

The DAWN

VOLUME No. LXXXVIII, Number 12
(USPS 149-380), December 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Published monthly by The Dawn Bible Students Association, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167. \$12.00 a year.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF DAWN

“Blessed Art Thou Among Women” 2

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

Appointed as Heir 16

He Shall Be Called Emmanuel 18

Wise Men Come to Worship 20

Preparing the Way 22

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

“Things That Accompany
Salvation” 24

Light Will Dispel Darkness 37

God’s Great Gift 49

Weekly Prayer Meeting Texts 14

TALKING THINGS OVER 61

OBITUARIES 15

SPEAKERS’ APPOINTMENTS 63

CONVENTIONS 63

“Blessed Art Thou Among Women”

“The virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”
—Luke 1:27,28

ADHERENTS TO CHRISTI-anity throughout the world are nearly universal in the belief that the mother of Jesus was a virgin named Mary, as spoken of in our opening verse. Beyond this, however, there is a wide variation of thought as to Mary’s role and position in God’s arrangements. In what might be considered the most

exalted viewpoint of Mary, she is regarded as being equally high in glory, importance and position as Jesus himself, and additionally, is even considered by some as being co-equal with God.

Unfortunately, many beliefs concerning Mary have come about by way of human philosophy and tradition. If, as most Christians would likely claim, we are to follow the Scriptures as our source of religious doctrine and truth, we would find that many of the thoughts concerning Mary which have been handed down over the centuries are not taught in the Bible. In fact, very little is written about her in

its pages. Only twelve passages make reference to Mary, and some of these are duplications of events recorded by the different Gospel writers.

Contrasting these few mentions of Mary in the Bible with the manifold Scriptures which speak concerning Jesus, we see an overwhelming preference toward her son as the important figure in the Bible, the holy Word of God. Thus, we recognize that much of what is now believed and taught about Mary came later. Notwithstanding her more limited mention in Scripture, those in which she is the focus show Mary to be of a righteous and pure character, and that she was used by God to bring to pass certain critical events in harmony with his divine arrangements.

BIBLICAL VIEW OF GOD AND JESUS

Before looking at Mary's role in the divine arrangement, it is helpful to first examine the Bible's teaching concerning the separateness of God and Jesus. In this regard, an important text to consider contains these words from Paul: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:5,6) Note the distinction Paul makes. There is "one God," and there is "one mediator," meaning "reconciler," between God and men. The "one mediator," Paul further asserts, is "the man Christ Jesus."

Thus the apostle clearly shows that God and Jesus are separate beings. He also says that it was the "man Christ Jesus," not God, who "gave himself a ransom for all." The word "ransom" means "corresponding price," and the only way a corresponding price could be provided was to have a perfect man, as was Jesus, give himself as a ransom for the perfect

man, Adam, who had forfeited his life and the lives of all his posterity, of whom Mary was one.

The separateness of God and his Son, Christ Jesus, is taught by many Scriptures. We merely cite four here, two from Paul and two from Jesus himself. Paul wrote, "There is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." There is "one God and Father of all, who is above all." (I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6) Jesus emphatically contradicted any thought of equality with God when he said, "My Father is greater than I," and when called "good master" by the rich young ruler, he replied, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."—John 14:28; Matt. 19:17

In harmony with this is another statement Paul makes concerning God, that he dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." (I Tim. 6:16) This corroborates what God told Moses: "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." (Exod. 33:20) If it be true, as these verses say, that no human being can see God and live, then it would be highly contradictory to believe that he is one and the same being as Jesus, since Jesus was seen by multitudes—believers and non-believers alike.

JESUS, THE IMAGE OF GOD

We are reminded of the conversation Jesus had with his disciples when Philip requested, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us," to which Jesus replied, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14:8,9) Jesus was "the

image of the invisible God,” both in his pre-human existence as an angelic being, and in his life upon earth as a man.—Col. 1:15

Reading the full context of Paul’s words to the Colossians, he wrote: “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.” (vss. 12-15) Since Jesus was the image, or mental and moral likeness, of the invisible God, it was possible for Philip to see what the Father would be like. Yet, as Paul so plainly says, God himself is invisible.

The definitions of the words “Father” and “Son” used in the above passage also shed light on the relationship between God, the Father and great supreme Creator of the universe, and his first direct creation, his only begotten Son. “Father” denotes one who gives life, whereas “Son” is one who receives life—that is, a descendant of his father. Originally, God was alone. His first direct creation was Jesus in his pre-human existence, or the “firstborn of every creature.” Jesus expresses the same thought when he speaks of himself as “the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.”—Rev. 3:14

To speak of Jesus as being the first direct creation of God is not demeaning to him in any way. In his pre-human existence he was at God’s right hand in the great creative works. We quote further from the apostle concerning Jesus: “By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth,

visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him; And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.”—Col. 1:16-19

THE SELECTION OF MARY

Let us now turn our attention to Mary. Many maidens of Israel had perhaps hoped to be the one who would give birth to the prophesied Messiah. Mary, whose descent was from the house of David, was the one chosen by God for this task. She was engaged to be married to Joseph, who also was a descendant of David. Mary’s lineage was through Nathan, King David’s son, and back to father Adam. (Luke 3:23-38) As noted in the *Amplified Bible*, Joseph was the “son by marriage” of Eli, Mary’s father. Joseph’s own lineage came through Solomon, another of David’s sons. In that genealogy, given in Matthew 1:1-16, we are told that Joseph’s father was Jacob.—vs. 16

God’s selection of Mary is recorded in Luke 1:26-38. The angel Gabriel was sent by God and appeared to her, saluting her in the words of our theme text. He then proceeded to tell an astonished and troubled Mary that she was to miraculously conceive and give birth to a son whose name would be Jesus. The throne of his forefather, King David, would be given to him, he would reign over Israel, and his kingdom would never end. When Mary asked Gabriel how the birth of Jesus would be possible since she was a virgin, it was explained to her that the child would be

begotten in a miraculous way. God would, in reality, be Jesus' Father, since the begetting would be accomplished by the power of God's Holy Spirit.—vss. 34,35

To satisfy divine justice, a perfect man was required to offset the perfect life forfeited by Adam. God, the Father, would supply this perfect life—his only begotten Son—and Mary was chosen to provide the organism, a human body. Thus it was that “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman,” who was also the seed of Abraham and the ancestor of King David, since Mary was descended from both.—Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:9,16

When this conception took place, Joseph, who was espoused to Mary, and being a just man, was at first troubled. He thought he should put her away secretly in order to prevent any shame coming upon her from the public, who would not be aware of the special circumstances surrounding the events which were transpiring. (Matt. 1:19) An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and explained that what had taken place with Mary was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14: “Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Joseph was told not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, and that this son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, would be named Jesus, and he would save his people from their sins. Joseph did as he was instructed by the angel.—Matt. 1:20-25

During the nine months Jesus was in Mary's womb, as well as the years of his infancy and childhood, he was not in a position to make decisions concerning the universe. Thus is provided further evidence that the Father and the Son are two distinct beings. It was not necessary that the Son be involved in overseeing the universe during this period of his existence,

because God, his Father, was in full control, dwelling in the heavenly courts.

Jesus would have been born in Nazareth if it had not been that a taxation law was decreed by Augustus Caesar, forcing all Israelites to travel to their native territories which, for Joseph, was Bethlehem in Judea. It was a difficult time for Mary to travel. However, with, no doubt, much help from Joseph, and by God's overruling providence, they made the journey. (Luke 2:1-5) There is no record that Mary or Joseph knew in advance that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, as prophesied in Micah 5:2. Who was directing the matter? It was God, the Heavenly Father, who was guiding and directing every step pertaining to these all-important events in his plan.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Jesus was born in Bethlehem under very humble circumstances. There was no room for them in the inn, and no one was made aware of the event except a few shepherds watching their flocks at night on the hills of Judea. God sent to them his angels which announced the birth of Jesus, and they promptly went to Bethlehem. Finding Mary and Joseph, the shepherds then made known to others the visit by the angels and of their finding the infant, Jesus. (Luke 2:7-17) The account then states, "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." (vs. 19) Nine months earlier it was confirmed to her by the angel Gabriel that this child was to be Israel's Savior. Now that he was born, the magnitude of the angel's words was no doubt embedded upon her heart more than at any previous time.

