God's truth abideth still;  
His kingdom is forever."

Jesus said, *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* (Matthew 10: 28)

Protection from the pit of ultimate hell is a great guarantee. What about the pits of earthly hells? Does the *“salvation from our enemies”* (v. 71) include salvation from these? Yes, indeed, for *“by His stripes we are healed.”* (Isaiah 53: 5)

Jesus, the great Son of David, has come to conquer the enemies within - the enemies of the soul. The enemies of the soul are legion, but think of a few of those enemies from which He has promised us rescue.

There is rescue from real and false guilts. There is rescue from terrorizing fears - fears like the fear of the unknown, the fear of failure, the fear of death. There is rescue from inferiority complexes which erode away the basic human need for wholesome self-esteem. There is rescue from the destructive passions of jealousy which threaten to destroy human relationships. There is also rescue from other destructive enemies - enemies like negativism, worry, greed, anger, doubt, and self-centeredness. There is victory in Jesus Christ, the One who has come to give us *“salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us...to rescue us from the hand of our enemies.”* (Luke 1: 71, 74a)

#### **IV. PURPOSE IN SALVATION (Luke 74b-75)**

We are to BEHOLD God as the source of salvation and praise Him for His saving purposes, thanking Him for the fulfillment of His prophesies of salvation and for the protection from all of our enemies which His salvation brings!

The next emphasis is on the purpose in salvation: *“to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”* (vss. 74b-75)

We are saved from our enemies in order to serve, not ourselves, but to serve God. We are to surrender our lives entirely to Christ, giving Him everything we have and everything we are. This includes our time, our talents, our possessions and money, our influence. We are not our own. We are bought with the price of Jesus' blood. Therefore, we are to serve Christ all of our lives. We are never to serve our own selfish interests, but we are to serve the living Christ, giving ourselves for the advancement of the cause of Christ's kingdom.

##### **A. What Is The Motivation For Serving Christ?**

What is the motivation for serving Christ? The love of Christ, not terrorizing fear of God!! The motivation is found in this statement: *“to enable us to serve him without fear.”* (v. 74a) It is true that reverential fear is the 'beginning of wisdom'. We are to respect God as a God of holiness, justice, and judgment,

who will reward every man according to what he hath done in the body. We are to be thankful to God and to worship God “*acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*” (Hebrews 12: 28)

However, while reverence and awe are appropriate motivations for serving God (in light of man’s final accountability before God at the Judgment), terrorizing and paralyzing fear is not a motivation for serving the living God.

“It is a simple fact that man did not know what God was like until Jesus came. The Greeks thought of a passionless God beyond all joy and sorrow, looking on men in calm unmoved detachment - no help there. The Jews thought of a demanding God, whose name was law and whose function was that of judge - nothing but terror there. Jesus came to tell that God was love, and in staggered amazement men could only say, ‘We never knew that God was like that.’” (Barclay’s Luke; page 19)

The drawing love of God is the strongest of all motivations for serving God. To see God as a close Friend with whom you can share your deepest thoughts and desires is to be motivated to serve God wholeheartedly. To see God as a loving Father whose wisdom is perfect is to be motivated to obey Him explicitly. To see God as a Saviour whose life was poured out for undeserving sinners is to be motivated to worship God in ‘wonder, love, and praise’!

In coming to earth, Jesus showed man the nature of the true God. What Jesus was on earth - perfect love - God has always been! Love is the magnet of God which strongly draws man to serve Him!

## B. What Is The Mode In Which One Serves God?

If the motivation for serving God is love - not terrorizing fear - then what is the MODE in which one serves God? We are to serve God without fear “in holiness and righteousness.”

Holiness means separation from outward sinful practices and from inward sinful attitudes. “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*” (II Corinthians 6: 17, 18) Holiness means separation from worldly practices. It also means separation or cleansing from carnal attitudes. Holy attitudes are attitudes characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, forbearance, forgiveness. Ephesians 4: 31, 32 summarizes well the life of outward and inward holiness: “*Stop being mean, bad-tempered and angry. Quarreling, harsh words, and dislike of others should have no place in*

*your lives. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ.” (Living Bible)*

We are to serve God without fear in holiness and in righteousness. ‘Righteousness’ refers to a right standing with God. That is, a relationship characterized by trust and commitment to Christ, and issuing forth in a life of good works. We are justified or made right with God through an exercise of positive faith in Christ. We are put in a right relationship with God the moment we place our total trust in Christ as our Saviour. After being put in that right relationship, we are to spend the rest of our lives doing good works for God. *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2: 10)*

### C. What Is The Measure Of Service?

We have noted that the motivation for service is love, and that the mode of service is holiness and righteousness. What is the measure of service? We are to serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days (v. 75). This means that the sooner a human being in his life begins to serve God, the better! Samuel, in the Old Testament was dedicated to the Lord before his birth. Every husband and wife who is anticipating becoming parents should dedicate their unborn child to the Lord. Urge your youngest children to make a wholehearted commitment of their lives to Christ. It is wonderful to be saved out of sinful living, but it is much better to be saved in youngest childhood before one has indulged in sinful living. Every person has been called to serve Christ all his days - and this means the days of his childhood, his adolescence, his young adulthood, his middle years, and his later years. I have never yet heard anyone tell me that they regretted that they became a Christian so soon in life, but many have expressed regrets for waiting so long before they surrendered to Christ. There is forgiveness from God at any stage of life, but “nothing can deliver us from certain consequences of our sins; the clock cannot be put back.” (Barclay’s Luke; page 19)

May I strongly appeal to every parent: Lead your children into a strong, intimate relationship with Christ while your children are very young. Tell your children and your teens that God has called them to serve God “without fear in holiness and righteousness” all their days.

**CONCLUSION:** ‘Behold’ the Saviour! ‘Behold’ means to take note of something important and to focus your total attention upon that object of importance. Jesus is the object of importance! It is Jesus who deserves all your praise and worship. ‘Behold’ Jesus in your life today. Center your total focus on Him!

To focus your attention on Jesus is to see the salvation of the Lord - the same as Zechariah saw the salvation of the Lord!

To see the salvation of the Lord is first to see that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies regarding God's salvation of mankind.

Jesus is the one of whom all the holy prophets of long ago spoke (v.70). Jesus is the redeemer of His people (v. 68). Jesus is the strength of man's salvation (v. 69), the fulfillment of the covenant made both to Abraham (v. 73) and to David (v. 69). Jesus is the protector and rescuer from man's enemies - these enemies which threaten to destroy man's soul (vss. 71, 74a). Jesus is the enabler of believers - the one who makes it possible for believers to serve God in holiness and in righteousness all their days (vss.. 74, 75).

If Jesus is the fulfillment of man's ancient longings, the redeemer from man's sins, the strength of man's salvation, the protector from man's enemies, and the enabler for man's call to holy and righteous living, then Christ is all-sufficient for you today!

Have you received Christ as your Saviour? Has Christ satisfied your ancient longings? Has Christ set you free (redeemed you) from your sins? Has He conquered your inner enemies, whatever they may be? Is He enabling you to live a life of holiness -separation from outward and inward sin - and a life of righteousness - a life of good deeds? Have you committed yourself to live for God all your days - every day you have the rest of your life, be that a short time or a long time?

Behold the Saviour and His saving purposes today!

## CHAPTER 9

### Questions

1. Why should the theme of 'Salvation' evoke praise in the hearts of humans? (Note Luke 1: 68; 2 Peter 3: 9; I Timothy 2: 3-6; Romans 11: 32; John 6: 51)
2. In what way did God fulfill His ancient promise to David, that David's throne "will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7: 16; Psalms 89: 20-37)?
3. In what way were all the nations of the earth blessed through Abraham (Genesis 12: 2-3; Luke 1: 72-73)?
4. In light of the fact that both God's chosen people - the Jewish People - and God's holy people - dedicated Christians - have suffered incalculable loss, physically and economically, why can we say with integrity and conviction that God "has raised up a horn of salvation" to save us "from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us" (Luke 1: 69-71)? (Note Hebrews 11: 35, 37; Matthew 10: 16-20, 28)
5. What, according to Luke 1: 74b, is the motivation for serving Christ?
6. What is the difference between 'reverential fear' of God (Proverbs 3: 7; Hebrews 12: 28; I Peter 1: 17) and 'terrorizing fear' of God (Hebrews 10: 27-31)?
7. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree with the following statements: "While reverence and awe are appropriate motivations for serving God (in light of man's final accountability before God at the Judgment), terrorizing and paralyzing fear is not a motivation for serving the living God. The drawing love of God is the strongest of all motivations for serving God."
8. If 'holiness' is the mode in which we are to serve God (Luke 1: 75), then how would you define and describe 'Holiness'? (Note 2 Corinthians 6: 17, 19; Ephesians 4: 31, 32; I Peter 1: 13-16)
9. How does the believer who serves God in righteousness before Him all his days, practically demonstrate and manifest such righteousness in his daily life? (Note Ephesians 2: 10)
10. If the motivation for service is love, and if the mode of service is holiness and righteousness, then what is the measure of service? (Luke 1: 76)

11. Give an example from contemporary life that illustrates the truth of the following statements: “It is wonderful to be saved out of sinful living, but it is much better to be saved in youngest childhood before one has indulged in sinful living. There is forgiveness from God at any stage of life, but nothing can deliver us from certain consequences of our sins; the clock cannot be put back.”

**CHAPTER TEN**

**HERE HE COMES - RECONCILE!**



## **CHAPTER 10**

**SUBJECT:** “HERE HE COMES” - ‘RECONCILE’!

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21

**TEXT:** “*How true it is, and how I long that everyone should know it, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*” (I Timothy 1: 15)

**INTRODUCTION:** The Christ of the manger is the same Christ of the cross and the empty tomb, and to understand Christmas, one must understand the reason for which God came to be born as the Christ of the manger. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Thus, the true meaning of Christmas is found in the word ‘Reconciliation’.

### **I. POSSIBILITY OF RECONCILIATION**

### **II. NECESSITY OF RECONCILIATION**

- A. Because Of The Possibility Of Sinning Against Each Other.
- B. Because Of The Fact Of Misunderstandings In Human Relationships.
- C. Because Continued Divine Fellowship and Forgiveness Is Granted On The Basis Of Ability To Forgive In Human Relationships.
- D. Because Bitterness And Resentment Grieves The Holy Spirit And Destroys Fellowship Between Christians.

### **III. STEPS TO HUMAN RECONCILIATION**

- A. A Christian Must Seek To Understand the Motives for People’s Behavior.
- B. A Christian Must Seek To Appreciate Differences In People’s Temperaments And Backgrounds.
- C. A Christian Must Hold No Secret Criticisms Of Another.
- D. Remember That At The Basis Of Most Resentment Is A Touchy, Unsurrendered Self.
- E. Raise The Question With Yourself As To Whether Your Resentments Aren’t Rooted In Imaginary Slights, Insults, And Wrongs.

- F. Every Time When The Name Of The Person Against Whom You Are Tempted To Hold A Resentment Is Presented To Your Mind, Breathe A Prayer For Them.
- G. Say Everything Good You Can About The Person Or Persons With Whom You Are Unfriendly.
- H. When You Do Have To Speak Of The Faults Of A Person, Don't Say, 'I Don't Like That Person'. Rather, Say, 'I Don't Like Certain Things In That Person, And They Are These.
- I. Remember That Fastening Upon Other People's Faults Is Usually A Defense - Mechanism.
- J. If There Is A Sudden Flare-Up And A Consequent Breakdown In Relationships, Get Into The Habit Of Settling Disagreements At Once.
- K. Be Inwardly 'Too Glad And Too Great' To be The Enemy Of Any Man.

**CONCLUSION:** Have you ever noticed how many of the traditional Christmas carols are not merely preoccupied with the Christ of the manger, but rather with the Christ of the cross and empty tomb. Our Christmas carols are deeply theological - speaking of the great doctrines of the Church - especially the theme of Reconciliation and Peace.

## CHAPTER 10

**SUBJECT:** “HERE HE COMES” - ‘RECONCILE’!

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Corinthians 5: 14-21

**TEXT:** “*How true it is, and how I long that everyone should know it, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*” (I Timothy 1: 15)

**INTRODUCTION:** Soon we will be engulfed in the Christmas rush - buying presents, decorating our homes, serving company meals, playing Christmas carols, window shopping, writing Christmas cards to old and new friends, attending Christmas programs, making candy, and perhaps going to the mountains to pick out that special tree, and many, many more activities.

Christmas time is a time when many hearts are opened to give, when those same hearts are seemingly closed the rest of the time of the year. It is a time of glee, anticipation, surprises, gifts, and gladness - and rightfully it should be! Christmas brings happiness to many unfortunate children who are often overlooked most of the time. Perhaps there will be more giving at Christmas time than at any other time during the year, even by people who are usually greedy and grasping.

Amidst all of the activity of Christmas season, there is always the possibility of getting our eyes on the glitter instead of on the grace, to get our eyes on gadgets instead of on God, to get our eyes on the commercialization instead of on the Christ.

**PROPOSITION:** We can only truly understand the meaning of Christmas as it is inseparably connected with Easter. The Christ of the manger is the same Christ of the cross and the empty tomb, and to understand Christmas, one must understand the reason for which God came to be born as the Christ of the manger. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Thus, the true meaning of Christmas is found in the word ‘Reconciliation’. Christ came to reconcile sinners to Himself, and if we are to enter into the true spirit of Christmas, we must enter into the spirit of reconciliation with God and man.

### I. POSSIBILITY OF RECONCILIATION.

Man was created in God’s own image, and as such was made only for greatness and fellowship. Man had blessed communion with his Creator. He was meant to enjoy God’s presence forever. Innocence, uprightness, strength, and obedience characterized man’s beginning. God gave man superior intelligence, and permitted him to subdue the earth. Man’s body was strong, his mind superb, his spirit unblemished.

