

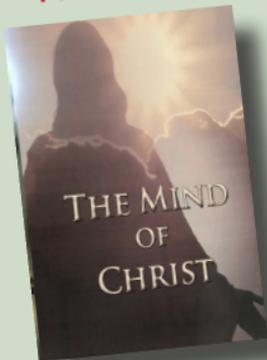
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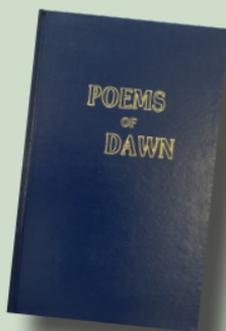
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Out of Bethlehem

*“Hath not the
scripture said,
That Christ cometh
of the seed of
David, and out of
the town of
Bethlehem, where
David was?”
—John 7:42*

OUR OPENING SCRIPTURE

was spoken by the people in Jesus' day who had seen his great miracles and heard his teachings of love, kindness and hope. In making the statement that Christ, the Messiah, was to come out of Bethlehem, they no doubt recalled the prophetic words of Micah, who wrote: “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.”—Micah 5:2

Indeed, the greatest news item of all time was announced as coming out of Bethlehem. This information was the brightest of all messages in this world's dark night of sin and death. It was the announcement of the birth of Jesus. No other single event has so changed the course of the world, nor given so many people a ray of hope for the future. For Jesus' followers, it has been a hope which has comforted and sustained them throughout their Christian journey.

TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY

The circumstances associated with the birth of Jesus were unusual. Destined to be “The Prince of Peace” and the king of the whole earth, yet he was born in a stable. (Isa. 9:6,7) The world as a whole knew little or nothing of what was taking place, nevertheless the coming to earth of the Son of God was announced by an angel, who said to the shepherds on the hills of Judea, “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.” Then the angel, together with a “multitude of the heavenly host,” praised God and said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—Luke 2:10-14

What an introduction this was to the world, and with what authority it was given! It was filled with hopes of peace and life for all mankind—“good tidings of great joy”—because a savior was born, one who had come to save mankind from sin and its penalty, death. No wonder the hosts of heaven cried, “Glory to God in the highest!”

DIFFICULTIES ARISE

However, this one who was born to be a king was soon confronted with difficulties. His parents were instructed to flee with the young child into Egypt to save him from the wrath of Herod. From the beginning of his short ministry, he was hated and persecuted by the religious leaders of his own people. Finally, he was put to death upon a cross. A few years later the nation to which Jesus ministered, instead of entering an era of peace because of his

coming, was removed from its land, and the people scattered throughout the earth, and subsequently bitterly persecuted.

We are to have confidence, however, in the promises of God, and should not fear. Whatever the daily news may be throughout all the days of our lives, we can turn back with assurance to that Bethlehem dateline and recall the announcement which came from heaven, that a savior and future king had been born in Bethlehem, the city of David, and that this good news would be for all people in God's due time.

MANY ACCEPT JESUS

As the present Christian age developed, many people and nations began to accept Christ and professed to practice his teachings. However, as it turned out, much of this was in name only. Instead of promoting peace on earth and good will toward their fellow man, they waged war upon each other, often doing so in Christ's name. Some of the bloodiest conflicts of this time period were waged by professed Christian nations under the banner of the cross.

There has hardly been a time since the birth of The Prince of Peace that the world, or some part of it, has not been plagued by war or the fear of war. Furthermore, the so-called advancement of civilization in recent centuries has not materially changed this picture. Even now, as the year 2022 draws to a close and many in the world commemorate the birth of Jesus, millions are wondering if and when the angels' announcement of peace and goodwill among mankind will ever come about.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine earlier this year sent shockwaves throughout the world. People and world

leaders alike fear that Russia will enlarge its desire for conquest and expand its attacks into other neighboring countries. Then there is the fear among more distant nations that they will somehow be drawn into the conflict on one side or the other. Finally, considering the unpredictability of the Russian president, there is the ever-present possibility that he may choose to use nuclear armaments as a display of power and control. Certainly, the news coming out of this part of the world is presently far from being a message of peace and goodwill.

LACK OF PEACE

The foregoing description of the current Russia-Ukraine conflict is but one example which points out the world's present state of affairs, in which "good tidings" are seldom part of the news of the day. Let us not conclude from this, however, that the purpose of Jesus' coming to earth has failed, or that its accomplishment has in any way been delayed. The storm clouds of human passion hovering over the distraught and fear-filled world today are the result of human failure. This was foreknown by God and foretold in the Bible. He has permitted it so that the human race might come to realize that the only way out of its confusion and perplexity is to look to him.—Luke 21:25-28

One of the basic teachings of the Bible is that the "peace on earth" proclaimed by the angels when Jesus was born is to be realized through the establishment of Christ's kingdom. This great truth was largely lost sight of during much of the Christian era. The viewpoint was gradually adopted that Christ's kingdom was to be set up through human

efforts, with the thought that whatever God had designed to do for the human race depended upon the efforts of men who would work and fight in the name of Christ. How shortsighted to suppose that the great God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, would depend upon the feeble, imperfect, and misguided efforts of his human servants!

The Christian world has made its best attempts to set up Christ's kingdom, but its poor, and oftentimes appalling, results are what we see throughout the earth today. Failure is emblazoned upon all the monuments reared, and history written, which testify to human folly and selfishness. However, for those who have faith in the promises and prophecies of the Bible, the heart-cheering message is that God will do for the human race what it has not been able to do for itself.

GOD'S PROMISES

Let us recall some of the promises in which God gives us this assurance. One of them is found in the prophecy of Isaiah, previously noted in part, pertaining to the birth of Jesus and to his future rulership as the world's king. "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

There are two statements in this prophecy of Jesus' birth to which many fail to give proper

consideration. One is that the government here promised shall be upon “his shoulder.” The other is that the “zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” In the Hebrew text the word “LORD” denotes Jehovah, or God Almighty. Thus is emphasized the fact that God takes responsibility for the fulfillment of this promise. In other words, Christ will shoulder the commission for the successful establishment and functioning of his kingdom, and the zeal of Jehovah guarantees the results.

