



 DAYS to
Remember 

Devotions for the Holidays Throughout the Year



Henry M. Morris



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PREFACE

These brief devotional Bible studies are largely taken from articles in the ICR booklet *Days of Praise*, a periodical which has been issued quarterly beginning in 1986. This devotional booklet is sent free each quarter to those who have requested it, about a quarter million each issue. Judging from their testimonies, God has graciously used it to instruct and encourage many people in the great truths of God's Word.

The sub-title of this third collection, *Devotions for the Holidays throughout the Year*, is self-explanatory. I have been privileged to write special devotionals for each of our main American holidays each year for 20 years, so the total number has become substantial. Not all have been printed here, but each holiday is believed to be well represented.

It may be that some reader will be called on to teach a class on Easter, say, or give a Thanksgiving devotional, or speak on some other holiday, and will find one or another of the devotional studies helpful. I hope so, and also that most readers will want to read them just for their own encouragement on the respective holidays. I know I personally have been blessed in studying the great truths of the relevant Scriptures while preparing them. Most of all, I pray that they are honoring to our gracious Lord and His wonderful words of life.

Chapter I

CHRISTMAS



The Christmas season — especially Christmas Day — is observed essentially all over the world as honoring the birthday of Jesus Christ. However, the actual date of Christ’s birth — even the year — is still uncertain. Many nations and Christian groups have designated December 25 as the official date, but even this was not done until the 5th century A.D. To some considerable degree, this date was taken over from that of the winter solstice, since no actual record exists as to the true date.

Many Christians — most notably the Puritans of 17th century England — have refused to observe Christmas at all, considering it (with considerable evidence) as having originated in pagan festivals associated with the winter solstice. The fact is, of course, that no one yet knows for sure when Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem really took place, and the existing festivals in late December seemed like a convenient choice.

In any case, His birth was *not* when He actually left heaven. His incarnation, beginning with His miraculous conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, was when the eternal Word of God first became flesh. In fact, the term “Christmas,” often defined in modern times as the “mass” of Christ, really means “Christ-sent” (the word “mass” itself was derived from the same Latin word from which we get such words as “mission” and “missionary”). Thus, the Son of God was *sent* on a great mission into the world that He had created thereby to become also the Son of Man, thereafter living in sinless perfection as God intended man to live. He could then redeem lost men and women by the sacrifice of himself. It is then the *incarnation*, rather than the birth itself, which is the vital message at the season we call Christmas.

A. PROPHECIES OF THE COMING SAVIOR

THE PROMISED SEED OF THE WOMAN — A VERY SPECIAL SON

“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1).

These opening words of the New Testament identify this “book of the generation (literally “*genesis*”) of Jesus Christ” as telling of the wonderful fulfillment of the promise to both Abraham and David of a very special Son. To Abraham, God had promised: “Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son . . . in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:16–18). This prophecy was directed immediately through Abraham’s son Isaac, but focused finally on Jesus Christ, Abraham’s greater Son. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16).

Similarly, a unique promise was made to David concerning his own special Son. “I will set up thy seed after thee. . . . I will be His Father, and He shall be My Son. . . . And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee” (2 Sam. 7:12–16). Once again, this promise applied precursively to Solomon, but ultimately to the greater Son of David, “made of the seed of David according to the flesh, And declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection of the dead” (Rom. 1:3–4). He was greater than Abraham, greater than David, and even “better than the angels. . . . For unto which of the angels said He at any time . . . I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son?” (Heb. 1:4–5). Further, He was the fulfillment of the primeval promise of the coming “seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15). He is the virgin’s Son (Isa. 7:14), the Son given (Isa. 9:6), “the last Adam. . . . the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:45–47).

“The book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1) introduces the Old Testament, with its record of human failure and God’s promises. “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ” introduces the New Testament and the fulfillment of the promises, culminating in eternal redemption through the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the Son of God!

A NEW THING CREATED

“How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:22).

Long ago, the “Preacher” in great wisdom concluded: “There is no new thing under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9). This is also the opinion of the leaders of the modern intellectual establishment who will be saying in the last days: “All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet. 3:4).

But God reminds us, as He reminded His backsliding people of Israel, that He has, indeed, created one new thing in the earth. Since only God can “create” (wherever this verb occurs in the Bible, God is the subject), a really *new* thing (not just a new combination of existing things) would have to be produced directly by the Lord himself. Of course, God had completed His original work of creating all things long ago (Gen. 2:1–3), including a marvelous mechanism for human reproduction. Nevertheless, because of man’s sin, He very soon had to begin a work of reconciliation, and this included a primeval promise that the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) would come someday to accomplish this great work. Since all normal reproduction requires the male seed, such a miracle would mean God would have to create a new thing when the appropriate time would come. At that time, as Isaiah prophesied many years later, “*the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,*” and that Son would be “the mighty God,” who would establish His kingdom “with justice from henceforth even for ever” (Isa. 7:14; 9:6–7).

Then, still later, Jeremiah reminded his forgetful people of this same great promise. God would *create*, by His mighty power, a *new thing*, a perfect human body, without inherited sin or physical blemish, and with no contribution from either male or female, in the womb of a specially called virgin. She would compass that “holy thing” (Luke 1:35) with warmth and love for nine long months as it grew in her womb. Then, in the fullness of time, “God sent forth His Son, made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4) to “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

THE ETERNAL SON OF GOD

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2).

This is a very remarkable prophecy, explicitly predicting, some 700 years before He finally came, that the future king of Israel would be born in the little village of Bethlehem. Humanly speaking, Micah would probably have guessed the place of His birth would be Jerusalem, the great capital of Judah. Then, to assure its fulfillment, the Roman Emperor Augustus had to decree a comprehensive census, compelling Joseph to take Mary with him to Bethlehem for her child to be born.