However, man lost his greatness. Man fell from splendor to despair, from the beauty of perfection to the vileness of distortion, from the joy of fellowship to the anguish of separation, from the freedom of innocence to the bondage of guilt, from health to weakness, from life to death. Man is estranged, haunted by loneliness and paralyzed by fear. He is alienated from God, from his fellow man, and from himself.

Paul taught that all of humanity indulged in sin and that the blanket wrath of God covered mankind. Says Paul, *"We all...followed the impulses and imaginations of our evil nature, being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else."* (Ephesians 2: 3, Phillips)

Man fell from God and is under the wrath of God. However, man is heaven-starved and in need of forgiveness and restoration and reconciliation.

"And Here at last we find  
Strict diagnosis of our malady,  
Which is, in short, that man is heaven-starved  
Men are born thirsting for infinity."  
(Abundant Living, page 95)

Christ's coming and His eventual death made possible man's reconciliation to God. *"It was through what his Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to him - all things in heaven and on earth - for Christ's death on the cross has made peace with God for all by his blood. This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies and hated him and were separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions, yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through the death on the cross of his own human body, and now as a result Christ has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are standing there before him with nothing left against you - nothing left that he could even chide you for: the only condition is that you fully believe the Truth, standing in it steadfast and firm, strong in the Lord, convinced of the Good News that Jesus died for you, and never shifting from trusting him to save you. This is the wonderful news that came to each of you and is now spreading all over the world. And I Paul, have the joy of telling it to others."* (Colossians 1: 20 -23, Living Bible)

Christ makes it possible for man to be at one with God. "When William Tyndale was translating the New Testament into English, he encountered great difficulty in finding a word big enough to convey the meaning of the redeeming work of Christ. Finding no adequate word, Tyndale joined two simple words - 'at' and 'onement', thus making 'atonement' and giving in its etymology a clue to the Bible's teaching of salvation by reconciliation. In Christ's death on the cross, God and man, who had been severed by sin, were brought together by the cross." (World Aflame; Billy Graham; pg. 116)

Man must face the fact of his estrangement and acknowledge that he can only be at one with God through faith and repentance. The object of man's faith is Christ who objectively accomplished man's reconciliation on the Cross. The meaning of man's repentance lies in his denial of attempts of self-reconciliation, and genuine sorrow for his sin.

"E. Stanley Jones has told a story of a little boy who stood before a picture of his absent father, and then turned to his mother and said wistfully, 'I wish Father would step out of the picture.'" (Sangster's Special-Day Sermons; page 17). The true meaning of Christmas is found in the fact that the God who rules this vast universe has stepped out of the universe to dwell upon this little, insignificant, sin-infested planet and lived and died for man, in order that sinners might be reconciled to the Father. The erring child may be reconciled. That is the true meaning of Christmas.

Have you repented and accepted Christ's offer of reconciliation? Remember, "*All who trust him - God's Son - to save them have eternal life; those who don't believe and obey him shall never see heaven, but the wrath of God remains upon them.*" (John 3: 36, Living Bible)

The meaning of Christmas is found in the fact that man must be reconciled to God. But also the meaning of Christmas is found in the fact that man must be reconciled to man. The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of reconciliation - man with God and man with man. To overlook either fact is to lose the spirit of Christmas. The angels praised God on the night of Jesus' birth, and announced the purpose of Christ's coming into the world: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" One cannot truly enjoy the spirit of Christmas and at the same time have ill will toward his fellow man.

The spirit of Christmas means the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. Christmas is a time of calling all men everywhere to be reconciled to God, and also a time for calling all believers to be reconciled to their fellow believers. The call of Christmas is the call to forgive and to be reconciled.

## II. NECESSITY OF RECONCILIATION

### A. Because Of The Possibility Of Sinning Against Each Other.

This problem of differences arising between fellow Christians is not new. Paul dealt with this problem in the Church at Philippi, as well as several other Churches. Wrote Paul to the Philippian Church: "*And now I want to plead with those two dear women, Euodias and Synthche. Please, please, with the Lord's help, quarrel no more - be friends again. And I ask you, my true teammate, to help these women, for they worked side by side with me in telling*

*the Good News to others; and they worked with Clement, too, and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are written in the Book of Life.” (Philippians 4: 2, 3)*

Jesus gave clear instructions as to what to do in cases between brothers who are divided: *“So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and suddenly remember that a friend has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar and go and apologize and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer your sacrifice to God.” (Matthew 5: 23, Living Bible)*

B. Because Of the Fact of Misunderstandings in Human Relationships.

We need each other’s forgiveness because we are very fallible human beings. One cause of misunderstanding among Christians is faulty judgment. The most sanctified Christian is subject to errors in judgment. With the best of intentions, a Christian can blunder and falter. Much misunderstanding among Christians is caused, however, because Christians make hasty judgments without sufficient knowledge even to form a judgment. What a different world this would be if we were very slow to form judgments about others.

“Has God deserted Heaven,  
And left it up to you,  
To judge if this or that is right,  
And what each one should do?

I think He’s still in business,  
And knows when to wield the rod,  
So when you’re judging others,  
Just remember, you’re not - God.”  
(God’s Psychiatry; page 116)

Christians sometimes expect more of people than what God Himself expects of them. Many Christians have pronounced judgments upon people, only to find out later that such judgments were unjust and the cause of much humiliation. How often we misinterpret someone’s action, facial expression, or overheard conversation. God help us to admit that we are sometimes faulty in our judgment.

Sharp differences in opinions sometimes sever strong-willed Christians. The contention between Paul and Barnabas was so great that they parted company. Christians oftentimes differ in outlook, tastes, and opinions, and from this alone, misunderstandings arise. It is very easy to talk, but often hard to listen.

It is easy to be so convinced that one is right in his views, that he becomes closed-minded even to the suggestions or opinions of other Christians. The clash of strong-willed opinions oftentimes breeds misunderstanding.

C. Because Continued Divine Fellowship and Forgiveness Is Granted On The Basis Of Ability To Forgive In Human Relationships.

Jesus made this truth clear in His Sermon on the Mount. He taught us to pray, *"..and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us."* Jesus further said, *"Your heavenly Father will forgive you if you forgive those who sin against you; but if you refuse to forgive them, he will not forgive you."* (Matthew 6: 12, 14, 15)

D. Because Bitterness And Resentment Grieves The Holy Spirit And Destroys Fellowship Between Christians.

*"Don't cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live...Stop being mean, bad-tempered and angry. Quarreling, harsh words, and dislike of others should have no place in your lives. Instead, be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ."* (Ephesians 4: 30a, 31, 32, Living Bible)

*"Since you have been chosen by God who has given you this new kind of life, and because of his deep love and concern for you, you should practice tenderhearted mercy and kindness to others. Don't worry about making a good impression on them but be ready to suffer quietly and patiently. Be gentle and ready to forgive; never hold grudges. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."* (Colossians 3: 12, 13, Living Bible)

### III. STEPS TO HUMAN RECONCILIATION

A. A Christian Must Seek to Understand the Motives for People's Behavior.

A Christian must seek to understand the motives for people's behavior. How much easier it would be to forgive our fellow men, if we would seek better to understand the motives for their behavior. Impoliteness may be caused by worry or pain. Suspicion may be caused by misinformation. Impatience may be caused by bad nerves. James Fraser, a missionary who worked hard and prayed intensely for his people, one day lost his temper in the presence of the very people to whom he was ministering. His problem was not primarily spiritual; his problem was physical. He had worked so hard and had prayed so long that he had failed to get sufficient exercise and fresh air. To understand the cause for one's behavior is to be aided in developing the forgiving spirit. How much easier it would be to forbear with one another, if we sought to

understand the personality make-up and the behavioral motives of those with whom we differ.

B. A Christian Must Seek To Appreciate Differences In People's Temperaments And Backgrounds.

Each of us is unique and is born with differing temperaments that we will have the rest of our lives. People judge one another with such statements as these: "He's too progressive or he's too slow to change"; "He's too liberal or he's too conservative;" "He's too emotional or he's too staid"; "He's too visionary or he's too practical"; He's too talkative or he's too quiet"; "He's too active or he's too passive." These judgmental statements are made on the basis of one's own temperament or one's own background. It would be much easier to accept or to forgive one another, if we all learned to accept each other's differing temperaments and each other's differing backgrounds. Learn to give and take. Learn to appreciate that which is different from you.

C. A Christian Must Hold No Secret Criticisms Of Another.

E. Stanley Jones has a motto: "Fellowship is based on confidence; secret criticism breaks that confidence; therefore we will renounce all secret criticism." He further says, "If there is no outer criticism, then we know there is no inner criticism: so the fellowship is relaxed and unrestrained. We must welcome the mutual helpfulness of constructive criticism, for 'the best of us are only Christians in the making.' If we are afraid of criticism we are living on the defensive, living by fear rather than by faith. Let us lower the barriers and welcome the worst and we will probably find the best!" (Abundant Living, E. S. Jones, pg. 268)

D. Remember That At The Basis Of Most Resentment Is A Touchy, Unsurrendered Self.

"The fact that we have been able to hold the resentment shows that there is a self that is oversensitive because Unsurrendered to the will of God." (E. S. Jones, Abundant Living, pg. 60)

E. Raise The Question With Yourself As To Whether Your Resentments Aren't Rooted In Imaginary Slights, Insults, And Wrongs.

"A self-centered person can image a group is talking about him when that group is talking about everything else but; he can read into actions and statements meanings never intended; he can go around with a suspicious, looking-for-slights attitudes, and will find imaginary ones a plenty."

"Remember that 'when you go around with a chip on your shoulder, the chip is probably from the block above.'" (Ibid; pg.60)

- F. Every Time When The Name Of The Person Against Whom You Are Tempted To Hold A Resentment Is Presented To Your Mind, Breathe A Prayer For Them.
- G. Say Everything Good You Can About The Person Or Persons With Whom You Are Unfriendly.
- H. When You Do Have To Speak Of The Faults Of A Person, Don't Say, 'I Don't Like That Person'. Rather, Say, 'I Don't Like Certain Things In That Person, And They Are These.'
- I. Remember That Fastening Upon Other People's Faults Is Usually A Defense - Mechanism.

“By doing so you are probably attempting to lift yourself up by pushing them down. It won't succeed. In mentally picking flaws in others you create a worse flaw in yourself - you become a sensitive, critical person, like the thing you habitually center upon.

- J. If There Is A Sudden Flare-Up And A Consequent Breakdown In Relationships, Get Into The Habit Of Settling Disagreements At Once. (E.S. Jones)

“Most misunderstandings could be dissolved by quick action. If you let them go they fester.” (Ibid; 268) Barclay says, “Again and again it is the experience of life that, if a quarrel, or a difference, or a dispute is not healed immediately, it can go on breeding worse and worse trouble as time goes on. Bitterness breeds bitterness. It has often happened that a quarrel between two people has descended to their families, and has been inherited by future generations, and has in the end succeeded in splitting a Church or a society in two. If at the very beginning one of the parties had had the grace to apologize or to admit fault, a very grievous situation need never have arisen. If ever we are at variance with someone else, we must get the situation put right straight away. It may mean that we must be humble enough to confess that we were wrong and to make apology; it may mean that, even if we were in the right, we have to take the first step towards healing the breach. When personal relations go wrong, in nine cases out of ten immediate action will mend them; but if that immediate action is not taken, they will continue to deteriorate, and the bitterness will spread in an ever-widening circle.” (Barclay's Matthew, pages 142, 143)

(All of the points in this last Section of the message are taken from E. Stanley Jones in his book 'Abundant Living'.)

K. Be Inwardly 'Too Glad And Too Great' To be The Enemy Of Any Man.

“Be so preoccupied with good will that you haven’t room for ill will. Dr. George Carver, the great Negro scientist and saint, has risen to fame through his classical discoveries and service to the farmers of the South. Someone asked him to reveal the name of the university which had accepted him as a student and then, on discovering he was a Negro, had refused him admittance. Dr. Carver consistently refused to tell, passing the incident off as nothing. He had what somebody called ‘the peace that passeth not only all understanding, but all misunderstanding.’ Someone said to me (Jones), ‘I don’t think you know when you are insulted’. I replied, ‘I am not looking for insults and so don’t see them’.” (Ibid; 63)

**CONCLUSION:** Christmas time is a time when peace ought to reign between God and man and between man and man, especially in the Church - *“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* (Ephesians 4: 1-3, Living Bible)

Have you ever noticed how many of the traditional Christmas carols are not merely preoccupied with the Christ of the manger, but rather with the Christ of the cross and empty tomb? Our Christmas carols are deeply theological - speaking of the great doctrines of the Church - especially the theme of Reconciliation and Peace.

**IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR**

Still thro’ the cloven skies they come,  
With peaceful wings unfurled,  
And still their heavenly music floats  
O’er all the weary world:  
Above its sad and lowly plains  
They bend on hovering wing,  
And ever o’er its Babel sounds  
The blessed angels sing.

For lo! The days are hastening on,  
By prophet bards foretold,  
When with the ever circling years  
Comes round the age of gold;  
When peace shall over all the earth  
Its ancient splendors fling,  
And the whole world sends back the song  
Which now the angels sing.

## WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS BY NIGHT

“All glory be to God on high,  
And to the earth be peace:  
Good will henceforth, from heaven to men,  
Begin and never cease!”

## HARK! WHAT MEAN THOSE HOLY VOICES

Peace on earth, good will from heaven,  
Reaching far as man is found:  
Souls redeemed and sins forgiven!  
Loud our golden harps shall sound.

## I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to man.

## HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark! The herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!”

Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
Risen with healing in His wings.

## O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

For Christ is born of Mary,  
And gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the Angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love.  
O morning stars, together  
Proclaim the holy birth,  
And praises sing to God the King  
And peace to men on earth!

## GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

Hark! The cherubic armies shout,  
And glory leads the song:  
Goodwill and peace are heard throughout  
The harmonious heavenly throng.

With Joy the chorus we repeat,  
"Glory to God on high!"  
Goodwill and peace are now complete,  
Jesus was born to die.

## PEACE ON EARTH - GOODWILL TO MEN

Peace on earth, Goodwill from heaven,  
Reaching far as man is found:  
Souls redeemed and sins forgiven!  
Loud our golden harps shall sound.

Let us meditate often on the truth of our great text: "*How true it is, and how I long that everyone should know it, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*" (I Timothy 1: 15)

## CHAPTER 10

### QUESTIONS

1. During the Christmas Season, have you ever felt the ‘pull of temptation’ in your own life, as described in the following statement? “Amidst all of the activity of Christmas season, there is always the possibility of getting our eyes on the glitter instead of on the grace, to get our eyes on gadgets instead of on God, to get our eyes on the commercialization instead of on the Christ.”
2. Explain what is meant by the following statement: “We can only truly understand the meaning of Christmas as it is inseparably connected with Easter.”
3. As Mankind, as represented by Adam and Eve, fell into sin through disobedience to God’s command, what consequence did this “Fall” have in terms of human interpersonal relationships?
4. Because of Christ’s death on the cross, what has God made possible for every human being, in terms of interpersonal relationships? (Note Colossians 1: 20-23)
5. What is the basic meaning of the word ‘Atonement’?
6. What must a person do, in order for him or for her to be reconciled to God? (Note John 3: 16, 36)
7. Tell to what degree you agree with the following statements: “The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of reconciliation - man with God and man with man. To overlook either fact is to lose the spirit of Christmas.”  
  
Is it possible for a professing Christian to be “at odds” (feeling enmity) with another person, and, at the same time, enjoy intimate fellowship with God? Why or why not? (Note I John 3: 10-18; 4: 7-8, 11, 20, 21)
8. Is the problem of misunderstanding between fellow Christians a problem which exists only in modern-day Churches, or was this a problem even during the time of the Early Church? (Note Philippians 4: 2, 3)
9. What should a believer do if he learns that a fellow believer has been offended by him? (Note Matthew 5: 23)
10. From your perspective and personal experience in interpersonal relationship, why do you think that fellow Christians find it so “easy” to judge one another?
11. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Christians sometimes expect more of people than what God Himself expects of them.”

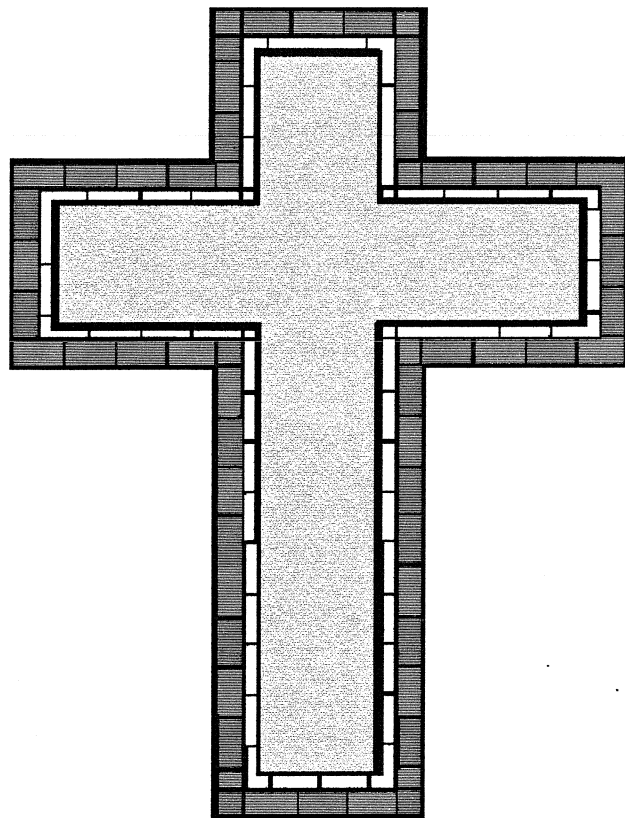
12. Give your reacting or response to the following statements: “It is very easy to talk, but often hard to listen. It is easy to be so convinced that one is right in his views, that he becomes close-minded even to the suggestions or opinions of other Christians. The clash of strong-willed opinions oftentimes breeds misunderstandings.” (Note Isaiah 1: 18; Philippians 2: 1-4; James 3: 17; Acts 15: 36-41; Ephesians 4: 31-32)
13. What condition must a believer meet if he is to continue to experience God’s forgiveness of his sins? (Note Matthew 6: 12, 14, 15; Matthew 18: 21-35)
14. What should be our attitude towards those who wrong us and sin against us? (Note Ephesians 4: 30-32; Colossians 3: 12-13)
15. How is seeking to understand the motives in another person a real aid in helping you to more quickly and easily forgive what seems wrong to you in another person?
16. How does taking into consideration another person’s temperament and background a real aid in helping you to understand and to forgive another person of his mistakes, shortcomings, and sins?
17. Give your reacting or response to the following statements: “We must welcome the mutual helpfulness of constructive criticism, for ‘the best of us are only Christians in the making’? If we are afraid of criticism we are living on the defensive, living by fear rather than by faith. Let us lower the barriers and welcome the worst, and we will probably find the best!”
18. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “The fact that we have been able to hold resentment shows that there is a self that is oversensitive because unsundered to the will of God.”
19. Has it been your experience that overly-sensitive people tend to “read into actions and statements meaning never intended”, and that they tend to hold resentments that are rooted in imaginary slights, insults, and wrongs”? What do you believe is the best “cure” for “over sensitivity” in a person’s life?
20. How does praying for a person, against whom you are tempted to hold resentment, help you?
21. Why is it so important to say everything good that you possibly can, about a person with whom you are unfriendly? Does the fact that you “*dwell on the fine, good things in other*” (Philippians 4: 8, Living Bible), and the fact that you verbalize those good qualities which you see in others, help you to begin to think and to feel positively about those persons with whom you don’t have a close relationship ( and with those persons that you don’t naturally like)?

22. Is it possible for a Christian to love another person whom he does not like”? Why or why not? (Note Luke 6: 27-36) Does ‘agape’ love (divine-type love) involve a “commitment of the will” or is it a “sentiment of the heart”? Is it possible, through God’s enabling grace, for you to genuinely love your “enemies”, even though you may hate their actions and attitudes and may not be naturally attracted to their personality? Why or why not?
23. According to II Peter 1: 5-8, what are the progressive steps which a believer must take, in order to become truly Christlike and mature in the Christian Faith? What is the greatest characteristic that best describes true maturity and Christ likeness?
24. Is it possible for you to fasten and focus on the faults which you see in others, without at the same time becoming a critical and judgmental and overly - sensitive person yourself? What is the difference between being judgmental (Matthew 7: 1), and evaluating and examining the character of another person (Matthew 7: 15 -20; I John 4: 1-3)?
25. Give your personal reacting or response to the following statements: “If ever we are at variance with someone else, we must get the situation put right straight away. It may mean that we must be humble enough to confess that we were wrong and to make apology; it may mean that, even if we were right, we have to take the first step towards healing the break.”
26. Is it possible for one to be so full of the love of God that he is “too glad and too great to be the enemy of any man”?

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **HOW SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS? -**

**'WITNESS'!**



## CHAPTER 11

**SUBJECT:** “HOW SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS? ‘WITNESS’!”

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2: 8-20

**TEXT:** “*When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*” (Luke 2: 17)

**INTRODUCTION:** If you want to celebrate Christmas authentically, follow the example of the shepherds. The shepherds were motivated to witness (v. 17). They were overcome with a sense of wonder and amazement, and they evoked a sense of wonder in the lives of those to whom they witnessed (v. 18), and they were moved upon to worship and to praise God “*for all things they had heard and seen*” (v. 20)

- I. MANDATE FOR WITNESSING
- II. MOTIVATION FOR WITNESSING
- III. MESSAGE IN WITNESSING
- IV. MOVEMENT OF WITNESSING

**CONCLUSION:** Pray that you, as a believer, will have such a real and personal encounter with Jesus (during your devotional times) that when you share your testimony with unbelievers, they will be amazed and astonished! To awaken a sense of amazement in the lives of sinners will oftentimes result in a personal quest for spiritual reality, that in turn can lead them to the feet of the Saviour!

## CHAPTER 11

**SUBJECT:** “HOW SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS? ‘WITNESS!’”

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2: 8-20

**TEXT:** “*When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*” (Luke 2: 17)

**INTRODUCTION:** How should we celebrate Christmas? There are doubtless many ways that unbelievers celebrate Christmas. I recently heard one of my friends, a former teacher in a public school, who ten years ago left public education. I sensed frustration in his voice as he shared with some of us men in the Church. He said that even 10 years ago the public school, where he was teaching, had become so secularized that the principal would not allow there to be a ‘Christmas Program’, only a so-called ‘Winter Program’!

There are cases of secular humanism sticking up its ‘ugly head’ to deny the manger scene from the lawns of public buildings in America, and prohibit every child from naming the name of Jesus in the songs they sing during the month of December in public schools!

Don’t take me the wrong way! There is nothing wrong in a Christian family having a Christmas tree or in a Christian family singing ‘Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer’. What is wrong is for Christians to become so engrossed in buying gifts for others that they forget that Christmas is a time set aside to celebrate God’s greatest gift to mankind - the gift of the Saviour to our sinful world!

*“The Angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.’ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’”* (Luke 2: 10-14)

How should we celebrate Christmas? If you want to celebrate Christmas authentically, follow the example of the shepherds. The shepherds were motivated to witness (v. 17). They were overcome with a sense of wonder and amazement, and they evoked a sense of wonder and amazement in the lives of those to whom they witnessed (v. 18), and they were moved upon to worship and praise God “*for all the things they had heard and seen*” (v.20).

## **I. MANDATE FOR WITNESSING**

The mandate for witnessing is given to all. Everyone is called to witness. A non-witnessing Christian is a contradiction in terms. Every Christian is ‘born to reproduce’. Even those who feel inadequate or untrained or unworthy are called to witness. Never forget, the shepherds were the most unlikely group of people to witness. “That God used them to spread this heavenly message must have stunned them. Shepherds were a despised class in first-century Palestine. The nature of their calling kept them from observing the ceremonial law, which meant a lot to religious people. Shepherds were also considered unreliable and were not even allowed to give testimony in the law courts. But the angels came to shepherds with the great message that Christ the Lord - the Saviour of the world - had been born in the town of David. And despite what others thought of them, the shepherds knew that lost people needed to hear that great message. It is the same today. Jesus is the world’s Saviour. And people are still lost without Him.” (Montgomery Boice)

Don’t belittle yourself, or feel you are incapable or unworthy. God wants to use you! You can make a difference in someone else’s life! You may be the best Christian that someone knows!

Lay persons who witness to other lay persons are the most effective witnesses! The vast majority of persons who come to Church and eventually to Christ, come as a result of a friend’s witness and invitation. It is not great ability that God is looking for; it is great availability. A person with a simple testimony and a sincere faith and a great love for people is the kind of person that God is looking for. Not great intellect, or formal theological education, or persuasive oratorical skills. Everyone can be a witness for Jesus - the high and the low, the young and the old, the educated and the uneducated, the rich and the poor. If God can use shepherds, He can use anyone to ‘spread abroad His message’! Every Christian is called to witness!

## **II. MOTIVATION FOR WITNESSING**

The true motivation for witnessing comes from one’s firsthand encounter with God! Just like the shepherds, we must hear from God. They heard the angels’ voices and they saw the glory of God for themselves. It was not secondhand. It was firsthand!

What motivates a person to tell another person about Jesus? Nothing less than a firsthand experience of Jesus!

There is a little song that says, “I was there when it happened, and I ought to know.” No guessing, no mere hoping, or wishful thinking, or illusions of the mind, or speculations! No, none of these! These shepherds heard with their own ears and they saw with their own eyes! When a person, like the shepherds, personally experiences the presence of God and personally feels the tug of God on his heart, and personally hears the voice of God and the heavenly music of the angels, he can never be the same

again! What he was seen, he can never unsee! His new experience forever puts him on a higher plane of reality, and he cannot keep his newfound message to himself!

Why are some professing Christians close-mouthed about Jesus, paralyzed by fear in the presence of sinners? Could their lack of motivation be due to the fact that many would-be witnesses have only a dead body of orthodox beliefs rather than a living encounter with Christ, to share with others?

If we are not spreading the Word of God to others, it is probably because we have not personally heard the voice of God!

It is easy to tell others about a new discovery or a new promotion or a new gift or a new experience. Spontaneity in witnessing is the result of natural excitement which is experienced because we have seen Jesus!

If you are having a hard time being motivated to witness, it might be good to evaluate the quality of your personal devotional life. He who has a vital devotional life with God is the same one who has a winsome and compelling witness to men. We can only touch others after we have first been touched by God! When God whispers into our spiritual ears the wonders of his love, then we desire to shout with our physical lips the glories of his message!

How can one be quiet after he has seen the glory of heaven revealed to him by God's holy angels and by God's Holy Spirit? If you merely witness out of a sense of 'oughtness' or guilt or legal requirement, you will soon lose your motivation, and your effectiveness will be greatly reduced. It is easy to witness to others when you have something compelling and exciting to share!

### **III. MESSAGE IN WITNESSING**

What is the message or content of effective witnessing? It is rather simple, yet profound in its results! It is the message of "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.*" (Luke 2: 14) When the shepherds spread the word to others, they did not focus on the beauty of the angels (the messengers), nor did they focus their attention on a description of the nighttime surroundings (the context and the immediate circumstances in which the message was revealed to them).