CHRIST’S KINGDOM

For centuries Christians have been trying to set up Christ’s kingdom by their own zeal rather than by God’s. In devious ways they have also endeavored to shoulder the responsibility of establishing and ruling in Christ’s kingdom themselves, but this arrangement did not bring peace on earth. Instead, it fostered cruel persecution and bloody wars in order to force conformity. This was not the zeal of the Lord of hosts, but the work of ambitious individuals and groups whose fervor was contrary to the will and plan of God. They had a “zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.”—Rom. 10:2

Christ’s kingdom is not set up by human intrigue and diplomacy. Such is true both of the past as well as the present. Its function will not come through balances of power brought about by the threat of destruction through the use of nuclear armaments or other humanly conceived means. Instead, the Messianic kingdom is established by divine intervention in the affairs of men, and thankfully, in spite of all the misguided efforts prompted by human selfishness.

In the prophecy of Micah, we are given this assurance. “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 pruninghooks: 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

GOD’S KINGDOM THROUGH ISRAEL

Beginning with David, the kings of Israel ruled as the representatives of God, with the headquarters of the government in Mount Zion at Jerusalem. (I Kings 2:11; Ps. 135:21) To the people of Israel, therefore, the “mountain of the house of the LORD” would readily be understood as meaning the kingdom of Jehovah, functioning through a ruling house of divine appointment. The ruling house of David was emblematic of this foretold mountain. However, this ruling house ceased to function with the overthrow of Judah’s last king, Zedekiah. A prophecy then given declared that it would be no more “until he come whose right it is.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

The one “whose right it is” was born as a babe in a stable at Bethlehem. In the annunciation to Mary, the angel Gabriel said, “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

This is in keeping with the prophecy of Isaiah previously quoted, which we recall stated that this “Prince of Peace,” Christ Jesus, would sit on the throne of David, to order, establish, and rule in his Father’s kingdom with judgment and justice forever. Thus it is that Jesus became the head of God’s divine ruling house. Starting with his earthly ministry, the selection and preparation began of a company called from the world of mankind to be joint-heirs with him in this ruling house. Through the begetting and birth of the Holy Spirit these are made members of the divine family with Jesus.—Rom. 8:14-17; I John 3:1,2

SELECTION OF THE ROYAL HOUSE

For a time, the opportunity of becoming a part of this royal house of sons was limited to the natural descendants of Abraham. These were the people of God to whom the promises had been originally made, and it was among these that Jesus conducted his ministry. “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” (John 1:12) However, an insufficient number of the Jewish

nation responded to this call, so later, through the Gospel message, the invitation was extended to Gentiles.—Acts 13:46-49

The work of gathering and preparing these to live and reign with Christ has continued throughout the Christian age. As each one, through trial, has proven worthy, he has fallen asleep in death to be awakened at the close of the age in the “first resurrection” to live and “reign with him [Christ] a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6) Just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God at the beginning of the age, so his joint-heirs are resurrected at the close of the age. They join Christ to make up the spiritual and all-powerful “mountain of the house of the LORD” which is established in the “top of the mountains,”—that is, dominating all the affairs of men.

One reason men have misunderstood God’s plan is that they have failed to take into consideration his mighty power. Thinking that he has been limited to what weak and imperfect humans are able to accomplish in his name, it has appeared that the divine purpose has failed. On the contrary, however, God is abundantly able to accomplish his purposes despite the efforts of fallen mankind in opposing directions.—Isa. 55:10,11

A good example of this is in the case of Jesus. He was born to be a king, and to sit upon the throne of his father, David. The religious rulers of his day hated him, and finally succeeded in having him put to death, one of the charges against him being that he claimed to be a king. (Matt. 21:4-9; Luke 23:38) They killed the King, but this did not thwart the divine purpose centered in him. Indeed, it was

necessary that Jesus die in order to redeem the world from death, and God raised him from the dead.—Acts 2:22-36

The significance of this, as it relates to God's promises pertaining to the ruling house of David, is brought to our attention by the Apostle Paul in a sermon preached at Antioch. "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David."—Acts 13:32-34; Ps. 2:6,7; Isa. 55:3

Just as it was good tidings that he who was to sit on the throne of David forever had been born, it was also glad tidings that, when his enemies put him to death, thus serving as cohorts of Satan in his efforts to thwart the divine purpose, God raised this greater David from the dead. Can we doubt the triumph of the Father's plan for the salvation and peace of the human race when power like this can be utilized to assure its successful conclusion? It is by the exercise of such almighty power that God's authority will be established in the earth.

ESTABLISHMENT OF GOD'S KINGDOM

In God's kingdom, under the rule of Christ and his faithful footstep followers, the people and nations of the world will want to be taught the Lord's ways; and when they do, they will no longer

learn war nor practice the arts of war. All the time and resources now being devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war will be directed toward peaceful ends. Then there will be security for all.—Ps. 46:9; Isa. 2:4; Zech. 9:10

At that time, none shall make the people afraid. Today the world is filled with fear. At this very moment, as the year 2022 draws to a close, there is fear of escalating war, revolution, economic recession or depression, growing societal conflicts, political extremism on multiple sides, and increasing moral bankruptcy, just to name a few. There is no genuine peace and security anywhere. It is as though the angels' message of peace and good will upon the earth had never been proclaimed. This is because we are living at the end of the age when, as foretold by the prophets, the empire of Satan, the "god of this world," is being overthrown by means of a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation."—II Cor. 4:4; Rev. 20:2,3; Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22

To those unenlightened by the prophecies of the Bible concerning the meaning of the present "distress of nations," it appears as though the angelic message of peace on earth is just empty words. (Luke 21:25) This has led to an incorrect understanding of the angels' proclamation. Instead of peace on earth, and good will toward men, it is now more frequently stated as "Peace on earth among men of good will."

