### Walking with Wise Men

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

— Proverbs 13:20 —

The company we keep matters. It is a vital component of our sanctification to associate most closely with those of like mind, and especially to learn from those who have advanced in matters of faith and wisdom. We also do well to associate with those on the pages of Scripture – those whose faith has been uniquely demonstrated and eternally canonized therein by the Spirit of God. Let us take a moment to reflect on what wise men the Wise Men were, for their example can no doubt edify every one of us!

The Wise Men appear at the beginning of the New Testament, coming on the scene suddenly, in Matthew 2:1-2. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea 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." God was doing a new thing in the earth, and these satraps from a distant land were not going to be left out. They came. Their faith drove them to action, even if it took them far from comfort and familiarity. The lesson? Be where God is working, and work where God has taken you.

The Wise Men were few in number. The Bible does not tell us how many, exactly, but it is doubtful it was more than three. Of all men everywhere on the earth at the time, only a few were awaiting and watching. They had seen His star. For how long they were watching we do not know, perhaps up to two years or more prior to their arrival. The watchful and the discerning are few, but that does not deter their faith!

The Wise Men were genuinely inquisitive. God welcomingly entertains questions from right spirits. The first question recorded in the Bible is a disingenuous one. "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat...?" How Jehovah must have loved the seeking nature of these Wise Men to eternally enshrine their genuine, searching question in contradistinction to the Serpent's as the first question of the New Testament, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"

The Wise Men were joyful. When they star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. The joy of the Lord is the strength of the wise souls.

The Wise Men were sacrificial. They presented gifts to Christ from their treasures. Their gifts were both highly valuable and significantly meaningful. They gave thoughtfully, and did so until it hurt. This is worship. This is the way of blessing.

The Wise Men were obedient. They were warned by God to depart another way. This action would no doubt put a price upon their heads, yet they did as they were commanded, regardless of the threat of personal loss.

Lord, make us wise like the Wise Men. - D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

The Healing Touch

rk 5:25-27 A certain woman which had an issue of blood twelve y

Mark 5:25-27 A certain woman which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment.

Consider the plight of this pitiable woman who pined away with a debilitating, hemorrhagic disease for twelve years, desperately visiting any doctor that proffered a cure. But having been seen by "many physicians" and spending "all that she had" her situation only worsened. It was time to seek the healing aid of the Great Physician!

As John informs us (John 20:30), Jesus performed many more miracles than could be written in the gospel record. Each recorded act must have had an intrinsic value for it to have won the honor of inclusion in the sacred annal. In this case, as with all of the miracles of our Lord, there is a profound spiritual lesson to be learned.

Here was a woman who, though for twelve years of dealing with a vitiating, deadly sickness, continued to seek for a cure. Who among us, having spent our savings on worthless cures, wouldn't have thrown up our arms in abject despair and resigned ourselves to an inevitable fate? But this woman who "against hope believed in hope" and, though now with her fortune spent and with her physical energies exhausted, she pushed against the unyielding multitude in hope of reaching the Savior. Oh, that men today would press against the denying forces with similar vigor and at last reach the hem of the Healer of the soul!

And so this woman, unclean, emaciated, exhausted, impoverished, and dying and yet resolute in purpose, falls at the feet of the Son of God. Charlatan "preachers" insist that to get from God you must "plant a seed" (which means give money in the offering) before the Lord can give you His blessings. But this woman had nothing to bring since "she had spent all that she had". Jesus gives his grace to those who have no money nor any other price to offer him. His terms are "without money and without price". Likewise, we have nothing to offer the Lord as we fall before His feet, afflicted with the deadly effects of sin.

The doctors of religion and philosophy were consulted and their worthless modalities failed to sate our guilt but instead, our condition only worsened. But there, within the reach of our weakened hand, the needed virtue flowed forth with its vivifying power, and in that instant, we were made completely whole. In a moment of time, the release from the bondage of sin's deadly grasp and we became immediate beneficiaries of His saving grace. As Jesus said to the woman, He now says to us "be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole".

