

THE GLORIOUS PROCLAMATION

– *DECEMBER 19.* – *LUKE 2:1-20.* –

THE ANGELIC MESSAGE OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS DAY – "GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY" – TO BE ACCOMPLISHED DURING THE MILLENNIUM – THE BLESSING TO COME FIRST TO THE CHURCH AND THEN TO THE WORLD – THEN "PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO MEN" FOREVERMORE – "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!"

"For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." – Verse 11.

THE Message of the angels to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem becomes more and more precious to each child of God in proportion as he grows in grace and knowledge. As his ears and eyes of understanding open more widely to the lengths and breadths of God's great Plan of the Ages, that prophetic Message is the more highly esteemed as an epitome of the entire Gospel. Nor can our attention be called too frequently to the great event which lies at the foundation of that Message – the Savior's birth.

It matters not that December 25th is not the real anniversary of the Savior's birth, but probably the anniversary of the annunciation by the angel Gabriel, the anniversary of the Virgin Mary's conception, our Lord being born nine months later on the calendar, or about October 1. One so great, whose birth, death and resurrection from the dead mean so much to the human family, may be remembered and celebrated any day, every day, by all who appreciate what He has done for our race. Since, then, the majority of Christian people have become habituated to the celebration of December 25th as our Lord's birthday, we need

make no protest, but join with all in celebrating that day with rejoicing of heart, giving gifts and remembrances one to another, thus copying Divine favor, which gave to mankind the Son of God as a gift of mercy and love for our redemption.

For more than four thousand years the promises of God, clothed in more or less obscurity, had been given to mankind, intimating that ultimately the great curse of sin and death that had come upon the world through Father Adam's disobedience in Eden would be rolled away, and instead of a curse, a blight, would come a blessing of the Lord with life-giving refreshment. In various types, figures and shadowy promises this lesson had come down through the ages to the time of our Lord's birth, especially amongst the Jews, who were the Divinely favored and covenanted people.

Since the Jews were a people of commercial spirit, many of them were to be found in all parts of the civilized world. Thus amongst every people the faith in the one God and the hope of Israel through a Messiah were more or less made known, so that at the time of our Savior's birth, we read, "all men were in expectation" of a coming Messiah. Doubtless this expectation was based upon the interpretation of Daniel's prophecy, which we now see clearly marked the year of our Lord's majority, when He was thirty years of age and made His consecration to His work and received the begetting of the Holy Spirit, His anointing as the great antitypical Priest and as the great antitypical King over Israel and the world. – Daniel 9:24-27.

FROM BETHLEHEM TO NAZARETH

In olden times there were honorable cities and mean cities. Nazareth was generally recognized as one of the latter, while Bethlehem was distinctly one of the former – the City of David, Israel's beloved king. The Scriptures explain that Mary, our Lord's mother, and her husband Joseph were both of the lineage

of David, and [R5819 : page 377] that in a seemingly accidental manner the prophecy was fulfilled which foretold that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. – Micah 5:2.

At that time the Roman Empire bore rule over the whole world, the Jews being subject to it, but waiting expectantly, restlessly, for the coming Messiah, who would deliver them from being a subject people and make of them the ruling caste in His Kingdom, which would have dominion over the whole world. The great Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus was in power at this time, and had sent forth his decree for a polling or census, of the whole world for the purpose of taxation, etc.

St. Luke informs us that it was in response to this royal decree that Joseph and Mary went up to their native city to be enrolled; that thus it was that Jesus was born in Bethlehem; that on account of the great concourse of people at the same time and for the same purpose, accommodations were scarce and the stable of the khan or inn, was used by some as a lodging; and that Joseph and Mary, being late comers, were forced to occupy these humble quarters. Thus it was that the King of Glory, whose Kingdom is by and by to rule the world, was in the time of His flesh born in a stable and cradled in a manger.

THE ANGELS AND THE SHEPHERDS

Noble shepherds those must have been to whom the Almighty sent the angelic Message respecting the birth of Jesus, the Messiah – the Message which has rung down the ages and reached our ears, the Message which thrills us the more in proportion as we are able to grasp its meaning. First, an angel appeared to the shepherds and allayed their fears, saying, "Fear not; behold, I bring you good tidings." It would appear that fear is one of the dominating impulses of the human mind, especially in conjunction with Divine revelations.

