

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
**Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.**

December 2022

Born of a Virgin

Elmer Yliniemi
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The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:20-21

IT TOOK A SUPERNATURAL MESSENGER, sent by God, to guide Joseph in the decision he had to make. Joseph was engaged to Mary. To the Jew, the engagement was as legal and binding as marriage. It usually took place a year before the wedding. They were to prepare for the wedding and marriage during that period. They did not live together; not like many today who live together in fornication, thinking about marriage which may never take place. This is still sin today, no matter how people try to justify it.

Joseph and Mary were living in obedience to the Word of God in this. Then Joseph heard that Mary, whom he loved, was pregnant, and he knew that he was not the father. What was he to do? Mary had obviously been unfaithful to him.

Joseph was a good man. He didn't want to make a public example of her shame. He could turn her over to the authorities and she would be condemned to death. Instead, he would "divorce" her quietly and not have anything more to do with her.

To understand the dilemma Joseph faced, we must recognize the significance of the birth of Jesus Christ as the unique supernatural event of history. This had never happened before and will never happen again. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

The angel told him that Mary was carrying God's Son, the Savior of the world, and that His name was to be Jesus, for He was to save His people from their sins.

God intervened. Why did God choose this method to give His Son? Under normal circumstances, we would consider it a disgrace and a shame to have a child in this manner. But God chose this way, even if it seemed against all reason. In *Isaiah 55:8-9*, we read, *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are*

your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Joseph was about to do what he thought was right. He would have missed the opportunity of naming, and being the earthly father of, the Son of God, all because he thought he



was doing the right thing. But God intervened by appearing to Joseph in a dream. God confirmed the truth of Mary's message to him which was also prophesied in Scripture. Isaiah wrote seven hundred years before that a virgin should be with child and bring forth a son, whose name was to be Emmanuel, meaning "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23).

Both Joseph and Mary undertook a great responsibility, even if the world ridiculed and mocked them. In their day, they were considered an irresponsible couple, trying

to hide their shame. But this was God's way. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Romans 11:33*

God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ does not seem reasonable to our minds, but God, through His Spirit, still reveals Jesus to His own as He did to Joseph and Mary. He still calls people out of darkness into His marvelous light by saying, *Fear not... for he shall save his people from their sins.*

He knows you by name. He has a special place in His plan for you, even as He did for Joseph. God can take ordinary people and use them in extraordinary ways if they submit themselves to His will. A life of faith is a life of miracles.

As true Christians, we are committed to the doctrine of the virgin birth. We read in studies that a large percentage of people claiming to be Christians do not believe that Christ was born of a virgin. It is impossible to be a true Christian and deny the virgin birth. Why is this so important?

When God created the first man, Adam, he was in direct communion with God when he lived in obedience to the Word of God. By the fall of Adam and Eve, sin entered into the world, and death by sin because all have sinned. All of us have come from Adam. Therefore, we must say, as the psalm

writer, *I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Psalm 51:5)* A great gulf separated the earth from heaven.

How, then, was man to become free from sin and reconciled to God? The one who could make us righteous could not come from the same old stock. A new beginning was necessary, and that involved a virgin birth. God had promised that the seed of a woman would bruise the serpent's head. Therefore, the angel told Mary, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:35)*

In the miracle of the incarnation of Christ—God becoming man—we find the bridge across the gulf that parted heaven and earth. The eternal God, who created everything, furnished Himself with a human body. From everlasting,

Jesus Christ is one with the Father, and is God, yet He was born a human child of the virgin, Mary. He had all the feelings and emotions of a human being. *We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. (Hebrews 2:9)*

Jesus was born to die. He was the perfect Lamb of God, sacrificed for our sins. His divine nature could not die, but He was to taste death; therefore, He took on human nature so He could suffer death in order to rescue us from our sins and be victorious over death.

We now have hope of eternal life with Him. Therefore, we can look for His second coming with hope and joy. Praise God for the greatest Christmas gift: our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. ~



Spiritual Christmas

Aatu Laitinen

December 1900 Sanomia Siionista, December 1985 CM

Submitted by Anders Sundqvist; Hayti, South Dakota

WE'RE NOW NEARING THE FESTIVAL of peace, the Christmas season, which we celebrate in memory of the incarnation of Jesus, when He took upon Himself a body like unto ours that He might suffer and die for our sins. This little Child is that "mustard seed" from which the blessed tree of the kingdom of heaven has grown, so that "the birds of the air may come and lodge in the branches thereof."