Blessing to all who read,

Pastor

Faith cometh by heaving; and heaving by the word of God Romans 10:17

## **Growing Again**

Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.

Judges 16:22

Samson is one of those enigmatic figures of the Bible. The exploits of his life can be an inspiration, while his sinful waywardness and disobedience stand as a warning to all. He is one of the Biblical characters who is known even by the non-Christian community. The reputation of his great physical strength that supposedly emanated from his long hair set him apart as one of the heroes of the Old Testament. Samson's birth was unique in that it was announced by the angels. His parents were instructed that he was to be a Nazarite and that no razor was to touch his head. He was given the name Samson which means "like the sun" and his life was to shine for God's glory. His strength was not his own but derived from his obedience to the Nazarite vow. Despite Samson's poor choices, God was faithful and used him to combat the enemies of Israel. Samson crossed the line of God's patience when he divulged the secret of his strength. The Nazarite vow was broken when Delilah cut his hair and God's strength departed, which led to persecution from his enemies. In his humiliation, Samson realized how far he had strayed from his commitment to God. But the faithfulness of God rises above His servant's unfaithfulness and Samson's hair begins to grow again. Samson regains the Lord's power for one final act against the Philistines.

The life of Samson provides many spiritual lessons for us either to emulate or to avoid. He had the confidence to face his enemies, but eventually, he relied on his own strength which led to his downfall. His lack of restraint with His passions led the strong man to a point of utter weakness. Even after Delilah revealed her true nature, Samson eventually disclosed his source of strength and surrendered his Nazarite commitment. In this dark situation, the Lord shines His grace. Samson's hair begins to grow again and God renews Samson's strength to defeat the Philistines.

Prayerfully, we will never stray as far as Samson did, but all of us have had times of unfaithfulness. Usually, these times of disobedience lead to further decline. One bad choice leads to another bad choice, and eventually, we find ourselves captive to the adversary. Fortunately, our God is True and Faithful, and His faithfulness far exceeds our own. He promises if we draw close to Him, He will draw close to us in return.

Today, if we find ourselves defeated, and it seems insurmountable to regain any spiritual strength, just remember that Samson's hair did begin to grow again. - J Ekis

### The God of heaven

Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 2:20

As Nehemiah answers the mocking jeers of the Samaritan enemies of God's people, he invokes an appellation for the LORD as "the God of heaven." A review of the use of this title by the followers of the LORD reveals its appropriate application. It is first used by Abraham in his discussion with his Syrian servant Eliezer, so that he would understand the import of his oath to God, and of God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 24:3, 7). Then Daniel the prophet, exiled in Babylon, applies the title among his peers, all surrounded by their Gentile captors, as well as before Nebuchadnezzar, the Gentile king of the empire (Daniel 2). Next, the term is used by Cyrus, the first emperor over the Persian realm, as he proclaims the charge of the God of heaven to him for the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem, and the invitation to the captive Jews to return and rebuild (Ezra 1:2). In the balance of the book of Ezra, the God of heaven is referred to by the Jews in response to the Samaritans who persisted in hindering the rebuilding, in their enemies' correspondence with the Persian kings, and in the correspondences of both Persian kings Darius and Artaxerxes, in their orders back to the enemies of Israel, and in support of Ezra's work for the establishment of temple worship.

From these contexts, it is relevant that the communications were to or by Gentiles who had vague or no knowledge of the LORD God of Israel. Their experience with religion would have been polytheistic, idolatrous, and superstitious imaginations of deity. These local "gods" would have been associated with earthly notions, like the god of the mountains or valleys, or of the sky or the sea. Therefore, Jehovah's representatives chose a frame of reference that would overcome the perspective of the heathen. From man's perspective, there is nothing higher than heaven. The God of heaven is over all the highest of the high that they might imagine. And the God of heaven had made a personal pact with Abraham and his seed that left them the memorial of a nation and a land that He had promised. Nehemiah could therefore confidently say that the God of heaven would be their source of prosperity in accomplishing the task for which he had been sent to Jerusalem. Though the mocking Samaritans knew not the LORD, He was clearly described to them as the God of heaven.