The angelic message, however, was that peace would come to the earth, not because of fallen mankind's goodwill toward one another, but because God's goodwill and purpose toward his human creatures was then being manifested through the

birth of Jesus to be the Savior and future King of the world. God's goodwill toward men had been shown in his promises to send a Savior, and then much more so when the Savior was born. God's goodwill toward the world of mankind was further shown by raising Jesus from the dead.

Although not recognized by the world, God's goodwill has continued through the preparation of Jesus' followers to live and reign with him in his kingdom. The world will, in time, acknowledge God's bountiful grace through the resurrection of these from the dead that they might be associated with Jesus in dispensing kingdom blessings of peace and life to the people of all nations.

GOODWILL MANIFESTED AMONG THE PEOPLE

God's goodwill is to be manifested through the exercise of governmental control over all mankind. This will be by means of that foretold government upon the shoulder of the Prince of Peace. Through that long-promised righteous and just government, the people will be assured of peace and security, and be given the opportunity, by obedience, to be restored to perfection and live forever. All of this will be as a result of God's good will toward his human creatures.

Finally, and as a result of mankind's education in righteousness and in love during Christ's kingdom, all of the willing and obedient among mankind will learn what true and lasting "peace on earth" is. They will learn, also, to extend goodwill, good deeds, and love toward their fellowman throughout the ages of eternity—all this the result of that news "out of Bethlehem," proclaimed by angels so long ago. ■

An Angel Speaks to Zacharias

Key Verse: *“The angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.”*
—*Luke 1:13, New King James Version*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:5-20

ZACHARIAS AND HIS WIFE

Elizabeth led lives devoted to God and his service. Their faithfulness is forever memorialized in Luke’s Gospel: “They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” (Luke 1:6, *NKJV*) Their life was blessed, save for one thing. They had no child, Elizabeth being barren. Perhaps the promise of God was often on their mind: “If you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God,

... all these blessings shall come upon you. ... Blessed shall be the fruit of your body.”—*Deut. 28:1-4, NKJV*

While walking blamelessly in the divine commandments and ordinances, Zacharias and Elizabeth did not waiver in their service and devotion to God, despite the lack of an heir. They would soon be rewarded. Many persons of great consequence in the plan of God were born to parents who had long been childless. Recall the delay in the births of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson and Samuel. God sometimes keeps his people waiting for the fulfillment of his blessings in order to amplify the

magnitude of it when finally granted. Such was to be the case in the birth of Zacharias' and Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist.

Zacharias was an Aaronic priest of Israel. "While he was serving as priest before God, ... according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord." (Luke 1:8,9, *NKJV*) While engaged in his duty, an angel appeared to him. Zacharias was very afraid. The Jews believed that seeing an angel would bring death to the beholder. The angel of the Lord was quick to reassure him, speaking to him the words of our Key Verse. To this, the angel then added, "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth."—vs. 14, *NKJV*

The news was overwhelming. After so many years he would be blessed with a son; and no ordinary son, but one who would grow to manhood and become a great prophet of the Lord. He would turn the hearts of many in Israel to the Lord their God. He would do so in the spirit and power of Elijah the prophet, fulfilling Malachi's prophecy, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers."—Mal. 4:5,6, *NKJV*

This was more than Zacharias could believe, and he expressed doubt. "The angel answered and said to him, I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time." (Luke 1:19,20, *NKJV*) We are instructed by this incident. As Zacharias' wavering led to a diminishing of the glory of the moment, so our unbelief at times will diminish the manifestation of God's power in our lives. Let us listen, and believe, when God speaks through his providences. ■

Zacharias' Prophecy

Key Verse: “*You, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways.*”

—*Luke 1:76, New King James Version*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:57-80

God. Emotions were soaring for him, his wife, and their fellow Israelites. They knew that there was something very noteworthy about this promised child. His birth was broaching on the miraculous. How could an aged woman conceive and bear a son? Long ago it had happened with Abraham and Sarah, but now it had occurred right in their own day! Surely God was working.

Many were aware that something extraordinary had happened to Zacharias. On the day God's angel had visited him, “the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lingered so long in the temple. But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.” (Luke 1:21,22, *NKJV*) Zacharias' enforced silence accomplished two things. First, it apparently focused his attention on the angel's words and Scripture prophecies. Secondly, it

HIS TONGUE AT LAST freed from nine months of enforced silence, Zacharias could now express his stored-up feelings. Would they be words of resentment, anger, or frustration at being made mute for such a long period of time? No, they would not. He opened his mouth and gave praise to

raised a great degree of anticipation among the Jews waiting for this child of promise to be born.

It was customary among the Jews of the time to name the firstborn son after the father. All were surprised when the name John was chosen. The moment Zacharias confirmed that the name was to be John, in obedience to the angel's instruction from God, "his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God." (vs. 64, *NKJV*) All who were within hearing listened as Zacharias extolled God's benevolence and faithfulness relative to his great plans for Israel and all mankind. The birth of John, and his role as God's messenger, had been determined far in advance. Zacharias declared that God had now "raised up a horn," a power, to deliver his people, "spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old."—vss. 69,70, *English Standard Version*

The great work of John the Baptist would find its focus in the Abrahamic promise. Zacharias affirmed that the promise was still in effect. God would now "remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham." (vss. 72,73, *ESV*) Jehovah had promised Abram, "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen. 12:2,3, *NKJV*) Therein lies the essence of the Gospel—the blessing of all the families of the earth.