Men realize – even the best of the race – that they are imperfect, and that the Almighty and His laws are perfect. Instinctively the world seems to realize that a curse, or condemnation of the Almighty, rests upon it; and instinctively it fears a further curse, a further condemnation, realizing its continual and increasing sinfulness. The same is true today with all except the comparatively few who are well informed respecting the Divine Plan. Thus the subject is generally obnoxious to the world – a subject which they prefer to avoid, because of a feeling of guilt and a dread of further knowledge and condemnation.

It is for the true children of God today, as it was for the angels at that time, to assure the world that God is better than all their fears – that God so loved the world as to redeem mankind from the just sentence of death, the curse that came upon all as inheritors of Adam's imperfection and sentence.

"Good tidings" is another translation of our word Gospel. How beautiful is the thought that the Gospel is really and truly good tidings! Alas, for the misrepresentations of God's Plan, because of which so many of His professed people misrepresent His character and His Word, and apply the term Gospel to their various messages from the Dark Ages, teaching purgatory and eternal torment as the portion of the race!

Let us get away from this false thought and get the truth that the Gospel is good tidings. The angel elaborated, saying that his Message was "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Ah, thank God, His Plan is wider, deeper, higher and grander than anything which we had ever conceived! The Gospel Message is not merely to be good tidings to the comparatively few that now have ears to hear and eyes to see its beauties, but in God's due time it is to be good tidings of great joy to all people the world over.

As every member of Adam's race shared in his fall and in the curse of death which came upon him as a result of his disobedience, so every member of the race was included in the great redemptive sacrifice which our Lord Jesus offered and which was finished at Calvary. God's Plan in Christ, as it is being worked out and shall ultimately be accomplished, will mean great joy for all people; and the tidings of this fact were given at the very moment of our Lord's birth, because He was the One through whom all the glorious things of the Divine Purpose and Plan shall ultimately be accomplished.

THE LOGIC OF THE MESSAGE

The Message took cognizance of the fact that it was to reasonable people, who would wish to know why the unchangeable God, who had once pronounced a curse upon the race, should at any time so amend and alter matters as to supplant the curse with a blessing. The messenger stated the philosophy of the Divine Plan – "Unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ [Messiah] the Lord." There we have the key to the entire Gospel statement of how God could be just and yet be the Justifier of sinners who accept Jesus. – Romans 3:26.

The word Savior here signifies Life-giver. How beautiful is the thought that as death is the wage of sin, the curse upon the race, this Messiah who was born is to be the One who will rescue the race from the sentence by giving them life again! The explanation of how He would give them life was not made, nor was it necessary at that time. But now, in the light of the developments and with the explanations furnished through the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, we see that our Lord's voluntary sacrifice of His life, dying "the Just for the unjust," settles the claims of Divine Justice against Adam, and thus incidentally against all who share his death sentence, namely, all mankind.

Truly, the more we see of the Divine Plan for our salvation, which began to take shape in the birth of Jesus, the more we feel like shouting with the angelic choir praises to the God of Heaven, thankfulness for His mercy to the children of men! It mattered not that the babe born in Bethlehem was the Savior only in prospect, that He could not even be anointed to do His work until He reached manhood's estate thirty years later. It mattered not that even then it would be necessary for Him to lay down His life gradually during the three and a half years of His earthly ministry, to be finished at Calvary. Nor did it matter that His resurrection was still three days after His death, and His ascension forty days later; and that the blessing in general would be deferred for nearly nineteen centuries thereafter. As the angels could sing and rejoice at the first budding of the Divine Plan of Salvation, so also can all who have faith in the ultimate outcome rejoice with joy unspeakable and give praise to God in the highest and to His Son our Lord.

