

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 2021

The Story of the Birth of Jesus

*Martin Luther
Christmas Sermon 1521*

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.

Luke 2:1-7

THIS GOSPEL IS SO CLEAR that it requires very little explanation, but it should be well considered and taken deeply to heart; and no one will receive more benefit from it than those who, with a calm, quiet heart, banish everything else from their mind, and diligently look into it. It is just as the sun which is reflected in calm water and gives out vigorous warmth, but which cannot be so readily seen nor can it give out such warmth in water that is in roaring and rapid motion.

Therefore, if you would be enlightened and warmed, if you would see the wonders of divine grace and have your heart aglow, and enlightened, devout and joyful, go where you can silently meditate and lay hold of this picture deep in your heart, and you will see miracle upon miracle. But to give the common person a start and a motive to contemplate it, we will illustrate it in part, and afterwards enter into it more deeply.

First, behold how very ordinary and common things are to us that transpire on earth, and yet how high they are regarded in heaven. On earth it occurs in this wise: Here is a poor young woman, Mary of Nazareth, not highly esteemed, but of the humblest citizens of the village. No one is conscious of the great wonder she bears, she is silent, keeps her own counsel, and regards

herself as the lowliest in the town. She starts out with her husband Joseph; very likely they had no servant, and he had to do the work of master and servant, and she that of mistress and maid, They were therefore obliged to leave their home unoccupied, or commend it to the care of others.

Now they evidently owned an ass, upon which Mary rode, although the Gospel does not mention it, and it is possible that she went on foot with Joseph. Imagine how she was despised at the inns and stopping places on the way, although worthy to ride in state in a chariot of gold.

There were, no doubt, many wives and daughters of prominent men at that time, who lived in fine apartments and great splendor, while the mother of God takes a journey in mid-winter under most trying circumstances. What distinctions there are in the world! It was more than a day's journey from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in the land of Judea. They had to journey either by or through Jerusalem, for Bethlehem is south of Jerusalem while Nazareth is north.

The Evangelist shows how, when they arrived at Bethlehem, they were the most insignificant and despised, so that they had to make way for others until they were obliged to take refuge in a stable, to share with the cattle, lodging, table, bedchamber and bed, while many a wicked man sat at the head in the hotels and was honored as lord. No one noticed or was conscious of what God was doing in that stable. He lets the large houses and costly apartments remain empty, lets their inhabitants eat, drink and be merry; but this comfort and treasure are hidden from them. O what a dark

night this was for Bethlehem, that was not conscious of that glorious light! See how God shows that he utterly disregards what the world is, has or desires; and furthermore, that the world shows how little it knows or notices what God is, has and does.

See, this is the first picture with which Christ puts the world to shame and exposes all it does and knows. It shows that the world's greatest wisdom is foolishness, her best actions are wrong and her greatest treasures are

misfortunes. What had Bethlehem when it did not have Christ? What have they now who at that time had enough?



What do Joseph and Mary lack now, although at that time they had no room to sleep comfortably?

Some have commented on the word “diversorium,” as if it meant an open archway, through which every body could pass, where some asses stood, and that Mary could not get to a lodging place. This is not right. The Evangelist desires to show that Joseph and Mary had to occupy a stable, because there was no room for her in the inn, in the place where the pilgrim guests generally lodged. All the guests were cared for in the inn or caravansary, with room, food and bed, except these poor people who had to creep into a stable where it was customary to house cattle... They had neither money nor influence to secure a room in the inn, hence they were obliged to lodge in a stable. O world, how stupid! O man, how blind thou art!

But the birth itself is still more pitiful. There was no one to take pity on this young wife who was for the first time to give birth to a child; no one to take to heart her condition that she, a stranger, did not have the least thing a mother needs in a birth-night. There she is without any preparation, without either light or fire, alone in the darkness, without any one offering her service as is customary for women to do at such times. Every thing is in commotion in the inn, there is a swarming of guests from all parts of the country, no one thinks of this poor woman. It is also possible that she did not expect the event so soon, else she would probably have remained at Nazareth.

