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Yuletide Traditions: and the Winter Solstice

“The angel said unto them, 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

THESE JOYFUL WORDS

were spoken by God’s angel to the shepherds who had come to worship the birth of our Lord Jesus more than two thousand years ago. They were announcing God’s greatest gift to his poor, sin-sick and dying human creation. The full impact and realization of Jesus’ earthly ministry and redemption for mankind, however, will not be made manifest to the world until his future kingdom of righteousness that will soon be established over all the earth.

UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

Many centuries before our Lord Jesus was born into the world as a perfect human child, the Prophet Isaiah was moved by the Holy Spirit of God to

foretell this great future event. He wrote, “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.”—Isa. 9:6,7

The prophecy speaks of Jesus as the antitypical King David, and that he would in due time assume the several and distinct offices of his yet future kingdom as outlined in the prophecy. At that future time, our loving Heavenly Father would entrust the glorified Jesus to exercise the great power and authority that would be given him to bless all the families of the earth as promised to the true and faithful “seed” of Abraham.—Gen. 22:15-18

THE HOLIDAY SEASON

As we approach another holiday season, and the world’s attention once again is drawn to the birth of our dear Lord Jesus, we must acknowledge that he left us with no instructions to celebrate his birth date. However, he did give us explicit instructions to remember his death. It was through Jesus’ sacrificial death that his Heavenly Father could carry out his ultimate plan and purpose for the reconciliation of the human family.

Jesus gave us the instructions to memorialize his death when he had gathered with his disciples in the upper room to observe the Passover. These

were the final hours of his earthly ministry, and just before he was to give his life as the price for the world's sins.

It was at that time that he substituted his own life for the antitypical lamb of sacrifice, and instituted the Memorial. He then invited his followers to partake of the emblems and to remember his death as recorded by Luke in his gospel. We read, "He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me."—Luke 22:17-19

JESUS' BIRTH AND DEATH

Although many Christian people continue to observe December 25th as the proper date of Jesus' birth, there is no scriptural evidence to prove this assumption. Many students of the Bible have come to the conclusion that the blessed event took place around the beginning of our present month of October, which we believe is more accurate.

To put this in its proper context, Jesus began his ministry when he was thirty years old, according to the Law. (Luke 3:23) His ministry was 3 1/2 years in length, based on Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks. (Dan. 9:24-27) Messiah's appearance was to take place at the start of the seventieth week of years. His sacrificial death in the middle of the final week of seven years marked the period as being 3 1/2 years.

Our Lord's death took place when the Jews were preparing for the Passover season during the Jewish

month Nisan. This occurs at the time of the Spring Equinox, and corresponds to our months March or April, depending on the position of the moon. The typical lamb was to be selected on the 10th day of Nisan, and killed on the 14th day.—Exod. 12:1-6

According to the scriptural record, Jesus' death took place on Friday, Nisan 14, about the ninth hour, or 3:00 P.M. (Luke 23:44-46) The following day was always a Sabbath Day, but that particular year it also coincided with a "great Sabbath" (John 19:31) which further establishes that his death took place in the springtime. Thus, counting backwards 33 1/2 years, he would have been born in the early part of October.

THE WINTER SOLSTICE

Many ancient cultures chose the Winter Solstice as a special time for celebration. This particular season of the year was significant because it was the terminal point between the darkest days of the year, and the time when the sunlight would begin to increase. Using very primitive and imprecise methods, the time of the Winter Solstice was often determined by measuring the length of the shadow created by a stick or a standing stone. It also depended on clear weather to create a shadow and to make their calculations as accurate as possible.

In pagan times, the Winter Solstice was seen as part of an annual cycle of the earth's seasons known as "the wheel of the year." They celebrated eight festivals including the spring, midsummer, fall, and Yule seasons. Four others were spaced midway between each of them. These festivals have origins in Germanic and Celtic pre-Christian feasts.

The word “solstice” literally means “the sun stands still.” During the Winter Solstice, the path of the sun has reached its furthest southern position, which has taken six months since it was at its most northern point. This results in the shortest period of sunlight during the entire year, and before the path of the sun turns northward once again. For those who live in the southern hemisphere, the opposite is true and indicates the longest period of daylight in the year. For regions north of the Arctic Circle, the sun will not rise on this day. Those living near the Arctic Circle will see only a twilight glow in the noontime sky, and at the North Pole the day will signify Midnight.

The date for celebrating our Lord’s birthday on December 25th, was officially set by the Roman Emperor during the fourth century of the Christian era. It thus coincided with pagan rituals and celebrations surrounding the Winter Solstice, and the time when the sun had reached its turning point. Light symbolizes life and happiness. It drives the gloom away and raises the spirits of men. The darkness had been halted, therefore the day of the Winter Solstice marks the beginning of a new solar year.

YULETIDE CELEBRATIONS

The Yuletide festival was one of the ancient traditions that was observed in many areas of Europe, the British Isles, and elsewhere. The word Yule relates to the Christmas season and the time when the sun reverses its downward path and begins to shine longer each day. The actual time may vary a few days over the course of years, but usually occurs sometime between December 21st-23rd.

The Yule ritual consisted of burning a large log on the hearth, called the Yule log. It was brought into a home where songs were sung and stories were told. Offerings of food and wine and decorations were often placed on it. The personal faults and mistakes of the homes inhabitants were burned in the fire so that they could begin the New Year with a clean slate. The fire represented the light of the world's Savior.

The log was the center of the annual Yule celebration, and was usually lighted on the eve of the Winter Solstice. It was to be kept burning throughout a previously designated period of time. In some cultures, it was held over to become a part of the entire "Twelve Days of Christmas" celebration which began on Christmas Eve and continued to the evening of January 5th. This was then followed by the "Feast of Epiphany" which was celebrated on January 6th.

The Yule log was never allowed to completely burn, and a portion of it was carefully stored in the house to start the following year's fire. The log was believed to bring good luck to the occupants of the dwelling. Ashes from the log were placed in wells to keep the water pure and they were also placed at the roots of fruit trees and vines to help them bear an abundant harvest during the following year.

The observance of Yuletide had connections with the pagan celebrations among the Scandinavian, Germanic, and other people who lived in the northern hemisphere. It also had a religious character, and it is noted how some aspects of the pagan era tradition have been gradually absorbed into the Christian traditions that also surround December

25th and the celebration of Christmas. There are certain similarities in connection with observing the annual “Rebirth of earth’s Sun” and the “Birth of the Son of righteousness.”

MITHRAISM

Even before Jesus was born, certain pagan rituals were already being observed during the time of the Winter Solstice. There were many variations, but they usually represented the death of the old life, and the birth of a new one. Some festivals were associated with the birth of a particular god who would bring life to the world in the new year. In some instances, the observance was extended until springtime when new life and vigor were actually brought forth with the increasing light and warmth of the sun.

The celebration of Mithra was one of these Winter Solstice festivals, and was annually observed by the people of ancient Persia. The celebration was in honor of the Persian god Mithra who was the deity of light, wisdom, and moral purity. He was one of three principal pagan deities whose attributes were later absorbed by a supreme deity Ahura-Mazda whose birthday was also celebrated on December 25th.

The celebration of Mithra was a popular pagan ritual in the east, and was later introduced into Europe from Persia and other areas of Asia Minor. This took place more rapidly after the conquests of Alexander the Great. Mithraism’s influence also spread throughout the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era. It reached its prominence during the third century after our

Lord Jesus' First Advent, but began to lose much of its influence by the end of the fourth century. With the rise of Constantine the Great in the fourth century, Christianity was then elevated to the prominent position as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Therefore, the ancient traditions and various observances of the old pre-Christian era gave way to the new Christian religion and its festivals.