According to the Mosaic Law, when Jesus was eight days old he was to be circumcised. The Law also required that Mary continue thirty-three days more for purification. (Lev. 12:2-4) When this time was completed, she and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him at the Temple. There they met Simeon and Anna, who were guided by God's Holy Spirit to prophesy concerning Jesus. (Luke 2:22-38) After citing a prophecy from the Old Testament, Simeon told Mary, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul, also.)"—vss. 34,35

While at the Temple, Mary and Joseph also were met by Anna, a prophetess, who had been widowed for most of her adult life. She served God "with fastings and prayers night and day." She no doubt knew of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and had probably also heard of the announcement made by the angels to the shepherds that the Savior had been born. Upon seeing Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus, Anna "in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord." (vss. 36-38) There is no record of Mary's reaction to the words of Anna. We are prone to think that she pondered these, too, in her heart.

JESUS' LIFE IN JEOPARDY

Sometime after the birth of Jesus, when he was a "young child," wise men from the east came to where Joseph and Mary resided to present gifts and worship the King of the Jews. During the course of their travel, the wise men had gone to Jerusalem to ask Herod the king where to find Jesus. Although he did not know where the child and his parents were residing,

Herod inquired for this information from the Jews' chief priests and scribes, who said he was born in Bethlehem, as they were no doubt familiar with the prophecy of Micah 5:2. Herod told the wise men that, upon their return, to let him know exactly where they found the young child Jesus, so that he could go and worship him also.—Matt. 2:1-11

Herod's intentions were only evil. God, however, knew this, and that the defenseless child, Jesus, was in jeopardy. Therefore God warned the wise men in a dream not to return to Herod, but to go back to their country by another route. Following this, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to flee to Egypt because Herod would seek the child to destroy him. This Joseph did, taking Mary and Jesus to safety as he had been instructed. Finally, after receiving word that Herod had died, Joseph left Egypt with his family and returned to Nazareth, in the land of Israel, where he and Mary had resided prior to Jesus' birth. (vss. 12-23) In all of this, we see that God, the Father, was protecting his Son, Jesus, once again showing that they were separate beings. How reasonable is the record of these events as found in the Bible.

MARY—WHEN JESUS WAS TWELVE

Another incident concerns Mary when Jesus was twelve years old. He had accompanied his parents to Jerusalem, where they went every year to celebrate the Jewish Passover. On this occasion, when it was time to return home, Jesus tarried in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know he was not with the returning group until they had traveled a day's journey. After searching among all their relatives and friends

who were traveling together and not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem and searched for three days. Finally, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his remarks.—Luke 2:41-47

When his parents found him, Mary said, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress. And he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house? And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.” (vss. 48-50, *English Standard Version*) We are not to understand that Jesus was showing disrespect to Mary by responding as he did. He was simply making reference to the fact that he was now at an age where he could understand certain Old Testament prophecies, especially those which concerned his mission on earth as designed by his Heavenly Father. Jesus left the Temple and returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, “and was subject unto them.”—vs. 51

DURING JESUS’ MINISTRY

One incident involving Mary occurred near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, when they both, along with his disciples, attended a wedding at Cana of Galilee. The celebration had run out of wine, and Mary made this matter known to Jesus. Apparently she had some involvement with the arrangements. Our Lord’s initial reply was, “Woman, what does this have to do with me?” Seeing, however, the opportunity to provide a lesson for those attending the wedding feast, Jesus proceeded to provide wine, performing his first miracle.—John 2:1-11, *ESV*

Later, there was the occasion when Mary, and Jesus' brothers also, sought him. They wanted to speak to him as he was preaching to a crowd of followers. Jesus was told of this by one who brought the message to him. Jesus reacted by asking, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? ... Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."—Matt. 12:46-50

This same incident is recorded in Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21. Why did Jesus make these statements? It was not that he had no regard for his natural family. Rather, he was emphasizing that spiritual relationships are of greater importance than earthly ones when it comes to selecting "a people for his [God's] name." (Acts 15:14) In other words, being the mother or brother of the man, Jesus, was not as important as being a disciple and true follower of Christ.

MARY IN JOHN'S CARE

Jesus life and ministry was focused on his mission as man's Redeemer. As a perfect man, however, we also realize that he showed proper love, respect and concern for Mary throughout his life. This is particularly shown by the action he took while dying on the cross. He saw his mother standing by the cross with the Apostle John, whom he especially loved. Jesus entrusted his mother into the apostle's care, saying to John, "Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."—John 19:27

Mary had faithfully performed the task given to her by God. She gave birth to Jesus; she nourished him and cared for him as all good mothers do for

their children. What reward did God plan for her? What position could be made available for her? Since Mary was descended from Adam, it was necessary for her to understand that Jesus was, indeed, Israel's and the world's Savior. Believing that Jesus was man's Redeemer was no problem for Mary. She had received much in the way of evidence during the roughly thirty-four years since the angel Gabriel first announced to her God's plan that she would give birth to the Savior of mankind.

THE BLESSINGS OF PENTECOST

When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, he showed himself on a number of occasions to his faithful company of followers. The last time they saw him was in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 1:1-12, before his ascension. Mary was there. They were told not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The eleven apostles were present and are named by Luke, assembling in the upper room. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."—vss. 13,14

Together, the number of them being about 120, they waited until the Day of Pentecost when they were blessed by the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:15; 2:1-4) Mary was one of these, having been called and chosen by God to be a member of the body of Christ. If she continued faithful unto death, she would receive a "crown of life" and have the privilege of living and reigning with Christ in his Father's kingdom.—Rev. 2:10; 20:6

There is no further mention of Mary in the Scriptures. As far as we know, she remained with the

Apostle John until she died. Some say she died in Jerusalem. Others say she later traveled to Ephesus with the Apostle John. The Scriptures are silent. What is important, however, is that, if faithful in her consecration to do God's will, she will receive her portion in the body of Christ. Mary and all faithful followers of the Master are, as Paul says, "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—Gal. 3:28,29 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

DECEMBER 3—"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."—Revelation 3:10 (Z. '01-118 Hymn 310)

DECEMBER 10—"Them that honour me, I will honour."—I Samuel 2:30 (Z. '01-318 Hymn 210)

DECEMBER 17—"Beloved, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."—Philippians 2:12,13 (Z. '97-147 Hymn 114)

DECEMBER 24—"Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."—Matthew 1:21 (Z. '00-8 Hymn 16)

DECEMBER 31—"What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD, now, in the presence of all his people."—Psalm 116:12-14 (Z. '99-286 Hymn 336)

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Jozefa Pietrzyk, Poland—October 10. Age, 88

Brother Jan Kuc, Poland—October 14. Age, 99

Sister Marysia (Purwin) Kwasnik, Gdansk, Poland
—October 18. Age, 89

Brother Eugene DeWys, Grand Rapids, MI—October
21. Age, 84

Brother Stefan Kubic, Betania, Miechow, Poland—
October 24. Age, 94

He Giveth More

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added affliction he addeth his mercy,
To multiplied trials, his multiplied peace.*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.*

*His love hath no limit, his grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth and giveth and giveth again.*



“He giveth more grace.”—James 4:6

“He increaseth strength.”—Isaiah 40:29

“Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.”

—Jude 2

(Selected)

Appointed as Heir

Key Verse: “[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”
—Hebrews 1:2

Selected Scripture:
Hebrews 1:1-5

IN HIS LETTER TO THE Hebrew brethren, Paul begins by stating that in former times God had spoken to their forefathers by the prophets. In our Key Verse, however, the apostle says how in these latter times God has “spoken unto us” by his Son, who has been appointed “heir of all things.”

The purpose of Paul’s letter to the Hebrews was to strengthen their faith in Christ Jesus. God is unchangeable. (Mal. 3:6) Therefore, the truths which would now be revealed through the words of his Son, and expanded upon by the apostles, are in harmony with what the prophets of Israel had previously testified.

