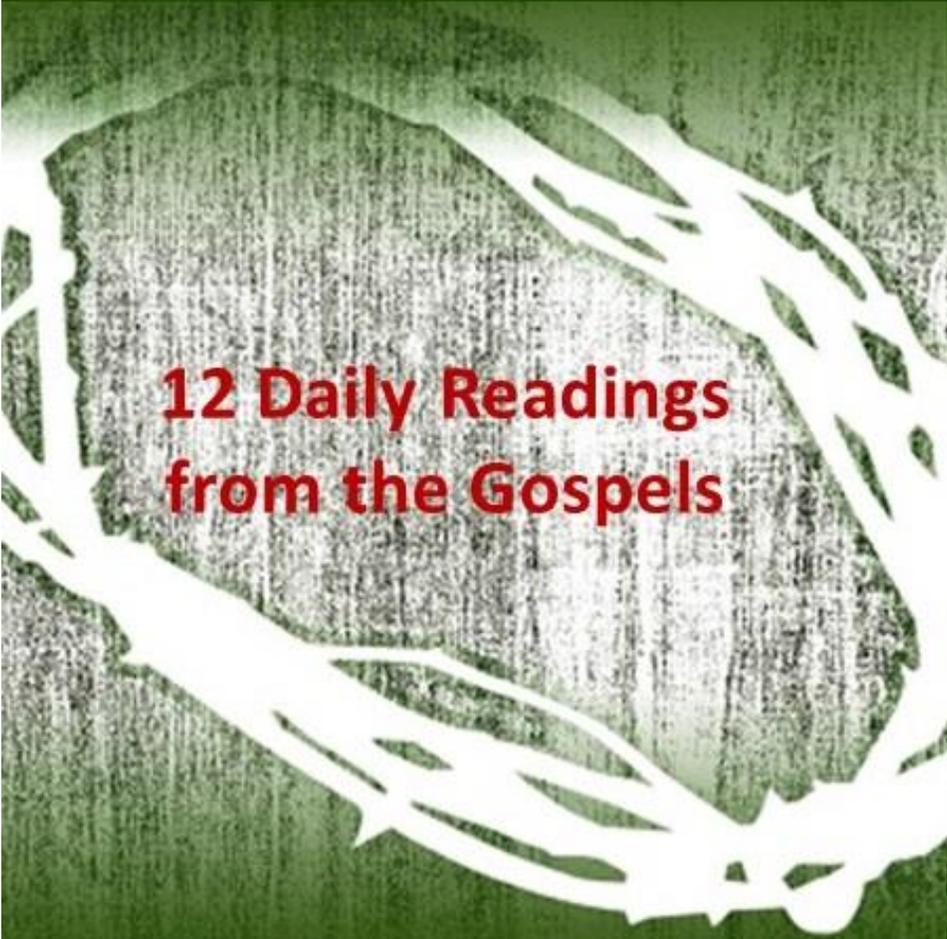


Seeing Jesus at Christmas



**12 Daily Readings
from the Gospels**

**J.C. Ryle
Adapted by Ron Jones**

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J.C. Ryle Bio

J.C. (John Charles) Ryle was born on May 10, 1816 in Cheshire, England. He grew up in a nominally Christian home. His parents were members of the Church of England, but were never committed to it or to Christ. However, God began to work in J.C.'s heart when he was a young man. He became seriously ill with a chest infection and was confined to rest. During this time, he began to read the Scriptures seriously and to pray and eventually came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Reflecting on his salvation, J.C. commented later, "Nothing to this day appeared to me so clear and distinct as my own sinfulness, Christ's preciousness, the value of the Bible, the absolute necessity of coming out of the world, [and] the need of being born again."

He was ordained as a pastor and preacher in the Church of England in December 1841 at the age of 25 years old. He served as pastor in four congregations during his ministry. He became well-known as a strong and Biblically sound teacher of the Scriptures. He preached many sermons and wrote many tracts (small booklets on various Bible topics) addressing

contemporary issues of his day that he felt Christians needed to understand. He wrote several books, the most famous being "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels." The "Expository Thoughts" is a book which gives a passage by passage explanation of the four gospels balancing solid scholarship with practical exhortation. Ryle lived to be 84 years old and died on June 10, 1900 in Chidwall, England.

JC Ryle was a man who loved Christ and loved his Word. He was a careful scholar who had a desire that Christians understand the practical applications of the Gospels based up a clear understanding of what the writers meant when they wrote them.

Preface

The season of Christmas is a time of extreme busyness. For us as Christians it can cause great conflict in our minds and hearts as we attempt to keep Christ in Christmas while at the same time getting done all the various responsibilities we have. One of the best ways this can be done is to spend a brief amount of time each day during the Christmas season reading and reflecting on what the Scriptures reveal about our wonderful Savior at the time of his birth. Through these Bible passages we can come to know Jesus in a deeper way. This eBook of twelve daily readings has been adapted from JC Ryle's Expository Thoughts on the Gospels. I have designed this daily reading schedule to help you as a believer to focus on Jesus during this hectic time of year.

I have adapted his writing by updating his wording for contemporary readers and by adding a Christmas application to each passage. I have also added my own exposition about Christ from the text in places where Ryle may not have given as full an explanation of Christ as it was my purpose to do in this eBook for Christmas.

My hope is that JC Ryle would have been blessed by how I have taken his work and adapted it for Christians living today for the Christmas season. I do know that he, like I, am always encouraged when the Word of God is carefully explained and the Lord of our lives is glorified through that exposition. May the Lord encourage you through his Word in this eBook this wonderful Christmas season!

Ron Jones

Table of Contents

- 1 The Eternal Divine Son of God
- 2 The Birth of Jesus Foretold
- 3 The Mother of Jesus
- 4 The Stepfather of Jesus
- 5 The Birth of Jesus
- 6 The Official Recognition of Jesus

Day 1
John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were created by him, and apart from him nothing was created that has been created. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. And the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it.

The five verses now before us contain a statement of incomparable magnificence concerning the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is, beyond all question, the one John calls “the Word.” No doubt there are heights and depths in that statement which are far beyond man's understanding. And yet there are plain lessons in it, which every Christian would do well to treasure up in his mind. This passage is where any celebration of Christmas should begin, with the Son of God before he was born into the world. Christmas is a time to remember who that child born in Bethlehem really was. He was not just an ordinary child, but the Son of God. John calls him “the Word of God,” to

share with us that, like the Word in the Old Testament, he was the one who revealed the Father to the world. Christ did not come just to die, but also to reveal the true nature of the Triune God.

First, we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ is eternal. John tells us that “in the beginning was the Word.” He did not begin to exist when the heavens and the earth were made. Much less did he begin to exist when the Gospel was brought into the world. He had glory with the Father “before the world was.” (John 17:5) He was existing when matter was first created, and before time began. He was “before all things.” (Colossians 1:17). He was from all eternity.