THE CHRISTIAN ERA

During the early centuries of the Christian era, many attempts had been made to reach a common consensus regarding the exact date that our Lord Jesus had been born. The religious leaders of the time wished to establish a fixed date to celebrate the mass of Christ, which was called Christmas. It was decided that calendars should also reflect the birth of Jesus as a major turning point in the history of the world. The terms B.C. and A.D. were to designate whether an event had occurred before Christ's birth, or afterward.

A cycle of festivals gradually emerged around the observance of a special day of nativity, and included Christmas Eve vigils. These became important celebrations because they were to establish the official designated time that our Lord's birth had taken place. They knew it had occurred at nighttime in accordance with Luke's gospel account. "There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." (Luke 2:8) The four Sundays before Christmas were to be known as Advent Sundays in preparation for the approaching special festival.

EVERGREENS' MAGICAL POWERS

Trees are the largest plants on earth, and have been the focus of certain religious cultures from ancient times. They have been invested in all cultures, and with a dignity unique to their own species. In some cases, a single tree or a grove of trees is the object of worship. Deciduous trees, bushes, and crops die, or hibernate, during the winter months, but the evergreen trees are unique because they continue to remain green.

It was believed that because they stayed green throughout the year and could withstand the rigors of an extreme winter, they had magical abilities to ward off the life-threatening powers of darkness and cold. They were also seen to possess powers over the dark and foreboding spirits. Some ancient pagan civilizations that inhabited the northern regions of Europe believed that the Winter Solstice also brought with it numerous evils and malicious spirits that stalked the eerie shadows of the winter-time forests.

Therefore, many people shored up their homes as a protection from the darkness and evil spirits by hanging evergreen wreaths and other forms of greenery over their doors and windows. In many cases, the evergreen décor was brought indoors during the winter months. The scent of the boughs would freshen the dark and dismal dwellings from the otherwise stagnant odor of thresh and straw. Sometimes, even large evergreen trees were brought inside to inhabit the home and to bless its occupants. The needles and cones could also be burned as a form of incense. The smoke and fragrance thus filled their dwellings, they believed, with the

protective and magical spirit of the evergreens during the darkest time of the year.

CHRISTMAS TREES

The origin of the Christmas tree had its roots in ancient times, and was sometimes connected to religious rituals. Many ancient cultures revered evergreen trees, which stayed green in the winter while other trees were bare. Thus, the evergreens served as a reminder that the rigors of winter would pass, and that the land would once again be fruitful.

As far back as ancient Rome, evergreens were used as a part of the Saturnalia festival, which was a New Year celebration. Romans exchanged branches and twigs of evergreens as a good luck blessing. Many historians believe that the pagan people of Scandinavia were among the first to actually bring evergreen trees indoors, which served as a mid-winter symbol of the promise of the coming warmth of spring. German Saxons are believed to have been the first to light their trees with candles, and to adorn them with decorations and trinkets for good fortune. The tradition of the indoor evergreen tree became popular in Germany, and it is believed that the first use of Christmas trees by Christians was developed in that part of Europe. Some historians have suggested that its origin may reach back as far as the eighth century.

In England, the first recorded Christmas tree was in 1841. At that time, Queen Victoria was married to Prince Albert of Germany, and he brought the tradition with him and set up the first Christmas tree in Windsor Castle. German immigrants to

America also brought the tradition with them and were celebrating Christmas with evergreen trees as early as the 1830s. The custom took several decades to catch on in the United States. During that period of time, most religious people correctly assumed that it had pagan origins. However, by the 1890s the indoor decorated Christmas tree had become popular in the majority of homes in America.

A JOYFUL SEASON

The Christmas season is the most enjoyable time of the year for many people. It is a festive time when families gather to exchange gifts and to eat a sumptuous meal. The attention of many is directed to our Lord Jesus as a special gift to the human family, but his redemptive work is perhaps seldom appreciated in its full sense. Our Lord Jesus left his heavenly home and was born a perfect human being for the purpose of giving his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole human creation.

A RANSOM FOR ALL

The true reason for Jesus' birth was that he would give his life as a ransom price for sin. Paul wrote to Timothy, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."—I Tim. 2:1-6

GOD'S TRUE COMMISSION

When Jesus turned thirty years of age, he presented himself to his Heavenly Father in total consecration and obedience to do his will. After his baptism, he was anointed with the Holy Spirit of God, and commissioned for the great work that lay ahead. Turning to the Hebrew Scriptures, he found what the Psalmist David had written concerning him. "Then said I, 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. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation. Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me."—Ps. 40:7-11

At the Nazareth synagogue where Jesus had gone to preach on the Sabbath Day, he read from the prophecy of Isaiah concerning his commission to preach the wonderful message of Truth. He told those who were gathered to hear him, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:21) From the prophecy, he read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."—Luke 4:18,19

Various aspects of our Lord's authorization by God are outlined in this prophecy. He was to preach the gospel to the "poor" and, in his sermon on the mount, he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3) He was to heal the brokenhearted, and he said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—chap. 11:28

Jesus was commissioned to "preach deliverance to the captives." Isaiah's account reads, "To proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. (Isa. 61:1) When he quoted Isaiah's prophecy, he used the word "bruised" which means to crush, as in death. The reference to "captives" points to the prison house of death. In his sermon on the resurrection of the dead, he said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."—John 5:25

The anointing to preach the "acceptable year of the Lord" speaks of the special invitation which has been extended to those who are being called by God during this present Gospel Age. They are laying their lives down in sacrifice which is acceptable to God. In his letter to the church at Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

OUR COMMISSION

The anointing of the Holy Spirit of God is also available for those who have accepted the narrow way of sacrifice and are members of our Lord's body. We, too, are commissioned to preach the Gospel to the poor, groaning creation. If we are faithful unto death, we will have the great privilege to share with our glorified Lord in his future kingdom of righteousness over all the people of earth. Let us renew our efforts to serve him as we approach another new year.

May we continue to give thanks to our loving Heavenly Father for his gift of Jesus, in whom the whole human family will be blessed under the provisions of his future kingdom of life and righteousness. ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

DECEMBER 1—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."—Matthew 22:39 (Z. '99-72 Hymn 354)

DECEMBER 8—"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."—John 15:18 (Z. '01-300 Hymn 261)

DECEMBER 15—"The LORD is my shepherd."—Psalm 23:1 (Z. '02-365 Hymn 87)

DECEMBER 22—"If a man therefore purge himself, . . . he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."—II Timothy 2:21 (Z. '02-319 Hymn 208)

DECEMBER 29—"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."—Ecclesiastes 11:6 (Z. '02-71 Hymn 210)

A Blessing for All Nations

Key Verse: *“I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.”*
—Genesis 12:2

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 12:1-9

OUR LESSON RELATES TO

the events surrounding the call of Abram [high father] by the Heavenly Father. God would soon rename him Abraham [father of the multitude], and he would be shown the magnitude of the undertaking that he had been called to complete. This would also involve the special point of the lesson concerning the calling of Abraham’s

seed, both natural and spiritual, and the divine promises made to them. These, as we realize, would constitute them as the center of hope to the world of mankind. Already, they as a people had been used by the Father, but the Scriptures indicate that their influence and usefulness toward their fellowman had only just begun. These blessings will certainly reach their fulfillment during the Millennial Age.