He was an unknown and rejected child in this world, like a deer early compassed about by dogs and lions, as it was revealed to the prophet's heart in Psalm 22. Yet He became that Prince of

Peace and the throne of grace for all troubled souls unto the end of the world, preparing salvation for the poor, a matter which the angels desire to see and for which they sing their songs of praise.

But this salvation was not easily attained for us. Great and bloody agony, conflict and painful death, endured with heavenly patience, first had to take place in this innocent Lamb of God, this pure Child, before our horrifying debt of sin and its abomination was paid. Let no one forget even for a moment this great price for our souls, which God in His love for us has given for eternal life in His holy Son who took on human flesh through the Virgin Mary.

Immortal souls, do not spend this Christmas festival in a light-minded way as do the heedless slaves of the world, of the flesh, and of the devil, who do not want to remember the humiliation of the Savior, His lowly form and His agony in this world, "who though He was rich... became poor for our sakes." The world rewards the Savior's humiliation and love with shouting, cursing, wantonness, drunkenness, vanity and pleasure. But awakened souls must seek the way to Bethlehem by the light of the star, in the hope that their hearts could draw so near to the Lord Jesus that they could kiss His feet and bow their knees and their faces to the earth to pray to Him with tears that He would not remember the sins of their youth, but in great mercy He would forgive all their iniquities, and would sanctify them unto eternal life by His bloody agony, and by the grace of His Holy Spirit. And you repentant and sorrowful souls who fear the magnitude of your sins, flee yet to this mercy seat. God the Father has given Jesus His holy Son to be our mercy seat.

You prodigal sons and daughters, may be gracious name of Jesus yet sound in your ears no matter where you may in the far country. You will die there in your wretchedness unless you flee soon to your Redeemer in the Father's house. In what other place can poor and wretched souls find comfort than in the name of this Child who is called the Savior of the whole world, regardless of the fact that all fallen children do not receive Him. You sorrowful and repentant sinners, receive Jesus and open to Him your hearts that He might sup with you.

He had to have a humble birthplace because the rich and royal of the world would not permit Him to enter their dwellings. An awakened and distressed heart truly is a humble abode for the Son of God, but He willingly comes to dwell within, for these poor, broken hearts can be helped by no other means than by this bread from heaven, the holy body and blood of Jesus; He whose hands we, like a lion, have pierced with our sins. With the venom of sin we have given Him gall to eat, and vinegar to drink in His thirst. We have filled the cup of God's wrath which this innocent Child had to drink in the Garden under the wrath of God in fierce and bleeding pain and anguish.

Let us here celebrate spiritual Christmas, and let us reckon in His pains the payment for our sins, reconciliation, and adoption that we might always remember with what price we have been redeemed from our vain conversation. It is the true celebration of Christmas where this holy Lamb of God takes away our sins, at dear brothers and sisters, that we might have eternal peace before God, that, washed in Jesus' blood, by faith of the heart we may close our eyes blessedly at last to this troubled-filled journey, and open them glorified in beholding Jesus in eternal Christmas joy. Amen.

The Advent Wreath

Pastor Dennis Hannu
Wolf Lake, Minnesota

THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS during Advent, I have been lighting the Advent wreath during our church service, following a tradition that has been passed down for many years and practiced in many Lutheran circles but fairly new to some of us Apostolic Lutherans. So, I thought I would write an article about this practice.

The Advent wreath is circular in shape representing God's infinite love and usually made of evergreen leaves or boughs, which symbolizes life everlasting given through Jesus Christ. The Advent wreath has within it four or five candles which are lit during the season of Advent. The candles are usually purple, although some use blue candles, and there is also a pink candle, if five candles are used the center candle would be white.



On the first Sunday in Advent, the first purple candle is lit. This is called the prophecy candle or candle of hope, and the Scripture reading is *Romans 15:12-13: And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

On the second Sunday, the first purple candle is lit along with the second purple candle which is called the Bethlehem candle or the candle of preparation. The Scripture reading is *Luke 3:4-6: As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

On the third Sunday in Advent, the first and second purple candles are lit along with the pink, which is called the shepherd candle or the candle of joy. The Scripture passage is *Luke 2:8-14: And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

On the fourth Sunday in Advent the first three candles are lit along with the fourth purple candle which is called the

angel candle or the candle of love. The Scripture reading is either the above passage again or *John 3:16-17: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

The fifth candle which is the Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve or in our case on Christmas Day, as our service is on that day, along with all the other candles. We read the entire Christmas Story from *Luke 2:1-20*. Now if you research you will find a variation of meanings for each candle and a variety of Scripture passages that are read along with the lighting of the candles, but always the main purpose of this tradition is a looking forward to the event of Christmas.