That the prophecy involves an actual child birth is clear not only from the phrase “come forth,” but also from the succeeding verse, which warns that God will “give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth” (Mic. 5:3). The preceding verses had also predicted that “they shall smite (this coming ruler) the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek” (Mic. 5:1), speaking of His initial rejection and execution.

That is not all. The prophecy not only foresees His birth in Bethlehem, His repudiation by His own people, and His eventual installation as king over all Israel (not merely Judah), but also that this same remarkable person was none other than God himself. His “goings forth” had been “from everlasting.” That is, He is eternally proceeding forth from His Father. He did not become God’s Son when He was born in Bethlehem; He has been coming forth eternally. “The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18).

There is still another truth implied in the remarkable Hebrew word for “goings-forth.” It is also used for such things as the flowing of water from a fountain or the radiations from the sun. Thus, the never-ending flowing forth of power from God through the Son is nothing less than the sustaining energy for the whole creation, as He is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). This was to be the babe in Bethlehem!

A CHILD BORN AND A SON GIVEN

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).

This magnificent verse, used so often on Christmas cards, is a splendid prophecy of the divine/human nature of the coming Messiah. He would be *born* as a child, like every other human being, but He would also be *given* as a Son at the same time, with the giver clearly being God himself. “He gave His only begotten Son!” (John 3:16).

The name of this God/man offers further testimony. At the introduction of this prophecy, God had named Him *Immanuel*, meaning “God with us” (Isa. 7:14). Now He is given a series of names, all of which are needed to express His full identity. It is likely the first two names should be considered one name: He is our “Wonderful Counselor” (the punctuation marks have been added to our translations, but the combined term is more in keeping with the structure of the other names).

This “child,” amazingly, is also “The mighty God” and “The everlasting Father,” stressing His absolute and eternal deity, as well as His omnipotence and the unity of the Father and the Son in the triune godhead. Finally, as “The Prince of Peace,” it is only He that can unite the warring factions of mankind and bring true world peace. These names stress His deity, but also His perfect and effective humanity.

Also, in His human nature, He is our “Wonderful Counselor,” our perfect example and infallible teacher. He both shows and tells us what to believe and how to live, and He is never wrong, for in Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” and “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:3, 9).

THE SCEPTRE OF JUDAH

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10).

This is a remarkable Messianic prophecy, given by Jacob 1,700 years before the first coming of Christ fulfilled it. Later prophecies would focus on His descent from David and then His birthplace in Bethlehem, but first one of the 12 sons of Jacob must be designated as His progenitor.

Remarkably, Jacob did not select either his firstborn son, Reuben, or his favorite son, Joseph. Nor did he choose Benjamin, the son of his favorite wife. He chose instead his fourth son, Judah, evidently by divine direction.

Yet it was over 600 years before the tribe of Judah gained ascendancy over the others. The greatest leaders of Israel were from other tribes — Moses and Samuel from Levi, Joshua from Ephraim, Gideon from Manasseh, Samson from Dan, and Saul from Benjamin. Finally, David became king, and “the sceptre” was then held by Judah for a thousand years until Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. Jesus’ parents were both of Judah, both of the line of David, with both the legal and spiritual right to David’s throne. Then, just 70 years after His birth, “the sceptre” (that is, leadership over the 12 tribes) departed from Judah with the worldwide dispersion of Israel, and no man since has ever held that right. It is still retained by Jesus, and will be reclaimed and exercised when He returns.

In the meantime, the prophecy stands as an unchallengeable identification of Jesus as the promised Messiah. Ancient Jewish commentators all recognized “Shiloh” as a name for Messiah. Since the sceptre has already departed, Shiloh has already come. When He returns, His people will, indeed, finally be gathered together “unto Him.”

JOSEPH — THE FRUITFUL BOUGH

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall” (Gen. 49:22).

This is part of Jacob’s dying prophetic blessing on his 12 sons. Each of the 12 prophecies has been fulfilled, including this prediction of Joseph’s fruitfulness.

Joseph actually received a double inheritance in the future land of Israel, with the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh both descended from him. The name Joseph means “increasing,” so that even his name was prophetic of the great multitudes who would be his descendants.

There is another interesting and intriguing fulfillment of this prophecy. More men were named after Joseph than any other man in the Bible, with no less than 11 different “Josephs” mentioned in Scripture. This may not seem so remarkable until it is realized that no one else in the Bible was named after Adam or Noah, Abraham or Isaac, or even Moses or David or Solomon. No one was named after Paul or Peter. Why, then, so many Josephs (except to fulfill prophecy)? One would normally think that Abraham or Moses or David would provide the most favored names for Hebrew children, but not so.

Among all the namesakes of Joseph, the most important were Joseph (the husband of Mary) and Joseph of Arimathea. One provided legitimacy to the birth of Jesus, taking the virgin Mary as his wife and giving Jesus the legal right to David’s throne. The other provided a legitimate burial to Jesus, falsely condemned and crucified as a criminal.

Two Josephs — both descended from Judah rather than from their namesake — thus played key roles at the beginning and end of the earthly ministry of the true “increaser,” the “Child born” and the “Son given.” He is the most fruitful branch of all, for “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end” (Isa. 9:6–7).

PARABLE OF THE STAR

“I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth”
(Num. 24:17).

A parable is not an illustrative story, as most people think, but a “dark saying” (note Ps. 78:2), designed to reveal some hidden truth only to those who are prepared to understand (note Jesus’ assertion in Matt. 13:10–17).