We know from the Scriptures that Abraham’s early life was spent at “Ur of the Chaldees.” (Gen. 11: 27-31) He was born two years after the death of Noah, and Noah’s father Lamech was born nearly sixty years before Adam’s death. (chap. 5:25-32; 9:28,29) We can see by this that the history of tradition that involved these

servants of God had few links up to Abraham's time, even though the period was nearly 2000 years long. God however, used Moses as a recorder of the events found in the book of Genesis. The important events in the lives of individuals, as well as their chronologies, were recorded for our benefit, to protect the chain of history. This is to help us understand that Abraham was directly in this line, as one of the best branches of Noah's descendents. It should also serve to show to us that encouragement will come to every true servant of the Lord who humbly relies upon his promises while striving to faithfully walk in the way. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"—Rom. 8:31

As we continue in the account, it leads us to what has come to be known as the Abrahamic Covenant, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3) For Abraham and his descendents, it should be evident that this covenant brought with it a great change. They now would be distinctly the heirs of promise. Abram would follow the leadings of the Lord, and depart with his family to the land of Canaan. (vss. 1,4-6) In the years ahead, he would have guidance and help from our Father in all matters of life.

The realization that God is with us, and that he is constantly looking for ways to help us in all of life's experiences should be a constant source of encouragement to us. (Heb. 13:5,6) Each one should carefully watch for the leadings of divine providence and realize that only as he is cooperating with God can he accomplish anything of value. We should thank him for being a faithful Father to us, and follow these words, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Prov. 3:6) Our Father assures us that we will have his help and guidance to assist us through any experience that may come our way. "I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee."—Isa. 42:6 ■

A Promise to Abraham

Key Verse: “*He believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*”
—*Genesis 15:6*

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 15:1-21

“He believed,” signifies more than just belief; it seems to convey the thought of a rest of faith. This is supported by the fact that Abraham is mentioned as a hero of faith in Hebrews. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.”—Heb. 11: 8,9

He responded to the leadings of God, and traveled to Canaan. The first test that came to Abraham after he was called was that he left his native country to wander up and down through Palestine as a shepherd. So much of an example of faith he has been to us, that God started a faith family through him to whom would be given many and great promises. “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.”—II Pet. 1:4

OUR PREVIOUS LESSON

included an account of the events that led up to Abraham’s calling and subsequent journey to the land of promise under the guidance of the Heavenly Father. A very important aspect of God’s dealings with Abraham involved faith. The phrase,

Abraham's call was the result of his having faith in God, and so should ours. He trusted God's love and believed that the Father's wisdom was superior to his own. He therefore accepted God's authority above all others. He also lived at the appropriate time for the divine purposes to begin to be carried out. Abraham did not have this high degree of faith when he first entered the land of Canaan. He would come to learn to trust God in all things and, as a result, his faith would grow strong through the leadings of the Heavenly Father. We should remember that faith can firmly trust him come what may. In these aspects, his experiences typify the true church in coming out of the world. At the same time, we have the assurance that "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way." (Ps. 37:23) We see in these words how much care God has for his children, for those who desire to be faithful in service to him, and walk in his paths guided by his loving hand.

The record confirms that Abraham believed on the Lord, and his faith in God triumphed securely over every obstacle. The faith of Abraham is the type of faith and point of a character that is set in the Scriptures for our encouragement. Abraham was not perfect, just as we are not perfect, "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10) However, we are told in our theme verse that God so highly esteemed Abraham's faith that he counted it as making up for his natural imperfections. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted [reckoned] unto him for righteousness." (chap. 4:3) He had faith in what God had told him and, as James points out, he showed his faith by his conduct. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (James 2:22) We have further assurance of this in Psalm 1:6, which reads, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous," for truly, "The Lord knoweth them that are his."—II Tim. 2:19 ■

The Lord Provides

Key Verse: *“He said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.”*
—Genesis 22:12

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 22:1-15

Mount Moriah. “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, . . . and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering.”—Gen. 22:2

To be able to appreciate this event fully, we must remember that Abraham was over 100 years old, and that Isaac was the son whom the Lord had indicated would be the channel for all of the promised blessings. Abraham and his wife Sarah had been childless, and in their old age had finally been given a long-awaited son. (Gen. 21:1-5) Through the years, Abraham had become personally acquainted with God, and the knowledge of God’s works and his promises that had been handed down through the faithful patriarchs were trusted and

AS WE CONSIDER THESE

words concerning God’s dealings with Abraham, we will come to learn a great lesson concerning faith. Actually this account details one of the greatest tests of faith that we have ever had recorded in the written Word. Abraham’s entire life was one of faith, a life of trust and reliance upon God’s divine promises. This ultimate test of faith would come through the divine command that Abraham should take his son, and offer him as a sacrifice to God upon

believed by him. This knowledge and acquaintance with God gave him the faith, love, and courage to obey. To a person of Abraham's character, the divine command called for prompt obedience.

He rose up early in the morning to take his son Isaac to the place where God had commanded him to go. (Gen. 22:3) When they came to the place of sacrifice, Abraham unwaveringly built an altar, laid the wood in order and laid Isaac on the altar. He stretched out his hand to slay his son, but at the very last moment God, through an angel, stopped the hand of Abraham from completing the sacrifice of his son. The sacrifice was reckoned to be complete in the sight of heaven. Abraham received his son from the dead, "in a figure." (Heb. 11:19) God provided a ram for Abraham, and he offered it in sacrifice according to his Father's will. (Gen. 22:10,11,13) This served as an indication of a part of the process by which reconciliation of divine justice will be made on behalf of all of the people of the earth.—Ps. 89:14,15

This incident from the life of Abraham has a further meaning. Abraham serves here as a type, or picture, of the Almighty God, and his son Isaac serves as a picture of our Lord Jesus. In an even grander sense, Isaac pictures The Christ, or the Head and body. The Heavenly Father freely offered up his Son on our behalf for the sins of the whole world. "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." (John 3:16) His birth, and a promise of what this blessed Son of God would accomplish as his mission, is beautifully worded in Isaiah 9:6, "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."

How blessed we are that God provided us with these lessons, and that he provided "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."—John 1:29 ■

According to the Promise

Key Verse: “*Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*”
—*Luke 1:46,47*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:26-56;
Galatians 3:6-18

WE HAVE A BEAUTIFUL poetic expression of love and devotion shown here by this statement made by Mary. It further shows that Mary was full of faith and the joy of the Lord, happy to be an instrument in carrying out his wonderful plan.

We recall from the account that the chiefest messenger remaining in the courts of the Heavenly Father, the angel Gabriel, visited her. He would come to tell her, “Blessed art thou among women.” (Luke 1:28) The fact that the Lord honored Mary above all other women in that she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus according to the flesh, would prove her nobility of character and her purity of heart.

The name Jesus, which is the Greek form for Joshua, signifies savior, or liberator, for “he shall save his people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21) The entire work of our Lord Jesus is summed up in the meaning of the name Jesus. Our Lord was announced as Savior as a babe; but it was only after he had fully completed his sacrifice at Calvary that he had the full right to the title, and became owner, or Lord, of the human race.

