

The Savior Is Born

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Bible verses: Luke 2: 8-14

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!"

Merry Christmas!

I wish Merry Christmas to each of you. As we just read, a few shepherds were tending their flock of sheep outside of a little village called Bethlehem, about six miles south of Jerusalem on the day a baby son was born to a young couple, Joseph and Mary, who had come from Nazareth in Galilee. They had come from their hometown to Bethlehem because they were both of the lineage of King David and Bethlehem was the original hometown of David. They had to register themselves in Bethlehem because the Roman Emperor of the time, Caesar Augustus had ordered all people in the domain of the Roman Empire to register in their respective home towns. So, to this small village of Bethlehem the people of David's family from all over the land of Israel and abroad came all at once. You can imagine a small village became crowded all of a sudden with hundreds or perhaps over 1,000 strangers visiting and they all needed places to stay and to eat. Just as they arrived at Bethlehem, Mary had to give birth to their son and there was no room in the little inn. And the inn keeper might have arranged for this young couple to stay in the animal stable of the inn where Mary gave birth to a son and Joseph placed him in the manger, which was used for feeding the animals such as horses and donkeys.

Out in the field where the shepherds were tending the sheep, an angel of God appeared to them and the glory of God shined about the shepherds. Naturally the shepherds were afraid. And the angel of God told them, "*Do not fear. I came with the good news of great joy to all people. A Savior or Messiah is born in the town of David, meaning Bethlehem, today. Go to the inn stable and you will find a baby wrapped in soft cloth lying in the manger, which is the feeding trough.*" Then suddenly they saw and heard a heavenly throng praising God by saying, "Glory to God in the heavens, and peace and good will towards humanity on the earth."

We cannot help but note that the birth of baby Jesus was celebrated by only a handful of people: His own parents, a half-dozen or so shepherds, and then later a few wise men from other countries who came to worship Him as King of the Jews. In contrast, Christmas is celebrated today by more than one billion Christians and non-believers all over the world. The birth of Jesus still brings a message of peace and good will towards the humanity. Through the short life of 33.5 years of Jesus here on the earth, the gospel of salvation has crossed the confines of the Jewish nation and spread to all corners of the world. And this is glory to God in the heavens. And the gospel has been bringing messages of peace and God's good will towards the humanity over the centuries, even today in the 21st century.

In this Christmas season I wish to invite you to ponder why the Messiah had to come and why God wants to bring the message of peace and good will to peoples of the world through Jesus. And let us also consider what God wants us to do to help carry this message to the world.

God has been sending out His message of peace and good will to the humanity since Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden after they sinned. Apostle Paul defined the relationship between Adam and Jesus Christ as follows:

[1 Cor. 15:21-22] For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Before their fall, Adam and Eve had the privilege of living with God in the Garden of Eden with divine commission of governing God's creation. In this capacity they were to enjoy everlasting life. But as Paul correctly spoke, death came to them through sin. And they could no longer live in the garden and were chased out of it. God could not allow a sinful person take part in the Tree of Life in the garden. And that is why a Savior is necessary for Adam and his descendants to be restored and resurrected to the new life and justification before God so that we may take part in the Tree of Life. Jesus came as the Savior to bring humanity back to Eden. Through Jesus God has been sending out His olive leaf of peacemaking to the humanity, so that sinner might be made whole again.

Through the centuries before Jesus came as a human, God had sent His message of peace and good will in various symbols and prophetic messages. When Adam and Eve sinned, God killed animal(s) to provide covering for their shame (sin). [Genesis 3:21] Through this provision God demonstrated to our first parents that a sacrifice was needed for cleansing of their sin. Yet the animal killed to provide covering of their bodies was only a temporary provision. Rather, it pointed to the need for a permanent provision to enable restoration of their lost righteousness before God. Their son, Abel, offered the right sacrifice of a blameless lamb to God. Abel must have been instructed on what was the acceptable sacrifice and its significance.

When Abraham was about to kill his son, Isaac, as an offering to the Lord God on Mount Moriah as he had been commanded, God provided a ram, which was caught in a thicket. As Abraham and Isaac together offered the ram instead of Isaac, they must have been keenly aware that this ram was dying on behalf of Isaac. They saw the Lamb of God afar off in a distance and worshipped God for His plan of human salvation. [Genesis 22: 13]

The night before the people of Israel left Egypt, they were told to kill a blame-free sheep of a year old, paint its blood on the door post and mantel so that the death angel would pass over such Israeli homes but kill the first-born male children of Egyptian households including the king's that did not have the benefit of the sheep's blood. This was the Passover, which became one of the most important Jewish memorials even unto today. So, when the Jews keep the Passover each year, they are supposed to remember that a sheep had to die so that their ancestors could live and be saved from the slavery in Egypt. It is truly ironic that in the very day the Jews killed their Passover lamb, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was killed on Calvary. How fittingly significant was the crucifixion of our Lord and yet the Jews rejected this Messiah and still do not accept Him.