Just imagine what kind of swaddling clothes they were in which she wrapped the child. Possibly her veil or some article of her clothing, she could spare. But that she should have wrapped him in Joseph’s trousers, which are exhibited at Aix-la-Chapelle appears entirely too false and frivolous. It is a fable, the like of which there are more in the world. Is it not strange that the birth of Christ occurs in cold winter, in a strange land, and in such a poor and despicable manner?

Some argue as to how this birth took place, as if Jesus was born while Mary was praying and rejoicing, without any pain, and before she was conscious of it. While I do not altogether discard that pious supposition, it was evidently invented for the sake of simple minded people. But we must abide by the Gospel, that he was born of the virgin Mary. There is no deception here, for the Word clearly states that it was an actual birth.

It is well known what is meant by giving birth. Mary’s experience was not different from that of other women, so that the birth of Christ was a real natural birth, Mary being his natural mother and he being her natural son. Therefore her body performed its functions of giving birth, which naturally belonged to it, except that she brought forth without sin, without shame, without pain and without injury, just as she had conceived without sin. The curse of Eve did not come on her, where God said: “In pain thou shalt bring forth children,” Gen. 3:16; otherwise it was with her in every particular as with every woman who gives birth to a child.

Grace does not interfere with nature and her work, but rather improves and promotes it. Likewise Mary, without doubt, also nourished the child with milk from her breast and not with strange milk, or in a manner different from that which nature provided, as we sing: “ubere de coelo pleno,” from her breast being filled by heaven, without injury or impurity. I mention this that we may be grounded in the faith and know that Jesus was a natural man in every respect just

as we, the only difference being in his relation to sin and grace, he being without a sinful nature. In him and in his mother nature was pure in all the members and in all the operations of those members. No body or member of woman ever performed its natural function without sin, except that of this virgin; here for once God bestowed special honor upon nature and its operations. It is a great comfort to us that Jesus took upon himself our nature and flesh. Therefore we are not to take away from him or his mother any thing that is not in conflict with grace, for the text clearly says that she brought him forth, and the angels said, unto you he is born.

How could God have shown his goodness in a more sublime manner than by humbling himself to partake of flesh and blood, that he did not even disdain the natural privacy but honors nature most highly in that part where in Adam and Eve it was most miserably brought to shame? so that henceforth even that can be regarded godly, honest and pure, which in all men is the most ungodly, shameful and impure. These are real miracles of God, for in no way could he have given us stronger, more forcible and purer pictures of chastity than in this birth. When we look at this birth, and reflect upon how the sublime Majesty moves with great earnestness and inexpressible love and goodness upon the flesh and blood of this virgin, we see how here all evil lust and every evil thought is banished.

No woman can inspire such pure thoughts in a man as this virgin; nor can any man inspire such pure thought in a woman as this child. If in reflecting on this birth we recognize the work of God that is embodied in it, only chastity and purity spring from it.

But what happens in heaven concerning this birth? As much as it is despised on earth, so much and a thousand times more is it honored in heaven. If an angel from heaven came and praised you and your work, would you not regard it of greater value than all the praise and honor the world could give you, and for which you would be willing to bear the greatest humility and reproach? What exalted honor is that when all the angels in heaven can not restrain themselves from breaking out in rejoicing, so that even poor shepherds in the fields hear them preach, praise God, sing and pour out their joy without measure? Were not all joy and honor realized at Bethlehem, yes, all joy and honor experienced by all the kings and nobles on earth, to be regarded as only dross and abomination, of which no one likes to think, when compared with the joy and glory here displayed?

Behold how very richly God honors those who are despised of men, and that very gladly. Here you see that his eyes look into the depths of humility, as is written, “He sitteth above the cherubim” and looketh into the depths. Nor could the angels find princes or valiant men to whom to communicate the good news; but only unlearned laymen, the most humble people upon earth. Could they not have addressed the high priests, who it was supposed knew so much concerning God and the angels? No, God chose poor shepherds, who, though they were of low esteem in the sight of men, were in heaven regarded as worthy of such great grace and honor.

See how utterly God overthrows that which is lofty! And yet we rage and rant for nothing but this empty honor, as we had no honor to seek in heaven; we continually step out of God’s sight, so that he may not see us in the depths, into which he alone looks. ~

O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go

Dave Impola; Marysville, Washington
January 2002 CM

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! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

Romans 11:33-34

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

WHEN THE CHILDREN OF GOD are born of God in spirit, we are not left to our own devices. God knows what's best for us so that we will remain faithful to Him.

