

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 2020

The Word Becomes Flesh

Pastor Chuck Bylka
South Range, Michigan

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-14

AT THE CENTER OF THE CELEBRATION of Christmas is a great mystery. With the birth of Jesus, the Divine becomes human. In his Gospel, John speaks of this event as the Word becoming flesh. In the past, God spoke to us through the spoken word and the written word. But now, God communicates His great love for mankind through the living Word, Jesus Christ. Instead of sending another ordinary messenger, God comes and speaks to us *in person*. The writer of the book of Hebrews echoes a similar thought:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (Hebrews 1:1-4)

This passage teaches us that God took on human flesh not only to say that He loves us, but to demonstrate His love for us. Christ came for the express purpose of offering Himself as a sacrifice for sins. Not only did Christ cleanse us from sin by His blood, but He also conforms us into His own image. We now walk in newness of life, because of the death and resurrection of God's Son. To paraphrase the church father Athanasius, "He became what we are, so that we might become what He is."

May God grant us grace to believe in the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation and celebrate the ...good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (Luke 2:10)

Yours in Christ.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. 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.

Luke 2:1-11

Jesus and His Mother

Albert Barnes (1798-1870)

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. (Luke 2:51)

Was subject unto them. Performed the duty of a faithful and obedient child, and not improbably was engaged in the trade of Joseph, that of a carpenter. Every Jew was required to learn some trade, and there is every reason to think that our Savior followed that of His reputed father. And from this we learn—

1. That obedience to parents is a duty. Jesus has set an example in this that all children should follow. Though He was the Son of God, and on proper occasions was engaged in the great work of redemption, yet He was also the son of Mary, and He loved and obeyed His mother, and was subject to her.



2. It is no dishonor to be a mechanic, or to be brought up in an obscure employment. Jesus has conferred honor on virtuous industry, and no man should be ashamed of industrious parents, though poor, or of a condition of life that is far from ease and affluence. Industry is honorable, and virtuous poverty should not be regarded as a matter of reproach. The only thing to be ashamed of, in regard to this matter, is when men are idle, or when children are too proud to hear or speak of the occupation of their parents, or to follow the same occupation.

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. (John 2:1-5)

Woman. This term, as used here, seems to imply reproof, as if she was interfering in that which did not properly concern her; but it is evident that no such reproof or disrespect was intended by the use of the term *woman* instead of *mother*. It is the same term by which He tenderly addressed Mary Magdalene after His resurrection, and His mother when He was on the cross.

What have I to do with thee? This expression is sometimes used to denote indignation or contempt. But it is not probable that it denoted either in this place; if it did, it was a mild reproof of Mary for attempting to control or

direct Him in His power of working miracles. Most of the ancients supposed this to be the intention of Jesus. The words sound to us harsh, but they might have been spoken in a tender manner, and not have been intended as a reproof. It is clear that He did not intend to refuse to provide wine, but only to delay it a little; and the design was, therefore, to compose the anxiety of Mary, and to prevent her being solicitous about it. It may, then, be thus expressed:

“My mother, be not anxious. To you and to Me this should not be a matter of solicitude. The proper time of My interfering has not yet come. When that is come I will furnish a supply, and in the meantime neither you nor I should be solicitous.”

Thus understood, it is so far from being a harsh reproof, that it was a mild exhortation for her to dismiss her fears and to put proper trust in Him.

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. (John 19:25-27)

Behold thy son! This refers to *John*, not to Jesus Himself. Behold, my beloved disciple shall be to you a son, and provide for you, and discharge toward you the duties of an affectionate child. Mary was poor. It would even seem that now she had no home. Jesus, in His dying moments, filled with tender regard for His mother, secured for her an adopted son, obtained for her a home, and consoled her grief by the prospect of attention from him who was the most beloved of all the apostles. What an example of filial attention! What a model to all children! And how lovely appears the dying Savior, thus remembering His afflicted mother, and making her welfare one of His last cares on the cross, and even when making atonement for the sins of the world!