Zacharias prophesied of the great blessings that would now come to his people. First, a great reformation was beginning, and repentance for sins was available. Second, salvation was near at hand through remission of sins. Third, the great light of the Gospel would enlighten the hearts and minds of God's people. May the vision of Zacharias' prophecy still excite and encourage us each day. ■

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Key Verse: “*He went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*”

—*Luke 3:3, New King James Version*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 3:2-6, 15-18

the region around the Jordan River, preaching a baptism of repentance for sins. As he did this, he fulfilled the words of Isaiah the prophet: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”—*Luke 3:4-6, NKJV; Isa. 40:3-5*

The word of God came directly to John, indicative of his favored position in the divine estimation. With boldness he began to preach a baptism of repentance. His message was to all ranks of Jewish society, from the poor and afflicted to the rich and privileged. He urged

IN THE DIVINE PURPOSE, John the Baptist was destined to fulfill the role of a prophet. There was little probability that he would devote himself to another calling such as a farmer, fisherman, or tradesman. He was to be the Messenger who would prepare the way for the ministry of Christ.

Thus, as stated in our Key Verse, John went throughout

all to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.

John was faithful to his mission. Although his notoriety spread throughout Judea, he remained humble. He did not begin to think of himself as someone highly exalted who deserved his “fair share” of wealth, honor, and comforts. He would cry out in the wilderness on behalf of someone who was coming after him—one who indeed was worthy of honor. This one of whom John esteemed himself unworthy to even unlatch the strap of his sandals was the Lord Jesus Christ. We, as Christians, take a lesson from John. We must always remain humble. No matter how much the Lord blesses us we are still broken, though forgiven, and God is no respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34; Col. 3:25) May we always put Christ ahead of ourselves.

Despite his humility, the people were reasoning in their hearts whether John was the Christ or not. They were in expectation, and this seemed to be the time when Christ would come. The Scriptures bear record of John’s faithful humility: “The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you? He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the Prophet? And he answered, No. Then they said to him, Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself? He said: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.”—John 1:19-23, *NKJV*

Armed with humility, John was a credible witness to the coming of Christ Jesus—the Messiah. He feared no man and plainly spoke of the need for repentance and the remission of sins. As the one who prepared the way for Jesus’ ministry, he was eminently faithful. We also desire to prepare the way of Christ to enter the hearts of men now, as God, virtue, integrity and opportunity may allow. ■

Mary's Song of Praise

Key Verses: “*Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.*”
—*Luke 1:46,47, New King James Version*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:46-55

TODAY'S KEY VERSES

fall uniquely at the time in which many Christians observe the birth of Jesus. His birth as a man, which occurred nine months later, was accompanied by many miraculous overrulings by God. He came as a newborn baby and not a fully grown man. He was born in a manger to illustrate the humility of

his coming. He was to be the King of Kings yet seemed so defenseless given the supremacy of Rome. Divine power kept him from all danger and harm. Of great magnitude also is the fact that Jesus' mother, Mary, was a virgin.

Gabriel, the angelic messenger of God, visited Mary to explain the miraculous circumstances now to come into her life. He said, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you.” (Luke 1:28, *NKJV*) Mary feared, not know what was happening. However, she was assured that she need not fear, but rather, realize the blessing that was about to come upon her. There must have been a significant degree of wonderment on both the part of Mary and of Gabriel. Mary was amazed at being told that she was going to be the mother of Israel's deliverer, and Gabriel was in awe that the “Logos” of God, whom he knew in the heavenly courts, was now to be made flesh and be born of this holy young maiden.

Upon hearing the news that her cousin Elizabeth had conceived a child in her old age—another miracle—Mary went to visit her. Upon entering the home of Zacharias, the sound of Mary’s voice reached Elizabeth’s ears. “When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.”—vss. 41-44, *NKJV*

The Holy Spirit filled Mary’s heart, and she began to extol the high praises of God. She acknowledged that she was a maidservant of the Lord, not one who should be exalted and worshipped. Mary gave humble thanks that many generations to come would refer to her as “blessed,” for indeed she was. She further praised God for his divine equity, soon to be expressed in his kingdom. The proud would be scattered and made powerless—the meek would inherit the earth. The mighty would be deposed from their thrones, and the lowly would be exalted. The great outworking of the Abrahamic promise was at hand—in his seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed.—vss. 46-55, *NKJV*

We are not given Mary’s age at the time of Jesus’ birth. However, noting Jewish customs of the time, it may be concluded that she was in her early to middle teenage years. We pause to consider the reality that her devotion to God was well formed and vigorous at an early age. Young Christian women—and men—should take encouragement from her example. Give honor and respect to the gift of faith that works in you. It will lead to a lifetime of rich blessings from God, a life “more abundant.” ■

The Peace of God

*“The peace of God,
which passeth all
understanding,
shall keep your
hearts and minds
through Christ
Jesus.”*

—*Philippians 4:7*

THE WORD “PEACE” occurs in every book of the New Testament with the sole exception of the First Epistle of John. To the Christian, peace is an important element of being “spiritually minded” and is listed as one of the

fruits of the spirit. (Rom. 8:6; Gal. 5:22) Thus we see that peace is a most vital subject, both in terms of comprehending its various components and then developing it in one’s character.

Our Heavenly Father is a “God of peace.” (Rom. 15:33; I Thess. 5:23) God’s mind is tranquil, calm, and undisturbed. He is never agitated, wearied, perplexed, anxious, nor exhausted by any of the cares in his vast dominion. The perfect peace which God has is not, however, because there is no disorder or trouble in his domain. He is always fully aware of such conditions. His mighty wisdom comprehends all causes and discerns with precision all effects, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.” (Isa. 46:10) As the Creator of all things and the originator of all laws, no problem can

arise which is unexpected or that he has not already forecasted.