The first reference in the Bible to parables is in connection with the seven parables of the false prophet Balaam (Num. 23:7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23). The central parable of these seven verses is the one in our text speaking of a mysterious Star which would come out of Jacob and a Sceptre out of Israel, both the Star and the Sceptre representing a great person coming in the far future, destined both to guide and to rule all nations.

The wise men of the East somehow recognized His star when it began rising, and came seeking the King. The star they saw, appearing perhaps in one of the constellations long associated by ancient peoples with the primeval promise of a coming redeemer/king — was but a type of the true “bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16) and the “day star” that one day shall “arise in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19), that “light of the world” (John 8:12) who would be “the light of life” for all people who follow Him in faith.

He would also be the Sceptre, the King of all kings, that “rod of iron” by which all nations must one day be ruled (Rev. 19:15) in righteousness. The babe in Bethlehem would become the suffering servant on the Cross, then would rise from the grave like a bright and morning star out of the darkness and now will also very soon be acknowledged as “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15).



BALAAM, A VERY FAMOUS prophet from Mesopotamia, was possibly a true prophet of God at one time, but through greed became a false prophet when the king of Moab hired him to curse Israel, the chosen people of God. God constrained him instead to prophesy a Star that would come someday to announce the coming of a Savior and King who would arise in Israel and eventually rule the whole world (see Num. 22–24).

THE OPENED EAR AND THE FATHER'S WILL

“Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required” (Ps. 40:6).

That Psalm 40 is primarily a Messianic psalm speaking mainly about the work of Christ is evident from its quotation as such in Hebrews 10:5–10. The psalm is prophesying particularly of His incarnation, as He says: “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me” (Ps. 40:7).

Burnt offerings and sin offerings were indeed required from God’s people under the law, but these were not an end in themselves. These sacrifices were meaningless unless they were offered out of a willing heart, obedient expressions of submission to a forgiving God.

That was the implication of the “opened ear,” a symbolic expression indicating one’s willingness thenceforth to hear only the voice of his master and to submit to His will in all things. If a freed bondservant “shall plainly say, I love my master . . . I will not go out free: Then his master shall . . . bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever” (Exod. 21:5–6). This was the testimony of the coming Messiah, as reported in our text.

Then note its application as recorded in Hebrews 10:5: “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.” That is, the phrase, “mine ears hath thou opened,” would be translated by the Holy Spirit as “a body hast thou prepared me.” The perfect submission of the Son to the Father required that He become a man, with a very special human body prepared by His Father. Then Psalm 40:7 becomes (in Heb. 10:7): “Lo, I come . . . to do thy will, O God.” “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:9–10).

LO, I COME

“Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7).

The marvelous words of Hebrews 10:5–7 are an interpretive quotation from Psalm 40:6–8, which in turn was cited prophetically as the testimony of the eternal Son of God as He prepared to leave heaven and “the bosom of the Father” (note John 1:18) to descend to earth to become also “the Son of man,” with no “where to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20).

He would first take up residence on earth in the womb of Mary, then in a manger, then a house in Bethlehem, then somewhere in Egypt until the death of King Herod who would seek to kill Him, then in the home of His foster father in a despised village, eventually on a cross on which His enemies would impale Him, and finally for three days in a borrowed tomb.

All this, amazingly, would be simply to do the will of His Father in heaven, which He fully understood would include the terrible death of the Cross. “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again” (John 10:17).

We can never comprehend such love — only believe it and receive it. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Now we can testify with Paul: “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God [*His* faith, not ours!], who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Anyone who ignores that love should note this sobering truth: “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

GARMENTS FOR THE KING

“All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad” (Ps. 45:8).

One of the most beautiful of the Christmas hymns (though rarely sung at Christmas) is “Out of the Ivory Palaces,” telling how the King of heaven left His heavenly home and laid aside His perfumed, royal clothing to enter “a world of woe.” That this 45th Psalm is symbolic in part is obvious; but that it refers to Christ is also obvious from its use in Hebrews 1:8: “But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom,” quoting Psalm 45:6.

That the eternal King left heaven to come to earth is not symbolic, however, but very real; nor did He have royal robes in which to be arrayed, for they “wrapped [Him] in swaddling clothes” and laid Him “in a manger” (Luke 2:12).

Then, as He later walked the dusty roads of Judea, we know little of what He wore, but we do know that on one notable occasion, He “laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. . . and began to wash the disciples’ feet” (John 13:4–5). A strange garment, and stranger action, for the King of glory!

Yet stranger still that men whom He had created, later “took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat. . . but cast lots for it” (John 19:23–24), leaving Him naked to die a painful death spiked to a tree. Finally, His little remnant of friends took “the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes” (John 19:40) for His burial.

Now, however, in glory, He once again is arrayed in kingly apparel, “clothed with a garment down to the foot, and . . . with a golden girdle” (Rev. 1:13), and one day, all His redeemed shall see Him — in His beauty — the King in whose law we delight!

B. THE INCARNATION

THE WORD MADE FLESH

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

This is the definitive verse on the divine incarnation, when “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19), and the wealth of truth implied therein is beyond human comprehension. We can never understand how the infinite God could become finite man, but where the intellect fails, faith prevails.

It was the Word who “was God” and by whom “all things were made” (John 1:1, 3), yet He made His own human body, in the womb of Mary, and therein “dwelt among us” for 33 years. The Greek word here for “dwelt” is unusual, literally meaning “tabernacled.”