Second, we learn that our Lord Jesus Christ is a Person distinct from God the Father, and yet one with him. John tells us that “the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The Father and the Word, though two persons, are joined by an inexpressible union. Where God the Father was from all eternity, there also was the Word, even God the Son, their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal, and yet their Godhead one. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ is truly God. Our triune God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, is above human understanding! Blessed is he who

can receive it as a little child, without attempting to explain it.

Third, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator of all things. John tells us that “All things were created by him, and apart from him nothing was created that has been created.” So far from being a creature of God, as some have falsely asserted, he is the being who made the worlds and all that they contain. “He commanded and they were created.” (Psalm 148:5)

Last, we learn that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all spiritual life and light. John tells us, that “in him was life, and the life was the light of men.” He alone is the eternal fountain from which the sons of men have ever received life. Whatever spiritual life and light Adam and Eve possessed before the fall was from Christ.

Whatever deliverance from sin and spiritual death any child of Adam has ever enjoyed since the fall, whatever light of conscience or understanding any one has obtained, all has flowed from Christ. The vast majority of mankind in every age have refused to know him, have forgotten the fall, and their own need of a Savior. The light has been constantly shining “in darkness.” Most have “not comprehended the light.” But if

any men and women out of the countless millions of mankind have ever had spiritual life and light, they have owed all to Christ.

Let us read these first five verses of John's Gospel often. Let us note what kind of being the Redeemer of mankind needed to be in order to provide eternal redemption for sinners. If no one less than the Eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, could take away the sin of the world, sin must be a far more abominable thing in the sight of God than most people suppose. The right measure of sin's sinfulness is the dignity of him who came into the world to save sinners. If Christ is so great, then sin must indeed be sinful!

Let us read these first five verses of John's Gospel often during our Christmas season. It is not one of the traditional readings, but it is one with the most meaning. Let us note that the Savior in whom the believer is urged to trust is nothing less than the Eternal God, one able to save all that come to the Father by him. He that was "with God," and "was God," is also "Emmanuel, God with us."

Let us thank God that our help is laid on one that is mighty (Psalm 89:19). In ourselves we are great sinners, but in Jesus

Christ we have a great Savior. He is a strong foundation-stone, able to bear the weight of a world's sin. He that believes on him shall not be disappointed (1 Peter 2:6).

Day 2
John 1:6-13

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came for a testimony to bear witness of the light so that all men might believe through him. He was not the light, but was sent to bear witness of the light. There was the true light that comes into the world which lights every man. He was in the world and the world was made by him and the world did not know him. He came to his own people and his own people did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the authority to become the children of God, even to those who believe in his name who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Often at Christmas we forget about John the Baptist who had a central role in the coming of the messiah. He was appointed by God as the prophet who was to identify the child born in the manger as the Son of God when Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty. It was prophesied in Isaiah 40 that God would send a messenger before the messiah to prepare the way for him. When

John came and preached the coming of the messiah, it was prophetic proof that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

We see, also, in these verses, one principal position which our Lord Jesus Christ occupies towards mankind. We have it in the words, "He was the true light that comes into the world which lights every man." We celebrate Christmas using many kinds of lights around our trees, around our houses and around many other areas. The clear white lights shine the brightest and most beautifully. They symbolize the light of Jesus Christ which he brought to the world when he was born.

Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world. He is the center and source of all spiritual light, warmth, life, health, growth, and beauty. Like the sun, he shines for the common benefit of all mankind, for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and for Greek. Like the sun, he is free to all. All may look at him and drink spiritual health out of his light. But whether men will see or not, Christ is the true sun and the light of the world. There is no light for sinners except in the Lord Jesus.

We see in these verses, the desperate wickedness of man's natural heart. We have

it in the words, Christ “was in the world and the world was made by him and the world did not know him. He came to his own people and his own people did not receive him.”

Christ was in the world, invisible and unseen, long before he was born of Mary at that first Christmas. He was there from the very beginning, ruling, ordering, and governing the whole creation. By him all things are held together. (Colossians 1:17) He gave to all life and breath, rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons. By him kings reigned and nations were increased or diminished, yet men did not know him and did not honor him. They “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” (Romans 1:25) The natural heart is indeed “wicked!”

Christ came visibly into the world when he was born at Bethlehem and he was not treated any better by his own people. He came to the very ones whom he had brought out from Egypt and purchased for his own. He came to the Israelites whom he had separated from other nations, and to whom he had revealed himself by the prophets.

He came to those very people who had read of him in the Old Testament Scriptures,

seen him under types and figures in their temple services, and professed to be waiting for his coming. And yet, when he came, those very people did not receive him. They even rejected him, despised him, and slew him. Well may the natural heart be called “desperately wicked!”

We see, lastly, in these verses, the vast privileges of all who receive Christ and believe in him. We are told that “as many as received him to them he gave the authority to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name.” Christ will never be without some servants.

If the vast majority of the Israelites did not receive him as the Messiah, there were, at any rate, some who did. To them he gave the privilege of being God's children. He adopted them as members of his Father's family. He reckoned them his own brothers and sisters. He conferred on them a great dignity. He made them sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

Privileges like these, it should be remembered, are the possession of all, in every age, who receive Christ by faith, and follow him as their Savior. They are “children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26) For those of us have trusted Christ and

are following him, we have been born again by a new and heavenly birth and adopted into the family of the King of kings.

Few in number and despised by the world as we are, we are cared for with infinite love by our Father in heaven, who, for his Son's sake, is well pleased with us. In time he provides us with everything that is for our good. In eternity he will give us a crown of glory that does not fade away. These are great truths! Faith in Christ gives us a title to them. Good masters care for their servants, and Christ cares for his.

Christmas time is a perfect time to ask, "Am I a child of God? Have I been born again? Have I the evidence in my life which always accompany the new birth, a sense of sin, faith in Jesus, love of others, righteous living, and rejection of the values of the world?" Do not be content until you can say "yes" to these questions.

Do you desire to be a child of God, but are not sure you are? Then, right now as you approach the celebration of the birth of our Savior, you can turn to Jesus. You can speak to him, turn from your sin, and ask him to become your Savior. He will listen and respond to you. Trust in him with your whole heart to deliver you from the penalty of sin.

To everyone that so receives him this Christmas, he will give the privilege of becoming a child of God.

Day 3
John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We saw his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

For most, Christmas is a celebration of good things, good people and goodwill. It is a celebration of family and loving others. It has many symbols, Christmas trees, lights, wreaths, and other decorations. It also often has a manger scene. Jesus' birth is added as a spiritual part of Christmas, but has no real meaning in their lives.

For us, as believers, it is very different. We believe Jesus, that child born in Bethlehem, was the Son of God who became a human being to bring us into his kingdom. We celebrate his birth because of who he is and what he did for us. In John 1:14, John brings out the true meaning of Christmas as he unfolds for us the true identity of this child born in such humble circumstances.