Jehovah is the Father of “the whole family in heaven and earth,” and demonstrates a father’s perfect love toward his intelligent creatures. (Eph. 3:14,15) He created mankind “in his own image” or likeness, having similar mental and moral attributes, so that he might have communion and fellowship with them as his children. (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 103:13; II Cor. 6:18) Mankind’s created likeness to God includes not only similar reasoning faculties, but also the ability to exercise one’s own free will in the development of their character. In order for one to develop a character, the alternatives of good and evil must be placed before them. Right and wrong principles of thought and action must be evaluated, and all individuals are left free to make their own choice. God does not force anyone to think or act in a particular way. An additional dimension of likeness to our Heavenly Father includes man’s having a dominion, something the angelic hosts did not possess.—Gen. 1:26-28

THE LOVE OF GOD

The love of God for mankind is similar to, though much stronger than, the love which earthly parents have for their child. The Heavenly Father’s loving interest and solicitude does not grow cold as the years go by. Rather, he earnestly watches for the development of the principles and fruits of righteousness in his creation. Like an earthly parent, he experiences the sense of either joy or sorrow when his freewilled human creation chooses the right or the wrong course.

This we are fully assured of by scriptures which speak of God's pleasure in those who reverence him. (Ps. 147:11; Mal. 3:16,17) Our Heavenly Father has a love, joy, and delight in the principles of righteousness and for those who obey them. Our Lord Jesus admonished his disciples, telling them: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) On the other hand, many scriptures also speak of those things which displease God, and are even "an abomination" to him.—Prov. 6:16-19; 16:5; Num. 11:1

PEACE KEEPS OUR HEART AND MIND

In our opening verse the Apostle Paul speaks of the peace of God "which passeth all understanding." Here the phrase translated as "which passeth," in the original Greek, means "to hold oneself above." In other words, the peace of God allows one, as it were, to rise above all outward circumstances and conditions. This type of peace is rather exceptional.

Paul then explains that this peace "shall keep [Greek: be a watcher in advance] your hearts and minds." Here the apostle differentiates between "heart" and "mind." The heart represents our affections and feelings. Paul urges not only that we should have peaceful feelings, but also that our mind should be at rest. Such peace acts like a "watcher" for both our heart and mind—standing guard continually, ready to challenge every hostile or worrying thought or feeling which may enter our being. Thus, this peace guards not only the Christian's heart affections, but also the thoughts of the mind. Elsewhere, Paul admonishes that we

are to bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Doing this contributes to our having and maintaining the peace of God.—II Cor. 10:5

“THROUGH CHRIST JESUS”

The peace of God is provided, and is only attainable, “through Christ Jesus,” as our text states. If after we have made a consecration of ourselves to the Lord, we should do something to violate our conscience in some respect, we would feel estranged from him. When this occurs, we should repent—that is, correct our thinking and reform our ways—drawing near to the Heavenly Father and endeavoring by prayer in the name of Christ Jesus to seek reconciliation and to return to divine favor.—II Pet. 3:9; Rev. 3:19; Phil. 4:6

The Apostle John elaborates concerning the provision which God has made for us when we sin. First, we should “confess our sins” in prayer to our Heavenly Father. Then, through the merit of Christ’s blood we can be forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness, for “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,” who appears in the presence of God “to make intercession” for us. (I John 1:9; 2:1; Heb. 7:25) Thus, we can come to God through the arrangement which he has made and rejoice that we may obtain forgiveness and grace to help in time of need.

Having peace “through Christ Jesus” means that such mental serenity and calmness is compatible even in the midst of outward commotion, sorrow, or pain of any kind. It is not dependent upon outward circumstances, but upon the proper

balancing of the mind and the condition of heart. This kind of divine peace was enjoyed by our Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry even in the midst of turmoil, confusion and persecution.

OBTAINING THE PEACE OF GOD

Concerning the peace which God gives to his faithful followers, the Prophet Isaiah writes: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.” (Isa. 26:3,4) Here Isaiah states two requirements in order to obtain the peace which God is willing to give.

First, our mind must be continually “stayed on” [Hebrew: to lean upon or take hold of] our Heavenly Father, his principles and promises. This includes all of our thoughts concerning our hopes, desires and ambitions. All of these must be rooted and fixed upon our Heavenly Father and the many “exceeding great and precious promises” which he has given to us in the Scriptures.—II Pet. 1:4

Secondly, we must continually trust, or have full confidence, in our Heavenly Father at all times and in all circumstances, as we pass through the various experiences in life. Along the same line, the Apostle Peter states that the followers of Christ “are kept by the power of God through faith.”—I Pet. 1:5

GOD KNOWS OUR THOUGHTS

There are many scriptures which point out the fact that our Heavenly Father knows all our thoughts. For example, when King David announced to all the princes of Israel that God had chosen his son

Solomon to succeed him, he admonished his son, saying: “Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee.”—I Chron. 28:9

The psalmist similarly wrote, “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.” (Ps. 139:1,2) We are also told in the book of Hebrews, “The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—Heb. 4:12

PROPER THOUGHTS

Knowing the importance of our thoughts, how can we direct them in a manner which would be pleasing to our Heavenly Father and which will enable us to have the peace of God? Part of the answer to this question is found in the Book of Proverbs, where we are admonished, “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.” (Prov. 16:3) Our “works” include not only outward deeds, but also our desires in life. The psalmist, expressing his one and only desire, writes: “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.” (Ps. 27:4) If our one and only desire is to be faithful

unto death, so that we may “dwell in the house of the LORD” forever, this will no doubt have a profound impact on our daily thoughts.