Paul also declares in our Key Verse that God’s beloved Son labored directly with him in the many works of creation. The Apostle John confirms this, stating: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”—John 1:3

Jesus is the “express image” of God, Paul says. (Heb. 1:3) The phrase “express image” is a translation of the Greek word *charakter*, and denotes an “exact copy” or “representation.” In Jesus we see a perfect representation of the character of God. Similarly, each follower of Christ, in proportion as they develop the spirit of the

Lord, becomes a representation of God's dear Son and, therefore, also a copy of the Heavenly Father. The apostle further states in verse 3 that after Jesus "purged our sins" by the willing sacrifice of his own life, God raised him from the dead, and he has now "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."—Heb. 1:3

The Hebrew Christians knew of the existence of angels—invisible spirit beings which are of a higher order than human creation. Israel's prophets had made many references to these angels, indicating that they were honorably used by God to convey messages to his people and render other services. (Gen. 22:11,15; Exod. 3:2; Isa. 37:36; Zech. 3:1,5,6) However, Paul points out that the resurrected and glorified Jesus has been made "much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."—Heb. 1:4; Eph. 1:20-22

Paul further emphasized the greater honor which the God of Israel had bestowed upon his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, by posing questions to the Hebrew brethren. "Unto which of the angels said he [God] at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?"—Heb. 1:5; Ps. 2:7

All should honor Jesus, not in the same way as the Father, but as his direct representative. It was not as a man that Jesus was made "heir of all things." Rather, it is the resurrected and glorified Christ Jesus, the "express image" of the Father for eternity, who is the heir which will bless "all the families of the earth." "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." "He is ... the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell."—Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:8,16; John 3:16; Col. 1:18,19

He Shall Be Called Emmanuel

Key Verse: *“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”*
—*Matthew 1:23*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 1:18-25
“seed,” all the families of the earth would be blessed.—
Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 22:18

The Prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of this great one, assigning to him various titles, such as “The Prince of Peace,” and explained that “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” Isaiah also foretold that this Savior of the people would be born of a virgin. (Isa. 9:6,7; 7:14) The angel’s announcement of Jesus’ birth emphasized the fulfillment of these promises: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke 2:10,11

Jesus’ birth was miraculous. He was not the son of

Joseph, but rather the Son of God. In Jesus' pre-human existence, he was a spirit being and known as the "Logos"—the Word, or representative, of God. (John 1:1-5) In order to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world it was necessary for the Logos to become a human being. He did not materialize into a body of flesh. Instead, God transformed his Son's spirit nature to that of a perfect human embryo and implanted it in the womb of Mary. Thus, "the Word was made flesh."—vs. 14

Paul states that "the man Christ Jesus" gave himself a "ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:4-6) The word translated "ransom" is from the Greek word *antilutron* and means "corresponding price." It was essential that Jesus be the exact equivalent of Adam prior to his disobedience. Jesus willingly gave his perfect human life for the forfeited perfect human life of Adam, and through Adam, the entire human race.—Rom. 5:18,19

The psalmist records that man was created "a little lower than the angels." (Ps. 8:5) Likewise, we are told that Jesus "was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death," in order that "he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Heb. 2:9) Elsewhere Paul explains, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:21,22

Isaiah prophesied that Messiah would be called "Immanuel," meaning "God with us." (Isa. 7:14) This does not mean that Jesus was God in the flesh. Instead, it denotes that his birth and ministry manifested the presence and favor of the Heavenly Father with his people, and that the promises which had been made concerning the birth of Messiah were being fulfilled. The name "Immanuel" is one of the many titles which help us to realize more fully the purpose and scope of Jesus' ministry. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."—I John 4:9 ■

Wise Men Come to Worship

Key Verse: *“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.”*
—Matthew 2:11

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 2:1-11

THE ACCOUNT OF OUR

lesson begins, “In the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.” When Herod heard this, “he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” (Matt. 2:1-3) This reaction perhaps was because Herod felt his own rule was now threatened. Likewise, others in Jerusalem who may have had some advantages because of his rulership were fearful of losing these special privileges.

Herod “gathered all the chief priests and scribes” of the Jews and demanded to know where Christ should be born. Knowing the prophecies concerning Messiah, they answered, “Bethlehem.” Herod told the wise men, “Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.” (vss. 4-8) This was a deception by Herod.

If he knew where the King of the Jews was, he could then have him killed, thus protecting his rulership.

After the wise men departed from Herod, “the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” (vss. 9,10) Our Key Verse states that when they came into the house, the wise men saw the young child with Mary his mother. They bowed down and worshipped him and then presented him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Joseph and Mary were perhaps surprised by the precious gifts received from these strangers. In God’s providence, however, their costly value was probably used to meet expenses during their flight to Egypt, which would soon follow.

Each of the gifts given by the wise men seems to have had a symbolic meaning. Gold, a relatively rare metal and considered precious throughout history, was a fitting gift for a king. Frankincense produces a pleasant odor when burned and was used extensively in the Tabernacle. It was one of the ingredients in the holy incense and was also placed on top of the shewbread in the Holy. (Exod. 30:34-38; Lev. 24:5-7) The gift of frankincense perhaps pointed forward to Jesus’ priestly service.

Myrrh was one of the ingredients in the holy anointing oil of the Tabernacle. (Exod. 30:23-25) A bitter herb, it may have symbolized in advance how during Jesus’ earthly ministry he would be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” (Isa. 53:3). Myrrh was also applied to Jesus’ body after his death.—John 19:39,40

After the wise men presented their gifts, having been “warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” (Matt. 2:12) Let us be as the wise men, presenting daily our treasure to the Heavenly Father—all that we have and are, which is our “reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

Preparing the Way

Key Verse: *“This is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”*
—*Matthew 3:3*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 3:1-12

JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS given the honor of announcing the long-promised Savior. John rejoiced in this privilege, saying of himself, “the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”—John 3:29

In the Bible there is a clear distinction between the faithful people of God who lived prior to and after Pentecost. Those living before Pentecost, such as John the Baptist, were called “friends” or “servants” of God. (James 2:23; Heb. 3:5) God’s people who have lived since Pentecost are called “sons of God.” (John 1:12) They are called “sons” because they are begotten of the Holy Spirit to a new nature and will, if they prove themselves faithful unto death, receive “immortality” as spirit beings in the “first resurrection.”—Rom. 2:7; 8:14; I John 3:1; Rev. 20:6

God chose John the Baptist, a rugged character, which was reflected in his simple clothing and diet, to announce that Messiah had come. His fortitude and complete devotion to God enabled him to be independent of all religious groups among the Jews and to freely preach. (Matt. 3:4) John’s mission was to arouse the people of Israel concerning the coming of Jesus, their promised Deliverer, and that they should prepare themselves by

repenting, turning from sin, and thus symbolize their heart reformation by being baptized.—vss. 2,6

John declared to the religious leaders of the Jews: “The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” (vs. 10) This was a figurative way of stating that the testing time for the Jewish nation had come. Only those who bore good fruit in their characters and lives would now be recognized by God as true Israelites. The remainder would be cut off and go into the symbolic fire of tribulation and the destruction of their national existence. Nevertheless, God has a plan for Israel’s recovery, which will come about through the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth in due time.—Mic. 4:2; Zech. 8:22,23

The Jewish nation, as a whole, did not recognize nor accept Jesus as the Messiah. However, some individuals did. The Apostle John states that Jesus “came unto his own [nation of Israel], and his own received him not. But as many as received him [individually], to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”—John 1:11,12

John the Baptist’s preparatory work was followed by the greater teachings and higher baptism which Jesus instituted. Indeed, John prophesied of Jesus: “He who is coming after me is mightier, ... he will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire.” (Matt. 3:11, *James Moffatt Translation*) Messiah’s baptism, John said, would be of two kinds. Faithful “Israelites indeed” would be baptized “with the holy Spirit.” However, the unfaithful, non-fruitbearing would experience a baptism of “fire,” symbolic of the trouble which ultimately resulted in Israel’s national destruction for a time.

Paul explains that when the spiritual seed, the “sons of God,” shall be completed, the blessing of the Lord shall proceed from and through them to the natural seed, Israel, and to all the families of the earth.—Gal. 3:16,27-29; Rom. 11:25-32; Gen. 12:3; 22:18

“Things That Accompany Salvation”

“Beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation.”

—*Hebrews 6:9, New King James Version*

WE WILL SOON REACH THE

end of 2020, which by any measure has been a most eventful, and often perplexing, year. At this time, it is most appropriate for us, as footstep followers of Christ, to step back from the affairs of the surrounding world and examine those things of utmost importance which pertain to our relationship with God as his children. As noted in our title and opening text, these critical matters are “things that accompany salvation.”

It is true that the means of salvation for mankind has already been provided through the sacrificial offering of Jesus as “a ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:5,6) However, if we are striving to follow in the Master’s steps as Christians, certain requirements must be met in order to gain the prize of “glory and honour

and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) In chapter six of the Book of Hebrews, from which our text is taken, the Apostle Paul delineates many facets of those matters which are vitally connected to the full accomplishment of our salvation. We will henceforth examine this chapter in more detail.

PRINCIPLES OF DOCTRINE

Paul begins this chapter with the following words: “Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”—Heb. 6:1,2

These opening verses are in reality a continuation of the lesson presented in the closing verses of chapter five. It is a lesson designed to encourage God’s consecrated people, by a study of his Word and the heart application of its principles, to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“Leaving the principles.” This expression must be understood in connection with the explanation, “not laying again the foundation,” found later in the same verse. Putting the two phrases together, the thought of “leaving” the principles is simply that of building upon them as a foundation. It does not mean leaving them in the sense of deserting them and never again thinking or talking about them. The illustration is clearly that of constructing a building. A building is not complete while only the foundation is laid, nor if the superstructure is built elsewhere than upon the foundation. We can thus understand

the phrase in verse 1, "let us go on to perfection." Indeed, the word "perfection" herein used is translated from a Greek word meaning "completeness."