As we light the first candle, we are reminded of the faithfulness of our God who has given us hope because His word and promises are fulfilled in Christ.

The lighting of the second candle reminds us of the preparing of the way of the Lord that was carried out through the work of John the Baptist. We are reminded that the salvation of God has been fully disclosed or made known to us in Christ.

The third candle lighting reminds us of the joy that we have as Christians as we hear again the familiar message of the angels: *Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* This joy is ours because we are in Christ Jesus. Paul writes, *Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. (Philippians 4:4)*

As we light the fourth candle, we are reminded of God's unfailing love for us as He sends His one and only Son to earth to save us. This candle can also symbolize peace and truly our peace is found in Christ.

Finally as we light the white candle, which is typically in the center of the wreath, we are reminded what Christmas is all about. It's about the Christ child, the One lying in a manger. The Christ candle, as it is called, is a reminder to us that the message of Christmas is the powerful message of God's gift to the world. The Light of the world has engulfed us in His glorious light. *Colossians 1:12-13: Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.*

So, whatever your traditions may be during the Advent and Christmas season, may they always point you to, and remind you of, the greatest gift of all which was given to us in the person of Christ Jesus! Have a Happy Advent and a Merry Christmas!

God's peace.



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Jennifer Miller, ALC Calendar Committee

The Lamb of God in a Manger Lay

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

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

Luke 2:14

Once again it brings me new hope and a special joy to tell that ever-so-precious story of Jesus' birth.

SO LONG AGO THE ANGEL Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary in her hometown of Nazareth. (Luke 1:28-33) He said: *Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind (thought) what manner of salutation (greeting) this should be.*

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Mary was somewhat puzzled at these words and said, “How can this be as I know not a man?” She was not married yet, but was planning to marry a man named Joseph.

The angel said, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee (cover with great importance): therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age (90 years): and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.*

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:35-38)

Mary was obedient to the angel's words and was willing to do what her God had chosen for her. That is how God would want all of us to be. He knows we have a hard time listening sometimes, but I pray that it will be our desire to always be obedient to the Lord's desires for us.

By and by, as Mary grew with child, there came a message from the king, Caesar Augustus. He wanted the entire world to be taxed (counted). All went to be counted, every one to the city of his birth. Joseph took Mary and they went to Bethlehem to be counted, because that was where he was born.

Mary at this time was very soon to have her baby. After she and Joseph reached Bethlehem, they looked for a place to rest for the night, but they found nothing. The town was full of people who now lived in other places and had returned to Bethlehem, the city where they were born, to be counted.

One innkeeper had a stable that they could sleep in. Imagine, a “stable,” a place where a farmer puts his animals. It was in this place that Jesus was born. *And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes (long strips of cloth), and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)*

Angels announced this special birth to the shepherds in the field saying, *Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2:10-14)

After the angels had gone back into heaven, the shepherds went to find this baby, and when they found Him, they fell down and worshiped Him. On their return to the fields they told every one they met about the child.

What a humble birth Jesus had, but it was a very special birth because God had sent His only Son to us to save us from our sins, so that one day we could be partakers of heaven. Imagine for a moment how much God loves you in that He sent His only Son to the earth to one day take you to live in heaven with Him if you believe.

Joseph and Mary were I'm sure amazed at this wonderful birth, just as the shepherds and the people were who heard the great news. The Bible gives us an idea of Mary's wonderment. It says, *But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)*

There was so much wonder with Jesus' birth that it was as though Mary was speechless. She could only quietly think about it in her heart.

Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus did not stay living in the stable; they did have a home in Bethlehem, after Jesus was born.

The Bible says, *And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40)*

We can be so thankful to God for giving us His Son, and we can thank Him every day and praise His name. I am humbled as I listen to songs as I write about Jesus' birth, songs that are speaking of God's love for us and His Son's birth and how His Son was hung on the cross, and one day He will come back for His beloved children. The chorus of one of the songs said, “Jesus is coming again, Jesus is coming again.” He came as a babe so many years ago, and IS coming again.