How could this be? “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). This is, indeed, a great mystery, “but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). God made a body for Adam; surely He could also make a perfect body in which He himself could “tabernacle.” He was made “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3) and “was in all points tempted [i.e., ‘tested’] like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Since “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13), and since the Word, who was God, was merely tabernacling in the likeness of sinful flesh, this testing was to demonstrate to man (not to himself) that He was without sin and therefore able to save sinners. Therefore, John could testify: “We beheld his glory!”

Jesus Christ is, indeed, true man — in fact, He is man as God intended man to be. Neither in the womb of Mary, nor on the Cross, did He ever cease to be God.

THE LIKENESS OF SINFUL FLESH

“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

The great truth of Christmas (meaning, originally, “Christ-sent”) is that “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). The eternal Word, “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). So vital is this truth that “every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of antichrist . . . and even now already is it in the world” (1 John 4:3).

Jesus Christ is the God/man — infinite God and perfect man, perfectly joined in full union, and salvation is based on this truth. If Jesus Christ were not perfect man, He could not die for the sins of man; if He were not God, He could not defeat death and save us from the penalty of sin.

He could not be born in *sinful* flesh, of course, like all the descendants of Adam, but only in the “likeness” of sinful flesh. From the moment of conception, He must be “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26), and thus miraculously conceived in a virgin’s womb.

In fact, that miraculous creation of His body in the womb of Mary was the actual moment when God became man. It is even possible that the incarnation took place on about the very night that we now call Christmas; since it is probable that Jesus was actually *born* in the early fall, when shepherds were in the field with their sheep. It may even have been on Michaelmas (“Michael sent”), the fall holiday on September 29, honoring the angel who with the heavenly host announced the birth of Jesus on that night long ago. How appropriate it would be if “the light of the world” had indeed come into the world on or near that world’s longest night just nine months before.

THE TRUE HUMANITY OF JESUS

“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 John 4:2).

The great truth associated with Christmas is the glorious fact of the incarnation, that the eternal Word of God, without whom “was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3) “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Bible warns, therefore, that anyone who denies the human nature of Christ “is not of God” but rather is of the “spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:3).

This problem is very real because “many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1) — that is, those “New Age” teachers, gurus, rabbis, and mullahs who deny that Jesus and the Christ are eternally one, and that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again, and that this was a physical death and bodily resurrection.

The real message of Christmas is not about a baby or gift-giving or good will, though these elements are all there, but about the God/man, who once came “in the likeness of sinful flesh” to die in our place, and thereby “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). It will not do to say that any person can become a “Christ” or any other compromise that dilutes either the humanity or the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the apostle John testified, “For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us” (1 John 1:2).

That living Word of God “was made in the likeness of men . . . and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him. . . . That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:7–11).

THE GOD-MAN

“Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:3–4).

How Christ could be both man and God is a great mystery, but the fact that He *is* both man and God is certain, both from Scripture and from history. This “hypostatic [substantive] union” is set forth in many passages of Scripture, including this one. He was “made” to be a man, by placing the body of flesh “prepared” for Him by God (Heb. 10:5) in the womb of the virgin, who was herself descended from David. Then He was “declared” to be the Son of God by His mighty resurrection from the dead, an event beyond the power of any but God himself to accomplish.

A similar testimony is found in Galatians 4:4: “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” As deity, He was “sent forth” from God in heaven. In His humanity, He was “made of a woman.” His “being in the form of God” preceded His taking upon himself “the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:6–7). As the eternal Word, He “was God,” but He “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:1, 14).

The same truth is found even in the Old Testament Messianic prophecies. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isa. 9:6). As a child, He must be *born*, but as God’s Son, He would be *given*. Furthermore, that human child would also be the “mighty God” and the “everlasting Father.” “A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (“God with us”; Isa. 7:14).

Christ *has* eternally been God; He *will* eternally be man. He *is*, forever, the God-man — man as God intended man to be and also the one true, eternal God.



JESUS WAS AND IS a true man — in fact, a sinless man but otherwise a man like other men, but He was always, from eternity, the Son of God, in perfect union with God the Father. Eventually however, He became the Son of Man. Henceforth He will always be the God-man. Note especially John 1:1–3, 14, and Philippians 2:5–11.

WHAT IT COST FOR GOD TO BECOME MAN

“Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands” (Heb. 2:7).

We cannot comprehend what it meant for the infinite Creator God to become finite man, even coming “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3). Nevertheless, we can, and must, believe it, for “every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:3).

The Scriptures have given us a glimpse of the “emptying” that His incarnation required, the setting aside of certain outward aspects of His deity. He had been “so much better than the angels” (Heb. 1:4), but He had to be “made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death” (Heb. 2:9). Angels do not die, but He who was “the Life” (John 14:6) must be “put to death in the flesh” (1 Pet. 3:18).

He was the eternal Word who “was God” (John 1:1), but it was necessary that “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). “The world was made by him” (John 1:10), but “the princes of this world . . . crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8).

He, “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phil. 2:6). That is, He was not fearful of losing His deity and, therefore, did not have to cling to His divine nature and attributes as He became man. Thus, He “made himself of no reputation” (emptying himself of the outward form of God), “and took upon him the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). From the glorious form of God to the humble form of a human slave — this is the measure of what it meant for God to become man.

Yet that was only the beginning. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). He suffered hell for us, that we might enjoy heaven with Him.

Because He was willing to be so humiliated, He will one day be crowned with glory and honor. “God also hath highly exalted him . . . that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:9–11).

WHY JESUS CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN

“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13).

At the Christmas season, even the secular world makes much of the Christ child, born in a manger, but few ever seem to recognize that He had been eternally one with the Father in heaven before He chose to come down. Even fewer stop to learn just *why* He chose to come down. As a matter of fact, He had much to say on this subject, giving many reasons why He came. Note just a few of them.