The passage of Scripture now before us is very short, if we measure it by words. But it is very long, if we measure it by the nature of its contents. The substance of it is so

immensely important that we shall do well to give it separate and distinct consideration. The main truth which this verse teaches is the reality of our Lord Jesus Christ's incarnation. John tells us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

The plain meaning of these words is that our divine Savior took human nature upon him, in order to save sinners. He became a man like us in all things except for sin. Like us, he was born of a woman, though born in a miraculous manner. Like us, he grew from an infant to a teenager and from a teenager to an adult, both in wisdom and in stature. (Luke 2:5) Like us, he hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, slept, was wearied, felt pain, wept, rejoiced, marveled, and was moved to anger and compassion.

Having become flesh, and taken a body, he prayed, read the Scriptures, suffered being tempted, and submitted his human will to the will of God the Father. And finally, in the same body, he suffered and shed his blood, died, was buried, rose again, and ascended up into heaven. And yet all this time he was God as well as man!

This union of two natures in Christ's one Person is doubtless one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith. It needs to

be carefully stated. It is just one of those great truths which are not meant to be curiously analyzed, but to be reverently believed. The Son of God who is one substance with the Father took man's nature in the womb of the virgin Mary so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and the manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, so that there is one Christ, truly God and truly man.

We must never forget that though our Lord was God and man at the same time, the divine and human natures in him were never mingled. One nature did not swallow up the other. The two natures remained perfect and distinct. The deity of Christ was never for a moment laid aside, although it was veiled.

He did lay aside his use of his divine attributes for his own benefit and submitted his use of his divine attributes to the Father's will while on earth. The manhood of Christ, during his lifetime was never for a moment unlike our own, though by union with the Godhead, greatly dignified. Though perfect God, Christ has always been perfect man from the first moment of his incarnation.

He who has gone into heaven and is sitting at the Father's right hand to intercede

for sinners is man as well as God. Though perfect man, Christ never ceased to be perfect God. He who suffered for sin on the cross, and was made sin for us, was “God revealed in the flesh.” Though he became “flesh” in the fullest sense when he was born of Mary, he never at any period ceased to be the Eternal Word.

This constant undivided union of two perfect natures in Christ's person is exactly what gives infinite value to his mediation, and qualifies him to be the very mediator that sinners need. Our mediator is one who can sympathize with us, because he is truly man. And yet, at the same time, he is one who can deal with the Father for us on equal terms because he is truly God. It is the same union which gives infinite value to his righteousness when imputed to believers.

It is the righteousness of one who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to the atoning blood which he shed for sinners on the cross. It is the blood of one who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to his resurrection. When he rose again as the head of the body of believers, he rose not as a mere man, but as God. Let these things sink deeply into our hearts.

The incarnation and what it means to us is what Christmas is all about. It should stir within us feelings of deep gratitude and thankfulness. It is full of abounding comfort for all who know Jesus Christ by faith and believe in him. Did the Word become flesh? Then he is one who can be touched with the feeling of his people's weaknesses because he has suffered himself, being tempted. He is almighty because he is God and yet he can sympathize with us, because he is man.

Did the Word become flesh? Then he can supply us with a perfect pattern and example for our daily life. Had he walked among us as an angel or a spirit, we could never have copied him. But having dwelt among us as a man, we know that the true standard of holiness is to “walk even as he walked.” (1 John 2:6) He is a perfect pattern because he is God. But he is also a perfect pattern for us because he is man.

Day 4
Luke 1:26-33

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came to her, and said, "Greetings, highly favored one. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women." When she saw him, she was troubled at what he said and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will have no end."

We have, in these verses, the announcement of the most marvelous event that ever happened in this world, the incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It reveals the true meaning of

Christmas. It is a passage which we should always read with wonder, love and praise not only at this time of year, but at all times.

We should notice, in the first place, the lowly and unassuming manner in which the Savior of mankind came to live among us. The angel who announced his advent was sent to an obscure town of Galilee, named Nazareth. The woman, who was honored to be our Lord's mother, was evidently in a lowly position of life. Both in her social and economic status and her house, there was a nothing of what the world calls "greatness."

We need not hesitate to conclude that there was a wise providence in all this arrangement. The plan of Almighty God, which orders all things in heaven and earth, could just as easily have appointed Jerusalem to be the place of Mary's residence as Nazareth, or could as easily have chosen the daughter of some rich scribe to be our Lord's mother, as a poor woman. But it seemed good to him that it should not be so. The first advent of Messiah was to be an advent of humility. That humility was to begin even from the time of his conception and birth.

Let us admire the amazing sacrifice of the Son of God. The heir of all things not only

took our nature upon him, but took it in the most humbling form in which it could have been assumed. It would have been a sacrifice to come on earth as a king and reign. It was a miracle of mercy passing our comprehension to come on earth as a poor man, to be despised, and suffer, and die. Let his love constrain us to live not to ourselves, but to him. Let his example daily bring home to our mind the precept of Scripture, "Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with those of low position." (Romans 12:16)

We should notice, in the second place, the high privilege given to Mary. The language which the angel Gabriel addresses to her is very remarkable. He calls her "highly favored." He tells her that "the Lord is with her." He says to her, "Blessed are you among women."

No woman was ever so highly honored as the mother of our Lord. It is evident that one woman only out of the countless millions of the human race, could be the means whereby God could be "manifest in the flesh," and Mary had the mighty privilege of being that one. By one woman, sin and death were brought into the world at the beginning. By the child-bearing of one woman, life and immortality were brought

to light when Christ was born. No wonder that this one woman was called "highly favored" and "blessed" to have such a privilege.

One thing in connection with this subject should never be forgotten by Christians. There is a relationship to Christ within reach of all of us, a relationship far nearer than that of flesh and blood, a relationship which belongs to all who repent and believe. "Whoever does the will of God," says Jesus, "is the one who is my brother, and sister, and mother." "Blessed is the womb that bore you," was the saying of a woman one day. But what was the reply? "Yes! rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." (Mark 3:35; Luke 11:27)

We should notice, finally, in these verses, the glorious account of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the angel gives to Mary. Every part of the account is full of deep meaning and deserves close attention. Jesus "shall be called the Son of the Most High," says Gabriel. He was so before he came into the world. Equal to the Father in all things, he was from all eternity the Son of God. But he was to be known and acknowledged as such by his followers, the church. The

Messiah was to be recognized and worshiped as nothing less than one who is truly God.

“The Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David,” says Gabriel, “and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever.” The literal fulfillment of this part of the promise is yet to come. Israel is yet to be gathered. The Jews are yet to be restored to their own land and to look on him whom they had pierced as their King and their God. Though the accomplishment of this prediction is delayed, we may confidently wait for it. It shall surely come one day.

Finally, says Gabriel, “and his kingdom will have no end.” Before his glorious kingdom, the empires of this world shall one day go down and pass away. Like Nineveh, and Babylon, and Tyre, and Carthage, they shall all come to nothing one day, and the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom. Before Jesus, every knee shall one day bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. His kingdom alone shall prove an everlasting kingdom and his dominion shall not pass away. (Daniel 7:14, 27)

Christmas is not just a time of looking backward at what Jesus did when he was on earth, but also looking forward to what he

will do in the future for us. As Christians we should think often about this glorious promise and take comfort in its contents. The day draws near when Christ shall take his great power and reign and when all who have served him faithfully shall exchange a cross for a crown. This will all take place because the Son of God was willing to be born into our world as a human being like us. That is something worth celebrating!