May we with Nehemiah represent the God of heaven to those of the world who have turned to worship the creature more than the Creator. We have a portion and memorial in the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the God of heaven, entered the world to humbly reveal His preeminence, in His person and in His work of love and redemption. No matter how the world may scorn or despise, the God of heaven, He will prosper us.

### **Identity Crisis**

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

- Matthew 1:18 -

Life was simple but difficult in Nazareth. Days were doubtless spent working hard, but solely in order to provide for the most basic needs of self and loved ones. There was no accumulation of wealth, no squirreling away savings or contributing to a retirement plan. Today's wages – if there were any – went first and foremost to Rome in the form of excessive taxation. Whatever paltry residue remained was used for food, raiment, and shelter. The trade of carpentry was dignified, but not lucrative by any means. Joseph was an extremely humble man, and though he was likely quite industrious and hard-working, he was just as poor as the next guy in this little village of Galilee.

How it must have shocked him when the angel of Jehovah addressed Joseph from Heaven's perspective, "Joseph, thou son of David..." Herein was the ground of an identity crisis! Joseph had lived probably at least two decades, maybe better than three, with the understanding that he was a poor carpenter. He obviously knew his lineage was one of royalty, but the reality of day-to-day living under Roman occupation did not permit him to live and move and have his being as Davidic progeny. At least, that is, not until this heavenly visitant reminded him of who he was. Upon this moment pivots the entire nativity account, for it is here that both Mary and Joseph now understand that God is about to visit His people. This mutual acknowledgement of God's working would fill them with courage and faith to follow where He was leading, even to a little town called Bethlehem.

As we labor day-in-and-day-out under the sun, the god of this world desires that we, like Joseph, forget our heavenly identity. The devil would much prefer to keep us under the excessive burdens of the cares of this life. But as Christians, we, too, are viewed by Heaven as royalty. Under inspiration of the Spirit of God, Peter says we are a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), John tells us we are kings and priests (Rev. 1:6), and Paul frequently reminds us that we are sons and daughters of the living God (Rom. 8:14, Gal. 4:6, Php. 2:14). This realization should change our tactical approach to life and living, much as it did for Joseph. Then we also will be in a right frame of heart and mind to accomplish what God has for us to do.

Let us face today not in our earthly habiliments, but by our heavenly designation. Afterall, we are just strangers and pilgrims here, ambassadors from a far distant land. May we walk with humble yet sanctified confidence and swagger. This will thwart the devil's designs, and our gracious Heavenly Father will be glorified. — D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week AUDI, VENI, VIDI (I Heard, I Came, I Saw) And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.Luke 2:16-18 Faith comes by hearing, and so it was that the glad evangel sung by the choristers of heaven provoked the shepherds to come with haste and see the "desire of all nations". With so heralded an announcement, perhaps they expected to see a somewhat more regal display than what greeted them lying in a manger, carefully attended to by His peasant parents. It is likely that these shepherds were priests, whose assignment was to provide the sacrificial lambs for the coming Passover. If that were the case, they would have been schooled in the prospects of a Messiah who would enter the human conflict with a flash of lightning, a prodigious clap of thunder, a conquering army, and a promised kingdom of peace. What they actually saw would have proven to be an epic disappointment had it not been for what they had heard from the angels. They heard they came, they saw, and they believed. Nathanael was similarly challenged when hearing the news from Philip that "We have found Him!". Conscientious Jews were to challenge any claim that their Messiah had appeared. In this case, Nathanael's incredulity was justified for, thought he, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see." And so he heard the news, he came, and he saw, not a conquering king astride a white horse, but an itinerant, unaccredited rabbi garbed in humble habiliment. Despite His outward appearance, Philip was brought under arrest by His omniscient words that flowed from divine lips. "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." He heard, he came, he saw, and he believed. The Samaritan woman was thirsting for more than what Jacob's well could supply. When she was convinced that she had found the living water she rushed back to the city urging her countrymen to "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" They heard her report and accepted the invitation to come and see for themselves. The forlorn, but dutiful, women trudged their way to the tomb that resurrection morning to dispense what was left wanting in the anointing of their dead Master. Upon approaching the sepulcher they heard the angel's salvific words "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Their faith impelled them forward into that sacred sanctum and their fears dissolved into joy at the sight of the empty niche that three days before bore the body of the now Risen Redeemer. With eyes of faith, we likewise are invited to come to that same place and behold with wonder the glory of all the ages and proclaim with the shepherds, the Samaritan woman, Nathanael, and the women at the tomb, "thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." Pastor Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