That Jesus would be able to be the savior of the race was indicated in the proclamation to Mary. “Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, . . . and shall be called the Son of the Highest.” (Luke 1:31,32) This expression reveals to us that Jesus was begotten not by Joseph, but by the Holy Spirit; therefore, the life principle by which Jesus was conceived came directly from the Heavenly Father. (Heb. 1:5) The promise was then fulfilled in the words, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11) He was born perfect—free from the Adamic curse of sin and death. He knew no sin, while all other men are sinners by nature. (II Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:18) Because of this, Jesus could die on the cross as a perfect man, fulfilling God’s desire that through him, “shall all families of the earth be blessed.”—Gen. 12:3

These “families” refer to the world of mankind under the new administration of the Millennial Kingdom. At that time, the kingdoms of this world will have passed away and the earth will have become the kingdom of our Lord. Mankind will be given an opportunity to return to harmony with God, and obedience will be rewarded with everlasting life. The people shall say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, . . . for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”—Isa. 2:3; Rev. 11:15

All of God’s work is perfect, so we see that through the giving of his Son as the Savior of mankind from sin and death, Jesus would make it possible for all to have the opportunity to live at peace on a restored, perfect earth forever. This will be the culmination of the promise made to Abraham, “Then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” (Gal. 3:9) All will then praise him, and say, “Blessing and glory . . . be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.”—Rev. 7:12 ■

Our Invisible Enemy

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”

—I Peter 5:8,9

THE QUESTION MAY BE

asked, is there a personal devil, an enemy of God and of man? If so, who created him, and why does an all-powerful God of righteousness and love permit such a being to exist? Throughout the ages, these questions have been pondered by sincere and thoughtful persons, and many answers have been given. On the one hand, there is the view that the devil is a hideous-looking creature with cloven hoofs and a spiked tail whose chief business is to preside over the alleged torture of the unsaved dead. On the other hand, the claim is made that the devil of the Bible is merely an evil principle, widespread and powerful in its opposition to God and to righteousness, but not a personality.

The Scriptures teach that there is a personal Devil, that he is of a higher order of creation than man, and invisible to man. This powerful being was created perfect, and is referred to as “Lucifer, son of the morning.” (Isa. 14:12) He fell from his perfection and from his loyalty to the Creator when pride and ambition developed in his heart. The Prophet Isaiah wrote further concerning him, “Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”—vss. 13,14

A variety of names and titles are given in the Bible that describe the Devil’s various traits and characteristics. He is referred to as “that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan.” (Rev. 20:2) In John 12:31, he is described as “the prince of this world,” and he is also thus depicted in John 14:30 and 16:11. In Ephesians 2:2, Satan is described as “the prince of the power of the air” and, in II Corinthians 4:4, as “the god of this world.”

Through the various references given to us in the Bible concerning him, we are able to gain a fairly comprehensive understanding of his many methods of attack against the Lord’s people. The first activity of Satan described in the Bible is recorded in Genesis. This is the account of the manner in which he deceived mother Eve. He asked Eve if it were true that God had said she would die if she partook of the forbidden fruit. Affirming that this was true, Satan’s reply was: “Ye shall not surely die.”—Gen. 3:1-4

GOD'S WORD ATTACKED

These scriptures point to an attack on the integrity of God's Holy Word. This has been one of Satan's methods of attack against God and his people throughout the ages since that early time in the history of the world. In this first instance, Eve was deceived, although Adam was not. So it has been since, many have been deceived by Satan's lies, while a few in every age have remained steadfastly loyal to the Word of God. The importance of this on the part of God's people is emphasized by the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."—Isa. 8:20

It was not until the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai that the Word of God began to be made available in written form. Prior to that, God spoke to his people largely through one or another of his holy angels. This continued until the First Advent of Jesus when an angel announced his birth and declared it to be glad tidings of great joy to all people. Meanwhile, the prophetic writings before Jesus' First Advent were added to the books of the Law. These inspired writings became a part of the written Word of God—that part which we now refer to as the Old Testament.

Throughout these books of the Old Testament rings the harmonious theme song of the Word of God. This theme centers around the great kingdom plan of God to redeem and restore mankind to life—the life which was lost when our first parents disobeyed the divine law in the Garden of Eden. In this melody of divine love, there is presented the hope of a coming Messiah—the Christ—and it was

this Christ whose birth was announced by the angel. By his birth, the plan of God had taken a giant step forward in its development.

NEW TESTAMENT RECORDS

The teachings of Jesus were first recorded in the four Gospel accounts of his earthly ministry. In due time, there also came the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John. Later, the book of Revelation was added. Thus the New Testament was included with the writings of the Old Testament to give us the complete Word of God. It is this vast storehouse of Truth which our Heavenly Father has used throughout this present Gospel Age to nourish and strengthen his people as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. How wonderfully the precious Truths of the divine plan refresh us as we feed upon them day by day.

Satan has always been on the alert to disparage the Word of God and to render it ineffective in the hearts and lives of those who receive it. A reference is made to one aspect of this effort in Luke's gospel where he recorded Jesus' teaching: "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."—Luke 8:11,12

This scripture is a part of the parable of the sower in which we are told that the "seed" which is sown is the Word of God. This refers to the glorious Gospel message of the kingdom which is the main theme of the Bible. Concerning the seed sown by the wayside, Jesus said, "Then cometh the devil,

and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

Jesus was pointing to the Devil’s efforts to prevent the Word of God from taking root in the lives of the people. Perhaps many of us have wondered why it is that so often, when we see someone beginning to take a keen interest in the truth of God’s Word, their interest may inexplicably wane. Jesus has given us the answer. In the case of Eve, Satan insisted that God’s Word was not the truth, and in the parable we see him snatching the Word from the hearts of the newly interested.

THE CHANGING PICTURE

Satan was not satisfied with the harm he could do by snatching away the Word of God from the hearts of individuals who might be interested in receiving it. As time went on, a much more ambitious scheme unfolded. Paul cautioned the Lord’s people and foretold that there would come a great falling away from the faith, and indeed, this has occurred. “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”—II Thess. 2:1-4

The most holy faith of the Scriptures was maintained through the apostolic days by the apostles' authority and insistence on strict adherence to the Word of God. Paul complimented the Bereans because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what he was telling them was true. (Acts 17:10,11) This insistence on a "thus saith the Lord" for every item of truth was one of the basic safeguards of the Early Church.

Following the death of the apostles, this situation began to change. At that time, the Bible was only available in manuscript form and copies were scarce. Many of the believers had to depend on the knowledge of a few favored ones who possessed the Bible, and could impart it to them. The idea soon developed that loyalty to the Word of God really meant loyalty to someone else's understanding of the Word of God. This natural consequence of circumstances was taken advantage of by Satan. As time went on, the tradition developed that, while the Bible was the supreme authority of truth, it could be interpreted properly only by the church and its leaders. The result was that human traditions and superstitions slowly began to replace the beautiful and inspiring doctrines of the Bible. This viewpoint is widely held even to this day.

It is apparent that essentially every precious doctrine of the divine plan has become distorted by interpreters of the Bible. Yet, it was so subtly accomplished that the majority supposed they were in harmony with the Scriptures. Satan has removed from the hearts of professed Christians the glorious kingdom hope set forth in the inspired Word of God.

THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

The clear and unmistakable teaching of the Bible is that the promised kingdom of the Messiah would not be established until after his return at his Second Advent. Satan has distorted this beautiful truth. Playing upon the ambitions of the human heart, he succeeded in getting many believers to accept the notion that the kingdom of Christ did not have to wait for Christ's return, but was set up and functioning through a great church-state system.

Satan had tried something similar to this in one of his temptations of Jesus. He told the Master that if he would fall down and worship him, he would give him all the kingdoms of this world. Jesus met this temptation in the proper manner, quoting a Scripture: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."—Matt. 4:8-10

While Satan failed to mislead Jesus, he succeeded later with some of Jesus' professed followers. They saw the glamour of power and authority among men who had succumbed to the lure of high-sounding titles. They gave up waiting for Christ to return to establish his kingdom and undertook to do it themselves. This became known as Christendom, or Christ's kingdom.