Behold thy mother! One who is to be to thee as a mother. The fact that she was the mother of Jesus would secure the kindness of John, and the fact that she was now entrusted to him demanded of him affectionate regard and tender care.

And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. John seems to have been in better circumstances than the other apostles (see John 18:16). Tradition says that she continued to live with him in Judea till the time of her death, which occurred about fifteen years after the death of Christ. ~

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)

The Child which is born shall be called Jesus. His name embraces His entire nature and His life's purpose. He is the Savior who has come to save His people from their sins.

Had there been no sin on earth, there would have been no Christmas. Had there been no sinners, there would have been no need of a Savior. For this very reason the Christmas Gospel is a message for sinners. And only those who acknowledge their sins can understand the true meaning of Christmas.

The name “Jesus” is the hope of the world; it is the radiant dawn over a generation living in the night of sin; it is salvation and victory for the sinner; it is release for him who is in captivity; it is hope, it is a future, it is eternity. Without Jesus the world is hopeless darkness. With Jesus something of heaven comes to earth.

Fredrick Wisloff

The First Resurrection

Beth Staudinger
Leslieville, Alberta, Canada

THERE IS MUCH TALK IN Christian circles today regarding the millennial kingdom and the first and second resurrection. I remember some of the older pastors talking about this and their understandings of it. If one understands that the first resurrection takes place in our lifetime, when we are either converted out of unbelief, or are childhood Christians, it totally changes the view that many have of two resurrections and a millennial kingdom.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6)

We understand from the writings in 2 Peter 3:8 that this thousand years can mean more or less in God's timing. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Many have understood this thousand years to be the years we are priests and kings here on the earth and have reigned with Him here in His kingdom, as the royal priesthood of believers. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

The First Resurrection, or Being RISEN with Christ

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a **new creature**. (Galatians 6:15)*

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Ephesians 4:23-24)

We become partakers of Christ's resurrection when we by faith believe in the redemptive work that He has done for us. *And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the **power** of his **resurrection**, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. (Philippians 3:9-10)*

Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed

unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:28-30)

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in **newness of life**. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the **likeness** of his **resurrection**. (Romans 6:1-5)*

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a **new creature**: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

*And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are **risen** with **him** through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. (Colossians 2:10-14)*

*If ye then be **risen** with **Christ**, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)*

Many, many places in the New Testament speak of the coming of Christ and one resurrection. *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)*

We believe the first resurrection is when we are resurrected out of our sins and have been partakers of Christ's resurrection. This puts a whole different meaning on the first resurrection of Revelation 20. So if we partake of Christ's resurrection here in the time of grace, we will be spared the second death. It is that simple.

God's peace!

2021 Apostolic Lutheran Church Calendars

We are now taking orders for the 2021 ALC calendars that will be ready for shipment in December. The price of the calendar is \$5.50 each to cover the cost of printing and mailing. Do not prepay for the calendars. A bill will be included with the calendars for payment to be mailed to the Federation accountant.

Please send your order in one of the following ways:

- By email: alc_calendars@mac.com
- By telephone: Leave a message at 925-454-1648
- or by mail to: Corrie Karlsen, 2994 Rodeo Lane, Livermore, CA 94550

Corrie Karlsen, ALC Calendar Committee

Christmas

Pastor Phil Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

This letter is coming from somebody else this month. Gwen is at our daughter and son-in-law's home as they have welcomed a new baby into their life. She has been away from home for about a week and asked that I would find an article to send in for the *Christian Monthly* December issue as she won't have time to do it. She told me that I could just find an old article that she has written and send it in; she told me that I didn't have to write an article for her. But I thought about it and also thought of how many times she has sat down to write an article for the Children's Page. After a while, I figured that I could take her place and write one this month.