As our love for God and all his principles grows, we will think more and more upon his words and strive to keep all his instructions. Let our meditations be these: “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. ... for thy testimonies are my meditation. ... I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.”—Ps. 119:97-101

God’s commandments and principles should not be viewed as grievous or painful to us. Instead, the sentiments of our heart should more and more be, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”—vss. 103-105

Elsewhere Paul invites us: “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service,” and then he adds, “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Thus are we to submit ourselves to the will of God by being transformed with the heavenly influences through his Word. Such a renewing of our mind implies a renovation of all our thoughts and way of thinking. This is a most important work in the Christian’s life. The apostle then concludes with the purpose of this renewing work: “That ye may prove [Greek: test] what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

ADVERSE EXPERIENCES FOR A WISE PURPOSE

When someone very dear and precious to us has died, we sorrow from the void which is left. At those times let us place all our trust, hope and comfort in the resurrection promises which our loving Heavenly Father has given.—John 11:24; I Cor. 15:21-23; Rev. 21:4,5

If we experience a joy or some slight prosperity in our life, may our thoughts humbly thank our Heavenly Father. At the same time, let us also remember that the things of this present life are, at best, only temporary, and that we must not place our hopes upon the things of this earth, but rather upon the things which are eternal.—II Cor. 4:18

At times we may be falsely or maliciously spoken of by coworkers, neighbors, relatives, or even by brethren. On such occasions, let us think how, throughout the past ages, God has permitted such experiences to come upon even his most faithful followers, because his wisdom saw that such adverse, and even unjust, experiences would allow his followers to develop and crystalize their character and thus prove them. Such experiences were permitted, for a wise purpose no doubt, to faithful ones such as Joseph, Moses, Paul, and many others. They were especially permitted to come upon the perfect man, our Lord Jesus, during his earthly ministry. Peter admonishes us: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”—I Pet. 2:21-23

If all our thoughts lean toward our Heavenly Father and his promises, and if we constantly place all our trust and confidence in him throughout all the various experiences of life, then we will be able to have “the peace of God.” The psalmist writes, “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” (Ps. 18:2) To have this fulfilled in us, however, requires constant effort throughout each day, from arising each morning until retiring at night.

JESUS' FINAL LEGACY

As a part of the final legacy which he gave to his disciples after leaving the upper room and before arriving at Gethsemane, Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”—John 14:27

Jesus, with compassion and tenderness, on the last night of his earthly life bestowed upon his disciples this heritage of peace. It was the richest gift he could bequeath to them. It was of priceless value because it encompassed the promise of the tranquility of soul, and the rest and ease of mind which he himself possessed—the peace of God!

This is the same peace which the Father himself has always enjoyed, even in the midst of all the commotion which the permission of evil has brought about, but its focal point is somewhat different than the peace which Jesus had. In Jehovah, this peace is centered in his own omnipotent power and wisdom, not in a selfish way, but in knowing that

all his plans and purposes are being accomplished in exact accord with his will. (I Chron. 29:11-13) The peace which Jesus had was not centered in himself, but in God, and his faith in the Father's wisdom, power and grace. So too with us. To have the peace of God, we must be like Jesus, and rest upon God by faith.

While Jesus was uttering these words concerning peace to his disciples, the betrayer, Judas, was out on his murderous errand. Then came Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, and fear swept over the disciples as they realized the fate of their beloved Lord. "Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled." Those who arrested Jesus took him to the high priest, the scribes, and the elders, who were already assembled waiting to try him. Peter, anxious to defend Jesus, followed them, but he became so overwhelmed with fear that three times he denied even knowing Jesus. (Matt. 26:47-75) Finally came the end—Jesus' death on the cross. The peace which Jesus had so lovingly promised had not yet come to his disciples.

Three days later, hope was revived with the news of Jesus' resurrection, confirmed by his appearances, and again forty days later, with his parting command to wait in Jerusalem until they would obtain the promised Holy Spirit of adoption, which was shed upon them at Pentecost. Only then did the Lord's rich legacy of peace begin to be realized.

Jesus' gift of peace was bequeathed not just to his first disciples. It is the blessed inheritance of the entire "body of Christ," even to the end of the Gospel Age. (I Cor. 12:12,27) Jesus expressed this thought in his earlier prayer, saying, "Neither pray

I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”—John 17:20

ABIDING PEACE

The peace promised by our Lord is not the short-lived peace of the world which is most often enjoyed for a relatively brief duration—while fortune smiles, friends abound, and health endures. It quickly vanishes, however, when poverty comes, friends leave, health fails, and death steals away our dear ones, the treasures of our heart. The peace which Jesus promised, “my peace,” is something which none of the difficulties of the present life can destroy, and which no enemy can take from us. What richer legacy could the Lord have left to his beloved followers?

Consequently, the peace promised is not of the kind that the world can generally recognize or appreciate, because the possessor of it, like Jesus, may have a stormy pathway. Indeed, it must be so with all the faithful followers of the Master until the purposes of God in the permission of evil are accomplished. The Lord distinctly forewarned his followers that, “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” but through all the storms of life, the peace of God would abide if they would trust him, so that “in me ye might have peace.”—John 16:33

THE FOUNDATION OF PEACE

To find the foundation and security of this abiding peace, which can survive even in the heaviest storms of life, we have only to look to the teaching and example of Jesus and the Apostles. Thus we ask: What was it that held them so firmly and gave them such peace, even as they suffered?

It was their faith in the love, power, and wisdom of God. They believed that what God “had promised, he was able also to perform,” and that his promises could not, and would not, fail. (Rom. 4:21; II Cor. 1:20) By the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, God declared, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: ... Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.” “The LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?” (Isa. 46:9-11; 14:27) Jesus and the apostles rested upon these and many other assurances of God.

FAITH AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

The Apostle John wrote, “This is the victory [Greek: the means of success] that overcometh the world, even our faith.” (I John 5:4) Faith in God is essential in achieving peace, because peace comes from God. “Without faith it is impossible to please him.” (Heb. 11:6) It is only by developing a constant, unwavering faith that the peace of God will abide with his people. It is the blessed peace which comes from the assurance that God acknowledges us as his children, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17) Along these lines James writes, “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”—James 2:5

This is the basis of our peace. No matter how heavily the storms of life may assail us, we must never let go our anchor and allow ourselves to drift. Rather, we should always remember that “the foundation of God standeth sure” and that “his truth

shall be thy shield and buckler.” “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”—II Tim. 2:19; Ps. 91:4; 119:165

Although each of us has human imperfections and frailties, these can be covered by the imputed righteousness of Christ. (I John 1:7-9; 2:1,2) We are also assured that “the Father himself loveth” us, and that “he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust,” having compassion for the sons of his love.—John 16:27; Ps. 103:8-14

If we want the peace of God to reign in our heart and mind, we must never let go our faith. Based upon full faith and trust, the peace of God which the Master bequeathed to us will always abide. Throughout our Christian journey, let our hearts be cheered and our minds stayed, being assured that the promises of God will come to fruition.