Another important word to understand in this verse is "principles." It is the translation of a Greek word meaning "beginning, or chief." The "principles of the doctrine of Christ" are not, therefore, the less important teachings of the Bible, but rather, the great foundation truths upon which all Christian belief and work must be built. How important it is, then, that we keep in constant touch with these chief foundation principles. It would not be necessary to build the foundation repeatedly. However, since the Hebrew brethren had evidently let these things "slip" they needed to be taught over again, in order that they might, in renewing their devotion, have the proper foundation upon which to build.—Heb. 2:1

In verses 1 and 2 of our lesson, Paul lists six foundation principles of the "doctrine of Christ," all of which should "accompany salvation" in us. The first of these is "Repentance from dead works." Because the apostle was addressing Hebrew Christians, the dead works here mentioned could be particularly their efforts to gain life by keeping the Mosaic Law. These were "dead works" not only because they did not thereby gain life, but also because by them they were brought under the additional condemnation of the Law. Repentance, however, is the principal thought in connection with this doctrine, and is essential to receiving God's blessings regardless of one's former position in life.

Repentance is a required step in the life of all who become Christians. It is not something with which we are only momentarily concerned when first drawn

to the Lord. Each day we fall short of perfection in some measure. Hence, we need to continually be in a repentant attitude, which is quick to seek divine forgiveness through the merit of the shed blood of Jesus. This fundamental doctrine should serve each day to keep us humble before God and to be in constant recognition of our need for his grace and mercy through Christ.

The second foundation principle noted by Paul is “faith toward God.” The relationship of faith to our standing before the Heavenly Father is a vital fundamental to our understanding of his plan and purpose. “Without faith it is impossible to please” God, the Scriptures emphatically declare. (Heb. 11:6) We see the importance of this doctrine by noting the manner in which Paul couples it with “repentance from dead works.” No one can be “justified by the works of the law,” but we can be “justified by faith” and have “peace with God” through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 5:1) How vital it is to keep this essential truth clearly in mind and order our lives in keeping with it!

Paul next mentions the “doctrine of baptisms.” Previously, all those of the Jewish nation had been symbolically “baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” (I Cor. 10:2) However, at the time of Jesus’ First Advent it was necessary for Jews who sought to follow and accept him as their Messiah to be baptized with John’s “baptism of repentance” from their sins under the Mosaic Law. (Mark 1:4; Acts 13:24) Even in the case of these, though, the real doctrine of baptism called for their burial into Christ, and their covenant to be dead with him. (Rom. 6:3-5) Later, Gentile converts would also have

part in this “death” baptism, symbolized in a literal way by immersion in water. Thus “baptisms,” in the plural, are involved in our understanding of this fundamental teaching, and all are important foundation truths upon which we are to build.

“Laying on of hands” is the fourth foundation principle the apostle cites. In Jesus’ day there were occasions when the sick were healed by the laying on of hands. (Mark 5:23; Luke 4:40) The servants of the Early Church were elected by the laying on of hands, or, more literally, by stretching forth the hand. (Acts 14:23) Timothy was cautioned by Paul not to lay hands on anyone suddenly, without due consideration. (I Tim. 5:22) As a Christian doctrine, the laying on of hands seems to indicate clearly the imparting of recognition, approval and authority.

The literal act of laying on of hands ceased with the death of the apostles, but its symbolic significance has continued with the church throughout the age. This outward sign of approval was of great value in the Early Church, but the Lord’s people still need that which the laying on of hands represented—namely, the approval and acceptance of God, which is manifested by the “witness” of the Spirit. (Rom. 8:16) The doctrine, or teaching, which has to do with our being begotten by the Holy Spirit, coming under its anointing, and being thereby recognized by God as members of the body of Christ and authorized to be his ambassadors, is therefore fundamentally important. Surely, we do not want to lose sight of the glorious significance which pertains to this aspect of the “doctrine of Christ.”

Next Paul mentions the “resurrection of the dead.” In another of his epistles, Paul writes, “If in this life

only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (I Cor. 15:19) The doctrine of the resurrection is a most vital one. This is true whether we think of it as pertaining to the “first resurrection” in which we hope to share, the “better resurrection” of the faithful ones of old, or the general resurrection of the world. (Rev. 20:6; Heb. 11:35; Acts 17:31; I Cor. 15:22) It is the very foundation of our hope, but requires keen spiritual vision, which can be enjoyed only by “those who by reason of use have their senses exercised,” to plumb the real depth of this glorious doctrine. (Heb. 5:14) In the first chapter of Ephesians the Apostle Paul says that he prayed for the opening of the eyes of understanding of “the saints which are at Ephesus,” that they might realize the mighty power being exercised on their behalf, explaining that it is the same power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead and highly exalted him, “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.”—Eph. 1:1,18-21

The sixth and final foundation doctrine Paul makes note of in our lesson is “eternal judgment.” The reference here seems to be to the final judgment, or determination as to an individual’s worthiness or unworthiness of everlasting life. The church is on trial now, and in the case of each probationary member, judgment is based on their fulfillment of the vow of consecration which they have made to do God’s will, even unto death. Let us strive earnestly that we may be found among those who will hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” (Matt. 25:21) It is important that we keep constantly before us the fact that our lives are an

open book before God, and that while he is merciful and just, our trial will end favorably only if we keep our hearts pure and render unto him the very best that we are able.

HUMILITY TO BE MANIFESTED

Hebrews 6:3 from the *Amplified Bible* reads: “We will do this [that is, proceed to maturity], if God permits.” In two ways Paul reveals his humility by this statement. He had criticized the Hebrew brethren for their lack of zeal and had pointed out to them their great need to make better progress in the Christian way. Yet, he puts himself on a level with them and says this “we” will do, if God permits.

Additionally, Paul realized that every blessing enjoyed by the Christian is a manifestation of God’s grace. We could not have come into this blessed relationship at all except the Heavenly Father had drawn us. (John 6:44) We could not know the Truth unless he had given us “ears to hear.” (Matt. 13:9,16) We cannot make progress in the way unless “God permits,” for we are able to work out our salvation only because he is working in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:12,13

“ONCE ENLIGHTENED”

Our lesson continues in Hebrews 6:4-6. “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world [Greek: age] to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

In God's plan, provision was made to rescue the fallen race from the result of Adam's sin. If we have been truly enlightened concerning this, have accepted the provision of divine favor and have entered into covenant relationship with the Lord, we must be ever vigilant so as not to "fail of the grace of God." (Heb. 12:15) Our enlightenment comes from the Word of Truth and is the first step in approaching God. We may "feel after him," but to find him we must be enlightened to know something of his plan and how to approach him.—Acts 17:27

The apostle says we have "tasted of the heavenly gift." This gift is Jesus, our Redeemer. The fact that we have "tasted" him implies that we have more than merely heard about him and believe that he is the Savior of the world. Jesus said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, ... ye have no life in you." (John 6:53) This denotes a close, intimate fellowship with the Master, based upon a full consecration to follow in his footsteps. "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."—Song of Sol. 2:3

We have been "made partakers of the Holy Spirit," Paul continues. Those who have tasted of the heavenly gift as a result of making a full consecration to God receive the begetting of the Holy Spirit. They are partakers of the Holy Spirit, the invisible power and influence of God, which is a helper and comforter to them as they seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.—John 14:16-18,26

"The powers of the world [age] to come" have likewise been made known to us. These are the powers of regeneration. In no other way will the power of God in the age to come be so wonderfully demonstrated

as by the resurrection of the dead and the subsequent restoration of mankind to perfection of life upon the earth. Those who are partakers of the Holy Spirit now have by faith tasted of the power of the resurrection. They are, even now, in their hearts and minds, “risen with Christ,” and seated with him “in heavenly places.”—Col. 2:12; 3:1-3; Eph. 2:5,6

Having learned the fundamental principles of the “doctrine of Christ,” and then “tasting” the various blessings associated therewith, we are warned to never “fall away” from this blessed position. Evidently the Hebrew brethren had not lapsed far enough to be in jeopardy of falling away, but they had begun to “slip” from their former zeal and faithfulness. Thus, Paul warns them not to fall short of the manifold favor bestowed upon them, that they “receive not the grace of God in vain.” (II Cor. 6:1) This warning applies equally now to those who have received and tasted of heavenly things.

PROGRESSING TOWARD PERFECTION

Hebrews 6:7,8 states, “The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.”