Day 5
Luke 1:34-38

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, that holy child whom you will bear will be called the Son of God. And, behold, your cousin Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold the servant of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word." The angel departed from her.

Let us notice first, in these verses, the question of Mary to the angel Gabriel. It is not a question of doubt, "I can't believe this is possible so how can this be since I am a virgin?" Rather it is a question of faith, "I believe you so how is this going to be accomplished since I am a virgin?" Mary's question was very different from Zechariah's "How shall I know this for sure?" Zechariah wanted a confirmation so he could believe

the angel. Mary wanted understanding since she already believed.

Asking God to show us what he is doing when we trust whatever he says he will do is acceptable to God. Asking God to prove to us he can do whatever he says he will do before we will believe is not acceptable to God. Christmas is a time to remember the importance of faith and trust in the promises of God. This faith Mary displayed.

Another thing to notice is the reverent and careful manner in which the angel Gabriel speaks of the great mystery of Christ's incarnation. In reply to the question of Mary "How can this be?" he uses these remarkable words, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." There is a mystery in Christmas, the mystery of the incarnation.

We shall do well to follow the example of the angel in all our reflections on this deep subject. It is enough for us to know that "the Word was made flesh," and that when the Son of God came into the world, a real "body was prepared for him," so that he "took part of our flesh and blood," and was "born of a woman." (John 1:14; Hebrews 10:5; Hebrews 2:14; Galatians 4:4)

The manner in which all this was accomplished is wisely hidden from us. In a faith which comes down from heaven there must by necessity be mysteries, things that we cannot understand. Of such mysteries in Christianity, the incarnation, the union of the human and divine in Christ, is one. At the heart of Christmas is this incredible mystery, God became a man.

Let us notice, in the third place, the prominent place assigned to the Holy Spirit in the great mystery of the incarnation. We find it written, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you." The honor here given to the Spirit is in precise harmony with the teaching of Scripture in other places. In every step of the great work of man's redemption, we shall find special mention of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Did Jesus die to make atonement for our sins? It is written that "through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God." (Hebrews 9:14) Did He rise again for our justification? It is written that he "was made alive by the Spirit." (1 Peter 3:18) Does He supply his disciples with comfort between the time of his first and second coming? It is written that the

Comforter, whom he promised to send is “the Spirit of truth.” (John 14:17)

We often do not think of the Holy Spirit at this time of year concerning his involvement in that first Christmas, but we should. The Holy Spirit plays a major role in the birth of Christ and in our daily lives. Let us give the Holy Spirit the same place in our personal faith, which we find him occupying in God's word. Let us remember, that all that believers have, and are, and enjoy under the Gospel, they owe to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. The work of each of the three Persons of the Trinity is equally and entirely needful to the salvation of every saved person. The election of God the Father, the redemption of God the Son, and the sanctification of God the Spirit, should never to be separated in our Christianity.

Let us notice, in the fourth place, the mighty principle which the angel Gabriel lays down to silence all objections about the incarnation, “with God nothing shall be impossible.” A hearty reception of this great principle is of immense importance to our own inward peace. Questions and doubts will often arise in men's minds about many subjects in Christianity. They are the natural

result of the fallen state of our soul. Our faith at the best is very feeble.

Among many antidotes to a doubting, anxious, questioning state of mind, few will be found more useful than that before us now, a thorough conviction of the almighty power of God. With him who called the world into being and formed it out of nothing, everything is possible. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

Let us notice, in the last place, the humble and ready agreement of Mary in God's revealed will concerning her. She says to the angel, "Behold the servant of the Lord, may it be to me according to your word."

There is far more of admirable grace in this answer than at first sight appears. A moment's reflection will show us, that it was no light matter to become the mother of our Lord in this unheard of and mysterious way. It brought with it, no doubt, at a distant period, great honor; but it brought with it for the present, no small danger to Mary's reputation, and no small trial to Mary's faith. She would be having a baby, who was obviously not her husband's. What would Joseph think when he found out? What would her friends and family think? The emotional stress at that time for a young

woman must have been very great, but Mary embraced it by faith and submitted herself to the Lord. All this danger and trial Mary was willing and ready to risk. She asks no further questions. She raises no further objections. She accepts the honor given to her with all its attendant perils and inconveniences. "Behold," she says, "the servant of the Lord."

Let us seek in our daily lives to exercise the same blessed spirit of faith which we see here in Mary as she began her journey toward the first Christmas. Let us be willing to go anywhere, and do anything, and be anything, whatever be the present and immediate inconvenience, so long as God's will is clear and the path of responsibility is plain from the Scriptures.

Day 6
Luke 1:39-45

Mary arose in those days and went with haste into the hill country into a town of Judah and entered into the house of Zechariah, and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke out with a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. How has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, behold, as soon as the voice of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

We should observe in this passage, the benefit of fellowship and communion between believers. We read of a visit paid by Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. We are told in a striking manner how the hearts of both these holy women were cheered, and their minds lifted up by this encounter. Without this visit, Elizabeth might never have been so filled with the Holy Spirit, as we are here told

she was, and Mary might never have uttered that song of praise which is now known all over the Church of Jesus Christ.

The first Christmas was a time when those who would participate in the birth of the messiah would come together and strengthen and encourage each other. Mary wanted to be with Elizabeth during this time, to share with her the incredible news from the angel Gabriel and in turn, she would receive the news Elizabeth had from that same angel. It was a time of great rejoicing between these two as believers in the one true God.

We should always regard communion with other believers as an important way of experiencing God's grace especially at Christmas time. Christmas is a celebration among believers in Jesus Christ. Communion with other Christians is always a refreshing break in our journey along the narrow way; it is a blessing to exchange experience with our fellow travelers. It helps us and it helps them, and so is a mutual gain. It is the nearest approach that we can make on earth to the joy of heaven. "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17) We need reminding of this.

The subject does not receive sufficient attention and the souls of believers suffer in consequence. There are many who fear the Lord and think upon his name, and yet forget to speak often to one another. First let us seek the face of God. Then let us seek the face of God's children. If we did this more, and were more careful about the people we spend time with, we would know more often what it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We should observe in this passage, the clear spiritual knowledge which appears in the language of Elizabeth. She uses an expression about Mary which shows that she herself was deeply taught of God. She calls her "the mother of my Lord." Those words "my Lord" are so familiar to our ears, that we miss the fullness of their meaning. At the time they were spoken they implied far more than we are likely to suppose.

They were nothing less than a distinct declaration that the child who was to be born of the virgin Mary was the long-promised Messiah, the "Lord" of whom David, in the Spirit, had prophesied, the Christ of God. Viewed in this light, the expression is a wonderful example of faith. It is a confession worthy to be placed by the

side of that of Peter, when he said to Jesus, "You are the Christ."

Notice, Elizabeth does not declare that Mary is "the mother of God," but "the mother of my Lord." There is an important distinction here. Mary was to be the mother of the human Jesus, who joined together with his divine nature was the one person, Jesus Christ, the messiah.