Following our opening verse, Paul states, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, ... honest ... just ... pure, ... lovely, ... of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” (Phil. 4:8,9) May our requests at the throne of heavenly grace be for the increase of his peace and our faith. Let all of us be filled with the promised peace which “passeth all understanding,” and that will guard our heart and mind through Christ Jesus. ■

*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*
—Matt. 11:29,30 New American Standard Bible

Peter's Strengthening Words to the Brethren

*“The Lord said,
Simon, Simon,
behold, Satan hath
desired to have
you, that he may
sift you as
wheat: But I have
prayed for thee,
that thy faith fail
not: and when thou
art converted,
strengthen thy
brethren.”*
—Luke 22:31,32

WHEN JESUS AND THE twelve were together in the upper room the night before the crucifixion, he addressed to Simon Peter the words of our opening text. Peter was a firm believer in Jesus. He was convinced that his beloved Master was the foretold Messiah. Hence, when the Lord spoke of Peter's future conversion he did not mean a change from being an

unbeliever to being a believer. Rather, the reference was to a change of viewpoint which was to take place in Peter's understanding of the full

scope of his Master's place in God's plan, and of the position to be occupied by his disciples.

OPPOSITION

Peter was a rugged fisherman and accustomed to carrying out his own plans in life quite as he wished. It was natural for him to assume that the great Messiah of promise would be even more capable of accomplishing what he desired. Consternation filled the disciple's heart when, on an earlier occasion, Jesus had let it be known that he was going to Jerusalem where he expected to be arrested and put to death. To Peter this must have seemed like surrendering to the enemy, so he said to his Master, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee."—Matt. 16:21,22

Jesus replied to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Then, addressing his disciples in general, he added, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (vss. 23-25) To the disciples this must have seemed like a strange statement. Peter had advised Jesus not to expose his life to danger, but the Master explained that in this Peter had expressed a human viewpoint.

The generally accepted thought among mankind is that one must protect his own interests, and the interests of those near and dear to him, at almost any cost. The idea of deliberately choosing a course that leads to suffering and death would surely be

frowned upon by those who are guided by the wisdom of this world. This was the case with Peter. Not only did he endeavor to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem where his enemies were waiting for him, but later even tried to prevent his arrest, going so far as to cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest.—John 18:10,11

Peter was in this frame of mind that night in the upper room when Jesus said to him, “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.” Satan was working hard with Peter in an attempt to wrest him away from his Master’s leadership. He had found a slight area of difference between them, and was exploiting this point of difference. However, Jesus assured Peter of his prayers, and said to him, “when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” Jesus had confidence that Peter would come through this experience and would ultimately gain the proper viewpoint.

ENLIGHTENED

The transformation of the apostle to the divine perspective did not begin in earnest until Pentecost. Then he received the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and saw the reason for Jesus’ suffering and death. Indeed, in his Pentecostal sermon, Peter called attention to prophecies pertaining to Jesus’ death and resurrection. (Acts 2:14-36) If he had discerned the meaning of these prophecies when he was with Jesus, Peter would not have endeavored to prevent his crucifixion. Now, however, he knew without doubt that his previously wrong viewpoint and the experiences to which it had led, was a special preparation enabling him to appreciate

the subject more clearly than might otherwise have been possible.

Thus, Peter was well prepared to strengthen the brethren, as stated in our opening text, along the line of Christian suffering and the place it occupies in the outworking of God's plan. This comes to light in his first epistle, which Peter may well have written recalling his Master's admonition to strengthen his followers. All of the Lord's people need strengthening along this line. Suffering is not pleasant, and the flesh will endeavor to avoid it whenever possible, whether it be physical pain, or mental discomfort due to the frown of our neighbors or of the world in general. To face ridicule, persecution, suffering or even death, when perchance we could choose a more pleasant course, requires faith and courage which is the outgrowth of conviction that we are doing that which is well-pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

STRENGTHENING THE BRETHERN

How did Peter strengthen the brethren, even down to our day? First, he emphasized that we are not seeking for earthly blessings, but heavenly. He reminds us that we have been begotten again "unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."—I Pet. 1:3-5

It is in the hope of this inheritance that we have our chief cause for rejoicing, rather than in the material good things of life which might be ours if

we bent our energies to secure them. We “greatly rejoice” because, as Peter states, “the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (vss. 6,7) Thus the apostle emphasizes that the Christian’s joys are based not upon the abundance of the things which they may possess in this life, but upon faith in the heavenly inheritance to which they have been called, which will include the joy of being with the Lord Jesus and the Heavenly Father.

Peter further tells us that our redemption and salvation are because Jesus, in keeping with his Father’s will as set forth in the Old Testament, gave his life on our behalf. We are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (vss. 18,19) Jesus was, indeed, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

TO OFFER SACRIFICE

The converted Peter presents another line of thought which concerns the matter of following Jesus. In I Peter 2:5 he explains that we are “a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.” In Old Testament times, the priests of Israel offered animals in sacrifice, but not so with the holy priesthood of the present age. We offer ourselves to be consumed upon a symbolic altar, where our sacrifice and service are made acceptable through the blood of Christ. We go to him “outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” (Heb. 13:10-13, *New King James Version*) We need

only to think of the burning animals in the arrangements of Israel to realize that in the offering of ourselves there will be suffering, and eventually death, into which we voluntarily enter.