The fact that in Christendom there was almost continuous war, persecution, and evil of every kind—all so contrary to the joyful conditions of Christ's true kingdom as presented to us in the Word of God—seemed to count for little or nothing in their claims to kingdom authority. Many chose to ignore the facts, and while there were no real evidences

of Christ's true kingdom having been established, they continued to be guided by the false interpretations of the Bible through which they were being deceived by Satan.

There were some points of Truth with which some individuals seemed to have difficulty. For example, in Revelation 20:4-6 the length of Christ's kingdom is given. It was to be a thousand years long. The claim was made that the Christendom of their making was already enjoying this millennial kingdom. However, others realized that according to the promises of the Bible, the Millennium was a time during which the dead were to be restored to life, and that no dead were being restored. Here Satan prompted a tampering with the Word of God by inducing a translator to insert the interpolation, "The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." (Rev. 20:5) Therefore, no one would need to look for the resurrection amidst the wars and troubles of their so-called Millennium.

KINGDOM HOPE LOST

The substitution of Christendom for the real Messianic kingdom, in addition to reflecting a disregard for the teachings of the Word of God, also took away the hope of God's professed people for the real kingdom of promise. Once the church-state systems were established, the preaching of the second coming of Christ and the establishment at that time of the kingdom of promise almost entirely ceased. Thus with this one master stroke, Satan snatched from the hearts of many honest-hearted believers the great kingdom theme of the Bible. He

did it by substituting misinterpretations of the Bible for the Bible itself.

The Word of God teaches that the followers of the Master should look to each other for mutual help in their study of the Truth. It would be a mistake to suppose that anyone, by deliberately isolating himself from others of like precious faith, could expect the Lord to specially guide them in the understanding of his Word. The Lord has placed various servants in his church such as pastors, teachers, and evangelists. He expects all of us to help one another as much as we can. However, in following this arrangement we should keep in mind that the Bible itself is the final word of authority. Even reasonable conclusions should be rejected unless they are in harmony with the plain statements of the inspired Word of God.

DISCOURAGEMENT

Another method used by Satan to oppose God's people is discouragement, and the Apostle Paul speaks of his own infirmities. We read, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake:

for when I am weak, then am I strong.”—II Cor. 12:7-10

There is some difference of opinion as to just what Paul’s infirmity might have been, but the important thing was the apostle’s recognition of the manner in which Satan was making use of it to discourage him. He asked the Lord three times to remove this thorn in the flesh, but the Lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

Satan did not succeed in discouraging Paul, who testified, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Peter says that we should resist this roaring lion steadfast in the faith. The lesson here seems obvious. All of the Lord’s people have afflictions of one sort or another—illnesses, deaths in the family, economic reverses, misunderstandings, and many others. Satan often endeavors to have us believe that if we were truly the Lord’s people he would take these burdens from us. Thus does our Adversary instill fear in our hearts that perhaps we have been unfaithful to the Lord, and because of this God has withdrawn his favor from us.

Our defense against this sort of attack is to return to the many scriptures which reveal that the followers of the Master are a sacrificing and suffering people, and that there is no assurance that the Lord will protect us from the trials and difficulties which are experienced by mankind in

general. Our attitude in these situations should be to cast all our care upon the Lord knowing that he cares for us, not according to the flesh, but as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

PRIDE

Concerning pride, James wrote, “Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:5-7) James indicates that one of Satan’s methods of attack is to engender pride and ambition in the hearts of the Lord’s people. We are to resist this urge by humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, knowing that our promised exaltation will come in due time. Genuine promotion that is in harmony with the divine will comes from God and is not self-planned.

Satan is directly or indirectly associated with all influences which tend to divert the Lord’s people from their course of true faithfulness in serving him. We often speak of our enemies as being the world, the flesh, and the devil, but it seems evident that Satan stands at the head of this list. It is he who works to our disadvantage as New Creatures in Christ Jesus through the world and its temptations, and through our fallen flesh. How important it is, therefore, that we keep alert in order to detect his every approach. We should be prepared to resist him through a sincere knowledge of the Word of God and through prayer.

ENMITY

Shortly after mankind's first parents—Adam and Eve—fell into sin and death in the garden of Eden, God said to Satan, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:15) Jesus later said to the scribes and Pharisees of his day, “Ye are of your father the devil.” (John 8:44) Here, our Lord was speaking of the serpent's “seed.” The seed of the woman refers to Christ and his footstep followers. The foretold enmity of the “seed of the serpent” against the “seed of the woman” was manifested in the bitter persecution inflicted upon Jesus by the religious rulers of his day. This enmity has also continued against his followers with varying degrees of intensity ever since.

However, we know that through it all the “seed” of promise will ultimately be victorious. We are not ignorant of Satan's devices. (II Cor. 2:11) We know that if we follow the Lord's instructions in our good fight of faith and rely always on him to guide and strengthen us, we will neither be overcome nor foiled by the wiles of the Devil. We have the promise of ultimate victory, for Paul wrote, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”—Rom. 16:20

This will be the promised bruising of the head of the serpent. The word “shortly,” used here by Paul, is an interesting one, reflecting God's perspective of time. Paul used it nearly two thousand years ago and the serpent's head has not yet been bruised. He is not yet even bound, and is still going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He

still appears as an angel of light to deceive and mislead. To resist him, we still need to have on the whole armor of God, which consists of all the great fundamental doctrines of the divine plan of the ages.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

We have the plain and understandable teachings of the gospel of Christ, which is the only hope for the sin-cursed and dying human family. Let us study these precious truths and bind them upon our hearts. Let us make sure that our understanding of these truths is in harmony with the facts with which we are surrounded. The Scriptures are clear that if we want to have a share in that kingdom, living and reigning with Christ, we must continue to suffer with him faithfully even unto death. This is one of the great fundamentals of the plan of God. Let us be encouraged by it to remain in the narrow way of sacrifice until the end of our Christian journey is reached in death. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

Let us ever keep in mind the admonition of the Apostle Peter in the words of our featured scripture, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”—I Pet. 5:8,9 ■

*“This is the victory that overcometh the world,
even our faith.”
—I John 5:4*

Christ Is Born

*“Unto you is born
this day in the city
of David a Saviour,
which is Christ
the Lord.”
—Luke 2:11*

MORE THAN TWO THOU-
sand years ago this angelic
announcement to a group of
shepherds watching their
flocks by night signaled an
outstanding step forward in

the outworking of the divine plan of salvation. The full context of our theme text reads, “The angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, 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. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—Luke 2:9-14

THE PROMISE

Previous to this, the coming of the Messiah was in the realm of promises, so one of the very important aspects of this message of good news was the fact that the Messiah had now been born. The word

“gospel” means good news. Paul informs us that the gospel was preached before to Abraham when God promised this ancient friend that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gal. 3:8; Gen. 22:18) Paul identifies Jesus in this connection as the promised “seed.” (Gal. 3:16) It was good news to Abraham that his progeny, which was Jesus as the seed of promise, would be the channel of blessing to all mankind. However, this was good news which was based merely upon a promise. Later this promise was confirmed by God’s oath.

This same promise was reaffirmed to Isaac and to Jacob. Shortly before his death, when pronouncing blessings upon his twelve sons, Jacob prophesied that out of the loins of Judah there would come one who would be called Shiloh, a peaceful one, and that unto him would the “gathering of the people be.” (Gen. 49:9,10) This was another promise of the coming of a Messiah—one to whom the people would be gathered and through whom they would receive the blessings of peace.