The first reference in the New Testament on this great theme, coming from His own lips, is very significant. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). His total commitment to God’s written Word was the first thing He came to confirm!

There are so many other reasons He has given for His coming that we can just list a small part of them, but note these especially.

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32).

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34).

“For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38).

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

The last time Christ gives a reason for His coming is also very significant. It refers to His *second* coming! “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

THE SECOND MAN

“The first man is of the earth, earthy: The second man is the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:47).

Paleoanthropologists, seeking to trace man’s supposed evolutionary ancestry, have widely different opinions as to the when and how of it. As one evolutionist has recently lamented: “Paleoanthropologists seem to make up for a lack of fossils with an excess of fury, and this must now be the only science in which it is still possible to become famous just by having an opinion.”

There is no need to speculate. The Bible solves the problem when it speaks of “the first man Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) and says that Eve “was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20). There were no “pre-Adamite men” (as even some Christians have alleged, hoping thereby to accommodate evolutionary speculations).

Adam, alone, was “the first man,” and he had been formed directly by God “of the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7) — that is, out of the same basic elements as those in the earth (carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, etc.). He was “earthy,” like the materials of earth. But, then, how could Jesus Christ, who is “the Lord from heaven,” be “the second man?” Adam had millions of male descendants before Jesus was born.

The answer can only be that He was “the second man” in the same way that Adam was “the first man.” That is, His human body, like that of Adam, was directly made by God, from earth’s elements — not produced by reproduction, like all other men. He was “made flesh” (John 1:14), but only made “in the *likeness* of *sinful* flesh,” for He must not inherit the sinful flesh of His human parents, if He is to “condemn sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). “A body hast thou prepared me,” He said (Heb. 10:5), and as the angel told Mary: “That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

“And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14).

This unique title of the Lord Jesus Christ assures us that, when the Father sent His Son away from the glories of heaven down to a world lost in sin, it was not just to be the Messiah of the Jews, or to assume David’s throne as king of Israel, or to punish the wicked Gentile nations.

“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17).

In fact, this special title is used only one other time in the Bible, and it was used by Samaritans rather than Jews when they came to know Jesus as He ministered among them for two days. These people were mostly of Gentile background with a mixture of Israeli blood who had become adherents of a quasi-Jewish religion that was also part pagan.

They were actually looking for a Savior, and their testimony after meeting Jesus was: “Now we believe . . . and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). They perceived that He had come to bring salvation to lost sinners in every nation, not just to Israel or Samaria. As He said later “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47).

So He commanded His disciples “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations” (Luke 24:47). He became to the Father “the propitiation . . . for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2), when He offered up His life as a sacrifice for sins, then died and rose again. We who have believed on Him as our personal Savior are now to be His witnesses “in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

SIGNS OF CHRISTMAS

“Moreover the LORD spoke again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above” (Isa. 7:10–11).

Although “the Jews require a sign” (1 Cor. 1:22), and this attitude was rebuked by Christ when He said that “an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign” (Matt. 12:39), God has given three specific signs with respect to the incarnation of Christ. There were other signs too, no doubt, such as the star of Bethlehem, but three events were specifically called signs.

First, to the unwilling King Ahaz, He said: “Therefore the LORD himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Immanuel means “God with us,” and the sign of the virgin birth, biologically impossible without a mighty miracle of divine creation, assures us that the omnipotent God has entered the human family once for all.

That entrance was not made in an emperor’s palace as a great conqueror, however, but in the very humblest of human circumstances, and this also was a sign. “And this shall be a sign unto you,” said the leader of the angelic host; “Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12).

There was a third sign. When the infant Jesus was brought to the temple, the aged prophet Simeon said, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against . . . that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34–35).

That is, the God/man would himself be God’s great sign to Israel and the whole world. The attitude of men and women to God, in Christ, would reveal the state of their hearts and seal their eternal destiny, whether rising again to everlasting life or falling forever away from God.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

“Therefore the LORD himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel”
(Isa. 7:14).

This has been a hotly disputed verse, as unbelievers for two thousand years have tried to undermine the vital doctrine of the unique sinlessness of Christ. Without the miraculous conception and virgin birth of Jesus, not only is His mother Mary made to be an impure woman, but also Jesus is deprived of His intrinsic deity, being born with the sin-nature inherited from Adam. He could not really be our sin-bearing Savior since He would thus be sinful also.

Because of this intrinsic importance of the virgin birth to the very essence of Christianity, liberals and other opponents of the truth have long argued that the Hebrew *almah* should be translated “young woman,” instead of “virgin.” This is utterly wrong, of course. There would be no “sign” in a “young woman conceiving,” and it would be blasphemous to name an ordinary child Immanuel (“God with us”), clearly implying divine incarnation in man.

Even if *almah* could legitimately be thus translated, none of its seven occurrences in the Old Testament *require* any meaning other than “virgin.” The issue is settled for all who believe the Bible by the fact that the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to use *parthenos* (a Greek word which can *only* mean “virgin”) when he translated and quoted Isaiah 7:14 (see Matt. 1:23, “Behold, a *virgin* shall be with child”). Actually, both Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23 support the use of the definite article (“Behold, *the* virgin . . .”) in this great prophecy. God has, indeed, “sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4), and *only* of a woman, fulfilling the primeval promise of “the seed of the woman” who would someday bring deliverance from Satan and sin and death (Gen. 3:15).

MARY AND THE GRACE OF GOD

“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God” (Luke 1:30).

This announcement by the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary, that she had been chosen as the mother of the coming Savior, contains the first mention in the New Testament of the Greek word for “grace” (*charis*). Mary was chosen, not for anything she had done, but because she had “found grace.”