The apostle here is using an illustration to help us grasp more clearly the declaration, “Let us go on to perfection.” God’s purpose in watering the earth, and the purpose of those who till the ground, is that it may “bringeth forth herbs”—that is, that there might be a fruitage, or harvest. In this illustration the earth represents those to whom are given the

water of Truth, while the dressers and tillers of the soil might picture those who are used by the Lord to assist these in connection with their understanding. This cooperative arrangement is intended to bring forth fruit. However, if nothing but thorns and briars appear, the effort is wasted. Thus, the object in our receiving the water of Truth is not merely that we may enjoy it, but that it produce the fruitage of a Christlike character in our lives, “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”—Heb. 12:11

As our lesson continues, we come to the words of our opening text and the verse that follows: “Beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”—Heb. 6:9,10, *NKJV*

Although these Hebrew Christians had not been making use of their opportunities as they should, Paul was pleased to call them “beloved.” This is the spirit of divine love, which will not let go its hold on an individual while there is evidence that reformation is possible. The expression, “better things,” is in contrast with the possibility previously mentioned of falling away after being fully enlightened. Here the apostle was encouraging them to take a firmer hold upon the Truth, and to follow that course of zeal and devotion which would result in their salvation, that “great” salvation which “first began to be spoken by the Lord.”—Heb. 2:3

The Hebrew brethren evidently progressed well for a time, for the apostle speaks of their “work and labor of love.” Later, in chapter ten, verses 32-34,

Paul asks them to call to remembrance those “former days” when they were first illuminated, when they “took joyfully” their trials and persecutions. He wanted them to renew their original zeal and love.

What could have been more encouraging to those who, perchance, had become weary in their walk than to assure them that the Heavenly Father had not forgotten their past faithfulness! While Paul does not say so, one of the evidences that God had not forgotten them was the fact that he stirred up the apostle’s mind to write this epistle as a means of helping them to take a more positive stand for the Truth and for its righteous principles.

God’s justice not only reproveth and disciplines where necessary, but treasures up every good deed and rewards it. Even the giving of a “cup of cold water” to one of his “little ones” will not go unrewarded. (Matt. 10:42) God also encourages every good trait that it might grow stronger and become more dominant in one’s life. He takes delight in every evidence of progress in the path of righteousness.

DILIGENCE UNTO THE END

In Hebrews 6:11,12, we read: “We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” God’s interest is in all his people, “every one of you.” He does not want one to fail. Victory, however, is dependent upon “diligence” and “full assurance of hope,” not merely for a little while, but until we have been faithful “unto the end”—unto death.—Rev. 2:10

Every truly faithful and zealous disciple of Christ is an encouraging example to his brethren. Those who inherit the promises do so because of their implicit faith and patient endurance, even unto death. If we be “followers of them” who are thus faithful and zealous, we will not be slothful, but diligent, daily striving to fulfill the conditions of our consecration.

GOD’S PLEDGE TO ABRAHAM

Paul next hearkens back to the promise given to Abraham. “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.”—Heb. 6:13-15

The apostle here does not quote the entire oath-bound covenant with Abraham. He is merely citing the illustration of Abraham’s faith in God’s promises and patiently waiting for their fulfillment as being essential to actually having them become a personal possession. It is important to note that the promise which Abraham “obtained” after he endured is from a Greek word which has the thought of a “pledge” or an “assurance.” God gave Abraham a pledge, an assurance, when he ratified the original promise by his oath.

HOPE—AN ANCHOR OF THE SOUL

The final five verses of our lesson read as follows: “Men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which

it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”—Heb. 6:16-20

God’s willingness to give his people a more abundant assurance of his loving purpose toward them is fully in keeping with his grace and mercy. He did not need to confirm the covenant with his oath, for no one would ever have reason to doubt his word. Later, one of the requirements of the Mosaic Law was that important matters should be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses, and God was willing to conform to this principle. (Deut. 19:15) His word was immutable, and his oath was immutable. Thus by these “two immutable,” or unchangeable, things, he has given us strong consolation who have laid claim to the hope set before us of being part of “Abrahams’s seed” which will bless all the families of the earth.—Gal. 3:16,27-29; Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Acts 3:25

Our hope is an “anchor,” secured “within the veil.” Here the apostle symbolically puts the Christian in the position of Israel’s high priest, who alone had the privilege of entering into the Most Holy of the Tabernacle. We can hope to enter into the greater Most Holy, even “heaven itself,” because Jesus, our forerunner has first entered for us to prepare the way. (Heb. 9:24; 10:19,20) What a glorious hope is ours! Let us, therefore, seek to complete, by the Lord’s grace and with his help and supervision, the development of all those “things that accompany salvation.” ■

Light Will Dispel Darkness

*“The LORD is my
light and my
salvation; whom
shall I fear? the
LORD is the
strength of my life;
of whom shall
I be afraid?”*
—Psalm 27:1

IN SCRIPTURE, LIGHT stands for enlightenment concerning the knowledge of God. As the psalmist suggests, this light or knowledge of God goes hand in hand with our salvation. From the New Testament, we read: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” (I John 1:5) This not only suggests that God is the author and center of all true wisdom and knowledge, but also that there is no darkness associated with any thought or act on his part. What a comfort this should be to us!

As a God of light, his is not a cold, calculating wisdom and knowledge, but a wisdom and knowledge prompted and governed by love. The Apostle James tells us that God’s wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, and full of mercy and good fruits. (James 3:17) The poet has truly said, “As every lovely hue is light, so every grace is love.” We are also reminded of these words of the hymn:

“For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man’s mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.”

A LIGHT IN THE WORLD

The very early act recorded in the Genesis account of creation resulted in the appearance of light upon the earth. “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” (Gen. 1:3) This reminds us that the beginning of the selection and development of the church, the “new creation,” was also preceded by the appearance of light in the world. This included, of course, the light of truth necessary for the work which was about to begin. As Paul said, “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”—II Cor. 4:6

Jesus was the centerpiece of this light which began to shine in the hearts of those who accepted him and desired to follow in his steps. The Master stated the matter clearly, “I am come a light into the world.” (John 12:46) Our Lord did not expect all men to come to the light and rejoice in it at that time, for the majority of mankind were, and still are, not ready for this blessing. As he observed, “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”—John 3:19

Looking back to Jesus’ earthly ministry, we see that only a few in Israel were ready for the message of the “great salvation” which he brought to light. (Heb. 2:3) The same thing has been true of the Gentile nations to whom the light of truth subsequently

shined forth. Only one here and one there has answered God's call, through faith and consecration, to come "out of darkness into his marvellous light." —I Pet. 2:9

The light greater than the "brightness of the sun" shining at noonday that Paul saw on the road to Damascus appropriately illustrates "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" which was so soon to come to him. (Acts 9:1-3; 26:12,13) Similarly, each called-out one, in proportion as they are ready for the message, sees a light far brighter than any of the lights of this world, and much more brilliant than can be given by human learning or philosophy.

This light comes not from any earthly source, but is a light from heaven communicated to us by God through his Word. Having received enlightenment concerning the great salvation in Christ Jesus, we are told that if we "walk in the light," we have fellowship with God and with one another, and we are cleansed from Adamic sin. (I John 1:7) We are exhorted to strive, that our thoughts and actions may be in accord with this enlightenment. In this way we become a "light in the Lord," and as we heed the admonition to "walk as children of light." (Eph. 5:8) Paul again says, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day."—I Thess. 5:5

We have been delivered from "the power of darkness" into God's marvelous light. (Col. 1:13) However, we must never forget that our continued enjoyment of the light is conditional. The psalmist wrote, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Ps. 119:105) We must walk in the pathway which is illuminated by God's Word, and seek to be obedient to its guidance and direction in our life.

Jesus gave solemn warnings concerning the light which has blessed us, saying that it must shine forth to others by word and by example, and not be hid from view. To hide the light will result in darkness, and “how great is that darkness!” (Matt. 5:14-16; 6:23) Later, in Jesus’ parable of the wedding feast, the king in the parable came to inspect the wedding guests, and finding one who was not properly attired, said, “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness.” (Matt. 22:11-13) How much more unfortunate would the position of such a one be than if he had never accepted the invitation to the wedding feast. Paul instructed us, “We are not of the night, nor of darkness. ... Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.”—I Thess. 5:5,8

LIGHT HAS MANY ENEMIES

We must never forget that the light of God, and the children of God illuminated by this light, have many enemies. First and foremost there is the great enemy of God and man, Satan, the ruler of the “darkness of this world,” of which we were once a part. Further, the subjects of his kingdom of darkness are far more numerous than the children of light, who have been delivered out of their former condition of darkness.