"SAVED BY HOPE"

Although nearly nineteen centuries have rolled away since that angelic Message was delivered, it has not yet been fulfilled except in a limited measure by faith to those who have the eye and the ear of faith – in all, a "little flock." But the bad tidings of great misery for nearly all people have been spread abroad in the name of Christ, much to the discredit of the Divine Plan and to the dishonor of the Divine character. Instead of **[R5819 : page 378]** carrying joy, the message has very generally carried grief and sorrow, especially to the kind-hearted and more generously disposed. Indeed we may say that no message of the Lord Jesus has ever reached all people. Even today, after nineteen centuries of propaganda, only a comparatively small portion of the human family have ever heard of the only name given under Heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved – "nor is there salvation in any other." – Acts 4:12.

What, then, shall we say of the salvation which has come to those who have truly accepted Christ as their Savior, who are today rejoicing in Him as such, and who by faith are seeing the salvation of God begun in their own hearts and yet to be fully accomplished under the whole heavens? This the Apostle calls the salvation by hope. His words are, "We are saved by hope."
– Romans 8:24.

We are not saved actually; we are still surrounded by sin, pain, sighing, crying and dying; the curse is not yet rolled away. All that the best of the Lord's people have yet received is salvation by hope, by faith. Yet this anticipation of the future salvation, of the resurrection from the dead, of a participation in the glory, honor and immortality of the Divine nature promised to the faithful, is so strong, so clear, that those who possess it are enabled to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, even in the midst of trials, difficulties, weaknesses and unfavorable conditions incident to the curse which still rests upon the world of mankind.

A PROPHECY OF GOOD THINGS

The angelic Message was a prophecy of good things to be accomplished for the Church and the world during the Millennial Age. The Church is to have the first blessing. The First Resurrection is to be composed only of the blessed and holy who shall live and reign with Christ during the thousand years. Then Satan shall be bound, and the good influences of truth and righteousness shall enlighten the whole earth. (Revelation 20:1-6.) The declaration of the Scriptures is that the deliverance of the Church will come early in the morning of the Millennial Day. As the prophet declares, "God will help her early in the morning."
– Psalms 46:5, margin.

But much as we rejoice in the glorious hopes of the Gospel set before us who now see, who now rejoice with joy

unspeakable, we are glad that the Divine mercy and love are of such lengths and breadths and heights and depths as to encompass the whole world of mankind, and to provide a blessing for every member of Adam's race through Him who loved us and bought us with His own precious blood.

During the Millennium this prophecy will have fulfilment. The great Savior who has already redeemed us by His sacrifice will stand forth as the King, the glorified Messiah, and establish His dominion of righteousness in the world for the blessing and uplifting of every member of the race. In harmony with the words of the Apostle, those will be Times of Refreshing, "Times of Restitution of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:19-21.) If the Lord had based the hope of the world upon some works of merit or righteousness of the world's doing, then indeed we might have feared – indeed, the more we know of the world, the less hope we would have. But, on the contrary, the Lord has based the entire proposition for the future blessing, not upon our worthiness, but upon the worthiness and sacrifice of His Son. To you is born a Life-giver, which is Messiah the Lord.

How it adds to our enjoyment of the blessings of the coming Age to know that the trials and difficulties of the present Gospel Age are subject to the Divine supervision in the interest of the Little Flock that is now being gathered in advance from amongst men – the Elect, the Church! We see how the present trials and difficulties are the chiselings and polishings necessary to our development in the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit in character-likeness of God's dear Son, our Lord, our Hope, our Bridegroom. How joyful the thought that soon the elect number called from the world to be "the Bride, the Lamb's Wife," will be completed and enter into her glory! How precious the thought that then they shall be privileged with their Lord and Master to extend

the Divine favor of blessing and uplift to the world! What higher honor or privilege or blessing could possibly come to any one?

THE ANGELS' SONG

It was after the giving of the Message of good tidings of great joy by the Heavenly one that a host of angels appeared to the shepherds, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men." This, too, is a prophecy. It is not yet true, but will be fulfilled in every particular in God's due time, which we believe is now nigh, even at the door. Not yet does God receive glory in the highest. Not yet is there peace amongst men. Quite to the contrary. God's name is blasphemed, not only by those who vulgarly and in ribald jest take the Divine name in vain, not merely by the heathen who worship devils and think that these are gods, but even by Christian people. Every day God's name is blasphemed by those who profess to be His people, who profess to uphold the Holy Name.