In a remarkable parallel, certainly implying divine inspiration, the first mention of “grace” in the Old Testament is also associated with the coming of a new dispensation in God’s dealings with men. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8).

Just as Mary found grace, so Noah had found grace. Grace is not something one earns or purchases; grace is a treasure that is *found*! When a person — whether Noah or Mary or someone today — finally realizes that salvation is only by the grace of God, received through faith in the saving work of Christ, he or she has made the greatest discovery that could ever be made, for it brings eternal life.

There is an even greater dimension to the grace of God. When we do “find” grace, it is actually because God in His infinitely precious grace has found us, and revealed to us the Savior of our souls. Just as God found Moses in the desert, and found Paul on the road to Damascus, then saved and called them to His service, so He finds us, and then we also find His saving grace.

Mary’s discovery of God’s grace in salvation, through the coming of the “seed of the woman” into the world, is revealed in her *Magnificat*. “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46–47). This could well have also been the testimony of Noah long ago, and it surely should be the testimony of each of us who has found grace today.

WHEN THE ANGELS WORSHIPED CHRIST

“And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him” (Heb. 1:6).

Jesus Christ is “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), but the day finally came when He had to proceed all the way to earth, and the eternal Word “was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). A few years later, He would be “declared to be the Son of God . . . by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). By eternal generation, by the incarnation, by the virgin birth, and by the resurrection, He is in every sense God’s “first begotten” — His only begotten — Son.

Our text says that when He first entered the world, born of the virgin, His Heavenly Father called on all the innumerable angels in the heavenly host to bow down and worship Him. It is not clear whether this command is a quotation from the Old Testament or not, although it is cited in a passage which also quotes several other Messianic prophecies as applied to Jesus Christ. Psalm 97:7 and Deuteronomy 32:43 have been suggested as possible source verses, but neither of these seems to fit very well in context. Thus, it may be that our text refers directly, and solely, to a specific decree of God, proclaimed throughout the universe at the time of the human birth of His Son, and recorded here alone.

All the angels of the infinite cosmos bowed in solemn worship, but a special contingent was commissioned to watch directly over the birth, and proclaim the good news to those nearby. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13–14).

The angels saw and worshiped; the shepherds heard and told. “And all they that heard it wondered” (Luke 2:18).

SHEPHERDS IN THE FIELD

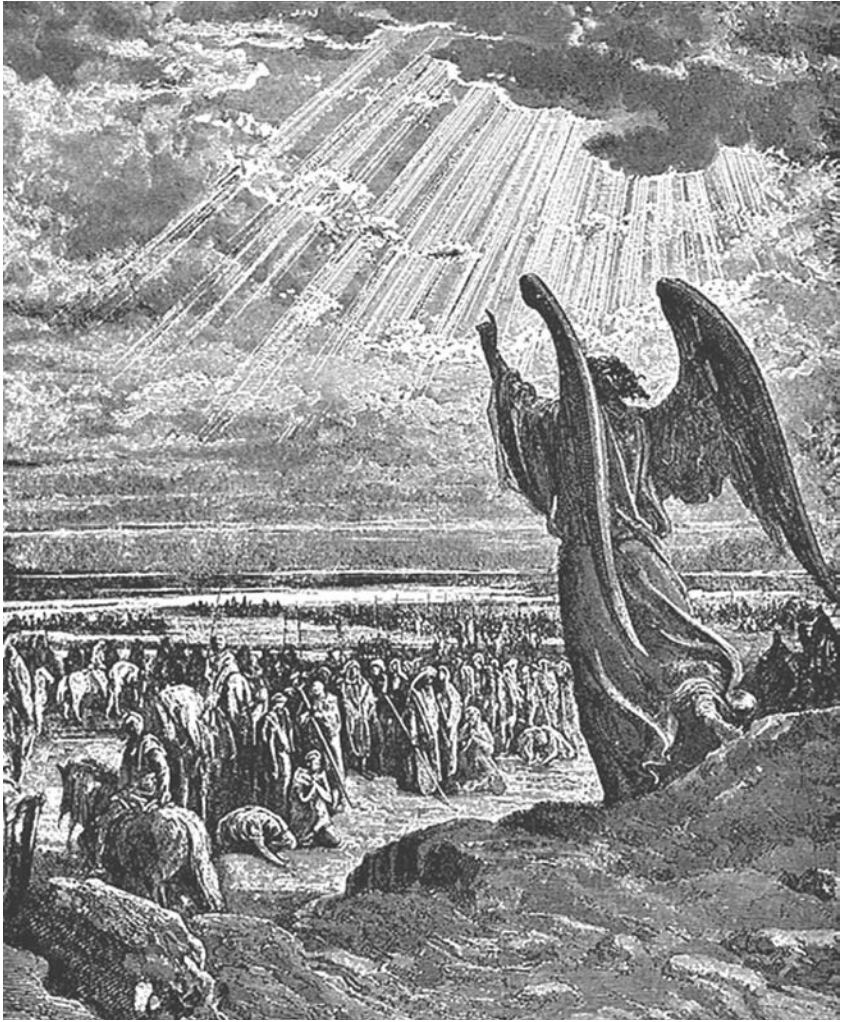
“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2:8).

The date of Christ’s birth, as observed in the Western world, is December 25, although other dates have been observed at various times and places — in January, March, May, etc. Actually, no one really knows. In fact, the church did not observe it at all for the first two centuries. The date in late December which was eventually adopted coincided with the various pagan festivals held in connection with the winter solstice.

A significant clue is found in our text. Shepherds were almost certainly not abiding in the fields watching over their flocks in late December; the sheep would have been gathered into the sheep folds long before that.