May the blessings of Christmas, of Jesus' birth have a special place in each of your hearts. I pray this Jesus will always be the Shepherd who leads you.

A blessed Christmas to you all! God's peace.



The Birth of Jesus

Paul Kretzmann

Matthew 1:18a: Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise, the evangelist writes. The reference is not so much to the actual process of generation, but expresses the general idea of origin. It was in this way that the Messiah assumed human nature, took upon Himself the form of our sinful flesh. As the Son of God He had no beginning, but is in the bosom of the Father from eternity (John 1:18). As a human being He had a beginning, and this origin the evangelist relates:

V. 18b. When as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Mary had entered into a betrothal, into a contract of espousal, with Joseph. She had agreed to a marriage, she had pledged her word to Joseph, just as he was bound to her by his promise of betrothment. While Mary was in this relation to Joseph, and after she had given him her pledge as his promised bride, she still lived at her own or at her father's house. As a rule, some time elapsed before a betrothed virgin was formally given in marriage and taken to her husband's house (Deut. 20:7, Judg. 14:7-8; 15:1-2). During this time, cohabitation did not take place, though the marriage contract was legal and binding. And it was then, before the celebration of the nuptials, that Mary was found with child. Her situation was not only delicate, but the most distressing and humiliating which could fall to the lot of a pure maiden. Knowing herself to be innocent of even the slightest transgression in deed, and fully convinced of the fact that her condition was due only to the supernatural working of the Holy Ghost, she nevertheless could expect no one to believe her defense, should she attempt one. "Nothing but the fullest consciousness of her own integrity and the strongest confidence in God could have supported her in such circumstances, where her reputation, her honor, and her life were at stake." (Clarke, *Commentary*, 5, 39)

At this critical juncture, Joseph proved himself all that a true Christian should be: **V. 19.** Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. Unable to believe her innocent, which in the face of the evidence must have been beyond the average man's strength, he nevertheless found a way out of the difficult dilemma. As the betrothed husband he had the husband's rights and responsibilities. And he was a just man, righteous, a respecter of the Law, which was especially strict and uncompromising on the subject of infidelity in the woman (Deut. 22:22-24). Yet he did not wish to expose Mary publicly and thus heap ignominy and shame upon her, for she was the woman to whom he had given the love of a husband. His humaneness and benevolence, his affection, were put to a severe test. But the result of his weighing the matter was that he did not choose strict measures, resolving rather upon a quiet cancellation of the bond of betrothal, without assigning a cause, in order that her life might be saved. Justice was tempered by mercy.

It was here that God interfered in behalf of the mother of His Son, according to His humanity: **V. 20.** But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying: Joseph, thou son

of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. Joseph's mind was still busily engaged with the perplexing problem; he was wrestling with painful, distressing, distracting thoughts, and even his kind expedient may have seemed harsh to him. But, behold! — a vivid introduction of the



angelic appearance to emphasize the intervention of God. In a dream the vision came to Joseph to save him and his betrothed from an act which would result in disastrous consequences. The appearance of an angel in a dream was one of the methods which God used to make known His will, or to reveal the future in special cases.

The angel addresses Joseph, "Thou son of David," not to awaken the heroic mood, as has been suggested, but to emphasize the thought of the legal acknowledgment and adoption of the child. He should not fear to take home, publicly to accept, Mary as his wife. This simple acceptance of the angel's words meant for Joseph an act of faith similar to those performed by the great heroes of the Old Testament, to believe the Lord absolutely, in spite of all the evidences of the senses. This public recognition would save the honor of Mary and also that of her child. For instead of being the fruit of adulterous and licentious intercourse, the product of a most unholy cohabitation, the child which was to be born of her was of the Holy Ghost, begotten by deliberate intervention of God, against the course of nature.