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON is upon us. Time passes quickly for us older people and maybe it does for you also. I think as a young person, one is always waiting for something to happen. As a result, time may pass slowly for a young person as "Will that day ever come?" When one gets older, they often are looking back over the years to the things that did happen. For us older ones, we try to hang onto the days that are passed and as they slip away, time seems to pass quickly. Can you imagine what it was like for those people in Judea some two thousand years ago as God had spoken to their ancestors for years that the Messiah would come and what God promises will come to pass. Many of the older people had given up trusting that the Messiah would come and just looked back over the years of their lives, at times thanking God and at other times wondering why He had forgotten them. (Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning "the chosen one.")

The Bible tells us "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son..." (Galatians 4:4). This means that when everything was right and prepared by God for the coming of Jesus, Jesus (the Messiah) came—not one minute earlier nor one minute later. So the time had come and the shepherds were in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night (Luke 2:8). As they were doing so, the Bible tells us what happened. God's glory appeared and the shepherds were afraid. As they were wondering, the angel spoke: "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." (Luke 2:10-12) Did you notice that I italicized a word that we find in these verses; this word is "you." I want to write a little about this little, but very important, word.

As we have already seen, the shepherds were the ones to whom the angel spoke. The shepherds were lowly people. By

lowly, we mean that their neighbors didn't see them as being very important. They weren't important people like doctors and lawyers and teachers and such. But isn't it interesting that the angel came from heaven to speak to the shepherds. It is also very interesting to see that the angel came with a message for *them*! The angel didn't say, "I have a message

from God in heaven and He wants you to tell it to the important people around Bethlehem and Judea." No! The angel said this message of good news is to you! This message is for all people beginning with you and then going to *all* people. The angel goes on: Who is this Savior born (or given to)? Again we see from the text that it is for you! In the city of the great king of Israel, David, God has sent a beautiful gift to the



The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds, Govert Flinck

lowly shepherds first and also to the whole world. This gift is Christ the Lord. (Christ is a Greek word meaning "the chosen one" so Messiah and Christ mean the same thing.)

Lastly, the angel tells the shepherds that you ("ye" in our Bible) will find the babe in a place that God had planned. Not only did the angel speak the promise which came true to the shepherds but he also told them where they could find the promise so they would see with their own eyes and believe that God had not forgotten His promise.

So, do you believe that the greatest of all Christmas gifts is for you? Can you read the Word of God that tells us that God sent His son for you as well as everybody else in the world? The Bible tells us that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) The love that He has shown is for the whole world and you, precious young one, are not left out. The message that God gave the angel to speak to the shepherds is for you. God had you in His heart when He sent the message and the gift. Why is it so important that we stress the word you in our story? I think there are two reasons: one we have already talked about and that is that God loves you! The other reason is that you need Him! Jesus came as a Savior and our Savior takes away our sin. Our Savior, Christ the Lord, delivers you from your sin.

My prayer for all men everywhere this Christmas season is that, by God's grace, they would have faith in these words "for the words 'for you' require truly believing hearts."

God's peace!
Pastor Phil

The First Commandment

Martin Luther
The Large Catechism

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

That is: Thou shalt have [and worship] Me alone as thy God. What is the force of this, and how is it to be understood? What does it mean to have a god? or, what is God? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the whole heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust be right, then is your god also true; and, on the other hand, if your trust be false and wrong, then you have not the true God; for these two belong together, faith and God. That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.

Therefore it is the intent of this commandment to require true faith and trust of the heart which settles upon the only true God, and clings to Him alone. That is as much as to say: "See to it that you let Me alone be your God, and never seek another," i.e.: Whatever you lack of good things, expect it of Me, and look to Me for it, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, creep and cling to Me. I, yes, I, will give you enough and help you out of every need; only let not your heart cleave to or rest in any other.

This I must unfold somewhat more plainly, that it may be understood and perceived by ordinary examples of the contrary. Many a one thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and, possessions; he trusts in them and boasts of them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. Lo, such a man also has a god, Mammon by name, i.e., money and possessions, on which he sets all his heart, and which is also the most common idol on earth. He who has money and possessions feels secure, and is joyful and undismayed as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise. On the other hand, he who has none doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God. For very few are to be found who are of good cheer, and who neither mourn nor complain if they have not Mammon. This care and desire for money sticks and clings to our nature, even to the grave.