Are we willing to submit to God's will, and not follow our own will? God, in His infinite wisdom, can allow circumstances to happen that are not pleasing to our flesh. Oh, how strong our pride can be when we are faced with adversity!

For the sake of preserving pride, man can be plagued with many unnecessary hardships. *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.* (1 John 2:16-17)

Our Lord Jesus said, *I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.* (John 15:1-2)

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (John 15:5-8)

Yes, dear child of God, let us rejoice that we are kept by the power of God through faith. *Wherein ye greatly rejoice,*

though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

May it be that we would not meddle in God's affairs, demanding fruit from one another in order to win man's approval and false praise. Man, convinced against his will, is of the same mind still. It is enough to have God's approval, whereby the Word says that *therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Romans 5:1)

May it be that the Lord would continue, by His grace, to give us strength and courage to endure His chastening with patience. *Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.* (James 5:10-11)

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (Hebrews 12:11)



May it be that we would not meddle in God's affairs, demanding fruit from one another in order to win man's approval and false praise.

The psalmist wrote these beautiful words: *And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.* (Psalm 1:3) The water of life, which is Christ, the Word, nourishes our hearts and souls.

I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live. (Psalm 116:1-2)

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. (Psalm 116:5-7)

In the love and peace of God.

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In Swaddling Clothes in a Manger

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

As I pondered what to write, it was clear that it was time for the Christmas story—the story of Jesus. In Him we have reason for great hope of eternal life. You can find this in Luke chapter 2.

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.

Luke 2:1-7

CAESAR AUGUSTUS DECREED THAT ALL should be taxed in the town of his birth. So, from the little town of Nazareth went Joseph with his espoused wife, Mary, to be taxed in Bethlehem, the town where Joseph was born.

While they were there, the time came for the Christ Child to be born, and all they could find for shelter was a stable. It wasn't much, but it would do because this was the plan of God. It was there that Mary brought forth her firstborn Son, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger. You may ask why. Because the inns were full, and they could not find even a small space.

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. (Luke 2:8-12)

It was after the angel made his announcement that the sky filled with many angels, all praising God and saying, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.* (verse 14). How those shepherds must have trembled as they didn't expect to see such a sight on a quiet night in the field.

After the angels went away into heaven, the shepherds left their sheep and went quickly to find that Babe, just as they were told they would. What joy filled their hearts! They bowed down and worshipped Him. When they left, they

spread the good news of the Savior to everyone they met. They could not keep it to themselves.

The people wondered at what they had heard, but Mary kept all those things in her heart, as she was in awe herself.

After eight days passed, the Baby was circumcised, and His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was born. Did you children notice that it wasn't until Jesus was eight days old that He got His name? That was a custom in that country and in that time.

You have just heard the old story, but it is new each day in our hearts. Hopefully, we will all want to share the same story with those who have never heard it, or who do not have Jesus living in their hearts. I pray that you children will want to spread the good news just as the shepherds did, and rejoiced again that your Savior was born. Christmas greetings to you all.

God's peace.
December 2003 CM



Nativity at Night by Geertgen tot Sint Jans
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

He who was going to consecrate a new order of birth, must Himself be born after a novel fashion, concerning which Isaiah foretold how that the Lord Himself would give the sign. What, then, is the sign? "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." Accordingly, a virgin did conceive and bear "Emmanuel, God with us." 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 a new seed, that is, in a spiritual manner, and cleanse it by the removal of all its ancient stains.

Tertullian

Greetings at Christmas

George Wilson
December 1983 CM

GREETINGS OF GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE from our Father and His Son, the Prince of Peace!
The natural mind of man, particularly at this time of the year, thinks and talks in terms of Christmas, the anniversary of the birth of the Christ Child in the manger of Bethlehem. The spiritual mind, which is the mind of Christ, knows that the Son was conceived in the heart of God before the foundation of the world was laid. According to the foreknowledge of God, He knew the plight of man before he was created from the dust of this earth, into whose nostrils He breathed the living spirit and man became a living soul. In behalf of this portion, God began His plan to redeem him and save him.