Neither did the shepherds focus on their personal feelings of fright as a result of seeing the angelic host (i.e., their personal emotions that came as a result of their own spiritual encounter and experience). Rather, they "*spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*" (v. 7)

It is important to focus only on Jesus when we are witnessing to others. There may be special persons whom God used to lead you to Christ - like an evangelist or a pastor or a friend or a relative. But it is not the messenger that we focus on in our witness to another, even if that messenger (as in the case of the shepherds) happens to be most unusual - like a miraculous encounter with angels! If God used a great miracle - like a

physical healing of your body - 'to catch your attention' and to bring the message of salvation to you, that is wonderful! But when you witness to another person, never focus on the 'messenger' (be it a person or a miraculous event) that God used to bring you to Christ. Rather, focus on Christ!

When you witness to another, never focus on the specific circumstances that accompanied your spiritual encounter with God. The shepherds did not spend time describing the beautiful hilltop topography - the location where they received their revelation from heaven! It is true that a certain altar of prayer or a certain room or a certain Church or a certain stadium may be a sacred place to you, for it was in that locality that you met Christ. Perhaps you found Christ in a special Church, with a special pastor who served in a special denomination. Fine and good that you mention these circumstances in your witness, but for you to focus on the circumstances and situations that accompanied your conversion or your unique spiritual experience, is about as ridiculous as the shepherds focusing on the topography of the hilltop where they happened to receive their spiritual revelation!

The shepherds did not focus on the host of angels; neither did they focus on their immediate surroundings and make a memorial out of the specific hilltop where God revealed his message on that memorable night.

The content of our witness should never focus on the messenger whom God used to reveal Himself to us. Neither should the content of our witness focus on the specific circumstances or location or context of our personal conversion. And, further, the content of our witness should never focus on our own personal experience - i.e., our own emotional responses at the time of our encounter with the supernatural realm. The shepherds did not make a 'big deal' over the angelic host (as wonderful as this was), nor did they make a 'big deal' over the location where this unique experience took place (the hilltop outside of Bethlehem), nor did they talk about their own personal experience at the time of the miraculous encounter (i.e., their response of fear and awe). These things - the messenger, the location of the spiritual encounter, the personal emotional response from the encounter - are all significant, but they are all secondary.

What is primary in one's witness? Testimony regarding the person and the work of Jesus Christ! The Good News of Jesus Christ is the focal point of authentic witness: *"A Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord... 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.'"* (Luke 2: 11, 14)

If you speak to sinners about your own experience rather than about the person and the work of Jesus Christ, you will focus the attention of others on you instead of on Christ. Never minimize your own personal religious experience, but never make your own experience 'normative'. The important thing is for people to turn their lives over to Jesus. If your unique experience is elevated, others who are seeking God may think they must have an experience which is identical to your experience (emotional responses, etc.) if their experience with God is to be authentic. Give Christ to people, and reinforce your testimony regarding Christ with your own personal

experience (the messenger that God used in your life, the location and context of your conversion, the feelings you had at the time of your encounter with God), but never focus on yourself when you are seeking to witness. Focus on Christ - His mission as Saviour, His call to repentance and faith, His power to forgive sins and to transform lives. You are leading people to Christ, not to you! You are seeking to give them Christ, not your own personal experience of Christ! Focus, therefore, on Christ!

#### IV. MOVEMENT OF WITNESSING

The 'movement' of witnessing is described in the following words: "*When they (the shepherds) had seen him (the Christ child), they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.*" (Luke 2: 17)

It was most natural for the shepherds to leave the Bethlehem manger and to spread the word far and wide regarding this new-born baby - the Saviour of the world!

When you have received news that your wife is to have a baby, or that you are getting a long-awaited-for job, or that you have been awarded with a sizeable college scholarship, or that you have been promoted to a coveted position of prominence, or that you have been granted a large financial gift in the settlement of an estate, how do you respond? Usually, if not always, with great gladness and excitement! You can hardly wait to tell a friend about your new gift or your new promotion, etc.! It is natural, and almost inevitable, for you to share good news with someone else.

So, it was with the shepherds! They had heard from heaven! They had seen God's holy angels! Most importantly, they had seen and adored the newborn child at Bethlehem! Their lives were filled with wonder and their hearts were overflowing with joy. How could they keep such good news to themselves? It was easy to "*spread the Word concerning what had been told them about this child.*" (Luke 2: 17)

What is witnessing? Witnessing is both a Noun and a Verb. It is first a Noun before it is a Verb. I witness by what I am before I witness by what I say. The shepherds first became witnesses of the event (Noun), and then they went forth and told what they had experienced firsthand (Verb).

We are a witness first by personally experiencing an encounter with God, and then we do witnessing by telling others about the Christ who has personally touched our lives. Using our lips, we desire to introduce others to the Christ who wants to change their lives as well.

The whole movement in witnessing is a movement that is outward, not inward; forward-moving, not backward-looking; extroverted, not introverted; aggressive, not passive; experiential, not theoretical; concrete, not abstract; contagious, not drab; persuasive, not coercive; universal, not exclusive.

In terms of witnessing, Jesus said, *“Go into all the world and make disciples.”* He said *“Go out into the highways and byways and compel men to come into the kingdom of God.”* It is Christians who are commanded to go to sinners, not sinners who are commanded to come to the Church. It is great when sinners come to our Churches to become converted to Christ, but Church was never intended to be the primary place where sinners are converted; it is in the ‘highways and byways’ of life (i.e., in the home, office, factory, school, and neighborhood) where people are to be reached for Christ. *“When they (the shepherds) had seen him (Christ), they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.”* (Luke 2: 17)

What had been told them regarding this Bethlehem Babe? That he is the Saviour, that he is Christ the Lord (i.e., that he is the Messiah who is in charge of all of life), that he is the One through whom God is glorified and sinners are reconciled (v. 14). Jesus is the Messiah (the Anointed One of God), the One who can save from sin, the One who can rule the hearts and lives of people, the One who can speak peace to troubled hearts and who can reconcile alienated souls to God!

How can we spread such Good News to those around us, far and wide? First, by being radiant persons in our very being, because we have seen and have heard the Lord in a vital and real way ourselves (like the shepherds whose very countenances must have been changed after they heard the angels announce the *“good news of great joy that will be for all people!”*) (v. 10) Second, by taking the initiative to share Christ verbally with those who are in the *“circle of our own influence”* (v. 17). Third, by the action of good works. Jesus, said, *“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* (Matthew 5: 16)

Be a witness for Jesus - by your changed personality, by your clear words, and by your good deeds!

When you fall in love with Jesus, your love for Jesus and your excitement about the saving message of Jesus, will compel you to *‘spread the word’* to others (v. 17). Because of your transformed character, your personal testimony, and your compassionate deeds, there will be many who will surrender their lives also to Christ the Lord, the Babe of Bethlehem, who transformed the lives and the words of those first shepherds long ago!

What is witnessing? Someone said that witnessing is simply taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Spirit and leaving the results with God. Your job, as a believer, is simply to witness, i.e., to tell others what you know about Jesus as a result of a firsthand contact with Him. After the shepherds actually saw the Christ Child and after they earlier had heard from God regarding the identity and mission of this special child through angel messengers on the lighted hillside, they could never be the same! Their lives were transformed, and transformed persons are strongly motivated to share

their authentic Christian witness with their non-Christian friends. Not hearsay, not second-hand reports, not theological speculations! Firsthand experience, filled with the vitality of one who has personally seen Jesus!

**CONCLUSION:** What results can one anticipate in the lives of those who listen to such an authentic witness? Perhaps conversion, but at least amazement, in the lives of those who take time to hear the testimony of genuine believers. “*And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.*” (v. 18)

Amazement leads to further inquiry, which can eventually lead to personal conversion to Christ.

Pray that you, as a believer, will have such a real and personal encounter with Jesus (during your devotional times) that when you share your testimony with unbelievers, they will be amazed and astonished! To awaken a sense of amazement in the lives of sinners will oftentimes result in a personal quest for spiritual reality, that in turn can lead them to the feet of the Saviour!

## CHAPTER 11

### Questions

1. In light of the secularistic and materialistic trends in our American society, how do you believe an earnest Christian should properly observe Christmas, in terms of ‘customs’ and ‘traditions’? Is it possible for equally sincere believers to differ in their viewpoints and practices, in their celebration of Christmas? Why or why not?
2. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: “Everyone is called to witness. A non-witnessing Christian is a contradiction in terms. Every Christian is ‘born to reproduce’.”
3. When you personally feel inadequate or ungifted in witnessing for Christ, why could a study of the shepherds’ witnessing to Christ’s birth be a great encouragement and motivation to you?
4. Give your personal reaction or response to the following statement: “You may be the best Christian that someone knows.”
5. Check those statements which describe the essential qualities that a person must possess, in order to be an effective and Christ-honoring witness:

- a. Ordination as a Christian minister.
- b. Special theological education.
- c. Youthfulness in actions and appearance.
- d. Articulation in speech.
- e. Outgoing personality.
- f. Cleverness in presentation of Gospel Message.
- g. Memorization of several Bible Verses which explain the ‘Plan of Salvation.’
- h. Forceful and Persuasive in verbal declaration of truth.
- i. Handsome or beautiful in physical appearance.
- j. Experience as a Christian for at least ten years.
- k. A simple, personal testimony of God’s transforming power in your life.
- l. A sincere faith in God’s promises as recorded in God’s Word (Bible).
- m. A great love for lost (unsaved) people.
- n. A deep desire to help fulfill Christ’s ‘Great Commission’.
- o. An understanding of the Biblical teaching regarding the meaning of ‘Repentance’ and ‘Saving Faith’.

- \_\_\_p. A courage that enables one to ‘risk rejection’ from the unsaved persons with whom you desire to share God’s plan of salvation.
- \_\_\_q. Availability to God for Him to use you as His ‘mouthpiece’ to declare the universal love of God to sinners who feel helpless and hopeless and loved.
- \_\_\_r. Special training in the arts of oratory and persuasive speech.
- \_\_\_s. Fearlessness and great bravery in order to meet and to witness to strangers.
- \_\_\_t. Sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who often gives special guidance in witnessing, as He did with Philip (Acts 8: 26-40).
- \_\_\_u. A vision for the lost, a compassion for the lost, a burden which compels you to share the ‘Good News’ of forgiveness and transformation.
- \_\_\_v. An argumentative approach which supports a dogmatic declaration of truth that does not allow the seeking sinner to ask any questions or to offer any challenges or disagreements.
- \_\_\_ w. A gentle spirit, a listening ear, a tender heart, an understanding mind, an unobtrusive mannerism all of which prepare you to build a love relationship with the sinner as a person, rather than treating him as a ‘case’ or an abstract ‘soul’ which needs rescued from hell.
- \_\_\_ x. A humble and teachable spirit, which allows discussion and which invites extended inquiry into the ‘claims of Christ’ and into the meaning of the ‘Christian life’ from sincere and intelligent persons who need time and thought before making a personal commitment to Christ.
- \_\_\_ y. Special training in the Apologetics of Christianity, to provide much ‘ammunition’ for debate with non-believers.
- \_\_\_ z. An ability to give a clear, Biblical answer to questions which non-believers ask regarding God, Man, Sin, and Jesus Christ.
- \_\_\_ aa. Empowerment from the Holy Spirit in order that you may be bold and loving in your witness to non-Christians.
- \_\_\_ bb. Possession of the gift of evangelism.
- \_\_\_ cc. Willingness to speak in behalf of the person and power of Jesus Christ, in spite of personal feelings of inadequacy and feelings of fear of people.
- \_\_\_ dd. A sense of respect for the eternal value of a never-dying soul who desperately needs Christ as Saviour and who will not go to heaven unless he is born again.
- \_\_\_ ee. A prayerful attitude which allows the Holy Spirit to guide you to those sinners who have been prepared by God to receive the message of salvation.

6. What motivates a person to tell another person about Jesus?
7. Why are some professing Christians close-mouthed about Jesus, paralyzed by fear in the presence of sinners who desperately need someone to introduce them to Jesus Christ?
8. Tell to what degree you agree with the following statement: “Spontaneity in witnessing is the result of natural excitement which is experienced because we have seen Jesus.”
9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “He who has a vital devotional life with God is the same one who has a winsome and compelling witness to men.”
10. Put a check by those statements which describe what should be the “Focus” of your witness to a non-Christian person.
  - a. The messenger whom God used to lead you to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
  - b. The specific circumstances and location and context in which you personally accepted Christ as your own Saviour.
  - c. Your own emotional responses which you experienced at the time of your own personal encounter with the supernatural realm.
  - d. Testimony regarding the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.
11. Tell if you agree or disagree with the following statement: “If your own unique spiritual experience is elevated when you witness to non-Christian, others who are seeking God may think they must have your own identical experience (emotional responses, etc.) if their experience with God is to be authentic.”
12. Tell if you believe the following statements are Biblically-supportable:” “When you witness to unsaved people, do not focus on yourself if, but instead, always focus on Christ - His mission as Saviour, His call to repentance and faith, His power to forgive sins and to transform lives. You are leading people to Christ, not to you! You are seeking to give them Christ, not your own personal experience of Christ. Focus, therefore, on Christ! Talk about Him, not about yourself!”
13. Why was it so easy and ‘natural’ for the shepherds to witness to others about the Babe of Bethlehem?
14. Tell what is meant by the statement: “Witnessing is first a Noun before it is a Verb.”
15. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: “The whole movement in witnessing is a movement that is outward, not inward; forward-moving; not backward-looking; extroverted, not introverted; aggressive, not passive, experiential,

not theoretical; practical, not academic; concrete, not abstract; contagious, not drab; persuasive, not coercive; universal, not exclusive.”