The Scriptures show how Satan is constantly attempting to deceive and mislead the children of light by making darkness appear as light, and light as darkness. “And no marvel,” Paul says, “for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” (II Cor. 11:14) Similarly, the prophet says, “Woe unto them

that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”—Isa. 5:20

We know from actual fulfillment how Satan has succeeded in deceiving many who claim to be God’s servants. Such deceptions of the Adversary have often resulted in the preaching of the darkness of false doctrine, while casting off as error the plainly stated light in the Word of God. As but one example, many have taught the bitter deception of Satan that all who die outside of Christ in the present age are forever lost, and will spend eternity in a state of conscious suffering. This, however, is in direct conflict with the beautiful message of God’s Word, which states that the Gospel, in due time, is to be “good tidings of great joy ... to all people.”—Luke 2:10

Indeed, all will be brought to an accurate knowledge of the Truth, and by obedience to the laws of God’s coming kingdom of righteousness, will be given the blessing of “eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (I Tim. 2:4-6; Rom. 6:23) Even for such a wicked people as those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah our Lord assures us that the thousand-year kingdom day of judgment will be a tolerable time—“more tolerable” than for some who had greater opportunities during the present life of coming to a knowledge of the Truth.—Matt. 10:15; Acts 17:31

THE END OF THE AGE

God, through his servant Paul, tells us that this conflict between light and darkness—between the children of light and the children of darkness—would be especially severe at the end of the present age, the time in which we are now living. The apostle calls

our attention to the bright shining of Christ's invisible presence at his Second Advent, saying at that time "there will be great activity on the part of Satan, in the form of all kinds of deceptive miracles, signs, and marvels, as well as wicked attempts to delude."—II Thess. 2:8,9, *Twentieth Century New Testament*

Against these attacks the faithful apostle exhorts the brethren, saying, "Stand firm, ... and hold fast to the truths that we taught you, whether by word or by letter." (vs. 15, *TCNT*) If we would stand against the wiles of the prince of darkness in this evil day, we must be faithful to the light with which we have been blessed, and walk in it. That is, our daily conduct and manner of life must be in accord with the enlightenment which has come to us. As the psalmist says, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."—Ps. 97:11

For the "upright in heart" living in this present day of trouble and spiritual famine in the world, the light of truth has shone brightly out of the darkness. To these, it is vitally important that they hold fast to, and walk in conformity with, the enlightenment now provided, as well as to possess more and more of its spirit of Christlikeness. Such is suggested by the psalmist's description of this class: "Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous."—Ps. 112:4, *English Standard Version*

Our Master said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6) In other words, I am showing you the way in which one who has been illuminated with the knowledge of God, his plans and purposes, should walk in order to realize the hope of glory, honor and immortality held out to them. Walking humbly in

this way, we are able to enjoy the very great honor our Lord placed upon his followers as suggested by his words, “Ye are the light of the world.” (Matt. 5:14) Indeed, the footstep followers of Christ have been the only true light-bearers in the world during the present age. Hence the Lord exhorts, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—vs.16

Though many in the world may see the “good works” of the Lord’s servants, at the present time the response is not generally to “glorify” the Heavenly Father. As John says, “The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” (John 1:5) The majority of mankind cannot comprehend the light of God’s plan at the present time. Many oppose the light and ridicule or, at times, even persecute the light-bearers. However, during the millennial kingdom, remembering their previous contact with the servants of the Truth, they will, as Peter says, “glorify God in the day of visitation.”—I Pet. 2:12

SPECIAL FULFILLMENTS

The Apostle Paul indicates that the things written aforetime in Old Testament prophecy have a special application and fulfillment in “the ends of the ages.” (I Cor. 10:11, *Revised Version*) When Jesus was present in Israel during his earthly ministry, it was noted with reference to certain things he was saying and doing: “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet.” (Matt. 13:35; 21:4) This shows that these prophecies to which Jesus referred, although given by God centuries before, were intended to have a special fulfillment at the end of the Jewish Age, at the time of Jesus’ First Advent. The Scriptures

indicate that even more prophecy was intended to have its special fulfillment when our Lord would return and again be present, though invisible, at the end of the present Gospel Age, just prior to the establishment of God's kingdom upon the earth, "wherein dwelleth righteousness."—Matt. 6:10; II Pet. 3:13

In the natural realm, the ending of nighttime and the dawning of a new day is first signaled by rays of light which begin to be seen above the eastern horizon prior to sunrise, penetrating the darkness, but not dispelling it. The Bible uses the same illustration to indicate that more light upon God's Word would be given to his people "upon whom the ends of the ages are come." This is the time which will culminate in bringing to a close the long night of darkness and sin, and usher in the new millennial day of light, righteousness and divine blessing.

Incorporating the symbols of darkness and light, night and day, Paul emphasizes the importance of our being awake and alert: "Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief: for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober." (I Thess. 5:4-6, *RV*) This is in keeping with the promised "meat in due season" which was to be dispensed when the Master would again be present. He said, "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."—Matt. 24:45; Luke 12:37

Indeed, God's glory has been seen in his gracious character and plan as these have been revealed to

those who are awake, alert and watching during this time in which the ending features of the present age are taking place. We now see with increased clarity God's character to be a perfect combination of infinite wisdom, justice, love and power. As this light has shined upon the faithful watchers, they have recalled Jesus' commission that the "gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations." Then, Jesus continues, "shall the end come." (Matt. 24:14) Thus, during this "end of the age" period, the Gospel message has gone forth worldwide as never before, and in ways that were not possible prior to this time in history. These present efforts have been for the purpose expressed by Jesus, that of "a witness," and not for the conversion of the world, which will be accomplished on a universal scale in God's kingdom.

LIGHT WILL DISPEL DARKNESS

In spite of all past and present misunderstanding and confusion, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (I John 1:5) All his doings relating to his human creatures are, and have always been, in the fullest accord with righteousness and truth, and prompted by his infinite love. Likewise Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, and man's Redeemer, is denoted by the Apostle John as "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." —John 1:9

The Prophet Isaiah wrote prophetically of the light which would, in due time, shine upon mankind through the redemptive work of Jesus. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon

them hath the light shined.” (Isa. 9:2) For six thousand years mankind has, for the most part, walked in darkness, not really knowing God and his gracious plan for their eternal blessing. Throughout this time the earth has been overshadowed by the darkness of suffering and death. Soon, however, man will see a “great light,” and “upon them” this light will shine. It will be the light of the “Sun of righteousness,” Christ Jesus, who shall “arise with healing in his wings.”—Mal. 4:2

The establishment of God’s kingdom, under the rulership of Christ and his faithful footstep followers of the present age, will dispel all darkness and bring the light of divine Truth to every corner of the earth, and upon each person. To accomplish this, the great resurrection work will take place, “every man in his own order.” (I Cor. 15:22,23) To begin with, there is the “first resurrection” of those who will live and reign with Christ. Then will be the “better resurrection” of the faithful ones of old, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others. This will be followed by the general resurrection of all the dead, both Jews and Gentiles.—Rev. 20:6; Heb. 11:35; John 5:28,29, *RV*; Acts 24:15

After Israel crucified their Messiah, blindness and darkness came upon them as a nation. However, as the apostle states, it is God’s eternal purpose that “all Israel shall be saved.” Christ, the one whom they crucified, will “come out of Sion” and deliver them from their blindness and darkness. He will “turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” (Rom. 11:25,26) The Gentile nations also will then begin to see and appreciate the light of the Gospel. Good tidings of great joy shall truly come to all people and nations!

Continuing the prophetic message of Isaiah chapter 9, we read: “Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased their joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.” (vs. 3, *RV*) We can well imagine how the joys of Israel and of all mankind will increase when they experience the blessings of God’s kingdom, and understand that the wonderful earthly inheritance lost through sin is to be restored to them! It will truly be “as men rejoice when they divide the spoil” of their harvest. The “spoil” will be the fruits of the Redeemer’s great victory, and the blessings which will come to all who, in that day of light, gain everlasting life by faithfully obeying from the heart God’s righteous and just laws.

The next verse of Isaiah’s prophecy points out that the burden and oppression upon mankind due to the curse of sin and death will be broken. (vs. 4, *RV*) The prophet then gives a picture of the destruction of the distressing burden of militarism and warfare which has been so commonplace during this so-called Christian dispensation, and especially during its closing years: “All the armour of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments [of war] rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire,”—that is, for destruction. (vs. 5, *RV*) Earlier in his prophecy, Isaiah writes specifically concerning this, that in God’s coming kingdom of peace the people “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”—Isa. 2:4

Returning to Isaiah chapter 9, verses 6 and 7 bring to a climax the great and all-important truths concerning the salvation to come to mankind during

the time of the kingdom. “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. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

In that kingdom day all will come to realize that a Son was born of the line of Abraham and David who has made atonement for the entire human family, all who lost life in Adam. As a result, mankind will receive the blessings associated with the restoration of all that was lost because of sin. Christ will be responsible for the affairs of earth in that day. Today he is not regarded by many as a wonderful counselor, for most give little attention to his teachings. Even those who have some theoretical knowledge of it seldom put his teachings and example into practice. When, however, under the influence of the righteous, just and loving rule of Christ the people begin to put into action the great principles of righteousness laid down by the Master, the results will surprise them.