There are times when Christian people wonder why we teach children the law of God and place such great emphasis on the Ten Commandments of God that we require them not only to study them, but also to memorize them. Some would even want to discontinue this practice. There seems to be much lack of understanding of the very reason of the law as it appears in the commandments.

First of all, the law is the very picture of righteousness and an image of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is holy and it demands absolute obedience and perfection from every creature. But man, after the fall and during the fall, found himself incapable of keeping this perfect law of God in his own living. This was no surprise to Him who created us, as David writes in his *Psalms* 103:14: *He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust.* Because of the deep corruption of our flesh and the iniquity that is ever present, God gave us His holy law that we would all become guilty before Him.

In teaching children it is not with the intent that by our teachings and our efforts we are to train our children to be

perfect in the law, but rather that we would all understand that we are guilty before God under the law. If we do not have the knowledge of our own sins and our sinful nature, the birth of the Christ Child remains a mere historical happening of such magnitude that we honor His birth annually. If we come to understand our sinful nature and our own inability to keep the law, God is able to lead us to Him, who fulfilled the law in our stead. This by the power of God leads us to true repentance and faith in the promise of God, by the precious Gospel that proclaims forgiveness and pardon.

The Lord teaches us: "Be ye holy even as I am holy (*Leviticus* 11:44)." The law prescribed this holiness, but we were unable to keep the law, so God promised that holiness by Him who is holy and has fulfilled the law. He has created the law of love, the very same law that was given by Moses to Israel of old, but now in fulfilling the law He removed the curse and offered grace to every one to believe, not only in the person of Christ, but by His great work of redemption wrought on the tree of Calvary.

This commandment of the Lord speaks of our love toward God and our love toward our fellow men. By faith and faith alone can we become partakers of the glory which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. By the law therefore is the knowledge of sin, which leads us to repentance, by true repentance to faith, by faith unto salvation and the righteousness of the Lord.

In this Christmas season let us remember that God the Father conceived His own Son to be born in His appointed time for our redemption and salvation. This is, in our hearts and souls, a spiritual Christmas for our Lord is a Spirit. Let us come to Him in Spirit and in truth. Amen.

With God's peace!

God's Leading Hand

Pastor A. Zoldners
Ropaschi Church in Latvia

It has been about 70 years since Germany capitulated to the allies in World War II. But the war was not over for some people, like Pastor A. Zoldners of Latvia. I received the following letter from him in 1992 for publishing in the Christian Monthly since I had previously published one of his articles. I did not publish the letter but saved it for possible future use. The following is a shortened version of his letter.

Following is a brief history regarding Latvia during wartime: Russia invaded and occupied Latvia and the other Baltic countries in 1940; in 1941, at the beginning of the Russian/German war, Germany took control of Latvia; in 1944 Russia drove Germany out of Latvia; when the USSR was disbanded in 1991, Latvia again achieved freedom. It is estimated that the population of Latvia decreased by at least 25% during the German and Russian occupations. It would be good for us to remember some of the suffering and abuses that many people experienced during those times.

Alvar Helmes

IBEG YOUR PARDON FOR being so obtrusive in sending this article to you, but it might be of interest to your readers. I was a judge in Latvia in 1944, but now I'm a pastor serving the Lord. After the capitulation of Germany in 1945, I was arrested for being a judge and sent to a concentration camp in Russia after the Soviet Union overran the Baltic countries. When I was released, I was not permitted to earn a living for my wife and children through my education. I could only work at manual labor, first as a wood-cutter, then as a bricklayer, and lastly as a chimneysweeper. In 1969, I became a pensioner and began to study theology. In 1973 at age 66, I was ordained into the ministry. I think that every faithful man can give witness to the fact that he has felt God's guidance, especially in wartime. And in my case, especially the year 1944, of which I want to relate.

In June 1940, the Latvian republic was occupied by the Soviet Union. Many honest and guiltless people were imprisoned in Latvia, and others were deported to Siberia or to the Arctic regions where they perished from hunger or the cold. When in June 1941 the Soviet regime was driven out by German forces, we welcomed Germany as liberators. We only slowly discovered that they were also occupiers.