Let us remember the deep meaning of the words, "the Lord," and beware of using them lightly and carelessly. Let us consider that they rightly apply to no one but him alone who was crucified for our sins on Calvary. Let the recollection of this fact invest those words with a holy reverence, and make us careful how we let them fall from our lips.

There are two texts connected with the expression which should often come to our minds. In one it is written, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3) In the other it is written, "Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:11)

Finally, we should observe in these verses, the high praise which Elizabeth bestows upon Mary's simple faith.

“Blessed,” she says, “is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” We need not wonder that this holy woman should thus commend faith. No doubt she was well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures.

She knew the great things that faith had done. What is the whole history of God's saints in every age but a record of men and women who trusted God? What is the simple story of all from Abel downwards but a narrative of redeemed sinners who believed what God had revealed to them, and so were blessed?

By faith they embraced promises. By faith they lived. By faith they walked. By faith they endured hardships. By faith they looked to an unseen Savior, and good things yet to come. By faith they battled with the world, the flesh, and the devil. By faith they overcame, and got safely home. Of this godly company Mary was proving herself one. It is no wonder that Elizabeth said, “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”

Do we know anything of this precious faith? This, after all, is the question that concerns us. Do we know anything of the faith of God's elect, the faith which is the

working of God? Let us never rest until we know it by experience. Once knowing it, let us never cease to pray that our faith may grow exceedingly. It is better to be rich in faith than rich in gold. When the great white throne appears, and the books are opened, when the dead are called from their graves, and receiving their final sentence, the value of faith will at length be fully known.

Men who have not believed will see the believers standing with the Lord and will learn then, how true are the words, "Blessed are those who believed." As believers have declared by faith the truth of Jesus Christ in that first Christmas and every succeeding Christmas on this earth since that time, we will one day declare that truth by sight when we are in the presence of Jesus Christ himself. What a glorious day that will be!

Day 7
Luke 1:46-56

Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has regarded the humble estate of his servant, for, behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me and his name is holy. His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his descendants forever." And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her own home.

One of the central individuals in the first Christmas is, of course, Mary, the mother of Jesus. Most likely, she was a teenager at the time, but a young woman of great faith. Her faith rested upon the Old Testament

Scriptures, the revelation of God about himself and his relationship to his people. These verses contain Mary's famous song of praise, as she rejoiced in becoming the "mother of our Lord."

Let us mark, firstly, the full acquaintance with Scripture which her song displays. We are reminded as we read it, of many expressions in the book of Psalms. Above all, we are reminded of the song of Hannah, in the book of Samuel. (1 Samuel 2) It is evident that the Mary's memory was a storehouse of Scripture. She was familiar, whether by hearing or by reading, with the Old Testament. And so, when out of the abundance of her heart her mouth spoke, she gave expression to her feelings in Scriptural language. Moved by the Holy Spirit to break forth into praise, she chose language which the Holy Spirit had already consecrated and used.

Let us strive, every year we live, to become more deeply acquainted with Scripture. Let us study it, search into it, dig into it, and meditate on it, until it dwells in us richly. (Colossians 3:16) In particular, let us labor to make ourselves familiar with those parts of the Bible which, like the book of Psalms, describe the experience of the

saints of old. We shall find it most helpful to us in all our approaches to God. It will supply us with the best and most suitable language both for the expression of our needs and thanksgivings. Such knowledge of the Bible can doubtless never be attained without regular study. But the time spent on such study is never misspent. It will bear fruit all of our days on this earth.

Let us mark, secondly, in this song of praise, Mary's deep humility. She who was chosen of God to the high honor of being Messiah's mother, speaks of her own "humble estate," and acknowledges her need of a "Savior." She does not anywhere say that she regarded herself as a sinless person. On the contrary, she uses the language of one who has been taught by the grace of God to sense her own sins, and so far from being able to save others, requires a Savior for her own soul. Let us remember that she was a human being like ourselves and like ourselves was saved by grace through faith in the Son of God.

Let us copy this holy humility of our Lord's mother. Like her, let us be lowly in our own eyes, and think little of ourselves. Humility is the highest grace that can adorn the Christian character. It is the grace, which

of all is most important for human nature. Above all, it is the grace which is within the reach of every saved person. All are not rich. All are not learned. All are not highly gifted. All are not preachers. But all children of God may be clothed with humility.

Let us mark, thirdly, the lively thankfulness of Mary. It stands out prominently in the early part of her song. Her "soul magnifies the Lord." Her "spirit rejoices in God." "All generations shall call her blessed." "Great things have been done for her." We can scarcely enter into the full extent of feelings which a holy Jewish young woman would experience on finding herself in Mary's position. But we should try to understand them as we read her repeated expressions of praise. We too shall do well to walk in Mary's steps in this matter, and cultivate a thankful spirit. It has ever been a mark of God's most distinguished saints in every age.

Let us mark, fourthly, the experiential acquaintance with God's former dealings with his people, which Mary possessed. She speaks of God as One whose "mercy is on those who fear him," as one who "scatters the proud, and puts down the mighty, and sends the rich away empty," as one who

“exalts those of humble estate and fills the hungry with good things.” She spoke out of her knowledge of Old Testament history.

She remembered how Israel's God had put down Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and then the Canaanites and the Philistines. She remembered how he had exalted Joseph and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Esther, and Daniel, and never allowed his chosen people to be completely destroyed. And now God was placing honor upon a poor woman of Nazareth in raising up the Messiah in Israel.

Let us mark, lastly, the firm grasp which Mary had of Bible promises. She ends her song of praise by declaring that God has “blessed Israel in remembrance of his mercy,” and that he has done “as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.” These words show clearly that she remembered the past promise made to Abraham, “In you shall all nations of the earth be blessed.” And it is evident that in the approaching birth of her Son she regarded this promise as about to be fulfilled.

Let us learn from this holy woman's example, to lay firm hold on Bible promises. It is of the deepest importance for our peace

to do so. Promises are, in fact, the spiritual manna that we should eat daily, and the water that we should drink daily, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. We walk by faith, and this faith leans on God's promises. On those promises we may lean confidently.

We shall find one day, like the Mary, that God keeps his word, and that what he has spoken, so he will always perform in due time. Christmas time should be a special time of reflecting on the great promises of God given in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in Jesus, his Son, as recorded in the New Testament.

Day 8
Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, did not want to shame her and desired to divorce her privately. While he was thinking about these things, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the one conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a son and will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Now all this was done so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Immanuel," (which translated means God with us). When Joseph awoke from his sleep he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary as his wife. But he kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son and he called his name Jesus.

Much of the focus at Christmas is on Mary and the child Jesus. Christians often forget about Joseph, the man God chose to care for and protect the mother of his Son and lead her to Bethlehem in very difficult circumstances to birth the messiah.