The many social and political difficulties of the present time will quickly be resolved, and to the Master will be accorded, by common consent, the title—Wonderful Counselor—as well as the other names mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah. Surely, the vast majority of all human creation will sing with joy the refrain of our opening text, “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”—Ps. 27:1 ■

God's Great Gift

*“Thanks be unto
God for his
unspeakable gift.”
—II Corinthians 9:15*

THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS when the spirit of giving is more universally manifested than at any other time. How appropriate that Christians should remember that in God we have the greatest of all examples of unselfish giving. Indeed, the gift of his Son is so far beyond our ability to comprehend fully that it can be truly described as “unspeakable.” Paul’s reference to God’s great gift was very timely, for he used it as a climax of his appeal to the Corinthian church for funds to be sent to their brethren in other places who were in need.—II Cor. 9:1-14

In the New Testament, the financial needs of the followers of Jesus is not a subject of significant discussion, although it is not entirely ignored. Jesus and the apostles had a treasurer. For a time after Pentecost, the disciples pooled their resources in a common treasury, to be used as needed by the brethren and for the work of spreading the Gospel message.

When famine conditions arose in Judea, the elders in Antioch did not hesitate to make a special collection of funds to help supply the needs of the brethren in the stricken areas. (Acts 11:27-30) In the same chapter as our opening text, Paul complimented the brethren at Corinth for their generosity, and assured

them that the Lord loves a cheerful giver. (II Cor. 9:1,2,7) In all these references, however, there is no indication that the church of that day engaged in specially planned campaigns of money-raising, nor that every meeting of the disciples for study and worship was made an occasion for taking up a collection. They were not ashamed to mention the subject when the need arose, but money-raising was not the major business of the Christian life.

In the Early Church, properly motivated gifts of financial support were a manifestation of the spirit of Christ in the hearts of those who had dedicated themselves to follow in his footsteps. In setting forth the terms of discipleship Jesus told the rich young ruler that he should “distribute unto the poor,” then added, “come, follow me.” (Luke 18:22) The Early Church understood that to follow in the steps of the Master meant giving everything to God, even life itself. He in turn would make them stewards of that which now belonged to him, including their time, strength, money—their all—to be used in his service.

Thus we find that the subject of giving to the Lord, whether it be for the furtherance of the Gospel, or for the spiritual or material needs of his people, is shown to be quite appropriate in the church. In our text the Apostle Paul lifts the matter up to a sacred position in the hearts of the Corinthian brethren by likening it to what our Heavenly Father has done for us and for the world by the gift of his Son. He first uses such expressions as: “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly;” “Let him give, not grudgingly;” and “your liberal distribution unto them.” (II Cor. 9:6,7,13) Then Paul closes his appeal, saying, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

The apostle reminds us that God's gift of his beloved Son is the most precious of any and all gifts ever bestowed, costing our Heavenly Father more than has ever been equaled by any disciple of Christ. The extent of cost to God was approached only by Jesus, who, in following the example of his Father, gave himself to die on the cross that all might have an opportunity to live. It is this principle of giving, this true spirit of charity, or love, that is emphasized in the Bible. Its outworking in the details of our Christian lives will of necessity cause us to be unselfish and liberal in the use of whatever resources may come under our control as the Lord's stewards.

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

In the act of proper, unselfish giving, both the giver and receiver are made happy. We know how much joy God's gift has brought to us, and this is just as true of our Heavenly Father. As stated by Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) The joy of both the giver and receiver is enhanced when the gift is specially examined and appreciated. Thus, our joy should be increased by recalling some of the virtues of God's unspeakable gift of Jesus. In doing so we are sure to find in him the one who is "chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely."—Song of Sol. 5:10,16

Jesus, given by his Heavenly Father to be man's Redeemer and Savior of the world, is identified in his prehuman existence as the "Word [Greek: *logos*]" by John. The apostle says concerning the "Word" that "all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... 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 1:3,14

In Revelation 3:14, the Son of God is identified as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the Creation of God.” The Heavenly Father, speaking to us through the psalmist concerning his Son, declares: “I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.” (Ps. 89:27) In another scripture, where the Logos is personified as “Wisdom,” he is quoted as saying, “The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. . . . Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.”—Prov. 8:22-24,30

The testimony of the Scriptures is clear that the one whom our Heavenly Father chose to be his gift for the redemption of the world was the highest of all his creatures, the very beginning of his creation, and that he participated in all the remaining creative work. The Bible also indicates that the association of the Father and the Son was a very intimate one. The Son was constantly a delight to his Father, doing always those things which were pleasing to him. Their fellowship and mutual purpose are revealed in the Genesis account of creation, where we find the Father saying to his Son, “Let us make man in our image.” (Gen. 1:26) Who among us today would not thrill to have our Heavenly Father speak to us in such an intimate manner? Surely the partnership and love of God and his Son was hallowed and sweet, beyond the ability of the human mind to fully grasp.

It was this beloved Son whom the Heavenly Father elected to give for the redemption of the sin-cursed and dying race. No wonder that John, in writing about such a gift, emphasized the extent to which it manifests God's love for the world, saying that he "so" loved the world "that he gave his only begotten Son." (John 3:16) Among the angelic sons of God there were perhaps many who would gladly have served their Creator in this manner, and the "gift" of any one of them would not have been without cost to God, for he loved them all. However, he chose to give the one who meant the most to him, the one dearest to him of all his obedient and treasured creatures.

A gift reveals the love of the giver, not just because of the intrinsic value the gift may have, but also by what it represents to the giver. This is why Jesus called particular attention to the widow's two mites. (Mark 12:41-44) To the wealthy, two mites had little value. However, because it was all that the widow had, her gift represented a spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice far beyond what was possessed by those who, out of their abundance, were able to give large sums without sacrificing their material comforts.

We know that in reality our Heavenly Father is not "poor." Poetically, the psalmist, in describing God's riches, declares that "every beast of the forest," and the "cattle upon a thousand hills" are his. (Ps. 50:10) The entire universe is God's creation and is owned and controlled by him. There is nothing that we can give to God that will increase his possessions, nor does our withholding make him poor. How, then, could any gift which he might provide be akin to the widow's two mites?

The Logos was God's only direct creation, so from this standpoint, giving him to be the world's Redeemer meant the giving of all that the Father had. While the Son in his prehuman existence was not on the divine plane of life and could not reach fully to the great heights of his Father's thoughts, he was the highest of all in the spirit realm. In him the Creator enjoyed a larger measure of fellowship and companionship than with any of his other angelic sons. Hence, to give him up to die, meant the giving of that which cost the Creator more than anything else.

ONLY THE FIRST STEP

As previously quoted, the Logos was "made flesh, and dwelt among us, ... the only begotten of the Father." (John 1:14) The natural process of begetting and birth is something which our finite minds are incapable of fully understanding and explaining. To that extent, all life is in the realm of the miraculous. Similarly, we cannot understand precisely the manner in which the life of the Logos was transferred to Mary as a human embryo, and in due time born as a babe in Bethlehem.

In Philippians 2:8, Paul speaks of Jesus as being "found in fashion as a man." This suggests that he was no longer in the "fashion" of a spirit being, such as was the case in his prehuman existence as the Logos. This emphasizes how completely he was given up by the Father for a time. His being made flesh, however, was only the first step in the divine provision of the "unspeakable gift," in which God's boundless love for the fallen and dying human race would be manifested. The "Word," though now made flesh, was yet to give himself in death for the life of the world.

As a child, and until he was thirty years of age, Jesus no doubt gained an increased understanding of the fact that he had been born into the world for a special divine purpose. This is indicated when, in the Temple at the age of twelve, he inquired of his mother, “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49) However, not until he was thirty years of age, when he presented himself to John at Jordan to be baptized, did the Father communicate directly with him. At that time Jesus was assured of his true relationship to God by hearing the voice of his Father saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—Matt. 3:17

Here a sweet fellowship between the two was reestablished, and later Jesus said to his Father: I know that “thou hearest me always.” (John 11:42) Of necessity, though, it was a limited communion. Jesus was no longer living on a high plane of spirit life. He was a human being, and his ability to comprehend his Father’s thoughts was limited by his human mind. Indeed, his was a perfect human mind, but it was greatly constrained as compared with the knowledge and understanding he possessed as the Logos, that mighty one who shared in all the work of Creation.