16. Does the Bible command Christians to GO to sinners, or sinners to GO to Christians and to the Christian Church? (Note Matthew 28: 19-20; Luke 14: 23) Tell if you agree or disagree with the following statement: “The Church was never intended to be the primary place where sinners are converted.”
17. Do you believe that all three of the following are indispensable if a believer is to be an effective witness for Christ: (a) Transformed personality, (b) Verbal communication of the saving message, (c) Performance of compassionate and Christlike good deeds?
18. Do you believe the following definition of witnessing properly reflects Biblical examples of witnessing? - “Witnessing is simply taking the initiative to share Christ, in the power of the Spirit and leaving the results with God.”





## CHAPTER 12

**SUBJECT:** “HOW SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS? ‘WONDER’!”

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2: 8-20

**TEXT:** “*And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.*” (Luke 2: 18)

**INTRODUCTION:** The shepherds, on that historic night, were filled with amazement and wonder. Have you ever been filled with a sense of wonder and amazement as a result of some spiritual experience? What does it mean to ‘wonder’? To wonder is to marvel, to admire, to be surprised, to hold one’s breath, to be electrified, to be taken aback, to be startled, to be astonished! The sense of awe and wonder and amazement and surprise is what gives mystery and splendor to life. It is a quality unique only to human beings!

What was the greatest of all of God’s acts? God’s act of becoming a Man!

- I. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO BIG COULD BECOME SO SMALL.
- II. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO STRONG COULD BECOME SO WEAK.
- III. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO REMOVED COULD BECOME SO NEAR AND SO PERSONABLE.
- IV. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO RICH COULD BECOME SO POOR.
- V. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO SINLESS COULD BECOME SO CLOSE TO SINNERS.
- VI. AMAZED THAT HE WHO WAS SO GLORIFIED IN HEAVEN, COULD BECOME SO OBSCURE ON EARTH.
- VII. AMAZED THAT HE WHO WAS SO BEAUTIFUL COULD BECOME SO BATTERED AND DISFIGURED.

**CONCLUSION:** As you celebrate Christmas this year, take some time to get alone with God and with God’s Word - and let yourself WONDER! Bow at the manger and marvel at the child! Then rise to your feet and live a transformed life! Be daily ‘lost in wonder, love and praise’!

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What does it mean to ‘wonder’? To wonder is to marvel, to admire, to be surprised, to hold one’s breath, to be electrified, to be taken aback, to be startled, to be astonished!

When you think about it, life is full of ‘WONDER’!

It is that feeling that you have when you look through a microscope and discover a whole new world of brilliant color and strange and fascinating shapes. Or when you first see the craters on the moon for the first time as you peer through a powerful telescope. A feeling of awe and amazement!

It is that feeling that you have when you come away from studying the various theories which modern engineers give in their attempts to explain the ancient marvels of the Egyptian pyramids! ‘The Great Pyramid’ - the largest of them all - contains more than 2 million stone blocks that average 2 ½ tons; it covers 73 acres and stands about 350 feet tall!

Why do we talk about the Seven Wonders of the World? Because each is an accomplishment that seems to defy human reason. They are out-of-the-ordinary, the amazing feats of men’s hands. Stand before an Egyptian pyramid and you will be taken aback, you will marvel, you will be filled with amazement. The Seven Wonders of the World will leave you with your ‘mouth open’!

It is that feeling that you get when you make a serious study of the human body! How amazing is the human body! The human brain is the most incredible creation of God that we know about! “Tucked beneath the skull in each of our heads is a three pound, jellylike mound that looks like crinkled putty, but is actually a collection of between 10 billion and 100 billion neurons. Each neuron is as complex as an entire small computer, and consists of a central nerve-cell core attached to a long tail and several thousand wispy ‘dendrites’. The dendrites reach out to make contact with other dendrites, and if we could count the number of contact points (scientists call the connecting points ‘synapses’), it is estimated

that there may be as many as 1 quadrillion in every human brain.” (Magnificent Mind; page 23; Gary Collins) Truly, we feel like declaring with the Psalmist “*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*”.

It is that feeling which comes over us when, along with millions of others, we view the launching of a multi-toned rocket into space! We declare with others, “It takes away my breath!”

Talking about traveling in space, I never cease to be amazed when I watch a 747 Jet take off from the Denver International Airport! It seems impossible to me that a gigantic, heavy object like a plane could actually overcome the pull of gravity and fly in mid air! Can't you imagine how the skeptical on-lookers must have felt when the Wright brothers actually took their first flight? Recently I was interviewing some of my older relatives - those in their late 70's and 80's (and one was 90), and they told me how when they were kids in the little rural community of Fountain, Colorado, they were fascinated when they saw their first airplane fly over the town. Some kids were on the three story school building roof - totally awe-struck as they saw this 'flying object' go over their building! What a wonder!

It is that feeling that I get when I see the drawings of Joni Earkeason. Those intricate drawings, produced by the small brush, manipulated by the lips and tongue of Joni (who is paralyzed from her shoulders down) make me stand back aghast! I can hardly believe it!

The sense of awe and wonder is what you feel when you see a baby born - a new life, a never-dying soul, an eternal creature made in God's own image, a person with amazing potential. One school teacher used to come into his classroom of boys and first make a small bow to them, before he started his lesson. Asked why he did this, he said, “Who knows, I may be bowing to a future king.” As I recall the story, one of those young children in that classroom was Martin Luther - the man whose revolutionary ideas changed the whole fabric of modern history! Do you have a sense of awe and wonder and reverence when you are in the presence of a group of children?

It is that feeling I had when I went to my first opera! I was awestruck (with my mouth opened in amazement) as I heard what seemed like angelic voices! I will never forget that operatic play! After it was over, I went back stage and met one of the young opera singers. I knew I was in the presence of one of the greatest young singers in America!

A sense of awe and wonder comes over me when I observe a world marathon runner (like at the Olympics) who can run 5 minute miles for 26 consecutive miles without stopping! I can't run one mile at that speed, let alone 26 miles! I am amazed, and I am dumb founded! How can any human body move that fast and continue to run for that distance without stopping?

When I go to a circus and watch the tight rope walkers, my breath is taken away as I watch in wonderment! I hold my breath, wondering if that person is going to slip and fall to the floor, forty feet below! I want to close my eyes when I see him carrying someone on his shoulders!

The sense of awe and wonder and amazement and surprise is what gives mystery and majesty and splendor to life. Whether one recognizes it or not, this feeling of awe is a so-called 'religious feeling'. It is a quality unique only to human beings! As far as we know, there is no animal that has the capacity to stand back with it's mouth open, beholding the wonders of life, appreciating the beautiful creation of God and the amazing feats of man. It is a spiritual quality that is evidence of our unique creation.

This sense of awe regarding the mysteries of nature and regarding the amazing feats of men - this response of wonderment is meant to take us to deeper depths! To the depths of spiritual realities! When Paul meditated on the ways of God, he was often "lost in wonder, love, and praise."

The Psalmist was filled with wonder when he wrote about the Lord and the Lord's marvelous ways: "*Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.*" (Psalms 145: 3, 4)

**PROPOSITION:** What is the greatest of all of God's acts? God's act of becoming a Man!

## **I. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO BIG COULD BECOME SO SMALL.**

Have you ever thought for even a short time of the magnitude of the universe? There is no way our finite minds can comprehend sizes and distances in the universe. For instance, our sun is 1 million times bigger than our earth! And yet our sun is a small star compared to the size of other stars. Our Milky Way Galaxy is but one small Galaxy compared to the billions of other Galaxies in our vast Universe. And yet, if we could travel 186,000 miles per second (the speed of light) it would take us 100,000 years to travel across only this one galaxy (the Milky Way Galaxy)!

Considering the size of this Universe, by way of comparison, our own planet Earth is smaller than a piece of dust in this room (compared to the space of the entire room)! I find myself 'lost in wonder' that the Creator God could ever or would ever come and live in a human body on this planet! But, remember, God is Creator of the universe, and, as such, He is separate from this universe.

Just think, the Creator of all became confined to a human body for a space of 33 years! How big He is, and yet how small He became! How wonderful, how amazing! Notes J. B. Phillip, “It is a fascinating problem for us human beings to consider how the Eternal Being - wishing to show men His own Character focused, His own Thought expressed, and His own Purpose demonstrated - could introduce Himself into the stream of human history without disturbing or disrupting it. There must obviously be an almost unbelievable ‘scaling-down’ of the ‘size’ of God to match the life of the planet. There must be a complete acceptance of the space-and-time limitations of this present life.” (The Newborn Christian; J. B. Phillips; page 6, 7)

It is hard to imagine that God - the One who is omnipresent (able to be everywhere at one time) - could confine himself to one human body for over three decades! Jesus is God focused, God scaled-down, and yet, while it is true that He is God limited, He is nevertheless authentically God!

Can you imagine a junior angel having a conversation with a senior angel, the latter teaching the former about the realities of the small planet called earth? Perhaps the conversation would go something like this:

“I want you to watch that one particularly,” said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.

Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me,” said the little angel. “What’s special about that one?”

“That,” replied his senior solemnly, “is the Visited Planet.”

“‘Visited’?” said the little one. “You don’t mean visited by ---”

“Indeed I do. That ball, which I have no doubt looks to you small and insignificant and perhaps not over clean, has been visited by our young Prince of Glory.” And at these words he bowed his head reverently.

“But how?” queried the younger one. “Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince, with all these wonders and splendors of His Creation, and millions more that I’m sure I haven’t seen yet, went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball? Why should He do a thing like that?”

“It isn’t for us,” said his senior, a little stiffly, ‘to question His ‘ways’, except that I must point out to you that He is not impressed by size and numbers as you seem to be. But that He really went I

know, and all of us in Heaven who know anything know that. As to why He became one of them....how else do you suppose could He visit them?"

The little angel's face wrinkled in disgust.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?"

"I do, and I don't think He would like you to call them 'creeping crawling creatures' in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, He loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him." (Ibid; pg. 32)

Think of it! "The Second Person in God, the Son, became human Himself: was born into the world as an actual man - a real man of a particular height, with hair of a particular color, speaking a particular language, weighing so many pounds. The Eternal Being, who knows everything and who created the whole universe, became not only a man but (before that) a baby and before that a fetus inside a woman's body. It you want to get the hang of it, think how you would like to become a slug or a crab." (The Joyful Christian; C. S. Lewis; p. 51)

## **II. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO STRONG COULD BECOME SO WEAK.**

The story of Christmas is the story of the omnipotent (all-powerful) God becoming a man - a man who was subject to human limitations and weaknesses. A man who became weary with work, who needs like all humans to sleep, to eat, and to clothe himself. A man who wept with the weeping, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Jesus was fully God, but Jesus was too fully Man. A man who needed others, a man who longed for companionship, a man who suffered being tempted, a man who was moved with compassion as He looked upon the multitudes, a man who was acutely aware of physical pain as the nails were driven into His quivering flesh on the rugged cross - the very cross that was so heavy that he fell beneath its load on his long journey up Calvary's Mountain!

How amazing to think that He (Jesus) who made the sun would be so weak and so helpless as a babe in a lowly manger, that he would, on the day of his birth, need the warmth of swaddling clothes and the warm breath of a nearby ox! "That He, from whose hands came planets and worlds, would one day have tiny arms that would not be long enough to touch the heads of the cattle. That the Eternal Word would be dumb. That omnipotence would be wrapped in swaddling clothes. That the feet that trod the everlasting hills, would be too weak to walk." (Bishop Fulton Sheen)

### **III. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO REMOVED COULD BECOME SO NEAR AND SO PERSONABLE.**

By His very nature, God is transcendent, i.e., He is holy, separate, far removed from man. His ways are higher than man's ways, as high as the heavens are above the earth.

How amazing that He who is so far above and far removed from man, could Himself become a Man! Wonder of wonders that this God would bow so low as to become one of us! The transcendent One is now the immanent One - the One who is closer to us than hands or feet or breathing!

Jesus said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you. Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!"*

Jesus is God focused, God approachable, God knowable, God touchable, God seeable, in short 'God domesticated'!

One man - a worldly man who was a bundle of nerves and on the brink of an emotional breakdown - visited a doctor, seeking help and wanting a release from his nervous tension. Said the doctor to the man, "The only way you are going to get relief from your nervous tension and mental anxiety is to pray." "What!" said the man, "you mean to tell me that I need to talk to that up there? You just as well could tell me to shake hands with the 'Milky Way'!"

To this worldly man, God was at best an abstract force or impersonal entity, far removed from the concerns of mankind. To him, 'God' (whatever that term means) was totally unapproachable and far removed and uninvolved in the affairs and the problems of man.