Moses, in his day, also clung to these wonderful promises that the God of Israel would send a great one, a Messiah, to bring deliverance to his people, and a blessing to all mankind. Evidently the mother of Moses, while caring for her child in the court of Pharaoh, told him of the promise to father Abraham and what it implied. We read that when he was come to years he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of [*Marginal Translation*, for] Christ

greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”—Heb. 11:24-26

Christ is the New Testament equivalent of Messiah. Moses evidently understood God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to mean that he would send a Messiah. He gladly cast in his lot with the people of God to whom these promises had been made. Later, after the Law had been given to Israel at the hand of Moses, he was instructed to say to this people that the Lord would raise up unto them a prophet like unto himself and that all would be called upon to hear and obey that prophet. (Deut. 18:18,19) In the New Testament, this prophecy is applied to Jesus during his future 1,000 year kingdom rule.—Acts 3:22,23

MANY PROPHECIES

Isaiah prophesied that “a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,” and that his name would be called “Immanuel.” (Isa. 7:14) Another of Isaiah’s prophecies reads, “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.”—chap. 9:6,7

Isaiah further prophesied concerning the coming Messiah: “There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of

his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear [reverence, Hebrew] of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear [reverence] of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove [*Marginal Translation, argue*] with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”—Isa. 11:1-5

In Daniel 9:25, there is another assurance of the coming of the Messiah. In this prophecy, a time measurement is given indicating when he would come. The prophecy reads, “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.” At the time Jesus did appear as the Messiah, many were in expectation of him. This expectation might well have been based, in part at least, upon this prophecy recorded by Daniel.—Luke 3:15

In Micah 5:2, there is a prophecy which identifies the place where the promised one would be born. The text reads, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting [*Marginal Translation, the days of eternity*].” Then in Malachi 4:2 we

read, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings."

These and other promises and prophecies relative to the coming Messiah served as a great inspiration to the devout of Israel. Yet, the majority of the people did not realize that they would not all be fulfilled at once. They failed to grasp the meaning of certain prophecies which told of the Messiah's suffering and death as the Redeemer of Israel and of the world. They did not know that he would be raised from the dead and return to heaven. They simply had in mind the many assurances of God that a Messiah would come, that Israel and all the families of the earth would be blessed.

The Israelites indeed were well aware that God had promised to send a Messiah. Many names and titles of this great one were mentioned in the prophecies, including Immanuel and Shiloh. He was the promised seed and a prophet greater than Moses. The Messiah was also to be a "rod out of the stem of Jesse," and a "Branch" was to grow out of his roots.

Throughout all the long centuries, Israel waited in hope for the fulfillment of the promised Messianic feature of the divine plan. At last, the time came for those promises to begin to be translated into reality, so the angel announced, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ [Messiah] the Lord." Now these promises began to take on substance; the Messiah was born.

Nine months earlier Mary had been given the assurance that she was to be the mother of the one who would become the great Messiah and deliverer of Israel and the world. "The angel said unto her,

Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”—Luke 1:30-33

In this announcement by the angel, we are reminded of Isaiah’s prophecy in which he foretold that the Messiah would sit “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 typical kingdom of David had fallen about six hundred years earlier. Because David was so greatly beloved by God, he arranged that the future Messianic kingdom should be looked upon as the rebuilt kingdom of this man after God’s own heart. (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) Jesus is the antitypical David, and through his mother he was an actual descendant of David.

HUMBLE CIRCUMSTANCES

From the announcement made to her by the angel Gabriel, Mary knew that she was to be the mother of the promised one. God had permitted her holy child to be born in a stable. While Jesus’ birthplace was humble, and his mother was a comparatively unknown person in Israel, his birth was announced by the angels. This was appropriate. The Lord had used angels on many occasions to convey to the ancients his plan to send a Messiah. Now that the time had come to fulfill those promises, it was fitting that both the conception and

birth of this great one would also be announced by angels.

The birth of Jesus was a turning point in the outworking of the divine plan. It meant that God's plan had moved out of the promise stage and into the era of performance. Through his New Testament servants, the Lord continued to make promises, but now the central figure both of the Old and New Testament promises had come, and his birth in Bethlehem had been announced by the angels.

The shepherds to whom this announcement was made must have been awed, and at the same time made glad. Their first thought was to go to Bethlehem and verify what they had heard. We read, "It came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger."—Luke 2:15,16

The shepherds were thoroughly convinced. "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." (vss. 17,18) The shepherds' desire to tell as many as they could about the good news which had been given to them was natural and praiseworthy. We should have the same desire today. At this time, the Lord's people are privileged to understand the divine plan more fully than did the shepherds. The good tidings of the birth of Jesus, and all that it means in connection with the divine plan as a

whole, should motivate us to do all we can to tell out this message far and wide and by every means at our disposal.

NOT YET THE MESSIAH

The birth of Jesus was truly important as an advance step in the plan of God, but actually as a babe he was not the Messiah. The word "Messiah" means anointed, or "the anointed one." The significance of the word derives from the custom in Israel of anointing kings and priests to office. The anointing was the official designation to office. It pointed forward to the anointing of the Holy Spirit which came upon Jesus at the time of his baptism and upon the church at Pentecost.

At the time of Jesus' baptism, he heard his Heavenly Father speaking to him from heaven, saying, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) Jesus' birth was announced by the angels, but as a babe he would not know about or appreciate his earthly purpose. At the age of twelve, he was found in the Temple with doctors of the Law endeavoring to learn what he could about his mission. It was not until he came to Jordan, when he dedicated himself to the doing of his Father's will and to then begin the public phase of his ministry, that he received this blessed assurance of his sonship. It was then that he learned that his Heavenly Father was well pleased with him. Now he was the Messiah of promise.

This was thirty years after Jesus' birth. Perhaps the shepherds to whom his birth had been announced had passed away. Certainly many to whom they had conveyed the good news had died. Whatever the

reason, no mention is made of an angelic announcement after Jesus began his ministry. It could well be that God wanted to emphasize that the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus were now the important considerations. Jesus' birth was necessary as the means to that end, but the Heavenly Father does not want us particularly to adore the babe Jesus. Rather, we are to take up our cross and follow the anointed Jesus in his steps of suffering and death.

GOD'S GIFT

The promises pertaining to the coming of the Messiah emphasized that he would be one sent by God. This thought is carried over into the New Testament. In John 3:16, Jesus is referred to as God's gift. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Paul speaks of Jesus as God's "unspeakable gift." (II Cor. 9:15) Words are wholly inadequate to describe this gracious and costly gift which our Heavenly Father made to us and to the whole world of mankind.

Since the first evidence of this gift was manifested in the birth of Jesus, it is appropriate that this feature of the divine plan should beget in us the desire unselfishly to give for the blessing of others. First of all, when we come to know of God's great gift of love for us, we should willingly give our all to him. He has invited us to give him our hearts. When we respond to this invitation, it means that everything which we have and are is surrendered to him, with the understanding that he can use it in whatever way may be pleasing to him. This is

consecration which involves presenting our bodies as a “living sacrifice,” as mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1.