Let us observe the conduct of Joseph described in these verses. It is a beautiful example of godly wisdom and tender consideration for others. When Mary received the angelic revelation of her impending pregnancy, Joseph was not with her. At that time in Israel, men and women were officially married in a legal ceremony one year before they were allowed to “come together” (i.e. live together and consummate the marriage). Mary’s pregnancy looked like she had been unfaithful to Joseph.

Joseph saw her pregnancy and naturally assumed Mary had been unfaithful. But he did nothing rashly because he loved her and wanted to treat her properly in this process even though he must have been deeply distraught. He waited patiently and in all probability laid the matter before God in prayer as to what he should do.

The patience of Joseph was graciously rewarded. He received a direct message from God upon the subject of his anxiety, and was at once relieved from all his fears. How good it is to wait upon God! Who has cast his cares upon God in conscientious prayer and found him a failure? Proverbs says "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:6)

Although God does not normally answer our prayers today through angelic visions as he did those who had direct roles in his redemptive plan, he does answer our prayers as faithfully as he did Joseph's.

Let us next observe the two names given to our Lord in these verses. One is "Jesus." The other is "Immanuel." One describes his office; the other his nature. Both are deeply interesting. The name "Jesus" means "Savior." It is the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament. It is given to our Lord because "He saves his people from their sins." This is his special office.

He saves them from the penalty of sin, by his own atoning blood. He saves them from the dominion of sin, by putting in their hearts the sanctifying Spirit. He saves them from the presence of sin, when, in the future, he takes them out of this world to

rest with him. He will save them from all the consequences of sin, when he shall give them a glorious body at the last day. Blessed and holy are Christ's people! From sorrow, cross, and conflict they are not saved. But they are saved from sin forever. They are cleansed from guilt by Christ's blood. They are made fit for heaven by Christ's Spirit. This is salvation. He who holds onto his sin is not yet saved.

Jesus is a very encouraging name to heavily burdened sinners. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords might lawfully have taken some more high-sounding title. But He does not do so. The rulers of this world have often called themselves Great, Conquerors, Bold, Magnificent, and the like. The Son of God is content to call himself Savior. The people who desire salvation may draw near to the Father with boldness, and have access with confidence through Christ. It is his ministry and his delight to show mercy. "For God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him." (John 3:17)

The other name in these verses is also important. It is the name which is given to our Lord from his nature, as God manifest in the flesh. He is called "Immanuel," which is

“God with us.” Let us take care that we have clear views of our Lord Jesus Christ's nature and person. It is a point of the deepest importance. We should settle it firmly in our minds, that our Savior is perfect man as well as perfect God, and perfect God as well as perfect man.

If we once lose sight of this great foundation truth, we may run into dreadful heresies. The name Immanuel takes in the whole mystery. Jesus is “God with us.” He had a nature like our own in all things, except sin. But though Jesus was “with us” in human flesh and blood, he was at the same time truly God.

We shall often find, as we read the Gospels that our Savior could be weary, and hungry, and thirsty, could weep, and groan, and feel pain like ourselves. In all this we see the man Christ Jesus. We see the nature he took on him, when he was born of Mary.

But we shall also find in the same Gospels that our Savior knew men's hearts and thoughts, that he had power over demons, that he could work the mightiest of miracles with a word, that he was ministered to by angels, that he allowed a disciple to call him “my God,” and that he said, “Before

Abraham was I am,” and “I and my Father are one.” In all this we see the eternal God.

At Christmas, Christians celebrate the true identity of that babe born in a manger to a poor and humble family from Nazareth. We celebrate Jesus, the God-man, who came to bear our sins on the cross and redeem us, the people whom he loves.

Day 9
Luke 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken of the whole Roman world. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be registered, everyone to his own town. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David to be registered with Mary his espoused wife who was pregnant. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. She bore 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.

We have, in these verses, the story of the first Christmas, the birth of the incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Every birth of a living child is a marvelous event. It brings into being a person that will never die. But never since the world began was a birth so marvelous as the birth of Christ. In itself it

was a miracle, "God was revealed in the flesh." (1 Timothy 3:16)

In reading these verses, let us first notice the times when Christ was born. It was in the days when Augustus, the first Roman emperor, made "a decree that a census should be taken of the whole Roman world."

The wisdom of God appears in this simple fact. The Jews were under the dominion and taxation of a foreign power. Strangers were ruling over them. They no longer had a fully independent government of their own. The "due time" had come for the promised Messiah to appear. Augustus takes a census to tax the Roman world, and at once Christ is born.

It was a time peculiarly suitable for the introduction of Christ's Gospel. The whole civilized earth was at length governed by one master, Rome. There was nothing to prevent missionaries of a new faith going from city to city, and country to country. Egypt, and Assyria, and Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome, had all successively proven by their worldly wisdom that they "did not know God." (1 Corinthians 1:21) Notwithstanding their mighty conquerors, and poets, and historians, and architects,

and philosophers, the kingdoms of the world were full of dark idolatry. It was indeed “due time” for God to intervene from heaven, and send down an almighty Savior. It was “due time” for Christ to be born.

Let us ever rest our souls on the thought that the times are in God's hand. (Psalm 31:15) He knows the best season for sending help to his people, and new light to the world. Let us beware of giving way to anxiety about the course of events around us, as if we knew better than the King of kings what time relief should come.

Let us notice, secondly, the place where Christ was born. It was not at Nazareth of Galilee, where his mother, Mary, lived. The prophet Micah had foretold that the event was to take place at Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2) And so it came to pass. At Bethlehem Christ was born. The overruling providence of God appears in this simple fact. He orders all things in heaven and earth. He turns the hearts of kings wherever he will. He overruled the time when Augustus decreed the census. He directed the enforcement of the decree in such a way, that Mary needed to be at Bethlehem when “the time came for the baby to be born.”

Little did the proud Roman emperor, and his officer Quirinius, know that they were only instruments in the hand of the God of Israel, and were only carrying out the eternal purposes of the King of kings. Little did they know that they were helping to lay the foundation of a kingdom, before which the empires of this world would all go down one day, and Roman idolatry pass away.

The heart of a believer should take comfort in the recollection of God's providential governing of the world. A true Christian should never be greatly moved or disturbed by the conduct of the rulers of the earth. He should see with the eye of faith a hand overruling all that they do to the praise and glory of God. Kings and rulers can do nothing but what God allows, and nothing which is not carrying out God's will. God does allow man to exercise free will and commit evil, but he always turns it to his purposes.

Let us notice, lastly, the manner in which Christ was born. He was not born under the roof of his mother's house, but in a strange place, and at an "inn." When born, he was not laid in a carefully prepared cradle. He was "laid in a manger" (that is, a

feeding trough for the cattle), because there was no room in the inn.

We see here the grace and humility of Christ. Had he come to save mankind with royal majesty, surrounded by his Father's angels, it would have been an act of undeserved mercy. Had he chosen to dwell in a palace, with power and great authority, we should have had reason enough to wonder. But to become poor as the very poorest of mankind, and lowly as the very lowliest, this is a love that passes knowledge. Never let us forget that through this humiliation Jesus has purchased for us a title to share in his glory. Through his life of suffering, as well as his death, he has obtained eternal redemption for us. All through his life he was poor for our sakes, from the hour of his birth to the hour of his death. And through his poverty we are made rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

There are many who fill their houses with Christmas decorations and spare no expense at this time of the year, but they have completely neglected the very person whose birth is being celebrated. For believers, Christmas is a time to fill our minds and homes with thoughts of Jesus. Talk often at this time of year about our Lord and the

true meaning of his birth and it will truly be a time of celebration that honors him and our Father who sent him.