So, too, whoever trusts and boasts that he possesses great skill, prudence, power, favor, friendship, and honor has also a god, but not this true and only God. This appears again when you notice how presumptuous, secure, and proud people are because of such possessions, and how despondent when they no longer exist or are withdrawn. Therefore I repeat that the chief explanation of this point is that to have a god is to have something in which the heart entirely trusts...

Thus you can easily understand what and how much this commandment requires, namely, that man's entire heart and all his confidence be placed in God alone, and in no one else. For to have God, you can easily perceive, is not to lay hold of Him with our hands or to put Him in a bag as money, or to lock Him in a chest as silver vessels. But to apprehend Him means when the heart lays hold of Him and clings to

Him. But to cling to Him with the heart is nothing else than to trust in Him entirely. For this reason He wishes to turn us away from everything else that exists outside of Him, and to draw us to Himself, namely, because He is the only eternal good. As though He would say: Whatever you have heretofore sought of the saints, or for whatever things you have trusted in Mammon or anything else, expect it all of Me, and regard Me as the one who will help you and pour out upon you richly all good things.

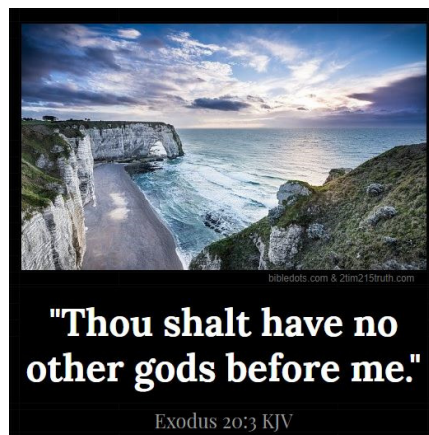
Lo, here you have the meaning of the true honor and worship of God, which pleases God, and which He commands under penalty of eternal wrath, namely, that the heart know no other comfort or confidence than in Him, and do not suffer itself to be torn from Him, but, for Him, risk and disregard everything upon earth. On the other hand, you can easily see and judge how the world practises only false worship and idolatry. For no people has ever been so reprobate as not to institute and observe some divine worship; every one has set up as his special god whatever he looked to for blessings, help, and comfort.

Thus, for example, the heathen who put their trust in power and dominion elevated Jupiter as the supreme god; the others, who were bent upon riches, happiness, or pleasure, and a life of ease, Hercules, Mercury, Venus, or others; women with child, Diana or Lucina, and so on; thus every one made that his god to which his heart was inclined, so that even in the mind of the heathen to have a god means to trust and believe. But their error is this, that their trust is false and wrong; for it is not placed in the only God, besides whom there is truly no God in heaven or upon earth. Therefore the heathen really make their self-invented notions and dreams of God an idol, and put their trust in that which is altogether nothing. Thus it is with all idolatry; for it consists not merely in erecting an image and worshiping it, but rather in the heart, which stands gaping at something else, and seeks help and consolation from creatures, saints, or devils, and neither cares for God, nor looks to Him for so much good as to believe that He is willing to help, neither believes that whatever good

it experiences comes from God.

Besides, there is also a false worship and extreme idolatry, which we have hitherto practised, and is still prevalent in the world, upon which also all ecclesiastical orders are founded, and which concerns the conscience alone, that seeks in its own works help, consolation, and salvation, presumes to wrest heaven from God, and reckons how many bequests it has made, how often it has fasted, celebrated Mass, etc. Upon such things it depends, and of them boasts, as though unwilling to receive anything from God as a gift, but desires itself to earn or merit it

superabundantly, just as though He must serve us and were our debtor, and we His liege lords. What is this but reducing God to an idol, yea, a fig image or an apple-god, and elevating and regarding ourselves as God? But this is slightly too subtle, and is not for young pupils.