A SAVIOR

When the angel announced to the shepherds that the Messiah was born, he referred to him as a Savior. To the shepherds, this possibly meant no more than being saved from the Roman yoke of bondage under which the nation of Israel was living at the time. To us it means much more. It means that, through his death as man’s Redeemer, Jesus would provide an opportunity of salvation from death for all mankind. The Heavenly Father knew that in giving his Son for the salvation of mankind, it meant giving him up to suffer and to die. What a costly gift this was. If we are to emulate the Father’s love in giving, we must be willing to suffer and to die even as Jesus did. Although our sacrifice does not have the redemptive merit that Jesus’ death had, our faithfulness will result in our participation with him in fulfilling the promise of blessing “all the families of the earth” in his coming kingdom.

After the one angel announced the birth of Jesus, “suddenly there was . . . a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Surely all who love the Lord, and rejoice in his great plan of salvation, will likewise give glory to God, and praise him for the gift of his Son.

We know that the birth of Jesus will yet lead to “peace on earth.” Over two thousand years have passed since this glory song of the angels was heard and still there is no peace on earth. This does not

mean that the divine plan has failed. It simply means that a further preparatory feature of God's great plan has been in the course of development. This feature is the calling out from the world those who are invited to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, suffering and dying with him, that they might live and reign with him. There is every reason now to believe that this work is nearing completion. This means that soon Messiah's kingdom will bring peace to the nations, and that Jesus will be recognized by the people of all nations as truly "The Prince of Peace."

Jesus also will, in this kingdom, serve as peacemaker between God and the estranged human family. There can be no lasting peace between the nations unless the people are at peace with God. Our first parents decided to take a course contrary to God's Law and brought upon themselves the sentence of death. By heredity, their entire progeny has been born in sin and "shapen in iniquity." (Ps. 51:5) The whole unbelieving world is thus alienated from God and under condemnation to death. Jesus gave himself in death as a substitute for Adam and his race. This opens the way for a return from death and a reinstatement of the human race into the favor of God to all who are obedient to the righteous laws of Christ's future kingdom. This glorious provision will become effective during the thousand years of the Messianic kingdom through the arrangement of the New Covenant, as promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Jesus will then be "The everlasting Father." That is, he will give everlasting life to all those who, through belief and obedience, will prove worthy of

it. How glorious is this prospect! It will mean the end of sickness, pain, and death. How true was the angel's announcement that the son born to Mary would be a "Saviour." As we contemplate the birth of Jesus, we should not overlook this glorious outcome of the divine plan of salvation.

"GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN"

In the song of the angels, they used the expression, "good will toward men." Many who do not know the plan of God for human salvation think of this as meaning good will "among" men. This viewpoint places a great strain upon their faith because they know that there has been no more good will among men since Jesus was born than there was before. They have striven in vain to convert the world to Christ and his teachings, and thus bring about a state of good will among men, believing that to be God's will. We rejoice to realize that in God's due time, during the thousand years of the Messianic kingdom, the world will be converted. Then the Lord's Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh. Under its enlightening influence, the people will be led away from selfishness and will learn to love and serve one another.

God's good will toward men was expressed through the birth of his Son, whom he sent into the world to be the Redeemer and Savior of mankind. God's good will was thus expressed toward men because he loved them. Even though the human family was alienated from God through wicked works, he still loved the people. He loved them so much that he gave his Son to serve as Redeemer and Mediator to restore them to life and to harmony with him.

Jesus' death and resurrection were further evidences of God's good will toward men. The selection of the "little flock" to share in the kingdom rule with Jesus is also an evidence of God's good will toward the Adamic race. The return of Christ to establish his kingdom also manifests God's good will toward the people. Indeed, God's good will is expressed in every detail of his loving plan for the blessing of all the families of the earth. In view of this, how appropriate that we join with the angels in singing, "Glory to God in the Highest!"

It was a marvelous experience for the shepherds to be told by angels that the great one whom the God of Israel had been promising for so long had at last been born. It is even more wonderful to be living now and to have the assurance that Christ will soon establish his kingdom through which peace and health and life will be assured to all people. To the unbelieving and troubled world, it seems incredible that we are living at the threshold of such a golden age of peace, security, health, and life. No doubt many disbelieved the report of the shepherds concerning the birth of the Messiah. Likewise, the people for the most part will ignore our message today. However, it is our privilege to proclaim the good tidings, and in doing so to show our joy and enthusiasm for the message of the angels to the shepherds in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. May this glorious message always be most precious in our lives. ■

"Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations."
—*Psalm 145:13*

Thou Shalt Call His Name Jesus

*“Thou shalt call
his name JESUS:
for he shall save
his people from
their sins.”*

—*Matthew 1:21*

BY THE GREAT POWER OF our Heavenly Father, Jesus’ spiritual life as the *Logos* was transferred to that of a perfect man. “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) He had come to earth to save the people from their sins. “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” (Heb. 2:9) “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.”—vs. 14

PRIEST AND KING

Jesus had many titles, each one portraying a particular aspect of his purpose for the sin-sick and dying human family. One of these titles was

“Priest” in connection with those who had served the nation of Israel in matters of worship. Thus it was with Jesus. He has already served as priest for the offering of sacrifice, and later, will extend to the world the blessing of everlasting life made available by the sacrifice he offered. In the case of the priests of Israel, they offered animals in typical sacrifice, but Jesus offered himself as the great antitypical sacrifice.

The Master is also appointed by God to be the “King” of earth, thus we are reminded that he will rule over the people and bless them. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul combines the two offices of priest and king, and applies them to Jesus. “Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. (Heb. 6:20) “For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.”—chap. 7:1,2

JUDGE

Another title which the Scriptures assign to Jesus is “Judge.” The psalmist wrote concerning Jesus, “He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.” (Ps. 72:4) The great oppressor of the people throughout the ages has been Satan. He has enslaved the minds of men through deceit, and has thereby prevented them from knowing and

-serving the true God, whom to know and serve in the proper way will lead to life eternal.

Traditional misconceptions of the future judgment day have hindered many from appreciating Jesus as the great Judge of mankind. Instead of looking forward to the judgment day as a time of blessing, many have dreaded its approach, supposing it to be a time of doom for nearly everyone. However, the future thousand-year kingdom of Christ will be a time of blessing for all people who will obey the laws of God. "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."—Acts 17:31

When our first parents—Adam and Eve—transgressed the divine law, they brought themselves and their offspring under condemnation to death; but Jesus' death as man's Redeemer provided a way of escape from that condemnation. The benefits to be derived from the death of Jesus are available only through belief in him, and obedience to the divine will. Paul raises the question, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14) The Scriptures reveal that the human creation will have this opportunity during the coming judgment day under Christ's future kingdom.

The judgment day will be a time of enlightenment for mankind. It will be the due time when the great fact that Jesus died for the sins of the world will be made known to all mankind. "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ

Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:4-6

WONDERFUL COUNSELLOR

A prophecy of the birth of Jesus and the future kingdom of righteousness over which he will preside, is recorded in the prophecy of Isaiah. We read, “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.”—Isa. 9:6,7

This prophecy assigns several meaningful titles to Jesus’ future rulership over the world. Some Hebrew scholars point out that there should be no comma between the words Wonderful and Counsellor, and, instead, that Jesus is a “Wonderful Counsellor.” The term Wonderful Counsellor means more than one who gives advice. It is suggested in the word attorney, one who represents a client before the bar of justice. Jesus will act in this capacity when he serves as “mediator between God and men.” His work as Counsellor will be akin to his role as Judge. In both respects he will deal with the people to effect their reconciliation with God, and thereby provide everlasting life to all the obedient.