Day 10
Luke 2:8-20

And there were shepherds in the same region abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were very afraid. And the angel said to them, "Do not fear, for, behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all people. For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign to you: you shall find a baby wrapped in cloths and 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 and good will towards men."

And it came about when the angels went from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass which the Lord has revealed to us." And they went quickly and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they had seen this, they made known the statement, which was told to

them about this child. And all who heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told to them.

We read, in these verses, how the birth of the Lord Jesus was first announced to human beings. Throughout history, the birth of a king's son is generally made an occasion of public celebration and rejoicing. Everywhere one went on that day people would be talking about the newborn prince. However, on that first Christmas the announcement of the birth of the Prince of Peace was made privately to a small group of people, at midnight, and without any worldly pomp and circumstance.

Let us point out who they were to whom the news first came that Christ was born. They were “shepherds abiding in the field near Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flocks by night.” To shepherds, not to priests and rulers, to shepherds, not to scribes and Pharisees, an angel appeared, proclaiming, “to you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

The saying of James should come into our mind, as we read these words “Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him.” (James 2:5) The lack of money prevents no one from spiritual privileges. The things of God's kingdom are often hidden from the great and noble, and revealed to the poor and humble. “Working with one’s hands” for a living does not prevent a man from being favored with special communion with God. Moses was keeping sheep, Gideon was threshing wheat, Elisha was ploughing, when they were each honored by direct calls and revelations from God. Let us resist the suggestion of Satan that Christianity is not for the common person. The weak of the world are often called before the mighty. The last are often first, and the first last. This is all because of God’s incredible grace.

Let us point out, secondly, the language used by the angel in announcing Christ's birth to the shepherds. He said, “I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be to all people.” We need not wonder at these words. The spiritual darkness which had covered the earth for four thousand years, was about to be rolled away. The way to

pardon and peace with God was about to be thrown open to all mankind. The head of Satan was about to be crushed. Liberty was about to be proclaimed to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind.

The mighty truth was about to be proclaimed that God could be just, and yet, for Christ's sake, justify the ungodly. Salvation was no longer to be seen through types and figures, but openly, and face to face. The knowledge of God was no longer to be confined to the Jews, but to be offered to the whole Gentile world. The days of heathenism were numbered. The first stone of God's kingdom was about to be set up. If this was not "good news," there never was news that deserved the name.

Thirdly, who were they who first praised God, when Christ was born? They were angels and not men, angels who had never sinned, and needed no Savior, angels who had not fallen, and required no redeemer, and no atoning blood. The first hymn to the honor of "God manifest in the flesh," was sung by "a multitude of the heavenly host."

Let us note this fact. It shows us what good servants the angels are. All that their heavenly Master does, pleases and interests

them. It shows us what clear knowledge they have. They know what misery sin has brought into creation. They know the blessedness of heaven, and the privilege of an open door into it. Above all, it shows us the deep love and compassion which the angels feel towards poor lost man. They rejoice in the glorious prospect of many souls being saved.

Let us point out, fourthly, the hymn of praise which the heavenly host sung in the hearing of the shepherds. They said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will towards men."

"Glory to God in the highest!" the song begins. Now is come the highest degree of glory to God, by the appearing of his Son Jesus Christ in the world. By his life and death on the cross he will glorify God's attributes of justice, holiness, grace, mercy, and wisdom, as they never were glorified before. Creation glorified God, but not so much as redemption.

"Peace on earth!" the song goes on. Now is come to earth the peace of God which passes all understanding, the perfect peace between a holy God and sinful man, which Christ was to purchase with his own blood, the peace which is offered freely to all

mankind, the peace which, once admitted into the heart, makes men live at peace one with another, and will one day spread over the whole world.

“Good will towards men!” the song concludes. Now is come the time when God's kindness and good will towards guilty man is to be fully made known. His power was seen in creation. His justice was seen in the flood. But his mercy remained to be fully revealed by the appearing and atonement of Jesus Christ. Such was the meaning of the angels' song. Happy are they that can enter into its meaning, and with their hearts subscribe to its contents.

Let us point out before we leave the passage, the prompt obedience to the heavenly vision displayed by the shepherds. We see in them no doubts, or questionings, or hesitation. Strange and improbable as the news might seem, they at once act upon it. They went to Bethlehem in haste. They found everything exactly as it had been told them. Their simple faith received a rich reward. They had the mighty privilege of being the first of all mankind, after Mary and Joseph, who saw with believing eyes the new-born Messiah. They soon returned,

“glorifying and praising God” for what they had seen.

During this Christmas, may our spirit be like theirs! May we ever believe implicitly, act promptly, and wait for nothing, when the path of obedience is clear! In so doing, we shall have a reward like that of the shepherds. The journey that is begun in faith will end in praise.

Day 11
Luke 2:11

For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

The words that the angel spoke to the shepherds on that first Christmas concerning the true identity of that babe born in Bethlehem cannot be over emphasized. He said, "For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord." The angel announced three titles for Jesus, brief and concise, but powerful identifications of his true nature.

First, he is called the "Savior." This is a title that God alone claimed for himself in the OT. In Isaiah 43:11-12, the Lord says "I, even I, am the Lord, and beside me there is no Savior. I have declared and have saved and I have proclaimed when there was no foreign god among you. Therefore, you are my witnesses that I am God." God was reminding Israel that he alone was their Savior and deliverer. They had foolishly fallen into idolatry and depending on foreign gods to protect them, but none of those gods were real and thus none of them could save anyone. When the angel proclaimed

that Jesus was the Savior, he was proclaiming that Jesus was the God of the Old Testament who have delivered them time and time again from their physical enemies and who was this time going to deliver them from their greatest enemy, sin.

The second title the angel gave for Jesus was "Christ." Christ is the English translation of the Greek word "Christos" which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "mashiach" which is translated into English as "messiah." They both mean "the anointed one" and refer to the messiah. Jesus was the one for whom the Israelites had been waiting. The prophets had foretold many things about the messiah and his future coming. Genesis 12:1-3 foretold that he would be a descendant of Abraham. Genesis 49:10 predicted that he would be of the tribe of Judah. 2 Samuel 7:12-16 indicated that he would be a descendant of David.

Isaiah 7:14 said that he would be born of a virgin. Micah 5:2 foretold that he would be born in Bethlehem. Isaiah 11:2 predicted that he would be anointed by the Spirit. Isaiah 35:5-6 indicated that messiah would perform incredible healing miracles. Isaiah 53 predicted that he would suffer and die for our sins. Psalm 16:8-11 said that the messiah

would not stay in the grave after he died. Psalm 110:1 foretold that the messiah would ascend to the right hand of God. Jesus proved he was the messiah by fulfilling these messianic prophecies and many more.