## **Dealing with Demands**

But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed. (Luke 5:15,16)

It was inevitable that the Lord Jesus would eventually draw a crowd. Though His teachings alienated the hypocritical religious leaders, His words of hope and miraculous works caught the attention of the multitudes. The people who sought Him were from every walk of life- young and old, male and female, rich and poor- longing for relief from their circumstances. In today's chapter, our Lord displayed His power over nature in providing the amazing draught of fish and restoring a hopeless leper to new life. He charged people to tell no one of what they had witnessed, but ultimately the word of His supernatural works was trumpeted abroad. Some came to see Him out of curiosity; while most came to lay their burdens at His feet. Jesus could have easily filled every day with His healing ministry. Yet with the demand being so great and since He alone could satisfy the people's needs, we find our Lord retreating to the wilderness to pray. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost, but in so doing He longed to spend time the time He knew He needed in His Father's presence. The solitude of the wilderness provided a location where the distractions of this life could be blocked out, and He could spend uninterrupted time in sweet communion with His Father. This time of prayer was so important to our Lord that He would leave the demands of life to spend time in God's presence. The sacrifice He made by leaving heaven probably caused a deep burning within for that heavenly fellowship. After a season of prayer, He would continue His earthly mission.

Every stage of life has its demands for each of us. Some demands may seem trivial or insignificant, while others are most pertinent. As believers we want our life to have some eternal influence. Balancing occupation, family, and church ministries is not always easy; and often other external demands arise that need our attention. Our Lord Jesus' example when the demands of life pressed upon Him is the example we should follow. Even when He could continually do good for the needy people that surrounded him, He took time to retreat to the wilderness and meet with His Father. These times of solace provided the necessary recharging to meet the demands placed upon Him. Like Jesus, we also must find our wilderness to have uninterrupted time in God's presence where His divine fellowship settles our souls and renews our focus on His will for our lives.

Today, find your wilderness for your vital spiritual respite and experience unbroken fellowship with our Heavenly Father. ~J. Ekis

### Celebrate understanding

And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

### Nehemiah 8:12

At this point in Nehemiah's account, the wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt, and some order had been established among the Jewish people, who had returned from exile, and their leaders. The seventh month of the religious year had come, so the people were gathered for the feast of tabernacles. This would be a special occasion for the celebration of this feast so close to the completion of the building project. In particular, Ezra, the scribe and priest, who had come to Jerusalem when the temple had been rebuilt before this, was leading the gathering of the people to hear the word of the law of the LORD. Ezra stood before the assembly, with a number of others there to help him with the reading of the law and some amount of exposition, as verse eight of this chapter explains: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." As the law was read and explained, and the people worshipped (v. 6), their initial reaction was to weep as they heard (v. 9). This is not unexpected, as the law of the LORD would bring many truths to bear upon their souls, from recognition of God's holiness, and conviction of sin, to remembrance of God's longsuffering and mercies, any of which could bring a heart sensitive to the LORD to tears. They were so moved that their teachers had to exhort them from their mourning unto the joy of the LORD (v. 10). As they heeded the exhortation, our text describes how they celebrated their understanding of God's word.