Jesus will indeed be a Wonderful Counsellor and a righteous Judge. In another prophecy, we read,

“The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear [reverence, Hebrew] of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear [reverence] of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”—Isa. 11:2-4

Our Lord will deal justly with the people and, under his future administration, those who desire to return to God and to receive the blessing of everlasting life on a perfected earth will be given every opportunity to do so. The assurance that he will not judge after the sight of the eyes, nor according to the hearing of the ears is especially noteworthy. The most competent of all the judges the world has ever known have been limited in making their decisions upon what could be seen and heard. They have been unable to look into the hearts of the people and to discover their hidden motives, or whether their words and conduct belied the real facts of their lives. However, Jesus will be endowed with divine powers of perception and will know the truth concerning all, regardless of their professions.

THE MIGHTY GOD

Another title ascribed to Jesus is “A mighty God.” This does not mean that Jesus is the Almighty God, but that he has been highly exalted by his

Heavenly Father, who is pleased to have him recognized as a mighty God and to be thus worshiped. “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.”—John 5:22,23

As written concerning him long centuries ago, we read, “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”—Isa. 53:12

The high position of Jesus in the divine arrangement is again brought to our attention in this 53rd chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy. Here the suffering and death of the world’s Redeemer is foretold. Thus this scripture was fulfilled when Jesus was raised from the dead and highly exalted to the right hand of the throne of God. There he became “The mighty God,” the one to whom the whole world may properly look for help and relief as the representative of the Heavenly Father.

In Jesus, we see the glorious characteristics of God manifested. Observing the laws of his future kingdom of righteousness, men will recognize that through Jesus the justice, wisdom, love, and power of Almighty God have become the operative principles for the world’s blessing. Gladly will the people recognize Jesus as God’s representative, and the manifestation of God’s presence in their midst.

MICHAEL STANDS UP

Another title applied to Jesus is the term “Michael,” which literally means, who as God, or the representative of God, and is recorded in the prophecy of Daniel. “At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.”—Dan. 12:1

In this prophecy, we read that when Michael stands up there will be a “time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation.” In this title, Jesus is seen in connection with the overthrow of the kingdoms of this world and in preparation for the establishment of his future kingdom of righteousness. We are witnessing some of the signs that we are now living in the end of this present Gospel Age.

EVERLASTING FATHER

The term “Father” means life-giver, and an everlasting father is one who gives everlasting life. Jesus will act as an “Everlasting Father” for all who will believe on him and obey the laws of his kingdom. All who then come to Jesus will be given everlasting life.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote, “The first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.”—I Cor. 15:45-47, *New American Standard Bible*

Here the apostle refers to Jesus as “the last Adam,” and declares that in his resurrection from death he was made a “life-giving spirit” that is endowed with the power to give life to others.

The first man [Adam] was of the earth, earthy. Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply and fill the earth with their offspring. Thus he became the original father of the human race. Because he transgressed the divine law, he brought the penalty of death not only upon himself but upon all of his yet unborn sons and daughters.

The last Adam is our Lord Jesus who will regenerate the entire race of the first Adam and enable them to obtain everlasting life. Thus he will be “The everlasting Father” and those who are faithful to their heavenly calling in Christ Jesus will share with him in blessing all mankind in his future kingdom. “Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”—Matt. 19:28

PRINCE OF PEACE

Jesus, the Savior of the world, will also be “The Prince of Peace.” The angelic song which heralded the birth of Jesus featured the happy theme of “peace on earth,” and this peace will become a reality. “In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the

LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.”—Mic. 4:1-4

Our Lord will establish lasting and universal peace between all people. Peace of heart will result from being at peace with God. The world of mankind is now alienated from God through wicked works. The Prince of Peace, serving as Mediator, Counsellor, and Judge, will reconcile men to God. No longer will the human family be in rebellion against their Creator. Being in harmony with him and enjoying the sunshine of his favor, they will have life everlasting, for “his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5

THE LAMB OF GOD

The symbolic description of our Lord Jesus as the slain lamb of God is frequently alluded to in the Word of God, and the revelator has recorded this wonderful passage of scripture. “I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and

thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.' And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.' And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped."—Rev. 5:11-14, *NASB*

The faithful members of "The Christ" who are being called out from the world during this present Gospel Age will share the kingdom honor and glory with our dear Lord Jesus. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." (Rev. 20:6) They will share in the great work of judging. "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (I Cor. 6:2,3) They will also share in the work of Mediator. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." (II Cor. 5:18) They are promised to share his heavenly home. Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again,

and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”—John 14:1-3

THE MORNING STAR

The Apostle Peter wrote, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” (II Pet. 1:19) The morning star makes its appearance just before the rising of the sun. In keeping with this illustration, the prophecies indicate that before the establishment of Christ’s kingdom, and before the world will enjoy the warming and healing rays of the Sun of Righteousness, the Lord’s own people will recognize the presence of Jesus through the prophecies of old, and by the signs of the times. Thus do they see our Lord Jesus as the Morning Star, who has come to save his people from their sins.—Matt. 1:21 ■

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 Aurora Polistico, Leyte Island, Philippines—
October 6.

Sister Esther Pappadapolus, Flushing, NY—October 18. Age, 88

Sister Martha Holmes, Irvine, CA—October 31.

Brother Michael Nekora, Los Angeles, CA—November 4. Age, 78

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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:

E. Blicharz

St. Augustine, FL December 4

R. Goodman

Chicago, IL

December 31-January 2

T. Krupa

Chicago, IL

December 31-January 2

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, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

CHICAGO CONVENTION, December 31-January 2—Addison Park District, 120 East Oak Street, Addison, IL 60101. Contact S. Morgenstern. Phone: (630) 561-4671

PHOENIX CONVENTION, January 14-16—La Quinta Inn Phoenix North, 2510 West Greenway Road, Phoenix, AZ 85023. For hotel reservations, call (866) 527-1498. Specify "Phoenix Bible Students," and Reservation Block Confirmation No. 0908GRXMZN for special convention rate. Deadline for special rate is December 22, 2011. For other information, contact J. Zardja. Phone: (602) 363-2612

AUSTRALIA CONVENTION, January 26-29—Wilkin Baptist Camp, 57 Noble Street, Anglesea, VIC 3230, Australia. Contact R. Charlton, randscharlton@bigpond.com

LOS ANGELES CONVENTION, January 29—Auditorium, 406 Irving Drive, Burbank, CA 91504. Contact R. Wojcik, 12807 Elkwood Street, North Hollywood, CA 91605. Phone: (818) 982-7253

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 17-19—Holiday Inn Express, 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821. Contact J. Freer, 8012 Vintage Way, Fair Oaks, CA 95628. Phone: (916) 879-4655

SOUTHWEST WINTER CONVENTION, February 25,26—Boys & Girls Club of Scottsdale, 8250 East Rose Lane, Scottsdale, AZ. Contact C. Humphreys. Phone: (480) 226-9076

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 4-6—Howard Johnson Hotel, 230 West State Road 436, Altamonte Springs, FL 32714. For hotel reservations, call (407) 862-4455. Specify “Florida Bible Students” to receive special convention rate. Deadline for special rate is February 20, 2012. For other information, contact R. Goodman. Phone: (407) 695-6815

GREATER NEW LONDON PRE-MEMORIAL CONVENTION, March 25—Bayview Lodge, East Lyme, CT. Contact V. Grillo. Phone: (860) 823-7099

*“Let us therefore follow after the things which
make for peace, and things wherewith
one may edify another.”*

—Romans 14:19

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To us the Scriptures clearly teach:

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD—peculiarly “his workmanship;” that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people,” and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING, AND POLISHING of the consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God “tasted death for every man,” “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet. 1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 35