But let this be said to the simple, that they may well note and remember the meaning of this commandment, namely, that we are to trust in God alone, and look to Him and expect from Him naught but good, as from one who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all necessities of both temporal and eternal things. He also preserves us from misfortune, and if any evil befall us, delivers and rescues us, so that it is God alone (as has been sufficiently said) from whom we receive all good, and by whom we are delivered from all evil. Hence also, I think, we Germans from ancient times call God (more elegantly and appropriately than any other language) by that name from the word Good, as being an eternal fountain which gushes forth abundantly nothing but what is good, and from which flows forth all that is and is called good.

For even though otherwise we experience much good from men, still whatever we receive by His command or arrangement is all received from God. For our parents, and all rulers, and every one besides with respect to his neighbor, have received from God the command that they should do us all manner of good, so that we receive these blessings not from them, but, through them, from God. For creatures are only the hands, channels, and means whereby God gives all

things, as He gives to the mother breasts and milk to offer to her child, and corn and all manner of produce from the earth for nourishment, none of which blessings could be produced by any creature of itself.

Therefore no man should presume to take or give anything except as God has commanded, in order that it may be acknowledged as God's gift, and thanks may be rendered Him for it, as this commandment requires. On this account also these means of receiving good gifts through creatures are not to be rejected, neither should we in presumption seek other ways and means than God has commanded. For that would not be receiving from God, but seeking of ourselves.

Let every one, then, see to it that he esteem this commandment great and high above all things, and do not regard it as a joke. Ask and examine your heart diligently, and you will find whether it cleaves to God alone or not. If you have a heart that can expect of Him nothing but what is good, especially in want and distress, and that, moreover, renounces and forsakes everything that is not God, then you have the only true God. If, on the contrary, it cleaves to anything else, of which it expects more good and help than of God, and does not take refuge in Him, but in adversity flees from Him, then you have an idol, another god. ~



Zwingle's Hymn

J.H. Merle D'Aubigne

Submitted by Ralph and Barbara Somero; New Ipswich, New Hampshire

[Editor's Note: Ulrich Zwingli was on a mineral-springs vacation in August 1519 when he heard that the Black Death had reached Zurich. Though he was weak and in poor health, he hurried home to minister to the victims and contracted the disease himself. Thinking death was near, he penned the following hymn. Stanzas 1-4 were written early in his illness, 5-8 were written as he became more sick, and 9-12 during his recovery.]

Part One

Lo! at my door
Gaunt death I spy;
Hear, Lord of life,
Thy creature's cry!

The arm that hung
Upon the tree,
Jesus, uplift,—
And rescue me.

Yet, if to quench
My sun at noon
Be thy behest,
Thy will be done!

In faith and hope
Earth I resign,
Secure of heaven,—
For I am thine!

Part Two

Fierce grow my pains:
Help, Lord, in haste!
For flesh and heart
Are failing fast.

Clouds wrap my sight,
My tongue is dumb,
Lord, tarry not,
The hour is come!

In Satan's grasp
On hell's dark brink
My spirit reels,—
Ah, must I sink?

No, Jesus, no!
Him I defy,
While here beneath
Thy cross I lie.

Part Three

Father and God!
Raised by thy hand,
'Mong living men
Once more I stand.

O let me flee
All evil ways,
And be my song
But of thy praise.

Unknown the hour
That brings my doom;
'Twill come perchance
In deeper gloom.

But still the lot
On earth I'm given,
I take with joy;
My rest's in heaven!

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Psalms 23:4

Comm-Unity

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

A Song of degrees of David.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Psalm 133

ONE DEFINITION OF THE WORD *community* is “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.” Let’s break that apart a little, and look at it from a Christian perspective.

The dictionary defines the prefix *com* as “with, together, completely.” *Unity* is “the state of being united or joined as a whole.”

As Christians, we live in **community**. We are **united together**. We are **completely joined as a whole**. And this is *good* and *pleasant*, according to the psalmist.