In July 1944, the German forces were retreating from the Russian forces, and the warfront was nearing our home. I and my wife, who was with child, determined to abandon our living in the provincial city of Kraslava, where I worked as a judge, and go to my father's home, about 200 miles further from the nearing warfront. To determine to do this was one thing, but to realize our goal was quite another, since the German military forces had extremely limited the traffic of civilians. We would only be able to buy railway tickets with the permission of the German Ortskommandantur (District Commander), and this was only in case of an extreme necessity. As to our belongings, we could only take what I could carry in two bags.

I had heard that the local merchant, Mr. Jesperinsh, was also preparing to leave and had a railway car. He was very kind and took my family and our belongings. He gave me four chests in which to pack our things. The four chests were not sufficient for everything, but we did the best that we could. From my library, I only took my New Testament. We quickly loaded our things onto the railway car and waited in the station for Mr. Jesperinsh to arrive. The railway car would then be joined to a passing train.

Suddenly we heard that a local train was nearing the station, which went once a day and in which the tickets may be obtained without permission of the Ortskommandantur. In a moment we decided to run into the station, buy tickets for the nearing train, and go away, leaving our things in the railway van! We begged the wagon driver to inform Mr. Jesperinsh, when he arrived, that we had gone.

The local train went only to Daugavpils, a railway center. To continue on our journey, we had to go to the Ortskommandantur to obtain permission. As a reason for our travels, we explained that we were fugitives (literally displaced persons, or DPs), and we were finally able to obtain permission to continue our journey.

There was only one car for civilian passengers; all other cars were for German soldiers. The car we were in was packed with people. My wife got a corner of a bench and took our two boys on her knees, but I had to stand in the corridor, squeezed together with others, so close that I could feel the pulsing of the neighbor's hearts. We were trembling with fear, for the previous night Daugavpils had been bombed by Soviet bombers and could be struck again. At last, hours overdue, the train started. It was as if a heavy load had been removed from our trembling hearts.

Without further hindrance we arrived at my father's house and far away from all centers of population that might be bombed. And there we at last found the rest that was so necessary for my wife, who keenly felt the Soviet bombers over our heads at night in Kraslava. But how long could we be at ease, as we awaited the fifth member of our family? And what about the things we left behind? A week passed without knowing where to go and what to do.

I learned that Mr. Jesperinsh's railway car had been joined to a passing train the second day after our departure. The train had only gone as far as Daugavpils. On that night, the city had again been bombed, especially in the area of the station. Bombs had fallen on the train to which the railway car was adjoined and the train started to burn so badly that the Jesperinsh's had to rush to the station and move their car away from the train. Many people were killed or wounded, especially the family of the policeman of Kraslava. His daughter was horribly torn apart by the bombing and his wife had been wounded. Upon seeing the carnage, the policeman lost his mind.

I got the address of a merchant in the town of Jelgava where our things were stored and I was able to load our belongings on a train headed in the direction of my father's house. The nearest station on the line to my father's house was at Blidene, but the engineer did not have permission to make a stop at this station. I begged him to drive by the station as slow as possible, and as he did so, I threw out our chests from the train, then my bicycle, and last of all, I jumped.

It was midnight and perfectly still. My chests lay along the railway at a distance of 200 steps, the first to the last. I brought them to the station on my bicycle, one by one. It was daylight when I finally stopped trembling. At 9 o'clock I phoned my father. After five hours my brothers came by horse and carriage to bring me to my father's house.

Why do I relate this story? It is because there is evidence of the safe leading and guiding hand of the Lord.

First, if there had not been the thought to leave our things at the station and run away, we would have been in the station of Daugavpils when the bombs were falling, the train was burning, and people were being killed and wounded.

Second, it was a matter of chance that after a week being in ignorance of what to do, I finally was pointed to people who could help me locate our belongings.

Lastly, after three days of wondering what to do, we arrived at a train station in Jelgava that would take us to Blidene. And even though the train engineer was not authorized to stop at Blidene, he **agreed to go slowly** by the station so that I could throw our belongings from the train and I could also jump from the train.

If one link in this story was missed, our future could have been very different. Also, about two weeks later, the warfront entered Jelgava and left it in ruins. Of course, I am not sure that those who read this story will feel as I felt. **But I felt that there is ONE who takes care of us, not only for our immortal souls, but also in cases of necessity.**



It Is *Christmas* in the Kingdom

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

CHRISTMAS! WHAT A WONDERFUL TIME of the year. We Christians are filled with the joy of the holy-day, and the coming of the Christ Child is at the forefront of the season. We may decorate our homes, we may give gifts, we may share delicious meals with family and friends, but the real purpose and reason for the celebration is that Christ our Savior is born.