In the former association of the Father and the Son, great works were done by them, creation and otherwise, but there is no reason to suppose that sacrifice and suffering were involved. Now it was different. Jesus was being offered in sacrifice, and the manner in which this must have affected the Heavenly Father is well represented by the experience of Abraham in offering up Isaac in sacrifice, as God had instructed him to do. It was a three days’ journey for Abraham and Isaac before they reached

the land of Moriah, where Isaac was to be offered, and the account says that “they went both of them together.”—Gen. 22:6

Thus it also was with the Heavenly Father and Jesus. In unity of spirit and purpose, they went “together,” as it were, from Jordan to Calvary. Just as Isaac displayed no opposition to his father, and willingly allowed himself to be placed on the altar to be sacrificed, so it was with Jesus. As he walked together with his Heavenly Father during the three and one-half years of his earthly ministry, his chief concern was to do always those things which pleased his Father. Jesus was also conscious of the fact that the Father was close to him. (John 16:32) This companionship and communion of the Father and the Son, though limited by the fact that one was on the divine spirit plane, and the other a human being, must, nevertheless, have been sweet and blessed.

Nevertheless, as they journeyed together in spirit, only the Father understood in advance the full scope of physical and mental pain and ignominy which lay ahead for Jesus, and to which the journey toward Calvary was leading. Surely, when we consider all that was involved in this complete giving of his Son by the Father, it should help us the more to understand the depth of what Paul had in mind when he described it as God’s “unspeakable gift.” Truly it was a gift which was exceedingly precious and costly.

JESUS’ WILLINGNESS

Jesus’ own part in humbly submitting to his Father’s will in the great redemptive plan for the recovery of the fallen race is also an important consideration. He said, speaking of his Father, “I do always

those things that please him.” (John 8:29) This was so completely true that he was able to say on another occasion, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (John 14:9) His obedience would, in fact, seem to make the Father’s part in the sacrifice even more costly. Obedience, such as Jesus rendered, merits reward and blessing, not ignominy and suffering. The Father, however, endured seeing his Son suffer severely, knowing that thus on him would be laid “the iniquity of us all,” in order that a way of escape from sin and death would be provided.—Isa. 53:6

From the time of his baptism, Jesus’ sentiment was, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart,” and he began to realize the full import of his coming to earth. (Ps. 40:7,8) During his forty days in the wilderness he no doubt learned more of the details surrounding his all-important mission—that he was to die for the sins of the world. Later he explained to his disciples that he expected to give his flesh “for the life of the world.” (John 6:51) He knew now that in being “made flesh,” the body which had been “prepared” for him was “for the suffering of death.”—Heb. 10:5; 2:9

We know that Jesus’ understanding of the Father’s plan, and of his own part in that plan, was progressive. Near the close of his ministry he acknowledged to his disciples that he did not then know the time of his Second Advent. (Matt. 24:3,36; Mark 13:32) Seemingly, also, he did not fully comprehend the extent of mental ignominy and pain which he was to suffer in connection with his death until very near the end. Thus each experience which came to him would serve as a further test of his obedience

to the divine will, and how wonderfully victorious he was in them all!

ON THE CROSS

One of the most crucial moments for Jesus was when, as he hung on the cross, the crowd cried out, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." Again, they cried, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." (Matt. 27:40,42) Here was a final opportunity on the part of the Father to take back the gift, or for Jesus to use divine power to deliver himself. To human thinking, it perhaps would have seemed appropriate for God to intervene and demonstrate to this sin-stained crowd that the one whom they were jeering at and crucifying was indeed his Son! Certainly, Jesus also could have thought to convince them that their conception of him was wrong, that he was not a blasphemer. He did not, but instead endured this "contradiction of sinners against himself."—Heb. 12:3

How little the people realized that by the Father not intervening in the matter, and Jesus' refusal to save himself, the two of them were, even in this most difficult hour, in full harmony and cooperation with each other. Indeed, in these very moments, the Father and his Son were providing the means of salvation for those responsible for the death of Jesus, as well as for all the families of the earth. What a Savior! What an "unspeakable gift" from the Heavenly Father!

In his final hours on the cross, Jesus continued to carry out the last remaining details of his earthly ministry, quoting several prophetic statements from the Old Testament which were now being fulfilled. (Ps. 22:1; 69:21) The last of these, from Psalm 31:5, was an expression of full confidence in his Father, as well as complete surrender to his will: "Father,

into thy hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46) Jesus then took his final breath as a human being. Now the gift had been fully given. The Heavenly Father had not only given his Son to be made flesh, but had traveled with him all the way to his death on the cross, because he “so greatly loved” the world. —John 3:16, *Amplified Bible*

THE COSTLY METHOD OF GIVING

Our appreciation of God’s unspeakable gift is greatly increased by seeing the immeasurable love which motivated him to make available the atoning blood of the Redeemer for the Church and for the world. In this is a great lesson. The principle of divine love represented both by the gift and by the manner in which it was given is held out in the Word of God as the only proper motivating power in our lives as we endeavor to be conformed to the pattern set before us, in both the Father and the Son. We, too, are to give all, and are never to take our sacrifice off the altar regardless of the suffering which may be involved in our offering.

An example of how this principle operates in actual practice is the unselfish love of the Philippian brethren for Paul, as manifested by sending him a gift while he was in prison at Rome. (Phil. 4:15-18) Of what the gift consisted the Scriptures do not disclose, and it is not important. Our interest is in the fact that the Philippian brethren loved Paul and demonstrated their love by sending him a gift. Paul appreciated this, and indirectly alludes to it in his epistle, saying, “I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more.” (Phil. 1:9) This was not a solicitation for another gift, but a compliment to their unselfish

interest in him as a servant of God and a brother in Christ. Their love had prompted the gift, and Paul wanted that same motivation to abound in all ways as they sought to know and carry out the divine will.

The gift itself meant much to the apostle. However, it was even more precious because of the great cost involved in its delivery. It had been brought to him by Epaphroditus, a member of the Philippian church, who, because of the hardships involved in making the journey to Rome, had become seriously ill and almost died. In sending this faithful servant back to the brethren at Philippi, Paul wrote, "Receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me."—Phil. 2:29,30, *Revised Standard Version*

No wonder Paul appreciated that gift so greatly. In the example of Epaphroditus' sacrifice, he saw the same spirit as that manifested by the Father in the gift by which his love has been so wonderfully demonstrated. The gift of Jesus truly is unspeakable, but the further love of the Father as manifested in his manner and motive of giving, and the great cost attached thereto, is so overwhelming in its implications that our finite minds cannot comprehend it, much less be able to describe such love.

The only adequate expression of appreciation we can make at all, in the face of the love manifested by God's "unspeakable gift," is in the offering of our all to him—life itself. Let us, therefore, with no reservations as to what may be involved in the way of hardship and trial, daily present our offering on the altar of praise to him who is the greatest of all givers.—Heb. 13:15 ■

“I Wish I Knew What To Do!”

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SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are invited by individual classes, or their services have been arranged by their home classes:

H. Montague

Online Broadcast of Convention
Ibadan, Nigeria December 5

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Numerous conventions in coming months will not be held in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these, however, will have an online broadcast alternative. Listed below are the details which the Dawn has been made aware of concerning upcoming conventions. Please contact the brethren shown in the listings to find out the status of a convention, and also how you can attend an online broadcast if one is planned.

IBADAN, NIGERIA CONVENTION, December 5—
The first section will be **ONLINE AND IN PERSON**.
The second section will be **IN PERSON ONLY** at the Ibadan Ecclesia place of fellowship. Contact C. O. Egbu. Email: egbucaje@gmail.com

CHICAGO NEW YEAR CONVENTION, January 2,3
—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY——Contact D. Whittaker. Phone: (630) 293-4810 or Email: donnawh@live.com

HARTFORD CONVENTION, February 7—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact J. Slivinsky. Phone: (860) 289-0116 or Email: djslivinsky@sbcglobal.net

The Stable of Bethlehem

'Twas not a palace proud and fair
God chose his Son's first home;
No dazz'ling pile of grandeur rare,
With pillar'd hall and dome;
Oh no! a stable, rude and poor,
Received Him at his birth;
And thus was born, unknown, obscure,
The Heir of Heaven and Earth.

No band of anxious menials there,
To tend the new-born child,
Joseph alone and Mary fair
Upon the infant smiled;
No broidered linens fine had they
Those little limbs to fold,
No baby garments rich and gay,
No tissues wrought with gold.

Come to your Savior's lowly bed,
All ye of humble heart,
And learn with bowed and humbled head
The lesson 'twill impart;
'Twill teach you not to prize too high
The riches vain of earth—
But to lay up in God's bright sky
Treasures of truer worth.
—Poems of the Way

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.—Philippians 2:9-11