May we learn from these that still today we should rejoice at the privilege to be able to understand the word of the LORD. Though often it may bring a message that strikes our souls with awe, or conviction, or a sense of duty, or of overwhelming thanksgiving, all of which may evoke strong emotions, let us recognize the lovingkindness of the LORD in allowing us to know and understand all these truths about Him and about ourselves. Had He no love for us, would He not rather have left us to our own wicked devices without rebuke, reproof, or exhortation? Yet, instead, we have in our age the greater privilege to be taught by His blessed Holy Spirit all that is needed and good for our souls, through the reading and exhortation of His word. Therefore, let us continually celebrate understanding with all those that love His word. "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

#### A Star!

...and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

- Matthew 2:9 -

There was perhaps no other natural phenomenon so suited for God to use in supernatural fashion to herald the birth of the long-awaited Savior of the world than a star. In the brilliant beaming of that heavenly light, let us contemplate how it bore universal witness to the character and nature of the Christ child...

Stars are heavenly in nature, as was Jesus. He said, "Ye are from beneath, I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world." (John 8:23)

In the Divine creative order, the stars preceded man, being formed on the fourth day of creation, and man being brought forth on the sixth day (Genesis 1:16, 26-31). Jesus would later tell us regarding Himself, "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)

The stars were designed to serve mankind (Jeremiah 31:35). Jesus told His disciples, "...but I am among you as he that serveth." (Luke 22:27)

Every star is wholly unique. Paul wrote, "...one star differeth from another star in glory." But the star of Bethlehem was so radiant, it outshone all with a brilliance never replicated before or since in the heavenlies. Similarly, Jesus witnesses of His wholly unique character in Revelation 22:16, "...I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."

Man must look up to behold a star. Christ was lifted up from the earth at Calvary, in order to draw the gaze of sinful men to His salvific work (John 12:32).

This particular star over Bethlehem brought with it a special joy. "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Matthew 2:10). Even so, Jesus promised His followers a joy that no man can take from them (John 16:22), one that is unspeakable and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8).

A star's light is global in its reach, accessible to all men and nations. Likewise, Jesus was no mere tribal deliver, but a universal Savior – a light to lighten the Gentiles, the glory of Israel (Luke 2:32), and the Desire of all Nations (Hag. 2:7). Indeed, He is the light that lighteth every man that comes into the world (John 1:9).

A star scatters the darkness away, turning the darkness to light. Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12). Every converted soul knows the powerful Light that came the day that Jesus came into the heart. "A star, a star, shining in the night." Shine, Jesus, shine! -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

## **Immanuel-God With Us**

Hebrews 2:14: Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

There was ample reason for great rejoicing that night of nights, for there, lowly lying was the One and Only God-Man. He could have chosen a more phantasmal form with which to accomplish His purpose, but it behooved him to be made like unto His brethren and to experience life in every facet so as to defeat the challenges of human temptation in all of its malignant variants. This concept is one of the most exhilarating doctrines in Christology and is the cause of much jubilation amongst the redeemed.

The heretical Gnostics of the first centuries of Christianity could not expand their narrow minds to comprehend the divine paradox of the immortal God condescending to human mortality. To these high-minded skeptics, the flesh itself was evil and prevented the spirit from connecting with God entirely. And so they went to work constructing elaborate aberrations to explain away the glories of Christ's incarnation.

The incarnation puts to rest the argument that God doesn't know what mankind has to endure in the ways of the curse, disease, and death. He has experienced life in all of its nuances or as the apostle wrote "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted". And Isaiah offered this consolation as well "In all their affliction he was afflicted".