For be it known that blasphemy is any dishonorable misrepresentation of another. God be merciful to us! for at some time or other doubtless every one of us has blasphemed His holy name in this manner – by misrepresenting the Divine character and the Divine Plan, by picturing the God of Love, of Mercy, of Justice and of Truth as the originator, the planner, the perpetrator of the eternal torment of the great mass of His human creatures, born in sin, misshapen in iniquity, prone to sin as the sparks to fly upward!

But the Lord had mercy upon us because we did it ignorantly. Therefore we should have compassion upon others who still ignorantly misrepresent our God; and our energies should be continually bent to their assistance, that the eyes of their understanding might open more widely to perceive the lengths and breadths and heights and depths, and to know the love of God, which passeth understanding.

Noting that peace on earth and good will to men have not followed the Savior's birth thus far, and not discerning that this is a prophecy of what is to be accomplished during the Millennium, many have been inclined to change the translation of this verse so as to have it read, "On earth peace amongst men in whom He is well pleased." However, by this change the statement would not be true; for even the Lord's people have no peace upon earth. Whatever peace they have is in their hearts, and is based upon their faith in God and in the glorious things which He has promised. Our Lord Himself and the Apostles testified to this, assuring us that whosoever in this present time would live godly should suffer persecution, and that a man's foes should be they of his own household. – 2 Timothy 3:12; Matthew 10:36.

Let us not confuse ourselves nor abridge the testimony of the Word, but with the eye of faith look forward to the Day of Christ, in which all these glorious **[R5819 : page 379]** prophecies will have their fulfilment, in which peace shall indeed fill the whole earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, bringing Divine favor and rolling away the curse from the entire groaning creation, as pointed out by the Apostle. – Romans 8:22.

FULFILLED IN GOD'S DUE TIME

Not even with the inauguration of the Millennium will this prophecy be fulfilled. Not until its close, when the human family shall have been lifted by the Kingdom regulations out of sin, sickness, pain, sorrow and death, up, up to all that was lost in Adam – not until then will there indeed be glory to God in the highest, not until then will there be peace amongst men. Nor are we to understand that the entire race will be appreciative of the Divine love and favor even after they have fully seen the righteousness of God in Christ manifested. On the contrary, the Scriptures seem to teach clearly that there will be a class who will then prove unfit for life eternal, unappreciative of the Divine

favor. And it is with satisfaction that we learn that all such shall be destroyed from amongst the people in the Second Death.

Thus eventually, by the close of the Millennium, Satan and all wilful wrongdoers having been destroyed, the time will come, as declared in the Scriptures, when all voices in Heaven and in earth and under the earth shall be heard praising God and the Lamb forever. Hosanna! Glory to God in the highest! Peace and good will to men! This will be the final shout of a redeemed race when the great Plan of Salvation shall have been fully outworked according to the Divine Purpose from the beginning, as set forth in the Scriptures.

FROM GLORY TO A MANGER

The time of our Lord's birth is quite clearly fixed. In STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, Vol. II., we have gone into the subject in detail, and will not here repeat our deductions. The notable census made by order of Caesar Augustus included the civilized world of that day; and according to Jewish custom each family and tribe had their names enrolled therein.

Both Joseph and Mary, being of the Davidic line, went to the City of David – Bethlehem – to be enrolled. The city is a small one, located on a hillside. The inns or hotels of that land are very different from ours. They are neither hotels nor drinking saloons, but are entered from a court-yard. Various large, unfurnished rooms are at the service of the traveler, who carries with him his wraps, in which he sleeps, and also his food and utensils for such light housekeeping as he may choose to do. Stalls for horses, camels, etc., are provided on the ground floor; and in the event of a crowd, as on such an occasion, it is no uncommon thing for people, finding the upper rooms crowded full, to make themselves nearly as comfortable in the stabling department.

Thus it came that our Savior was ushered in a most humble manner into the world which, as the Logos, He had made. (John 1:10.) It was there in the stable of the overcrowded inn that the shepherds found the babe, as predicted by the angels, and went forth proclaiming the fact. Mary made no boasts, however, but waited for God's due time.

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