Another possible clue is the recorded presence of “the angel of the Lord” (verse 9) to announce the birth of the Savior, along with a “multitude of the heavenly host” (verse 13). The angel leading the host was likely Michael the archangel (note Jude 9). The angel Gabriel, who stands “in the presence of God” (Luke 1:19), was sent to bear individual messages to Zacharias and Mary (Luke 1:11, 26, 27), but Michael is the one seen commanding the angelic host (Rev. 12:7).

It may be significant that the ancient church in Britain observed a date called Michaelmas (i.e., “Michael sent”), known as the feast of Michael and the angels. This date (still recognized in England’s legal system) is September 29 — a date when it is reasonable that Jewish shepherds would be in the fields with their flocks. Now, if that might be the date of Christ’s birth, then December 25 (nine months earlier) could well be the real date of the incarnation, when the eternal Creator God left heaven to take up residence as a special “seed” in a virgin’s womb!



IT WAS POSSIBLY MICHAEL, “the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people” (Dan. 12:1) who led the heavenly host as they announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds (Luke 2:8–14). He had left heaven’s “ivory palaces” (Ps. 45:8) to live nine months in the virgin’s womb, thence to be “lying in a manger” (Luke 2:16) for a brief time, and eventually to die on a cross. But the day will come when “every knee” will bow to Him and “every tongue” will acknowledge that “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:10–11).

JOY TO THE WORLD

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Luke 2:10).

When God became man, and Jesus was born, true joy entered a world of sin and sadness. The Magi, who had been long anticipating the Savior’s coming, “rejoiced with exceeding great joy” when they saw the star standing over the young child (Matt. 2:10). This is the first mention of “joy” in the New Testament.

The heavenly host also rejoiced as their angelic captain shared with the shepherds in the field at Bethlehem the “good tidings [that is, ‘the gospel’] of great joy.” The very gospel we are to preach is a gospel of exceeding joy, because we have a Savior to preach — Christ the Lord!

Although He was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3), the Lord Jesus “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2). He prepared His disciples for His coming death and their own subsequent sufferings for His name’s sake by conveying to them His own joy. “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). He prayed for them to the Father, “that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). He promised to answer prayers offered to the Father in His name “that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

Thus, it is that all who truly believe on Christ can testify with Peter that even though “now [we] see Him not, yet believing, [we] rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). Even when suffering for Him, Christians know that “when his glory shall be revealed, [we] may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:13), for His Word promises that He will “present [us] faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24).

TROUBLE AND JOY

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy” (Matt. 2:10).

The familiar story of Herod and the wise men, in addition to its important record of some of the events surrounding the birth of Christ, is a fascinating parable of how news of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ so effectively separates people into two great companies. The “gospel” of Christ means, literally, “good news,” but most people, sad to say, react as though it were bad news.

When the “wise men from the east” came searching for the newborn Savior, this glorious news was received badly right where it should have been received most gladly. “When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matt. 2:3). Herod was an Edomite, representing the Romans, but the Jewish leaders were equally unresponsive. The priests and scribes, knowing the prophetic promises, could tell the king where Christ would be born (Matt. 2:5–6), but they were merely “troubled” along with others in Jerusalem. Neither Herod nor the Jewish leaders were glad for the news, and neither would join in looking for the Savior. Later, they all tried to slay Him.

The wise men, on the other hand, “rejoiced with exceeding great joy” (Matt. 2:10) when they found Him. After worshiping Him, “they departed into their own country another way” (Matt. 2:12), no doubt with lives changed as well as itineraries.

One’s attitude of heart is all important. Those who proclaim Christ encounter two reactions: “To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life” (2 Cor. 2:16). Some, like Herod, react with fear and hatred, setting about to destroy the gospel by persecution. Others in the scholarly community — like the priests and scribes — seem to react with learned indifference but, when confronted more directly with their own hypocrisy, also eventually resort to persecution. But always, there are some who, like the wise men, fall down in joyous faith to worship Him (Matt. 2:11).

THE GIFTS OF THE WISE MEN

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matt. 2:11).

These wise men (or Magi) were of great eminence in the Parthian Empire at that time, and it is unlikely that the caravan from the East consisted of only three men. They more likely had a large entourage as they came searching for the future king of Israel, so it was small wonder that “all Jerusalem” was “troubled,” along with king Herod (Matt. 2:3). The Parthians (i.e., Persians) had never been conquered by the Romans and at that very time were posing a significant threat along the eastern boundary of the extended Roman Empire.

When they found the young child and His mother in Bethlehem, the Magi “fell down, and worshipped Him” (Matt. 2:11). Why did they offer Him just three gifts — and why *these* three gifts? Somehow, they seemed to have sensed, possibly from meditating deeply on the ancient prophecies of Balaam (Num. 24:17), Daniel (Dan. 9:24–26), and David, concerning the priesthood order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4), that this young child whose birth had been announced by a star was destined not only to be the King but would also become the Messianic sacrifice to “make reconciliation for iniquity” (see Dan. 9:24, 26) and then eventually become our eternal High Priest who “ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Thus, the gold would acknowledge His right to reign; the frankincense would speak of the incense to be offered in the heavenly tabernacle, and the myrrh (John 19:39) to testify that His crucified body would be so anointed as it entered the tomb for a very temporary burial.

THE MAN CHILD

“And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne”
(Rev. 12:5).

This remarkable scene was part of a great vision given to the apostle John as the Lord was revealing to him “the things which shall be hereafter” (Rev. 1:19). He had seen an amazing “sign” in heaven — a woman “clothed with the sun . . . travailing in birth,” with “a great red dragon” awaiting the delivery and ready “to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Rev. 12:1–4).