Now the Lord of creation could have made His entry in a fully matured physical frame. He could have averted the humiliation of gestation and the passing through the normal matrix of human existence via the virgin's womb. But if He was to conquer the power of death, He must enter and exit the conflict in the same manner as those He came to save. Let us note the volitional language of the text asserting the emphatic nature of our Near Kinsman Redeemer who "also himself likewise took part". No coercion, no external pressure pressed Him into that decision. It was His choice to come into the world and, likewise, leave the world as He did. The seraphs of heaven remain stupefied by the magnanimous, self-abasing act of His descending beneath their realm of glory, all to seek and to save that which was lost.

At this holy time of the year, let us not lose sight of the grand truth that God came to be as us and to be with us.

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing: and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

# **How Long?**

Howlong wilt thou forget me, O LORD? forever? howlong wilt thou hide thy face from me? Howlong shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrowin my heart daily? howlong shall mine enemy be exalted over me?

### Psalm 13:1,2

Patience is learned over time. When we were young how often did we ask the question: how long? How long till supper? How long is my punishment? How long do I have to do this? How long till we get there? Reflecting on the occasions when we asked those questions, we realize that eventually our desires were acquired or the trial of waiting passed. Though we would never acknowledge it in our impatient youth, there was some benefit in the waiting period. The process of waiting will continue for the rest of our lives.

In today's text, four times David asks the question- how long? He had the feeling that God had forgotten him and was keeping His presence at a distance. This produced sorrow in David's heart and fear that his enemies would triumph over him. In this depressed condition, he pleads for God to consider his circumstances and lighten the eyes of his faith so he can see the LORD's face. If the Lord would shine on him, then he could see hope through the present darkness. David could draw from the past experiences in his life for reminders of the times God proved Himself True and Faithful. Even though deliverance had not yet come in his present situation, David's hope was restored, causing his soul to sing. His question was eventually answered – but it was in God's time.

One of the things we can learn from the saints who have gone before us is that we will have times of trial and tribulation. The godliest and most faithful were not exempt from the many and varied difficulties life presents. Faith tells us to trust that God is in control and He has a designed purpose in all that comes our way: and yet our flesh may still question why? When Job questioned, the LORD reminded him that there are things beyond our understanding. Here in the thirteenth Psalm, David's question is not answered; rather, it is resolved when he remembers God's past mercies. David could now sing, O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: and His mercy endureth forever.

Better men than we have questioned before us, and the answer is still the same: He will answer in His time and in His way. Until then we can trust in His mercy, and rejoice in His salvation.

### Gifts of worth

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

Matthew 2:11

The enigmatic magi, who at least annually attract our attention and consideration, provide here a glimpse of the goal of their intention at the climax of their journey. While they had stated heretofore that they had come to worship the newborn King of the Jews, we now see the manifestation of their worship. As worship in the pure sense of the word implies, they first fall down before the young child, indicating by their bodily position their inward attitude of lowliness before the majesty of this One whom they beheld. Although surmised and conjectured by some, we know not if they were kings. We also don't know for certain how they understood who this child was simply by the appearance of a star. We only know by the appellation given them in the original that they were men of some depth, and that would typically include understanding, or at least the pursuit thereof. Whatever their actual position in life, their approach to Him revealed their recognition of the relative worth between themselves and this child. As a side note, they were also obviously aware that, of those whom they beheld, they would only worship Him.

Whoever they were, they possessed magnificent treasures, out of which they presented Him gifts commensurate with their worship. The word translated "gifts" here is used elsewhere of sacrifices and offerings to God (e.g., Hebrews 5:1; 8:3-4). As such, they connote the worthiness of the one to whom they are offered. This is not the same as gifts given to others as a matter of grace, which may even at times be undeserved. Instead, it implies the worthiness of the one worshipped with the gift. If the magi esteemed Christ with the best of their treasures, how much more should we follow their lead, in accordance with the abundance of revelation we now have in our New Testament, illuminated by His Holy Spirit. We can now understand that in Him did, and does, all the fullness of the Godhead dwell (Colossians 2:9). Therefore, far beyond adoring just the sweetness of a poor baby in lowly circumstances, let us recognize again His unfathomable condescension, and fall down and worship the King of kings and Lord of lords with gifts out of our own treasuries commensurate with His worthiness.