The entire Mosaic Law points to the sacrificial lamb to be slain for the sins of people. Every time a Jewish person brings a sheep or lamb for offering on behalf of his sin, the offering person lays his hand on the sheep's head, whereupon the animal is killed and its blood is sprinkled on the altar so that the offeror's sin is absolved by God. Acts of such offering of a living animal as a ransom for sins of the people should have reminded the Jewish people about the grace of God and the Lamb of God to be slain for the humanity.

The whole Isaiah Chapter 53 describes the suffering Messiah. Particularly verses 3-6 speak of his suffering, death and bearing of our sins on His shoulders:

*He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.
But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

Isaiah also prophesied how the Messiah would be reviled and beaten.

[Isaiah 50:5] I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.

Zechariah prophesied that the Messiah would be pierced and there would be a great mourning for Him:

[Zechariah 12:10] "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn."

In Psalm 22 David sang of God's rejection of the Messiah on the cross as He was hung on it:

[Psalm 22:1] My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?

There are a number of other prophesies that characterize the life and death of the suffering Messiah. The later part of Isaiah 53 speaks of His burial in a rich man's grave and how God suffered to see the sins of humanity laid on the Messiah's shoulders:

[Isaiah 53: 9-11] And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

The timing of the first coming of the Messiah had been foretold by Daniel and it was fulfilled exactly to the day. In Daniel 9:25 Daniel prophesied, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks." The king who gave the command to rebuild Jerusalem, was King Artaxerxes Longimanus of Persia who ruled from 465 to 425 B.C. The prophet Daniel said that 483 years from that date, the Messiah would be revealed to Israel, but He would then "be cut off, but not for himself" (9:26). This prophecy refers to the crucifixion when Jesus died, or was cut off, for the sins of the world. Exactly 483 years later, to the day according to the Jewish calendar, was Sunday, April 6, 32 A.D. On that day, which we commemorate as Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and revealed Himself as Israel's Messiah. He was killed four days later, thus fulfilling the prophecy that He would be revealed and then slain.

The birth place of the Messiah was foretold as Bethlehem by Micah as follows:

[Micah 5:2] 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.

The virgin birth of the Messiah was foretold by prophet Isaiah:

[Isiah 7:14] Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Here's the irony in the birth, life and death of God' Son who came to the earth as a human. Although He had all the glory of Heaven with Him as the Son of God, and although He is to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords here on the earth when He comes again at the end of the world, he was born and raised as a son of a poor carpenter in a small village in Galilee in northern Palestine and had to die a cruel death on a cross on Calvary outside of Jerusalem at the young age of 33. He faced unjust judgment by leaders of the people whom He loved, and suffered misunderstanding and derision in addition to the physical torments of beating, flogging and crucifixion, which was the worst kind of execution. He went through such an ordeal and death although He was totally sinless so that you and I might have our sins washed clean and be made whole before God. God had foretold the Jewish people about the coming of the Messiah as a suffering Messiah, a servant and a lamb to be slain through a number of symbols and

numerous prophecies. The Jewish scribes were aware of such prophecies and meaning of the symbols such as the Passover feast.

The Bible scholars of the Jewish society, notably the Sadducee-Pharisee community of the first century, were responsible for correct interpretation of these prophecies and for instructing and guiding the masses to their meaning. Yet they were not doing their duty but were misleading the people by living in hypocritical ways. John the Baptist criticized the Pharisees and Sadducees on their duplicity in Matt. 3:7-8, *“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance.”*

Their irresponsible attitude was deeply disappointing to our Lord Jesus as He criticized them, *“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in [Matt. 23:13].”* And Jesus told His disciples to go to *“the lost sheep of Israel”* and spoke the parable of the lost sheep. To Jesus the condition of the people of Israel was that of a flock of lost sheep, untended and uncared for by those who were responsible for the shepherd duty. The wrath of God, which had been mentioned many times in the OT prophecies on the day of the Lord, was now applicable to this irresponsible elite of the Israeli nation that was not doing their part as God had expected them to do. Jesus was acutely aware the flock of Israel during His time on the earth was awfully lacking in spiritual guidance and, for this very reason. It is no wonder that Jerusalem met a total destruction including the temple by the Roman military in AD 70 as was prophesied by our Lord.

While the Jewish religious leaders in the first century neglected their duty to warn the people and to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah, the church leaders of the early NT era were very diligent in educating and preparing the Christian believers for the second coming of the Lord. Jesus Himself gave sufficient warnings about the impending punishments, including the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, and about His coming again in the latter days during the Olivet Discourse in Matt 24-25. Peter, Paul and other disciples also warned of the day of the Lord and admonished the Christian believers *“to watch and pray.”* The churches of the early centuries were, in fact, anticipating the day of the Lord in the near future and were willing to suffer great degrees of opposition and persecution because they believed the Lord would come soon in heavenly glory. In this sense we can confidently say that the anticipation and faith of the early Christians on the second coming of the Messiah far exceeded those of the OT Jewish people, who failed to acknowledge and embrace their Messiah when He came to their midst in the first century.

