

THE BIRTH OF JESUS continued from page 1

In explaining why the birth of Jesus occurred in a stable, and not in some more comfortable place, the inspired writer said that “there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). The reason there was no room for them in the inn was not that the innkeeper was mean or cruel. It was simply a matter of others having arrived first, and the inn was full of guests. This reminds us of the fact that Jesus has no place in the lives of the great majority of the people in the world, and in many cases it is not because of some hatred they have for Jesus. It is not because of ill will toward Him or His church. In fact, they may have a tender feeling in their hearts for His cause, but they still give Him no place in their lives. Why? For the simple reason that they have allowed their lives to become so filled with other matters that they have no room left for Him.

In modern times, if we are going to need a motel or hotel room, we make reservations in advance. Joseph and Mary had made no advance reservations. Those who have a place for Christ in their lives today must make reservations in advance. Do not fill your life with all the things that fill so many lives, and plan then to crowd Christ in. It won't work that way. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Mat. 6:33). We must arrange our priorities correctly if we expect to have room for the Lord.

What if the innkeeper in Bethlehem had known the importance of the event that was about to take place? Don't you know he would have made room for Joseph and Mary, even if he had to give them his own room, or put someone else in the stable? A failure to recognize the importance of serving the Lord causes Christ to be crowded out of the lives of many. If one could only realize how much faithful obedience to the Christ could mean to him, he would never remain in disobedience. If one could only fathom the sorrow which will certainly come to the disobedient, he would never secure his own heart's permission to remain in disobedience.

When the angel announced to the shepherds the birth of Jesus, the Bible tells us the shepherds “came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger” (Luke 2:16). They “came with haste.” They did not say, “Well, we know we really should go into Bethlehem and find the baby, but we are not ready yet. We will one of these days.” Yet, there is nothing to indicate that their eternal salvation depended upon their going to Bethlehem and finding the baby. How is it that those who know their eternal salvation depends upon their obedience to the Gospel can be so apathetic toward that obedience? What kind of reasoning is it that causes one to say, “Well, I know I really should obey the Gospel...and one of these days I plan to do so”? It seems that reason would demand that those who know they are lost in sin, and who know they must obey Christ to be saved, would come “with haste” in obedience to His will.

Luke 2:17 says: “And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.” If these shepherds were given a command to do as they did, the Bible does not record it. Yet, they were anxious to tell others about the Saviour which had been born in Bethlehem that night. We have been commanded to tell all the people in the world about that same Saviour (Mark 16:15; Mat. 28:19). But we are doing a pretty good job of keeping the matter secret. Let us resolve within our hearts that our lives will be given in service to Him who was born in Bethlehem.

Bobby Duncan, Deceased



BELVEDERE BEACON
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The Birth of Jesus

The birth of Jesus furnishes an example of how prophecy and providence worked together. When the wise men came to Jerusalem inquiring where the King of the Jews should be born, the chief priests and scribes could confidently answer:

In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written through the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come forth a governor, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel (Mat. 2:5-6).

The prophecy of Micah 5:2 was plain, so they had no difficulty in understanding.

Though they lived in Nazareth of Galilee, Joseph and Mary had journeyed to Bethlehem, and were there where the prophet had specified the Christ would be born. They were there because of a certain enrollment which was forced upon them and all others by a decree which had been given by Caesar Augustus. The prophet miraculously named the place, and then God providentially arranged for Joseph and Mary to be in that place.

Look at the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding it in contrast with the ideas of Premillennialists. His birth and the circumstances surrounding it simply do not coincide with the kind of king the Premillennialist demands. The Premillennialist never would have selected a little town like Bethlehem. He never would have let Him be born in a stable, or be laid in a manger. All of this was totally contrary to the kind of King the Premillennialist is looking for.

But was not this one of the problems of the Jews in Jesus' day? Were they looking for this kind of king? The spiritual nature of the Lord's kingdom was a stumblingblock to the Jews of Jesus' day and to the Premillennialists of our day. Both the Jews of Jesus' day and the Premillennialists of our day insist that the kingdom be an earthly kingdom and that its king be an earthly king. The announcement to Joseph (Mat. 1:21) that “he that shall save his people from their sins,” should let all know that the rule and reign of Christ would not be political in nature, but spiritual. And our Lord's own statement in John 18:36 to the effect that His kingdom is “not of this world,” should let all know that He never intended to be an earthly king.