### **Dwelling Among Us**

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

- John 1:14-

The mystery of the incarnation of the Logos, the second Person of the Triune Godhead, is one that cannot be fully apprehended, much less comprehended. God decreed within His divine counsels that in order to redeem sinful man, He must fuse Himself with His creation. This mystery is succinctly put forth by John in our text, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..." Let us ruminate upon just the last three words of that phrase in order to merely begin to scratch the surface of the depths of this Love Divine...

He <u>dwelt</u> among us. The word rendered "dwelt" here from the Greek could be transliterated "tabernacled", and draws us to recount the Shekinah of God visiting His people Israel. Similarly, Christ would be the very presence of God, the solitary epicenter of acceptable worship of Jehovah. It is here, and here alone, where man can find God. It is this form of frail human flesh that He would take for over three decades, until He assumed the more sure temple of His glorified body three days after His death, thereby becoming our eternal Daysman, the only Mediator between God and man.

He dwelt <u>among</u> us. He did not dwell beneath us, lest we trample Him under foot. He did not dwell above us, else we could never reach Him. He did not dwell merely beside us, for we should never fancy ourselves equal to His impeccability. He dwelt among us – as One in our midst, at once wholly like us, but so much greater.

He dwelt among <u>us</u>. It was not to devils that He came, for they are confirmed in their iniquity. There could be no salvation for them. It was not the nature of angels that He assumed, for as pristine and glorious as they are, they simply are not the crowning touch of His creation. It was among us – fallen sons and daughters of Adam, made in His image and after His likeness – that He dwelt. Mankind alone was precious enough to the Eternal God to vacate His glory to secure such wonderous redemption.

This God that loved us so is worthy of all praise and honor. Let us render our lives afresh to Him Who dwelt among us. -- D. Murcek

Pastors Thoughts of the Week

# Joy Unspeakable

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

Four hundred silent years passed since the last words of the prophet Malachi were heard in the land. They had all but forgotten that word of promise "the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple". Even the priests, those stalwart stewards of the mysteries of God, went about their assigned duties in a heartless, perfunctory manner. A spirit of gloom and pessimism pervaded the people of the covenant. Spiritual apathy added to resigned complicity to the customs of their Roman captors deflated any hope of a Messianic deliverance. Into this miasmic atmosphere of despair was the angel sent to the temple wherein Zacharias, the priest performed his liturgical obligation. Suddenly his service was interrupted by a divine intruder who greeted him with this unexpected salutation "thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

Gabriel expected his words to be met with the same enthusiasm with which it was delivered, but instead, Zacharias remained incredulous and could not muster the faith to believe the seeming impossibility of the promise. In petulant response, the angel smites the faithless priest with speechlessness until the days of accomplishment would be fulfilled. And then, as predicted, "thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth."

Now consider the utter frustration that beset the old priest. The angel vanishes as suddenly as he appeared, and Zacharias is left with the impossible task of communicating what had just transpired to the waiting people who, by now, wondered why the appointed ministration had taken so long. We can imagine his excited (though silent) retelling of this divine event using gesticulation in place of articulation. The pantomime was so animated with joy that they deduced that he had seen a vision- a vision that bore glad tidings for the nation. It would be nine months that the old priest would have to serve his sentence of silence, but then with the birth of John, his tongue was given rebirth and he could finally express, by the fullness of God's Spirit, that God "hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us."