Jesus was anointed by God to deliver his people from sin and set up his righteous kingdom. In Matthew 16:16 Peter declares to Jesus “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” That was Peter’s declaration of faith that he believed that Jesus was the long-awaited messiah of Israel who had come to deliver God’s people and set up his kingdom. Because the Jewish people rejected Jesus as their messiah, Jesus instituted the spiritual form of the kingdom of God and brought the Jew and Gentile together as one, united to him and to each other by faith in Christ. One day Jesus will return and set up his physical kingdom and rule on the earth.

The third title used of Jesus by the angel was “the Lord.” The Greek word used here is “kurios” which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Jehovah” or “Yahweh.” When the angel uses this term “Lord,” he is saying that this child is the Lord, Jehovah of the Old Testament come in the flesh. Jesus revealed to us that God was a trinity. There were

three persons in one God. Each person, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is Jehovah God. The Son of God was the person in the godhead that became a man. He was God in the flesh. How can we even describe what that means? It is far beyond our comprehension.

Everything that Jesus accomplished for us was based on who he was. Why is having a relationship with Jesus Christ so great? It is because of who he is. If a famous person whom you admire met you and wanted to spend time with you, you would be very excited. Why? It is because of who he or she is. It is the same with Jesus. Jesus is the greatest human being that ever lived. He is our Savior, our messiah, and our God and he loves us with an infinite love that never ends. What more could we ask from someone?

It's hard for our human minds to grasp the enormity of that three-fold description of a baby born in a manger on that first Christmas, but that is who Jesus was and is. It is so important at Christmas to focus on the true identity of that babe born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago and remember that we have a love relationship with him that strengthens and encourages

us every day and will one day bring us into a glorious future with him.

Day 12

Matthew 2:1-12

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

Gathering all the chief priests and scribes of the Jewish people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'And you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the Magi, inquired of them earnestly what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." When they

heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was located. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him. They opened their treasures and presented gifts to him, gold, frankincense and myrrh. Being warned by God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country by another way.

No Christmas manger scene is complete without the three Magi bearing gifts for the newly born king. Who were these Magi and why would God choose them to give testimony of his Son? Most likely “Magi” was a title used for government dignitaries from the kingdom of Parthia to the east of Israel. One day an entourage of dignitaries from the Parthian empire showed up in Jerusalem asking the people of the city, “Where is the one born king of the Jews?”

These Magi were powerful religious and political officials within the Parthian empire (made up of Medes, Persians, and

Babylonians). Their duties included the choice and election of the king of the realm. For a man to become king he must be approved and crowned by the Magi. God had chosen them to officially recognize his Son as the King of Israel. This was to be a testimony not only to the people of Israel, but to the whole world.

They had known of the prophecies of the Hebrew messiah-king who would be born in Israel and would ascend to the throne of David and rule over the whole world. They had heard this from Daniel the Hebrew prophet who had actually been appointed head of the Magi and other high officials in the Babylonian Empire by King Nebuchadnezzar and was later appointed to the same position in the Medo-Persian Empire under King Darius as recorded in the book of Daniel.

In fact, many of the Hebrews did not go back to Israel when they were freed from their exile, but stayed in that empire, intermarrying, and becoming part of every level of society and government. The area of that empire had strong Hebrew influence for five centuries right up until the time of Christ. It may be that some of the Magi had even embraced Judaism and the belief in the

Most High God. Certainly there were many Parthians who had.

They had not only a powerful physical influence, but a theological one. Daniel had received revelation from God, particularly in Daniel chapter 7, that the messiah would be a Hebrew king who would reign forever. In Daniel 9 God gave Daniel the approximate time that messiah would come. This knowledge had become part of the Parthian and Israeli national knowledge and had created an expectation of a coming Hebrew king by the time of the birth of Christ.

Because Herod told his soldiers to kill any child two years and younger “according to the time which he had learned from the Magi,” most commentators believe that Jesus was between one and two years old when the Magi came. Although the Magi were not part of the manger scene, they definitely were part of the story of Christmas as they saw the star for the first time on the day of his birth and God led them to travel to Bethlehem to worship his Son as the king of Israel.

These verses show us, that there may be true servants of God in places where we should not expect to find them. The Lord Jesus has many “hidden ones” like these

wise men. Their history on earth may be as little known as the Old Testament believers Melchizedek and Job or the New Testament believers who were visiting Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death and heard and believed Peter's message about Jesus in Acts 2 and went back to their own countries and shared the gospel. But their names are in the book of life, and they will be found with Christ in the day of his appearing. It is well to remember this. We must not look around the earth and say hastily, "all is spiritually barren." The grace of God is not tied to places and families. The Holy Spirit can lead souls to Christ without the help of any outward means. Men may be born in dark places of the earth, like these wise men, and yet like them be made "wise leading to salvation." There are some traveling to heaven at this moment, of whom the church and the world know nothing. They flourish in secret places like the lily among thorns, but Christ loves them and they love Christ.

The conduct of the magi described in this chapter is a splendid example of spiritual diligence. What trouble it must have cost them to travel from their homes to the place where Jesus was born! How many weary miles they must have journeyed! The

fatigues of an Eastern traveler are far greater than we in modern times can at all understand. The time that such a journey would occupy must necessarily have been very great. The dangers to be encountered were neither few nor small. But none of these things mattered to them. They had set their hearts on seeing him “who was born King of the Jews;” and they never rested until they saw him. They prove to us the truth of the old saying, “Where there is a will there is a way.”

It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the wise men's example. Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about our spiritual lives? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our faith in Christ cost us? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.

Last, but not least, the conduct of the wise men is a striking example of faith. They believed in Christ when they had never seen him. They had only the Hebrew Scriptures read and studied in a foreign land and a sign of a star that had miraculously appeared in the night sky and yet they believed. But that was not all. They believed in him when the

scribes and Pharisees who were part of God's people who had seen the prophets who wrote the Hebrew Scriptures, yet did not believe. But that again was not all. They believed in him when they saw him as a little child with Mary and worshiped him as a king. This was the crowning point of their faith. They saw no miracles to convince them. They heard no teaching to persuade them. They beheld no signs of deity and greatness to amaze them. They saw nothing but a child needing a mother's care like any one of us. And yet when they saw him with the eyes of faith resting in the Hebrew Scriptures and God's miraculous appearing and movement of the star they believed that they saw the divine Savior of the world. "They fell down and worshiped him."

This is the kind of faith, let us remember, that God delights to honor. We see the proof of that at this very day. Wherever the Bible is read the conduct of these wise men is known, and told as a memorial of them. Let us walk in the steps of their faith. Let us not be ashamed of placing our faith in the Scriptures and believing in Jesus and confessing him, though all those around us remain careless and unbelieving. Have we not a thousand-fold more evidence

than the wise men had, to make us believe that Jesus is the Christ? Beyond doubt we have. Let's live by our faith not only at Christmas, but throughout the whole year.