Although the whole vision is richly symbolic, the figure of the man child clearly refers to Jesus Christ, because it is He alone who must eventually rule all nations “with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15). Thus, the symbolic “woman” must suggest His human mother Mary but also Eve, the “mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20), for in His human birth, the Son of God became also “the Son of man” (Acts 7:56; Rev. 1:13). The vision, in fact, dramatizes the long warfare between the great dragon (i.e., Satan — Rev. 12:9) and the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15).

In the vision, the “man child” will have been “caught up” (i.e., “raptured”) to heaven, and the dragon and his angels “cast out” to earth (Rev. 12:5, 9). When Christ returns from heaven, all believers, living and dead, will also be “caught up” to meet Him in the air, and thus may well be included in the man child of the great “sign.”

There has been continuous warfare between the seed of the serpent and the spiritual seed of the woman ever since the beginning. The dragon is forever “wroth with the woman” and with “the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17). Christ will finally prevail and cast Satan into the eternal lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES

“And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).

These words were presumably directed to the Son by the Father as the triune God prepared to implement the ancient promise that a Savior would come to bring salvation to a world lost in sin. That salvation would not only be the restoration of Israel as God’s elect nation, but also would reach the Gentile nations and spread to the ends of the earth.

The old prophet Simeon referred to this prophecy when he took up the infant Jesus in his arms, and said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. . . . For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2:29–32).

Similar prophecies occur in other Old Testament passages as well. “I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isa. 42:6). “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. . . . And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa. 60:1–3). The latter verse apparently prophesies even the coming of the Magi to worship the child Jesus in Bethlehem.

Paul used this truth as he preached to Gentiles in Antioch and elsewhere. “So hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47; also note Acts 26:23). In fact, Jesus not only enlightens both Jews and Gentiles, but is “the light of the world” (John 8:12).

THE DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH

“Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us” (Luke 1:78).

This is an unusual but beautiful name for the coming Savior given Him by Zacharias when he was “filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied” (Luke 1:67). In that same prophecy, Zacharias also called that coming one “the Highest” and “the Lord” who would “give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins” (verses 76–77). Just six months later, Jesus was born.

The Greek word here translated “dayspring” is so translated only this one time. It refers to the metaphorical spring from which the sun springs forth each day, and so is usually translated simply as “the east.” It is interesting that it is used three times in connection with the story of the wise men “from the east” who saw “his star in the east” and then, when they reached Bethlehem once again, “the star, which they saw in the east,” led them to the one who was himself “the dayspring” (Matt. 2:1, 2, 9).

There is one other sunrise appropriately presaged here. Many years later, the women who had tearfully watched the Lord being crucified and buried came to His sepulcher to anoint Him with sweet spices “at the rising of the sun” (Mark 16:2) immediately after He had risen from the dead. Here a closely related word is the word translated “rising.”

There is another great sunrise coming, as promised in the last chapter of the Old Testament. “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (Mal. 4:2). He who is himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12) will someday even replace the sun in the new Jerusalem. There will never be another sunrise after that, for “there shall be no night there . . . neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light” (Rev. 22:5).

THE GREATEST GIFT

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

It is singularly appropriate that we look at this greatest of all verses on Christmas Day, for it records the greatest of all gifts. John 3:16 is surely the best known, most loved verse in the Bible, and it has been by far the most effective verse in illuminating blinded minds and breaking hardened hearts, to bring them to Christ and salvation.

The theme of giving is very prominent in the Bible, with such words as “give,” “gift,” “gave,” etc., occurring more than 2,100 times. The first is Genesis 1:17, when God created the sun, moon, and stars “to give light upon the earth,” and the last is Revelation 22:12, when Christ will return with His rewards, to “give every man according as his work shall be.”

The greatest gift clearly was when God gave himself for a lost and undeserving world. It was the greatest gift because it met the greatest need, revealed the greatest love, and had the greatest scope and greatest purpose of any gift that could ever be conceived in the heart of an omniscient Creator.

That was not the end of His giving, of course. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). “Trust . . . in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17).

This great gift of God is abundantly sufficient to provide salvation and everlasting life for the whole world. A gift only becomes a gift when it is accepted, and the greatest of all tragedies is that this greatest of all gifts has been spurned and even ridiculed, or — worst of all — simply ignored, by multitudes who need it so greatly. When they brazenly refuse God’s free gift of everlasting life, they can only perish in everlasting death. God did all He could do when He gave His Son to suffer and die to save their lost souls.

THE BLESSED HOPE

“Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12–13).

The annual remembrance at Christmastime of the first coming of Christ into the world ought naturally to lead to anticipation of His second coming. To the unbeliever, that coming will entail a fiery time of judgment, but to the Christian, the return of Christ is “that blessed hope.” Since the time of the Second Coming is unknown, the Lord has commanded us always to be watchful. “Therefore, be ye also ready,” He said (Matt. 24:44).

By no means, however, is this promise conducive to Christian indolence, as some have charged. It encourages us, rather, to “live soberly, righteously, and godly.” As John says: “Abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28). Jesus warned, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34). How distressing would be the shame of a Christian to be caught in some such situation when his Lord returns!

The hope of His imminent coming is also a great incentive to evangelism and missions. In Paul’s last message, immediately after his long description of the last days, he says, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word . . . do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:1–5). Similarly, at the conclusion of his great chapter on the future resurrection at the Second Coming, Paul says: “Therefore . . . be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Jude, also in the context of the imminent return of Christ, urges us: “And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire” (Jude 22–23). The blessed hope is, in fact, a quickening incentive in the Christian life. “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3).