The Incarnation teaches us that God, far from being detached and disinterested in man, is instead the God who has taken the initiative in seeking and saving mankind! There is a story of a woman who was trying to find God. "She had a certain dream which she dreamed more than once, namely, that she was standing in front of a thick plate glass window. As she looked at it, she seemed to see God on the other side. She hammered on the window, trying to attract His attention, but without success. She grew more and more desperate, and began to call to Him and found herself shrieking at the top of her voice. And then a quiet, calm voice at her side said: 'Why are you making so much noise? There is nothing between us.' Perhaps that illustrates our difficulty, does it not? We have been groping around for a long time, and all the while He is standing beside us." (Mr. Jones, Meet the Master; Peter Marshall; pg. 131)

The amazing news in the Christmas story is that God is in our world, that He is not far removed but that He is totally personal and personable. It is a great thing to know that God loves the human race -- corporately yes, but more amazingly, individually. Paul Rees tells of a community canvass being made. "At a certain door the questioner asked the woman who answered his knock what children she had. She began, 'Well, there's Willie, and Horace.' But the canvasser interrupted, 'Never mind names, I just want numbers. Then she grew impatient and a bit indignant. 'They haven't got numbers,' she protested. 'Every one of them got a name.'" Concludes Paul Rees: "They had personalities that spoke with all the eloquence of their individual characteristics.....So God looks upon His human creatures." (*Stand Up In Praise To God*; Paul Rees; pg. 23 - 24)

"You may or may not be aware of Him. But He is, at this very moment, sharply aware of you. He knows you - as you are." (*What Is God Like?* By Eugenia Price; pg. 23)

Regarding God's personal love for him as a sole individual, the Psalmist wrote, "*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body, and knit them together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous - and how well I know it. You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion! You saw me before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your Book! How precious it is, Lord, to realize that you are thinking about me constantly! I can't even count how many times a day your thoughts turn towards me. And when I waken in the morning, you are still thinking of me!*" (Psalms 130: 13 - 18, Living Bible)

Do you realize that "*the very hairs on your head are all numbered*"? (Matthew 10: 30)

"Another passage says: 'He hath visited and redeemed his people'. The only way to redeem His people was to visit them. He couldn't sit on a cloud and utter commands, or pick us up and take us to heaven with celestial tongs, not soiling His fingers with the messy business of human living. No, He dwelt among us - amid our poverty, amid our temptations, amid our problems and choices, amid our oppositions and disappointments, He lived among us and showed us how to live by living." (*The Word Became Flesh*; E. S. Jones; pg. 34)

God loves you as if you were 'an only child'! If you would have been the only one who would have ever lived, Jesus would have died for you! That's how much He loves you!

‘Immanuel’ - the name given for Jesus - means ‘God with us’! As John Wesley lay dying in his bed, the last thing he was heard to say was: “The best of all is that God is with us!”

Yes, I stand amazed to think that He who is so removed (transcendent ) could become so near (immanent) and so personable! One of the great wonders of the Incarnation!

#### **IV. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO RICH COULD BECOME SO POOR.**

Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity, was the Creator of everything. *“Christ himself is the Creator who made everything in heaven and earth, the things we can see and the things we can’t; the spirit world with its kings and kingdoms, its rulers and authorities; all were made by Christ for his own use and glory.”* (Colossians 1: 16, Living Bible)

How amazing, that He for whom all riches in creation were made, left all those riches to be reduced to earth’s poverty. No room even in the inn, born in a stable where animals live. “He who later was to be slaughtered by men, acting as beasts, was born among beasts.” (Bishop Sheen)

“Out of the ivory palaces  
Into a world of woe,  
Only His great eternal love...  
Made my Saviour go.”

Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to accept the poorness of humanity! If he lived as the wealthiest King on earth, that status would still be lowly, compared to His place of royalty that He enjoyed in heaven, but he did not live like a king. Instead, he lived in poverty. Not out of self-pity, but merely to state the nature of His incarnate state, Jesus once said, *“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but I, the Messiah, have no home of my own - no place to lay my head.”* (Matthew 8: 20, Living Bible)

His calloused hands testified to the fact of his hard work as a carpenter. He, the oldest child, worked with his hands, as a skilled carpenter, until he was 30 years old. Tradition holds that Joseph died when Jesus was relatively young, and that Jesus financially supported His mother and several younger brothers and sisters. Life was not easy for Jesus.

Wrote Paul, *“You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus was; though he was so very rich, yet to help you he became so very poor, so that by being poor*

*he could make you rich.” (II Corinthians 8: 9, Living Bible) Jesus chose voluntary poverty that He might die for the lost!*

**V. AMAZED THAT HE WHO IS SO SINLESS COULD BECOME SO CLOSE TO SINNERS.**

Jesus, the sinless Son of God, was called “the friend of publicans and sinners.” What He was called in derision, He was in reality!

He who knew no sin, became our sin bearer on the cross! *“When we were utterly helpless with no way of escape, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners who had no use for Him. Even if we were good, we really wouldn’t expect anyone to die for us, though, of course, that might be barely possible. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”* (Romans 5: 6 - 8, Living Bible)



“I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene,  
And wonder how He could love me, A sinner, condemned, unclean.

He took my sins and my sorrows; He made them His very own;  
He bore the burden to Calvary, And suffered, and died alone.

**Chorus:**

How marvelous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be;  
How marvelous! How wonderful! Is my Saviour’s love for me!

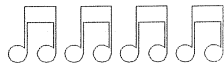


“And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour’s blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”

“He left His Father’s throne above,  
So free, so infinite His grace!  
Emptied himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam’s helpless race;  
‘Tis mercy all! Immense and free,  
For, O my God, it found out me!  
‘Tis mercy all! Immense and free,  
For, O my God, it found out me!



“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?  
O! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.  
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”



“There’s the wonder of sunset at evening,  
The wonder as sunrise I see;  
But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul  
Is the wonder that God loves me

O, the wonder of it all!  
The wonder of it all!  
Just to think that God loves me  
O the wonder of it all!  
The wonder of it all!  
Just to think that God loves me

One cannot understand the significance of the Incarnation without understanding the importance of the atoning death of Jesus! Jesus was born to die! To die for sinners like you and like me! “He went to the cross and made identification with us complete - there He was identified with us at our lowest place - the place of our sin. ‘He became sin for us’. He was crucified between two sinners as one of them. So identified with us in our sin that He cried the cry of dereliction which we have to cry when we sin: ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’ ‘He bore our sins in His own body on a tree.’ The identification and, hence, the incarnation were complete. He was identified with our sins. But the identification was not quite complete - sin and death are always connected. So having tasted our sins, He would have to taste our death too.” (The Word Became Flesh; pg. 60)

“Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all!”

## **VI. AMAZED THAT HE WHO WAS SO GLORIFIED IN HEAVEN, COULD BECOME SO OBSCURE ON EARTH.**

If Jesus was God, why was He not recognized as God when He was on earth?  
Because He stripped Himself of all his divine prerogatives - save one, love - when  
He became man.

“Many years ago, when the Duke of Windsor was the Prince of Wales, he one day left Buckingham Palace, journeyed west into the coal mining country, put on a miner’s cap, and went down into the dingy tunnels to see for himself the conditions in which men toiled in a difficult and dangerous branch of British industry. As a member of the Royal family he was as much a prince in the coal mine as he was when he lived in the palace in London. But, while his essential equality with royalty was unchanged, there was no longer an equality of experience. He had consented to enter into experience that never came to him amid the elegance and immunities of the palace.” (Proclaiming the New Testament; Paul Rees; pg. 44)

When the Prince of Wales was in the dingy coal mine, dressed in miner’s clothes, his identity as royalty was obscured. When Jesus, the Heavenly Prince of God, was dwelling for 33 years in the ‘coal mines’ of earth, amidst the filth of man’s sinful environment, most failed to identify Him as the pure and the spotless Son of God.

Notes Swindoll, “Who could have cared about the birth of a baby while the world was watching Rome in all her splendor?...Political intrigue, racial tension, increased immorality, and enormous military might occupied everyone’s attention and conversation. Palestine existed under the crush of Rome’s heavy boot. All eyes were on Augustus, the cynical Caesar who demanded a census so as to determine a measurement to enlarge taxes. At that time who was interested in a couple making an eight mile trip south from Nazareth? What could possibly be more important than Caesar’s decisions in Rome? Who cared about a Jewish baby born in Bethlehem?” (Paper from R. C. Sproul)

Jesus was born in obscurity. He lived in obscurity, as a common laborer, until he was 30 years old. And even during his 3 year public ministry, during which time He drew many followers to Himself, Jesus was not without His enemies. His popularity waned, and finally through intrigue and evil plotting, He received the sentence of death by crucifixion!

It is amazing to me that He who was so glorified, occupying the center of attention in the universe and in Heaven itself, should become on earth an object of cruel scorn and heartless rejection, eventuating in crucifixion!

He gave up the glory of heaven to receive the shame of earth - all because He loved a lost race! “Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming like men. And he humbled himself even further, going so far as to actually to die a criminal’s death on a cross.” (Philippians 2: 5-8, Living Bible)

## **VII. AMAZED THAT HE WHO WAS SO BEAUTIFUL COULD BECOME SO BATTERED AND DISFIGURED.**

The beauty of Jesus in heaven, before He was born in Bethlehem, was unsurpassed. He was the “Bright and Morning Star”, and the glory of God shone upon Him. All other beauties, compared to that of Jesus, fade into insignificance. The angels are glorious in appearance, but the angels cannot be compared in beauty to the Son of God. “*God’s Son shines out with God’s glory, and all that God’s Son is and does marks him as God.*” (Hebrews 1: 3a, Living Bible)

Whether or not Jesus was actually a handsome man when he lived here on earth (and some speculate that he was not, based on Isaiah 53: 2b: “*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him*”), one thing is certain: Jesus was not beautiful to behold when he was led away to be crucified and while he hung on that rough, splintery cross! Blood, caused by the deep pricks of the crown of thorns on his brow, came rushing down his face, to combine with the blood from the wounds on his face (where his beard had been plucked out) and with the blood from the deep slashes that were visible on his back as a result from the terrible whip lashes! A stark and pitiable sight to behold - the crucified Christ!

Is it not amazing that the repentant thief, the companion of Jesus who was being crucified beside Jesus, could see past the blood and the sweat and filth and flies on Jesus body, and could believe that Jesus was Lord? He said, “*Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom!*” *Amazing was Jesus’ selfless and yet authoritative reply: “Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise!”*

There is enough evidence to make the contention that Jesus, in His resurrected form, bore in His resurrection body the marks of his humanity, and that He ascended to heaven where He continues forever to bear those marks of identification with the human race. After his resurrection, he showed his doubting disciple, Thomas, the wounds from his crucifixion that he still had in his hands and in his side. Is it not conceivable (and likely) that Jesus maintained those wounds in his body when he ascended to the right hand of his Heavenly Father, following the

forty days after the Resurrection? I believe that Christ is immediately identifiable to the heavenly saints, among other reasons, because of the visible wounds in his resurrected body!

“In the Christian story God descends to reascend...One may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in midair, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the deathlike region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover. He and it are both colored now that they have come up into the light: down below, where it lay colorless in the dark, he lost his color too.” (C. S. Lewis; *The Joyful Christian*; pg. 54, 55)

Jesus is eternally identified with the human race! He forever bears the marks of his crucifixion for mankind! Jesus has permanently been ‘colored’ (as it were) because of his ‘dive’ into the depths of the ‘sea’ to recover the precious object of his greatest longing - lost mankind that lay at the bottom of the ocean of sin and corruption!

What makes the Incarnation so amazing? It was the Incarnation (God becoming Man, Philippians 2: 4 - 11) that made it possible for God to save mankind, through the death of Jesus! But, the Incarnation is not the end of Jesus’ identification with mankind! *It is the consistent belief of the New Testament that Jesus ascended to make intercession for us. It is Christ who is at the right hand of God who indeed intercedes for us.* (Romans 8: 34) He always lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7: 25). He appears in the presence of God on our behalf (Hebrews 9: 24). In Him we have an advocate in the presence of God (I John 2: 1). He is the mediator who stands between man and God to bring man and God together, and He continues that mediating work in the presence of God (Hebrews 8: 6; 12: 24; I Timothy 2: 1, 5). “Jesus ascended, not to end his work for men, but to continue his work for men, that in this or in any other world he may still carry on his ministry of intercession and mediation for men...In the Ascension the manhood of Jesus was taken up into the heavenly places, and, therefore, our manhood will also be so taken up. As Denney finely says, the Ascension is the proof that manhood is destined for heaven and not for the grave, that manhood is destined, not for dissolution but for glory.” (The Mind of Jesus; Barclay; pg. 320)

## **CONCLUSION:**

How should we celebrate Christmas? By being lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise.

Let the “Seven Wonders of The Incarnation” of which we have spoken today, capture your attention. Meditate upon these Wonders and let God transform your thinking! Be amazed! Be full of Wonder!

- I. Be amazed that He who is so Big could become so Small!**
- II. Be amazed that he who is so Strong could become so Weak!**
- III. Be amazed that He who is so Removed could become so Near and so Personable!**
- IV. Be amazed that He who is so Rich could become so Poor.**
- V. Be amazed that He who is so Sinless could become so Close to Sinners!**

- VI. Be amazed that He who was so Glorified In Heaven could become so  
Obscure on Earth!
- VII. Be amazed that He who was so Beautiful could become so Battered and  
Disfigured!

As you celebrate Christmas this year, take some time to get alone with God and with God's Word - and let yourself WONDER!

“I wonder as I wander out under the sky,  
How Jesus the Saviour did come for to die;  
To save lowly people like you and like I,  
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.”

Celebrate Christmas! Take time to Wonder! Take time to marvel, to admire, to be awe-struck, to be surprised, to be electrified, to be astonished! Bow at the manger and marvel at the Child! Then rise to your feet and live a transformed life! Be daily “lost in wonder, love, and praise!”

## CHAPTER 12

### Questions

Have you ever really been filled with a sense of wonder and amazement as a result of some spiritual experience?

What does it mean to 'wonder'?

What was the greatest of all God's mighty acts?

When you contemplate the vastness of the Universe, does it seem almost "unbelievable" that the Creator of the Universe actually came to live on this tiny planet called Earth?

Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Jesus is God focused, God scaled-down, and yet, while it is true that He is God limited, he is nevertheless authentically God!"

Do you believe, among Christians generally, that there is more emphasis upon the deity or the humanity of Jesus? Do you find it difficult to comprehend that the One, who created the world and all that is therein, actually was at one time a helpless baby, totally dependent upon a young human mother?

What is meant by the 'transcendence' and the 'immanence' of God?

What evidence is there that God is not an impersonal, abstract, unreachable 'entity', but that He is instead a personable, concrete, approachable, available and caring Being who desires to establish an intimate fellowship with every human being?