It's a little overwhelming when we consider that the second Person of the Trinity—Himself God—was Incarnate in the womb of a virgin girl. God became flesh. Flesh and blood.

We can't quite fathom God being hungry, but this infant God-man became hungry and needed to be nursed by His mother. We can't imagine God being tired, but the little Baby Christ grew tired and slept in His mother's arms. We can't comprehend God learning to walk and talk, but the young Child Jesus learned language and mobility as our children do.

And we cannot even begin to grasp the concept of God dying, but this enfleshed Divine Word, this Incarnate God, was able to die. And He did just that, for us and our salvation. What a marvel! What a mystery!

The body of the Word, then, being a real human body, in spite of its having been uniquely formed from a virgin, was of itself mortal and, like other bodies, liable to death. But the indwelling of the Word loosed it from this natural liability, so that corruption could not touch it. Thus is happened that two opposite marvels took place at once: the death of all was consummated in the Lord's body; yet, because the Word was in it, death and corruption were in the same act utterly abolished.

Athanasius

By His death, He destroyed the one who had the power of death. The writer of the Hebrew epistle says that this Great High Priest took on flesh and blood, destroyed the devil, and delivered us who were enslaved to death. Our faithful and merciful Great High Priest offered Himself and reconciled us to God.

Forasmuch then as the children 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 behoved 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 succour them that are tempted. Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him...
(Hebrews 2:14 - 3:2)

This is the reason for great celebration at Christmas, and through the whole year. This is Very Good News for a sin-sick and dying world.

Mary B. Mickelsen's simple children's song for Christmas brings out the joy and thankfulness of the season. It prays for blessing to those around us, and asks God to help us spread the Good News of His coming. Here are the lyrics:

*It is Christmas in the Kingdom,
Hearts are merry, spirits gay;
For the Babe, so long awaited,
Came in to our hearts to stay.
Let us thank our gracious Father,
Who is Lord of heav'n and earth;
Peace, goodwill, and healing blessings,
Now attend His holy birth.*

*It is Christmas all around us,
In our Sunday school so dear,
Ev'ry little pray'r ascendeth,
Into golden vials from here;
Bless our many faithful teachers,
Bless our Christian parents' plea,
And spread tiding of His coming,
To the souls redeemed by Thee.*

May we always proclaim the Good News to the souls redeemed by the Incarnate God, the God-man who died and lived again. For me. For you.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
(Hebrews 13:20-21)

Thanks be to God for the marvel and the mystery of the season. It is Christmas in the Kingdom! ~

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The Hymn Story

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee.
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that follows all my way,
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee.
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee.
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee.
I lay in dust, life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red,
Life that shall endless be.



George Matheson

From the Wikipedia "George Matheson" page:

One of his hymns, "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go," has passed into the popular hymnology of the Christian Church... [It] was written on the evening of Matheson's sister's marriage. Years before, he had been engaged, until his fiancée learned that he was going blind—that there was nothing the doctors could do—and she told him that she could not go through life with a blind man. He went blind while studying for the ministry, and his sister had been the one to care for him through the years, but now she was gone. He was now 40, and his sister's marriage brought a fresh reminder of his own heartbreak. It was in the midst of this circumstance and intense sadness that the Lord gave Matheson this hymn, which he said was written in five minutes.

From the Cyberhymnal "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go" page:

Matheson said about this hymn:

My hymn was composed in the manse of Innelan [Argyleshire, Scotland] on the evening of the 6th of June, 1882, when I was 40 years of age. I was alone in the manse at that time. It was the night of my sister's marriage, and the rest of the family were staying overnight in Glasgow. Something happened to me, which was known only to myself, and which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering. It was the quickest bit of work I ever did in my life. I had the impression of having it dictated to me by some inward voice rather than of working it out myself. I am quite sure that the whole work was completed in five minutes, and equally sure that it never received at my hands any retouching or correction. I have no natural gift of rhythm. All the other verses I have ever written are manufactured articles; this came like a day-spring from on high.