The climax of the angel's message: **V. 21.** And she shall bring forth, a son, and thou shall call His name JESUS; for He shall save His people from their sins. It was thus ordained in God's counsel: She will give birth to a son, she is to become a mother, not only by supernatural interposition, not merely by God's giving new life to organs that were past the age of bearing, as was true in the case of Sarah and Elizabeth (Gen. 18:10-14, Luke 1:7, 13-18), but by a miraculous suspension of the usual process of nature, according to which men are born of the will of the flesh and of the will of man, both sexes being active. And this son of Mary he, Joseph, was to call Jesus. This is a command in the form of a prediction. By giving to the child His name, Joseph would publicly recognize and formally adopt Him as his legal son. Jesus is to be the child's name, not indeed as a mere appellation to distinguish Him from other people, as in the case of the Hebrew synonym Joshua (Num. 13:17, Zech. 3:1), but as an expression of the very essence of the divine personality, through which the salvation of men would be gained. For the angel explains the name: He shall save His people from their sins That, in a sentence, is the end and object of His coming, that alone is His errand and mission: He, and no other. He

alone, and He completely, saves. He brings full pardon, free salvation, complete deliverance, not only from the pollution and power, but also from the guilt of sin. To His people He brings this priceless boon, not merely to the members of His nation according to the flesh, to the Jewish people, but to all that are in need of a Savior (Matt. 18:11). This is the Gospel-message, not that Jesus makes allowances for sin, but that He has made atonement for it; not that He tolerates sin, but that He destroys it.

Matthew now adds an explanatory note to show the fulfillment of the Old Testament types and prophecies in the person and work of Christ: **V. 22-23. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son; and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.** It was not an incident that just happened that way which the evangelist records, but an occurrence definitely decided upon and fully planned by the Lord centuries before. For it was He that spoke the prophecy through Isaiah, chapter 7:14. The words as written by the prophet referred to a sign or miracle which the Lord promised King Ahaz in order to assure him that the counsels of the enemies of Israel should not stand, but that the latter should finally be utterly discomfited. In giving this sign, the Lord had in mind the spiritual Israel and its enemies, the deliverance being the redemption wrought by the Messiah. Before the eternal God, the space of seven hundred years is as a watch in the night. This sign was now to

be given and the prophecy fulfilled. The virgin, not any virgin, but the one designated and chosen by God, being with child, was now about to bear a son. And they, not only His parents, but men and people that would know Him, especially those that would accept His salvation, would call His name Emmanuel: God with us. In the son of Mary these words were fulfilled, her son is God Himself; in His person the strong God, the almighty Lord, is with us, not according to His condemning justice, but according to His loving-kindness and tender mercies (Is. 9:6, John 1:1, 14, 1 Tim. 3:16).

The result of the angelic vision: **V. 24. Then Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife.** As soon as he awoke from sleep, he was immediately, energetically active and set about to act upon the divine instructions. He took Mary home as his wife, he celebrated the betrothal with all customary Jewish ceremonies. She who was his wife by betrothal now was given this position in the eyes of the whole world. But the marriage was not consummated at that time: **V. 25. And knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son: and he called His name Jesus.** Joseph did not enter into the natural relations of marriage with Mary until her son, the promised Messiah, had been born... The evangelist concludes the narrative by stating that he, Joseph, called the name of Mary's son Jesus, thus following the divine command, assuming the legal paternity of the child, and incidentally expressing his hopeful belief in the Savior of mankind. ~



Your Savior Has Come

Pastor Chuck Bylkas
South Range, Michigan

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Luke 2:10-14

THERE ARE TWO IMPORTANT THOUGHTS in the first verse alone. First, the angel commands that the shepherds have no fear, in spite of this heavenly visitation. The message that the angel brings is joyful rather than a fearful one. The Apostle John tells us in his epistle *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:18-19) All fear will be dispelled, because God's gift of perfect love is coming to mankind.

Secondly, the angel brings *good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* God has good news to share with mankind, and the message is a simple one: a Saviour is born. It is not a message of law, but of grace and truth. *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* (John 1:17) The message is not about what we must do for God, but what He intends to do for us. God is not angry with His people, He loves them with an everlasting love. God has not come to punish His people, but to deliver them from the forces of darkness.

What was first heard by the shepherds as a promise is our present reality. The Saviour has come, and has redeemed us from sin with His precious blood. Christ has given us life and salvation through His death and resurrection. As Charles Wesley the songwriter puts it in one of his Christmas hymns:

“Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.”

May the good tidings of the angel fill your hearts with joy during the coming Christmas season and always. Rejoice, your Saviour has come! ~

God Is With Us

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, **Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.**

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

THE INCARNATION OF OUR LORD is a mind-blowing concept. Emmanuel—that God is with us—is far beyond human comprehension. Marvel with me just a moment!