Do you, as one individual in a world of teeming billions of human beings, really believe that at this very moment God is sharply aware of you, that He knows you perfectly and that He loves you unconditionally, and that He understands all of your personal problems, and wishes to fellowship with you personally? Why or why not? (Note Psalms 139: 13-18; Jeremiah 1: 4-5; John 1: 47-51; Matthew 10: 30; I Peter 5: 7)

Give your reaction or response to the following statements: "God loves you as if you were 'an only child'! If you would have been the only one who would have ever lived, Jesus would have died for you! That's how much He loves you!"

Who actually was the Creator of this world? (Note John 1: 1 - 3; Colossians 1: 16;

Hebrews 1: 2)

If it is true, according to II Corinthians 8: 9, that Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to accept the poverty of earth, for the purpose of making humans 'rich' through His life of earthly poverty, how then should true believers define and experience their life of 'richness' as children of God? When Christ promises to make those who believe in Him rich, does this mean that Christians will always be materially rich?

To what extent did Jesus identify with the human race when He was here on earth? (Note Matthew 27: 46; Romans 5: 6-8; Philippians 2: 5-8)

During His time on Earth, how well known was Jesus?

Tell what is meant by the statement: "Jesus was not recognized by many people as the DIVINE Son of God, because when He came to Earth Jesus stripped Himself of all of His divine perogatives - save one, love."

Why was it so amazing that the repentant thief - the companion of Jesus who was being crucified beside Jesus - would believe that Jesus was Lord and that Jesus had an unearthly Kingdom to which He was going?

What evidence is there to make the contention that Jesus, in His resurrected form, bore in His resurrection body the marks of His humanity, and that He ascended to heaven where He continues forever to bear those marks of identification with the human race?

Do you believe that when you meet Jesus in heaven some day, you will immediately identify Christ, among other ways, by the visible wounds on His resurrected body - wounds which He received when He was crucified for the sins of all people on Earth? Why or why not?

Would it have been possible for an all-holy God to have saved a sinful race, without the Incarnation and the Death of Jesus? Why or why not?

Following the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus, what heavenly activity did Jesus enter into, which activity He is still involved in? (Note Romans 8: 34; Hebrews 9: 24; I John 2: 1; Hebrews 8: 6; 12: 24; I Timothy 2: 1, 5)

Share your personal reaction or response to the following statements: "In the Ascension of Jesus the manhood of Jesus was taken up into the heavenly

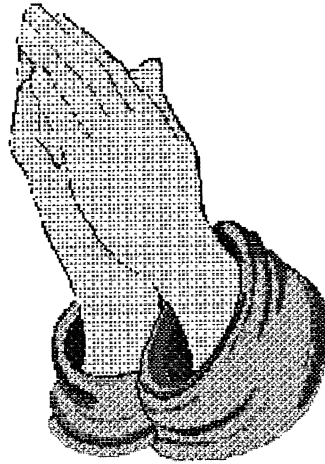
places, and, therefore, our manhood will also be so taken up. The Ascension is the proof that manhood is destined for heaven and not for the grave, that manhood is destined, not for dissolution but for glory.”

When you consider the phenomenon of the Incarnation (God becoming a Human for 33 years), should not you be “lost in wonder, love, and praise?”

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

**HOW SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS? -**

**‘WORSHIP’!**



## CHAPTER 13

**SUBJECT:** “HOW SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS? ‘WORSHIP!’”

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2: 8-15; Matthew 2: 9-11

**TEXT:** “ *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*” (Luke 2: 20)

“*On coming to the house, they (the wise men) saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.*” (Matthew 2: 11a)

**INTRODUCTION:** Jesus is worthy for many reasons. Because of who He is and because of what He can do! He is declared, in those several Christmas-related Scriptures, to be the Saviour, the Lord, the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Reconciler, the Light of Hearts, the Source of Joy and Salvation.

**PROPOSITION:** As one considers the various responses of the various persons surrounding the Christ Child - the shepherds, the Wise Men, Simeon, Anna-there is ‘common denominator’ in their response. All in their various ways responded in worship of the Babe of Bethlehem.

What was the greatest of all of God’s acts? God’s act of becoming a Man!

- I. The Basis of Worship - Recognition Of Jesus’ Identity (Luke 2: 10-14)
- II. The Response of Worship - Surrender to Jesus’ Person (Matthew 2: 11)
  - A. Frankincense is the gift for a priest (Jesus is priest)
  - B. Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die (Jesus is Savior)
  - C. Gold is the gift for a king (Jesus is King)
- III. The Goal of Worship - Glorifying and Praising God (Luke 2: 20)
- IV. The Benefits of Worship - Joy and Peace In The Worshiper’s Soul) (Luke 2: 29-30; 2: 37- 8)

**CONCLUSION:**

O come let us adore Him,  
O come let us adore Him,  
O come let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!

## CHAPTER 13

**SUBJECT:** “HOW SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS? ‘WORSHIP!’”

**SCRIPTURE:** Luke 2: 8-15; Matthew 2: 9-11

**TEXT:** *“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told.”* (Luke 2: 20)

*“On coming to the house, they (the wise men) saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.”* (Matthew 2: 11a)

**INTRODUCTION:** What does it mean to worship God? To worship God is to declare God’s worth. The angel declared the worth of Jesus when he declared to the shepherds: *“Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”* (Luke 2: 11) The kings from the East followed the star to Bethlehem, and they went into the house and saw the Christ Child before whom they bowed down and worshiped. They recognized Jesus as the ‘King of the Jews’ (Matthew 2: 2, 11). Simeon recognized Jesus as God’s instrument of salvation, God’s light from heaven as a gift, not only to Jews, but also to Gentiles (Luke 2: 29-32). To Anna, the elderly prophetess, Jesus was the One whom she and all of Israel had anticipated - the long-awaited-for Messiah (Luke 2: 38).

Jesus is worthy for many reasons. Because of who He is and because of what He can do! He is declared, in those several Christmas-related Scriptures, to be the Saviour, the Lord, the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Reconciler, the Light of Hearts, the Source of Joy and Salvation.

It was appropriate that the shepherds, and the Wise Men from the East, and Simeon and Anna should all respond in worship of the newborn babe - the Babe of Bethlehem.

How should we celebrate Christmas? Like the shepherds, we too should (1) Witness, (2) Wonder, (3) Worship.

“Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to Thee be all glory given;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;  
O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,  
O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord!”

**PROPOSITION:** As one considers the various responses of the various persons surrounding the Christ Child - the shepherds, the Wise Men, Simeon, Anna - there is a ‘common denominator’ in their response. All in their various ways responded in worship of the Babe of Bethlehem. From these worshipers, we may learn better the meaning of true worship.

We must look at: (1) The Basis of Worship, (2) The Response of Worship, (3) The Goal of Worship, (4) The Benefits of Worship.

What was the greatest of all of God's acts? God's act of becoming a Man!

## **I. THE BASIS OF WORSHIP - RECOGNITION OF JESUS' IDENTITY.**

*But the angels reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone! The Savior - yes, the Messiah, the Lord - has been born tonight in Bethlehem! How will you recognize him? You will find a baby wrapped in a blanket, lying in a manger!" Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others - the armies of heaven - praising God: "Glory to God in the highest heaven." they sang, "and peace on earth for all those pleasing him." (Luke 2: 10-14)*

Someone rightly pointed out that all persons are incurably 'religious'. In other words, everyone everywhere worships someone or something. However, the object of one's worship determines the value of one's worship!

Why did the shepherds (in Luke 2: 10-14) worship Jesus? Because God revealed to them, through the angels, that Jesus was unique and special and worthy of worship!

The basis of true worship is recognition of Jesus' identity. When people, like the shepherds, are shown who Jesus really is, they are instinctively drawn to Jesus and find themselves on their faces before Him.

The great Napoleon once said, "If Socrates would enter the room we should rise and do him honor. But if Jesus Christ came into the room we should fall down on our knees and worship Him!" (Shoe-Leather Faith; No. 138).

Said the angel to the shepherds, "*Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.*" (Luke 2: 11)

Why is Jesus worthy of worship? Because He is the Savior, i.e., He came to seek and to save the lost! There is no one more worthy of praise and worship than Jesus, for Jesus gives hope for the despairing, life for the dying, forgiveness for the guilty, joy for the sorrowing, friendship for the lonely. He is everything that your soul ever hoped for - the Bread of life, the Water of life, the Way of life, the Truth of life!

Jesus said, "*I have come not to condemn, but to save!*" "*I have come that ye might have life, and might have it more abundantly!*" "*I have come to seek and to save the lost!*"

In announcing the birth of Jesus to Joseph, the angel said to Joseph, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1: 21)

Why is Jesus worthy of worship? Because Jesus alone provides a means by which sinful men can become reconciled to God. After the one angel announced to the shepherds that a Savior had been born in Bethlehem, “*a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.’*” (Luke 2: 13 -14)

It is not the condemnation of God that rests on mankind, but it is the peace and favor of God that rests on mankind! God is for, not against, the human race! It is not strict justice, but it is loving mercy, which God is ready to offer to a lost race of sinners!

Wrote William Tyndale (1494-1536),

“Now, do you see what this means?  
All men in jail to sin,  
All men wounded by death  
all men overcome by the devil,  
- all such men are,  
neither by merit nor  
because they deserve it,  
loosed!  
made right!  
restored to life!  
saved!  
given their freedom!  
brought into God’s favor!  
put in harmony with God!

All that is great news,  
and as many as believe it,  
sing, praise, and thank God -  
well! they just can’t help but be glad,  
sing, dance for joy.

## **II. THE RESPONSE OF WORSHIP - SURRENDER TO JESUS’ PERSON (Matthew 2: 11)**

*“Entering the house where the baby and Mary his mother were, they threw themselves down before him, worshipping. Then they opened their presents and gave him gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”* (Matthew 2: 11)

The essence of true worship is self-surrender, i.e., presentation of ourselves to God.

The wise men “*bowed down and worshiped him.*” Each gift that was presented to Jesus, recognized the purpose of His mission, which in turn calls for a proper response to the Christ.

A. Frankincense is the gift for a priest (Jesus is Priest)-

When a gift of frankincense was given to Jesus, this symbolically identified Jesus as a Priest. Priests of the Old Testament presided over the Temple sacrifices, and “it was in the Temple worship and at the Temple sacrifices that the sweet perfume of frankincense was used.” (Barclay’s Matthew, pg. 23)

It was the work of the Old Testament priests to act as representatives of God to man, and to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. The Old Testament priesthood was imperfect and unable to remove the guilt of sin. “*But in those (Old Testament) sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*” (Hebrews 10: 3, 4)

Christ came to be the Perfect High Priest, of which the gift of frankincense was but a symbol. “The Latin word for priest is pontifex, which means a bridge-builder. The Priest is the man who builds a bridge between man and God. That is what Jesus did. He opened the way to the presence of God; He made it possible for men to enter into the very presence of God.” (Barclay’s Matthew, pg. 23)

In the Old Testament the common man was barred from personal access to God. It was the High Priest’s responsibility to intercede in behalf of the people. On the day of Atonement the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, the place in the Temple where it was held that God’s presence dwelt. Jesus, the Perfect High Priest, became a bridge to God by which man can personally encounter God. The veil of the Temple was rent in two, symbolizing man’s personal access to God.

Frankincense is the gift for a Priest. Christ came to be the Perfect High Priest, of which the gift of frankincense was but a symbol. Jesus, the perfect High Priest, became a bridge to God by which man can personally encounter God. Christ, as ‘Bridge-builder’ (i.e., Priest) provides a means by which the sinner can have access to God. The great ‘gulf of sin’ has been bridged by Christ. Wrote Paul, “*This is good and pleases God our Savior, for he longs for all to be*

*saved and to understand this truth: That God is on one side and all the people on the other side, and Christ Jesus, himself man, is between them to bring them together, by giving his life for all mankind.” (I Timothy 2: 3-5, Living Bible)*

Properly to respond to Christ, is to recognize Him as my Priest, and boldly (though humbly) to come to Christ to become reconciled to Almighty God. My sins no longer need bar me from God! I no longer need feel isolated, alone, and separated from God!

If Jesus is High Priest, how should I respond to Him? As a sinner, I should cross the bridge and reestablish that sweet fellowship with Jesus which sin destroyed. I should ‘come home’ to Jesus!

“Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,  
Calling for you and for me;  
See, on the portals He’s waiting and watching,  
Watching for you and for me.

Come home, come home,  
Ye who are weary, come home;  
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
Calling, O sinner, come home!”

As a believer, I can come boldly to the throne of grace, because of my High Priest!

B. Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die (Jesus is Saviour)

In the opening account of Matthew’s Gospel, the purpose of Christ’s coming is defined. *“She (Mary) will bear a son, and you must call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1: 21, Barclay) Jesus is both the Perfect High Priest and the Perfect Sacrifice for sin. *“And if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a burnt heifer were, when sprinkled on the unholy, sufficient to make the body pure, then how much more will the blood of Christ himself, who in his eternal spirit offered himself to God as the perfect sacrifice, purify our souls from the deeds of death, that we may serve the living God!”* (Hebrews 9: 13, 14) *“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that comes unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”* (Hebrew 7: 25) *“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”* (Hebrew 8: 12)

Christ died for the sins of the world. The gift of myrrh symbolized Christ’s death. To stop with the Babe of Bethlehem, without considering the Christ of

the Cross, is to miss the meaning of the Incarnation. Christ was born into the world to transform individuals, to make bad men good.

Myrrh is the gift for one who is to die. The gift of myrrh symbolized Christ's death, His Saviourhood.

Properly to respond to Christ means that I affirm the fact and accept the reality that Jesus has died for my sins. His death spells life for me! His suffering spells healing for me! He shed his blood in my place. This means that I cannot merit His forgiveness; I can only humbly receive it as a free gift of His grace. I am not worthy of the least of His favor, but He nevertheless accepts me and forgives me. Such love 'demands' that I give him the praise and worship of my total being!