Peter, in his epistle, reminds us that there is a "joy unspeakable and full of glory". This joy is worn on the countenance and has no syntax with which to communicate its presence. All believers who have received the hope of God's promises will have that same unspeakable joy until that day when we stand "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" and our faith is rewarded with reality. Then shall our tongue be released and that which was heretofore inexpressible will find utterance and eternal praise in our Living Lord.

May His choice blessings be yours today,

Pastor

Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God Romans 10:17

### **Necessary Ingredients**

Testifying both to the Jews and also the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ

#### Acts 20:21

An ingredient is something that enters as an element into a mixture. Proper ingredients are necessary for desired outcomes. Missing an important element in a food recipe or a certain medicine can prove disastrous. The same holds true for our salvation, faith without repentance, or repentance without faith will not produce genuine salvation.

Repentance is a change of mind which usually results in some form of a change in action; while faith is believing with conviction in something unseen. Throughout one's life, both of these elements can exist without acquiring eternal life. Turning away from bad habits alone will not make a Christian, and just believing that there is a God does not involve conversion. Quitting some bad habits doesn't produce true faith in God, and the scriptures remind us that the devils believe in God. True conversion occurs when the Holy Spirit draws an individual to the point where they recognize a need for turning from unbelief, and the barriers they have built up in their lives and place their absolute faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Throughout the New Testament, we find the example of people that came to Christ as they left behind ungodly practices. Zacchaeus restored those that he cheated, the maniac of Gadara separates from his harmful behavior, the Philippian jailor tends to Paul and Silas's wounds, and the Ephesian believers burn their occultic books. Repentance and belief go hand in hand to work the miracle of conversion.

Repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ are not to be just a one-time occurrence. The initial faith and repentance are what effects the spiritual adoption into God's family, but these ingredients will be necessary throughout the sanctification process. Often there are elements of the carnal nature that tenaciously cling to the believer's life. Self-will power is not sufficient to rid these sins, and the admonition of the Word will reveal more and more of the unbecoming ways that impede the Christian's progress. Daily believers must exercise their faith in every circumstance and be willing to confess and repent of sinful attitudes or behavior. Exercising faith and having a sensitive awareness of sin will purify and strengthen a believer's walk.

This day pray God shows us the things that divert us from the path He has planned, and by faith and repentance follow in our Savior's footsteps.

J. Ekis

### Advent observance

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 11:15

As we have appropriately celebrated the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, it gives us ample opportunity to contemplate the contrasts and similarities with His predicted second advent. As He came the first time with only a few being aware of His identity and humble entrance, He will come again in magnificent splendor when "every eye shall see Him" (Revelation 1:7) and will execute judgment upon the kingdoms of the earth, over which He will reign, as indicated in the context of our text and its following verses. As Handel's famous "Messiah" captures both advents in its sweep of scriptural references, in the latter part of the oratorio the "Hallelujah" chorus conflates the triumph of this context and that of chapter 19, looking forward to the day when He shall reign forever and ever with His blood-washed saints. Even though at His birth king Herod, seemingly alone, did furiously rage against Him, in that coming day all the nations will do so (Psalm 2). Yet in both advents He did and will foil His enemies according to the multitude of promises in both Old and New Testaments.

In an age such as ours, as the fury of the nations seems to be continuing to increase more vehemently against Him, how much more should we, who adore Him in remembrance of that first advent and embrace the hope of the second, represent the hope that He only can give to those who will listen? While many may valiantly attempt to engage in the debate over the increasing divide in moral values, we must ultimately recognize that the only true remedy for the pull of sin upon mankind is for individuals to recognize who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. As we move beyond various ways that human policies and practices have sought to disassociate people from one another, supposing that, for example, electronic communication can substitute for true personal interaction, may we as God's people seek a return to true interaction that will personally introduce people to the Savior who has come and will come, that they may be prepared, and therefore transformed. As we remember His commission, let us seek both old and new avenues to occupy until He comes.