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold Him come,
Offspring of the Virgin's womb:
**Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail the Incarnate Deity,
Pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.**

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Charles Wesley

How can the God Who Is Everywhere be contained within human flesh, in a body like ours?

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7-10)

How is it possible that the Self-Sufficient One becomes needy, becomes tired, hungry, thirsty?

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things... (Acts 17:24-25)
How is it thinkable that the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last must learn to eat, to walk, to talk?
I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. (Revelation 22:13)

How can the Blessed and Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords become a weak infant? How can He Who Dwells in Unapproachable Light be held in the arms of a virgin mother, subject to human touch? How is the One Whom No One Can See visible to human eyes?

...until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen. 1 Timothy 6:14-16

And how, oh how, can the Eternal Immortal God become subject to death?

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)

God be praised that Matthew opens his gospel with the proclamation of Emmanuel—that God is with us. Matthew also closes his gospel with the comforting words of our Lord Jesus: *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:20)*

God is with us! Glory, glory, glory! Amen.

**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!**

Phillips Brooks

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On the Flesh of Christ

Tertullian: He who was going to consecrate a new order of birth, must Himself be born after a novel fashion, concerning which Isaiah foretold how the Lord Himself would give a sign. What, then, is the sign? “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Isaiah 7:14). Accordingly a virgin did conceive and bear “Emmanuel, God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

This is the new nativity; a man is born in God. And in this man God was born, taking the flesh of an ancient race, without the help, however, of the ancient seed, in order that he might reform it with new seed, that is, in a spiritual manner, and cleanse it by the removal of all its ancient stains. But the whole of this new birth was prefigured, as was the case in all other instances, in ancient type, the Lord being born as a man by a dispensation in which the virgin was the medium. The earth was still in a virgin state, reduced as yet by no human labor, with no seed as yet cast into its furrows, when, as we are told, God made man out of it into a living soul. As, then, the first Adam is thus introduced to us, it is a just inference that the second Adam likewise, as the apostle has told us, was formed by God into a quickening spirit out of the ground—in other words, out of flesh which was unstained as yet by any human generation.

Augustine: He so loved us that, for our sakes, He was made Man in time, although through Him all times were made. He was made Man, who made man. He was created of a mother whom He created. He was carried by hands that He formed. He cried in the manger in wordless infancy, He the Word, without whom all human eloquence is mute.

H. A. Ironside: What could be more wonderful than that God came down to earth as a baby! Could anything tell out more perfectly His deep yearning over mankind and His earnest desire to have men love and trust Him? Almost everybody, even the most depraved, loves a baby. No one need fear a baby, and the Babe of Bethlehem was the perfect manifestation of the heart of God, who would have all men know that He became incarnate, not to condemn, but to save. By becoming a little child Himself, our Lord has changed the thoughts of untold millions as to the value and preciousness of the little ones. Christianity makes more of children than any pagan religious system ever did. It rebukes the horrible crimes of infanticide, which was accepted as a matter of course even among the cultured Greeks and the highly civilized Romans.



The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Luke 4:18-19

JESUS WAS NOW READING THE prophetic words that were written of Himself. When He had spoken these words and they wondered at the gracious words, He said, *This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.* He is saying, “Now these words are coming to pass.” What did He say? *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor.* Beloved friend, are you the poor one who needs the Gospel? Are you the lost one who needs the good news of One Who will save you?

Jesus told the disciples of John who brought the question from John to Jesus, *Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?* (Luke 7:19) and one of the things He said was, *The poor have the gospel preached to them.* Poor beggars of grace, but hearing and receiving the rich Gospel of the precious blood of Christ. He has come to *heal the broken-hearted.* This healing balm of Gilead is the blood of Jesus which heals the broken and wounded heart. Preaching *deliverance to the captives.* All the prisoners of unbelief in the chains of condemnation and in the dungeon of death and despair can be set free from the bondage. He gives *sight to the blind* in sin by sending light from heaven and anointing the eyes with the eye-salve of His precious blood. *To set at liberty them that are bruised.* Yes, we have been bruised by Satan, but He liberates us from his clutches. And to *preach the acceptable year of the Lord.* O beloved, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Come to Jesus now, all who are far away, come defiled without, within, to Calvary’s Lamb and be washed whiter than snow. Come before it is too late, or e’er the sun of grace sets and you will be left in outer darkness forever! O heed His loving call!

Paul Coponen; Chassell, Michigan

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