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Give and God Will Bless You

On the Aiken-Augusta highway there is a church building with a big sign out front : “Holy St. John Temple” underneath it states “Help and God will bless.” This time of year we are confronted with the folk outside of stores with their bells and red buckets seeking to get shoppers to put money in the bucket. During the summer months we often find young people outside of businesses seeking to raise funds for various projects either selling items or offering car washes. Some of these are community projects but many are religious organizations and churches seeking to raise funds. With youth groups from churches, it is often a car wash, with inappropriately dressed young ladies, to raise funds for their activities or “mission trips.” Whether these religious groups and churches make a specific statement like the one mentioned above, they strongly imply that contribution to their religious cause that “God will bless.”

But is that so? Can we, as Christians contribute to such causes and have God to bless us? The answer of scripture is “No” for at least two reasons.

First, we are taught that we are not to have fellowship with the “*unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*” (Ephesians 5:11). When we give to religious groups and churches we have fellowship with them by sharing of the bounty that God has blessed us with. Do these religious groups and churches (and those with the bells and red buckets are raising funds for the work of the Salvation Army which is a church - a visit to their web site - www.salvationarmy.org will quickly confirm that they are) teach the truth? A study of the beliefs and practices of such groups will confirm that they are not. That being so, they are indeed “*unfruitful works of darkness*” in the eyes of the Lord as they are false teachers giving false hope. Thus rather than having fellowship with the purveyors of error, we should “*reprove them.*”

But, someone might ask, what if those seeking to raise funds in this manner proclaim that they represent a church of Christ, can we then support such work with God’s blessing? Indeed, there are some congregations that have practiced such activities to raise funds for the work of the church – car washes, sales from the trunks of cars, etc. However, such is a violation of scripture. The Lord’s people are taught that they are to give voluntarily of their means, as they have been prospered on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1,2; II Corinthians 9:7). There is **no authority** in the Scriptures for the Lord’s people to go to the world to raise funds for the work of the church. Thus to support such would again place a faithful Christian in violation of Ephesians 5:11.

It might be asked, what about non religious groups that conduct such fund raisers such as band boosters, football boosters and a host of other causes. If we desire to help such causes there is no sin involved and might help a good cause in the community.

However, when it comes to God blessing our giving, it will only come as we give cheerfully as we have been prospered to the work of the Lord (II Corinthians 9:7) thorough our contribution on the first day of the week.

May we indeed give in such a way that God will bless us.

Ken Chumbley

NEWS AND NOTES

Keep in your prayers the following: Helen Culpepper, Pam Gossett, Lavonne McClish, Linda Chumbley, Maomi Aaron’s sister, Leann Rogers, who is having health problems, and Lanny Niver together with his daughter and son, and Tim Smith.

Lanny Niver is doing some better but still has health problems that limit his movements from time to time.

Ken Ford continues to recuperate at home following his surgery in Brisbane, Australia. Ken Chumbley has been able to talk with him on the phone a couple of times this week to keep up with his progress.

Tim Smith’s is still having difficulties although he is somewhat improved. He has a doctors appointment this week.

The next pot-luck will be next Sunday, December 27 after the morning services. Plan to stay and eat with us.

IF YOU HAD DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD HOW WOULD YOU FEEL . . .

- . . . when men took your name in vain?
 - . . . when men damaged their bodies dabbling in sin instead of glorifying you as their savior in their bodies?
 - . . . when men fussed and got angry among themselves in the which you had established and thus brought reproach upon you?
 - . . . when men chose to go somewhere else on the day which you had set aside for men to worship you?
 - . . . when men refused to obey what you said they had to do to gain the benefit of your death?
 - . . . when men did not appreciate your sacrifice enough to stay for the supper you had left as a memorial of it?
 - . . . when men did not respect you enough to wear your name?
 - . . . when men did not care whether their conduct caused anyone else to stumble?
- Did you ever stop to think? The Son of God probably would think the same as you would about such thoughtless people.

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