So, the gospel message of salvation and restoration has spread to all corners of the world through the unceasing evangelical fervor and dedication of Christians who saw a true and lively hope in the second coming of the Messiah sometime in the future. Apostle Paul admonished the Christians to be watchful but not to be shaken or troubled in mind about the second coming of the Lord as follows:

[2 Thes. 2:1-3] Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

Both the OT prophecies and the prophecies of Paul and Peter tell us that a great period of apostasy must come together with appearance of an Antichrist before our Lord comes again. So, on this Christmas day of 2020 I encourage all Christians to be mindful and be diligent in the following four things:

First, let us be diligent in keeping the life of Jesus Christ alive and vibrant in our lives and in our church. Christ gave His life for such a purpose --to give us His eternal life to us sinners that we might be made whole. He gave His sinless life in exchange for all our sins so that we could be made sinless before God. The work of sanctification must go on in greater vigor in anticipation of the coming of the Lord in the near future now that there are concrete signs of its coming near. As apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Thessalonica:

[1 Thes. 5:23] *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.*

Secondly, since we accepted Him into our life, the newness of the true life began working in us, bringing in heavenly blessings of joy, peace and happiness. It has also moved our hearts to share the good news with our family, friends and neighbors. So, let us be diligent in sharing our joy of salvation with those around us so that God's message of peace and good will be spread to the far corners of the world. God has established His servants through the centuries and gave them missions to carry His message. Today there are such true servants among you. However, there have always been faithful assistants to the ministry of God in every era. They provided what was needed by God's servants but more importantly they were sources of encouragements and strength to those in God's work.

Philip, who was one of the elders of Jerusalem church, was guided by the Holy Spirit and preached the gospel message to the Ethiopian eunuch as described in Acts 8. As we see in this example, the lay ministry is just as important for spreading the gospel message as the work of the evangelical workers who are dedicated fully to God's work. So, let us share the good news of Christ's coming to our unbelieving family members, close friends, classmates, coworkers at your jobs and even strangers you get to meet along the way as the Holy Spirit guides you in this important work.

Thirdly, let us watch and pray so that our faith will not fail. A great many believers will lose their love of God and fall away together with the Antichrist before the Lord comes again. We have certainly seen this world going after the idolatries of pleasure and sin, lowering the moral standards and condoning the sinful life styles such as of homosexuals and drug addiction as acceptable. Christian leaders have fallen into temptations of greed for power and money. They have cavorted in the so-called ecumenical movement and accepted pagan religions of idol worship as ways leading to God, thus bringing God's wrath closer to their front doors.

Apostle Peter warned the Christians of the first century that there will be scoffers and unbelievers who will throw stumbling blocks to the Christians.

[2 Peter 3:3] *Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?"*

Scoffing is speaking derisively in mocking and jeering. These are people who speak in sarcasm and criticism spoken with a look of disdain and despise. I encourage all of you to choose love rather than criticism and sarcasm. We need to distance ourselves from such people. Rather we should remain and grow in the love of God, love of His truth, love of our Lord Jesus and the love of our brethren as apostle John encouraged the Christians in;

[1 John 4:13-15] *By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*

So, let us abide in love and demonstrate this love in our spirit and actions towards our fellow brethren, to our family, friends and neighbors so that God may be glorified through us.

Fourthly, let us pray and anxiously wait for the coming of the Lord with earnest and eager anticipation. God has shown signs that the second coming of our Lord is nearing. One very important sign was the establishment of the nation of Israel in November 1947, when the Jews scattered throughout the world were allowed to come to the land of Palestine and establish a nation of their own after nearly 2,000 years of diaspora. We need to watch for the signs in the world arena how God is working to bring the day of the Lord near to us. Vigilant prayerful watching will help us be alert spiritually and be more dedicated in our service to the Lord. This spirit of eagerly praying and anticipating His return will cause us to be sober, careful and wise in all manner of our living and church life. As He came some 2,000 years ago as a baby in the little town of Bethlehem, Jesus Christ will come the second time to lift

us true Christians out of this world to be with Him in heaven and march together to the wedding ceremony of the Lamb in due time.

May the Holy Spirit help each of us as we daily pray for the coming of our Lord as it says:

[Rev. 22:20] He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Now I pray that the Spirit of Christmas overwhelm all of you on this Christmas Day. May the God of peace and goodness bless each of you and your family to be ever faithful in serving and worshipping Him as the Almighty God! And may Jesus Christ come soon to rule the whole world as King of kings and Lord of lords!

Amen.