Both the priestly oil and the refreshing moisture are compared to brothers dwelling in unity. Can you picture the anointing oil being poured on Aaron’s head in the presence of the congregation? It runs down his beard, and trickles onto his robe. The fragrant scent of the spicy oil fills the room. The priest is sanctified, consecrated, set apart for service to God. He brings the sacrifices of the people before the Lord, ministering and serving **for the sake of the people**.

The dew (rain/snow) of Mount Hermon, the dew that descends on the mountains near Jerusalem, is the refreshing moisture that waters the dry land of Israel. The people of Israel are refreshed and renewed by this water of life.

From Zion the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore! The Living Water was lifted up on a cross and poured out, **for the sake of God’s people**. Our Great High Priest serves eternally, but He was offered as a sacrifice once for all, **for the sake of the people**.

Jesus brings us to unity. Our communion—our fellowship—is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the Head and we are members individually of Him. When we are joined as the body of Christ, serving one another **for the sake of God’s people**, we are truly living in COMMUNITY. The Apostle Paul writes:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say,

Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body?

But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered

the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:12 -31)

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!



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Cling to the Lord

Pastor Joel Baker
Plymouth, Minnesota

ANOTHER CALENDAR YEAR IS ABOUT to conclude. Usually there will have been changes and challenges during the past year that have altered our daily lives, sometimes slightly, other times significantly. As you reflect upon this last year you are probably able to identify most of those instances. The reason for their occurrences are often less identifiable.

As we are studying in the lives of the Kings of Israel and Judah, some did good in the eyes of the Lord and some did evil. The way of the king was usually followed by the people, his behavior being a model for the people. As an example:

2 Kings 15:27-28: In the two and fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and reigned twenty years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord: he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.

*2 Kings 18:1-6: Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zachariah. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. **For he clave to the Lord**, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.*

The kings that did evil, as well as the people that they governed doing evil, forsook God, abandoned Him and suffered for it. Hezekiah clung to the Lord, being an excellent king, and he and the people he governed benefitted greatly because of it.

Through events in our life, as we recall this past year, we either drifted from the Lord or clung to Him. It makes all the difference. Clinging to Him doesn't remove all earthly pain or sorrow but it directs and navigates us through the tough currents of life in a way that God promises to use for good. He never changes, being the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He never runs out of grace, mercy, and love for you. That's something each one of us can count on day by day. Have a wonderful time at Christmas, thanking Jesus for wanting to live among us, and continuing to live among us through the Holy Spirit living within our heart. I am grateful for having a ministry among all of you. May God's peace/shalom truly reign in your heart, mind, and soul now and forever. Amen.

His Name Was Called Jesus

1 January—Evening

...His name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Luke 2:21

Lord Jesus, Your hand has guided me to the evening hour of this day, for which I wish to heartily thank You. At the time of going to sleep I am reminded of the beautiful name, Jesus, given to You in the circumcision. That I would inscribe within my heart and, viewing upon it, fall asleep.

Your name lays hold of all the treasures of blessedness within me. You are my Saviour, You are my Mediator, my Reconciler, my High Priest, my Advocate before Your Father, my Immanuel (God with us), my Physician, and my all. In Your name all knees shall bow, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Even as Your name is, so is also your glory until the end of the world. Your name to me is like an ointment poured out, which fills my heart with joy and assurance. In Your name I receive peace, grace, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal blessedness. My desire is towards You and to think about Your holy name at all times. Permit also that that my death Your lovely Jesus name would remain in my heart and thinking. Yes, grant me strength that I may even then with confidence of faith say, "Lord Jesus, unto You I live; Lord Jesus, unto You I die; Lord Jesus, Yours I am, living or dead." Yes, in that my mouth not pray, so allow Your Holy Spirit to cry towards Your lovely name within me, so that thereby quickened I will be strengthened in faith and affirmed. ~

*Johannes Stark; Tr. from Stark's Andachten Kirchentellinsfurth Edition, 1876; Tr. by Ed Haikio
Submitted by Ralph and Barbara Somero; New Ipswich, New Hampshire*