“My sin - O the bliss of that glorious thought!  
My sin - not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!  
It is well with my soul;  
It is well, it is well with my soul.”

C. Gold is the gift for a king (Jesus is King)

When a gift of gold was given to Jesus, this symbolically identified Jesus as a king, for gold is the gift for a king. The coming of a great king was a deep-seated expectation in the hearts of all Jews throughout the centuries, since the rule of David. Tasker notes the spirit of anticipation that was maintained amidst the decline of Israel after David's reign. “The abuse of power led to the division of the kingdom, and so to its permanent weakening, rendering it more and more the prey of foreign powers. But often during the period of decline that followed the disruption, the Israelites looked wistfully back to the happy days of King David, and dreamed of the time when a king of David's descent would arise and establish the reign of God at Jerusalem, and manifest the sovereignty of God by bringing all other nations into subjection and bestowing great blessings upon His people.” (The Nature and Purpose of the Gospels; pg. 63)

Jesus came to be King, but not the type of king that the Jews were anticipating. The Jews looked to Jesus as God's agent through whom the Jews would conquer all their enemies and enjoy an age of peace and prosperity. This expectation reached its height when the excited Jews shouted Hosanna to Christ as He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The Jews expected Jesus to soon fulfill their nationalistic dreams.

Jesus, however, came not to be a conquering king over earthly kingdoms, but He came to be the King of men's lives. He came not to shatter the Romans, but He came to die on a cross in order that the Romans might be truly transformed, as well as all the Gentiles of the world. Christ came not to destroy, but to restore. He came not to hate, but to love. Christ came to destroy man's passion and pride and then set up his rule in man's heart.

Gold is the gift for a King. Jesus is the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords, and as such, I must surrender my all to His kingship! I must look to Jesus as my king. Because He is my King, I must submit to His kingly reign! What is His reign? His reign is the reign of love. Therefore, to make room for King Jesus' reign in my life, is to make room for the King's love.

To make room for Jesus' love in your life means that you allow Jesus to cast out the 'demons' of hate and bitterness and resentment and jealousy.

Norman Vincent Peale tells of being invited to an old-fashioned prayer meeting and praise service. "The house was full of people. Many were sitting on the floor; some were on the stairs, even two on the grand piano. People were everywhere and all were singing old Gospel hymns - 'Jesus shall reign where 'er the sun does his successive journeys run,' 'Just as I am', and many other familiar hymns. Then they prayed, holding hands as they did so. It was like an electric current flowing around the circle. Power was emanating from one to the other. Finally a man arose and walked across the floor with a slight limp. 'I had a very bad physical condition and was told I would never walk again.' he said.

'Well,' I commented, 'you're walking now. How did it happen?'

'Jesus did it', he replied.

"A beautiful woman came forward and told how she had been helped out of a street gutter in the city of Chicago, a drug addict, and sent to an institution where she received treatment. She found herself, kicked the habit, and was free at last. 'How did it happen?' I asked.

'Jesus did it' she replied.

"Then a couple stood up, arm in arm. 'You have no idea how we used to fight,' they said. 'We cursed and swore at each other. We hated each other and each of us tried to be the most devilish to the other. But now we are remarried and live happily in love and peace.

I asked, 'And how did that happen?'"

‘Jesus did it,’ they answered.” (Sermon: ‘Defeat? No Way. The Word is Victory’; pg. 8, 9)

Have you made room for Jesus’ kingly deliverance in your life? Have you allowed Jesus to deliver you from your personal hang-ups, from a foul temper, or from foul words, or from foul attitudes, or from foul habits? Remember, Jesus is King, and “He is able to deliver thee.”

He is able to deliver thee,  
Though by sin oppressed,  
Go to Him for Rest;  
Our God is able to deliver thee.”

One man was ‘making fun’ of a new convert. Said the cynic to the new convert: “How do you explain the fact that Jesus turned water into wine?” Replied the new believer, “Whether Jesus turned water into wine, I do not know. But one thing I do know. When Jesus came into my heart and home, he changed my beer and wine into furniture!”

Jesus is King! Will you worship Him as your King? Will you submit to His kingly power, the kind of power that can transform your entire life? Paul was transformed! *“I (Paul) used to believe that I ought to do many horrible things to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. I imprisoned many of the saints in Jerusalem, as authorized by the High Priests; and when they were condemned to death, I cast my vote against them. I used to torture to try to make Christians everywhere curse Christ. I was so violently opposed to them that I even hounded them in distant cities in foreign lands. I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when one day about noon, sir, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. We all fell down, and I heard a voice speaking to me in Hebrew, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You are only hurting yourself.’ ‘Who are you, sir?’ I asked. “And the Lord replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Now stand up! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and my witness. You are to tell the world about this experience and about the many other occasions when I shall appear to you. And I will protect you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am going to send you to the Gentiles to open their eyes to their true condition so that they may repent and live in the light of God instead of in Satan’s darkness, so that they may receive forgiveness for their sins and God’s inheritance along with all people everywhere whose sins are cleansed away, who are set apart by faith in me.” (Acts 26: 9-18)*

### III. THE GOAL OF WORSHIP - GLORIFYING AND PRAISING GOD.

*“Then the shepherds went back again to their fields and flocks, praising God for the visit of the angels, and because they had seen the child, just as the angel had told them.” (Luke 2: 20)*

What is the goal of worship? Is it to solve our human problems? Is it simply to feel good? We need to have our human problems solved, and we all like to feel good, but the goal of worship is neither of these. The goal of worship is to focus on God, not on ourselves and not on our world’s problems. “The Bible is filled with praise to Eternal God. The Psalms, hymn book of the Israelitish nation, and the burst of song which appears with almost calculated regularity throughout, characterize the Word of God. Why, then, the preoccupation with man, his problems, and his world? Even our modern devotions tend to be man-centered. Surely this is but one more symptom of what Archbishop William Temple called our self-centeredness which is our original sin’.” (Alive To God Through Praise; Preface; Demaray)

The object of all true worship is God - His character and His purposes. *“Glory to God in the highest”* was the theme of the angelic choir on that historic night long ago. And it remains the theme of heaven’s angelic choirs throughout eternity. *“Day and night they (the heavenly hosts) never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’”* (Revelations 4: 8-11)

### IV. THE BENEFITS OF WORSHIP - JOY AND PEACE IN THE WORSHIPER’S SOUL!

*“Lord,” he said, “now I can die content! For I have seen him as you promised I would. I have seen the Savior you have given to the world.”* (Luke 2: 29-30) *“She never left the Temple but stayed the night and day, worshiping God by praying and often fasting. She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph and she also began thanking God and telling everyone in Jerusalem who had been awaiting the coming of the Savior that the Messiah had finally arrived.”* (Luke 2: 37-38)

The message which the angel announced to the shepherds was a message full of joy. Said the angel, *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”* (Luke 2: 10) *When the Wise Men “saw the star, they were overjoyed.”* (Matthew 2: 10)

Can you sense the joy that the old man Simeon must have felt when he took the Christ child into his arms? Do you remember the account? *“That day a man named Simeon,*

*a Jerusalem resident, was in the Temple. He was a good man, very devout, filled with the Holy Spirit and constantly expecting the Messiah to come soon. For the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen him - God's anointed King. The Holy Spirit had impelled him to go to the Temple that day; and so when Mary and Joseph arrived to present the baby Jesus to the Lord in obedience to the law, Simeon was there and took the child in his arms, praising God. 'Lord,' he said, 'now I can die content! For I have seen him as you promised I would. I have seen the Savior you have given to the world. He is the Light that will shine upon the nations and He will be the glory of your people Israel!'"*

And think of the joy and contentment that Anna, the elderly prophetess, must have felt when she first saw the Christ child! Her response to the Christ Child is recorded in Luke 2: 38. *"Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."*

Whenever people appropriately respond in worship to the Christ, there inevitably comes a sense of joy and fulfillment and contentment. In Christ's presence there is joy forevermore!

Worship should never be a drab or monotonous routine. Rather, worship should be filled with excitement and joy - "joy that is unspeakable and full of glory!"

After he came from his prayer closet, where he worshiped his blessed Lord, John Wesley's face often shone with a glow of joy. Someone said of him, "He thought prayer to be more his business than anything else, and I have seen him come out of his closet with a serenity of face next to shining." Moses too was a "man with a shining face". When he descended Mt. Sinai, where he had been a long time alone with God, his face was radiant with the glory of God - shining with such a brilliance that the Israelites put a veil over his face!

Notes William Barclay, "It must never be forgotten that joy is one of the commonest New Testament words."

"When Dr. Farmer, organist at Harrow, pleaded with the Salvationist drummer not to hit the drum so hard, the beaming bandsman replied: 'Lor' bless you, sir, since I've been converted, I's so happy, I could burst the blooming drum.'"

Notes Donald Demaray, "One of the doxologies of the Church contains the phrase, 'Him praise with mirth!' ....It was Mauree Johnson who told of the old mountaineer who said, 'When I give thanks it happifies my soul.'" (Alive To God Through Praise; Preface) If you want joy - real joy - let Jesus come into your heart! If you want joy - real joy - make Jesus the object of your worship.

Concerning his great happiness as a worshiper of the true and living God, John Wesley wrote the following:

As a Christian I am happy in a special kind of way, inexpressibly happy.

Happy in what? In these clear and complete convictions:

The God who is all-powerful, all-wise, all-gracious, governor over all, loves me!

This God who is the lover of my soul is always with me, is never absent, no! Not for a moment.

Well! Is it any wonder I love Him too.

There is no one in heaven but God. There is no one on earth I desire but God!

Something else:

He has made me like Himself; He has stamped His image on my heart.

Now then:

I live for Him; I do only His will; I honor Him with my body and my spirit.

Before long, I will die and go to Him, I will die in the arms of God.

Then!

Good bye to sin

Good bye to pain

Then! There is only one thing left - to live with Him for ever!

(Quoted in "Alive To God Through Praise"; by Donald Demaray; pg. 100, 101)

## CONCLUSION:

### **O Come, All Ye Faithful**

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!  
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels!

Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation,  
O sing, all ye bright hosts of heaven above!  
Glory to God, all glory in the highest!

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning,  
Jesus, to Thee be all glory given;  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!

O come, let us adore Him,  
O come let us adore Him,  
O come let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!

The goal of worship is to praise and to glorify God. All persons or groups of persons surrounding the manger, find themselves praising and exalting in God and in the Good News which God revealed in Jesus Christ:

- (a) The Angels - Luke 2: 13-14
- (b) The Shepherds - Luke 2: 20
- (c) Simeon - Luke 2: 28
- (d) Anna - Luke 2: 38
- (e) Wise Men - Matthew 2: 11

Jesus' worth is recognized when:

1. Like Anna, we are willing patiently to wait upon God to reveal the Christ to us (Luke 2: 37-38).
2. Like the Wise Men, we are willing to search for the Christ (Matthew 2: 9-10).
3. Like the Wise Men, we are willing to bow low before Christ to surrender ourselves to Christ (the most important gift we can give to Christ).
4. Like Simeon, we are able to understand and to experience the significance of Christ's universal salvation (Luke 2: 28-32).
5. Like the Shepherds, we are eager to witness for Christ to others (Luke 2: 17).

## CHAPTER 13

### Questions

1. What common response did the following make to Christ, when they first heard about the birth of Christ, or when they first saw Him? - (a) The Angels - Luke 2: 13-14; (b) The Shepherds - Luke 2: 15-20, (c) Simeon and Anna - Luke 2: 25-28, (d) Kings - Matthew 2: 2, 11.
2. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: “The basis of true worship is recognition of Jesus’ identity. When people, like the shepherds, are shown who Jesus really is, they are instinctively drawn to Jesus and find themselves on their faces before Him.”
3. Because of what Christ accomplished when He came to earth, what attitude does God have towards mankind, according to Luke 2: 13-14?
4. According to Matthew 2:11, what is the essence of true worship?
5. What significance is there in each of the gifts of the Wise Men - ‘Frankincense’, ‘Myrrh’, and ‘Gold’?
6. Because Christ is your ‘Priest’ - i.e., your ‘Bridge-Builder’ - what should be your response to Him? (I Timothy 2: 3-5)
7. Why is it impossible for a person - a sinner - to earn, to purchase, or to deserve God’s salvation?
8. Why is it impossible for Jesus to be the King of your life while, at the same time, you nurse grudges against people or hold hate and bitterness and jealousy in your heart?
9. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: “We need to have our human problems solved, and we all like to feel good, but the goal of worship is neither of these. The goal of worship is to focus on God, not on ourselves and not on our world’s problems.” (Note Luke 2: 11,13-14, 20, 28, 38; Revelation 4: 8-11)
10. From your own personal experience, tell if you can attest to the truth of the following statements: “Whenever people appropriately respond in worship to the Christ, there inevitably comes a sense of joy and fulfillment and contentment. In Christ’s presence there is joy forevermore!” (Note Luke 2: 28-32, 38; Matthew 2: 10; Luke 2: 10)



## APPENDIX

## CROWN THE SAVIOUR

Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious,  
See the Man of sorrows now;  
From the flight returned victorious,  
Every knee to him shall bow;  
Crown Him, crown Him!  
Crowns become the Victor's brow.

Crown the Saviour, angels, crown Him;  
Rich the trophies Jesus brings;  
In the seat of power enthrone him,  
While the vault of heaven rings;  
Crown him, crown Him;  
Crown the Saviour King of kings.

Sinners in derision crowned Him,  
Mocking thus the Savior's claim;  
Saints and angels crowd around Him,  
Own his title, praise his name;  
Crown Him, crown Him;  
Spread abroad the Victor's fame.

Hark, those bursts of acclamation!  
Hark, those loud triumphant chords!  
Jesus takes the highest station;  
O what joy the sight affords!  
Crown him, crown Him,  
King of kings, and Lord of lords.

- by Thomas Kelly

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