When Peter endeavored to prevent Christ's crucifixion, he thought of him as an earthly king, not as a priest to offer sacrifice, and certainly not the sacrifice of himself. He hoped to be with Jesus in his kingdom, to share his rulership, but he did not expect to suffer and die in order to attain this high position of glory. However, when he was enlightened by the Holy Spirit, Peter then gained a clear vision of this aspect of the divine purpose. Then he could strengthen the brethren to endure their suffering. He wrote: "This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."—I Pet. 2:19-23

All of the Lord's consecrated people need to be strengthened in order to take patiently the ridicule and suffering that is inflicted upon them unjustly. This was the position of Jesus. He spent his life going about doing good. He never harmed anyone, and yet his enemies reviled him and finally put him to death. This is the example which we are

invited to emulate. This is the course laid down for us—to follow in the footsteps of the Master. This is what it means truly to be one of his disciples.

There are many Christian churches which teach that a child of God will be blessed with material gain. A common view claims that success in business, securing the best employment, enjoying good health, and having many friends, are evidences of God's favor. This was not Jesus' viewpoint, however, nor that of the apostles and those in the Early Church who followed their teachings. Instead, suffering for well-doing, and taking it patiently without any disposition to fight back, is that which results in God's favor. Thus, our association with one another should be as described by Peter: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."—I Pet. 3:8,9

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

Since we are in the world, but not of its spirit, we may often find ourselves surrounded by coolness and opposition. It is most fitting, therefore, that all who are walking in this narrow way together should be of one mind, and have compassion one for the other. Due to our fleshly imperfections misunderstandings will occur, but those who are laying down their lives doing good, and are not returning evil for evil, will surely want to be guided by this same Christian principle in their dealings one with another. These will realize that having their own

way is not nearly so important as endeavoring to be all of one mind and purpose, and to be sympathetic toward all.

Peter continues to strengthen the brethren by reminding them that God will not permit them to be harmed as New Creatures if they keep on following the right path of sacrifice. He wrote: "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled."—I Pet. 3:13,14

We see that Jesus, as a man, was reviled; his enemies spat upon him and placed a crown of thorns upon his head. They nailed him to a cross and let him hang there until he died. They inflicted much suffering upon the Master, but they did not harm him as a New Creature; for his suffering and death was his pathway to glory, honor, and immortality. (Rom. 2:7) It is the same with us. Suffering inflicted upon us by our enemies can harm us only if we permit such experiences to embitter our hearts so that we will begin rendering evil for evil. This might result in temporary satisfaction to the flesh, but, if continued, will lead to the loss of our inheritance with Jesus in the heavenly phase of his kingdom.

Continuing his message of encouragement, Peter wrote, "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." (I Pet. 3:17,18) Prior to being "converted," Peter surely would not have admitted that it is better to suffer for well-doing than for evil doing. He knew

that Jesus' entire life was one of well-doing, and he rebelled at the thought that such a man would be made to suffer and to die.

Now, however, Peter knew the purpose of his Master's suffering and death, and he knew that we, his followers, have the privilege of suffering and dying with him. To know why we suffer, and to be assured that this is the will of God for us, is surely a great source of strength in facing our experiences. As the apostle said: "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."—I Pet. 4:1

NOT STRANGE

Continuing to strengthen the brethren, the apostle wrote, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (I Pet. 4:12,13) To Peter, before Pentecost, it was very strange indeed that fiery trials should come upon Jesus, leading to his crucifixion, but since he had learned that this was God's plan for him, and it had been foretold by the prophets, he realized it was "not strange." We, too, should not think it strange when fiery trials come into our lives, for, as Peter explains, we are partakers of Christ's sufferings. If we partake of his sufferings, and endure courageously and faithfully to the end of the narrow way of sacrifice, we will share in his glory.—Rom. 8:17

How strengthening it should be to our faith to realize that the trials which come to us as a result

of faithfulness to the Lord, to the Truth, and to the brethren, are not due to our Heavenly Father's lack of interest, but because he is supervising our experiences to prepare us for joint-heirship with his beloved Son in the kingdom! The human mind is prone to say, "How strange that this great trial has come into my life!" Peter says, though, that we should not reason in this manner, but rather, rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings.

It requires faith to take this viewpoint—a faith that is based on an understanding of the reason that the narrow way is so difficult. True, we do not always understand in detail just why certain experiences are permitted to come into our lives, but we know the plan of God in arranging for us to suffer with Christ, and the details we can leave in his hands. If the way of the cross seems hard, we have the assurance of divine grace to help in our every time of need, and our faith should enable us to say that we would rather walk in the dark with God than go alone in the light.—Heb. 4:16

FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

Not all suffering is acceptable to God. Sometimes our trials may be due to our own imperfections, which cause us to say and do things that are contrary to the divine will. Peter calls our attention to this, saying, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."—I Pet. 4:15,16

From God's standpoint we could become murderers through the assassination of a person's

character by evil speaking. By misrepresentation we could “steal” another’s good name and reputation. Those who do these things frequently find themselves embroiled in trials and difficulties, but they cannot properly rejoice in such experiences on the grounds that they are the sufferings of Christ. These are sufferings which result from wrongdoing, and are a cause for shame on the part of those who experience them. Only those who “suffer for righteousness’ sake” can be assured of the Lord’s approval and look forward to receiving their inheritance with Jesus in the kingdom of heaven.

GOD CARES

While the way of the cross is a difficult one, its joys far outweigh its sorrows. These joys are largely in the assurance of our Heavenly Father’s love and care. Peter wrote, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. 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. 5:6-9

We are to humble ourselves before the Heavenly Father and to accept without question the experiences which he permits. He who cares for us is never weary; his eye is watchful for our every need; and his ear is always open to our cry. God is abundantly able to do for us more than we can possibly ask or think, and will do so, if we continue humbly to look up to him in thankfulness for all the blessings

which his love provides—even for our trials. (Eph. 3:20,21) These trials also are blessings in disguise, because they have a special part in preparing us for glory, and for sharing with Christ in the great restoration work of bringing mankind back into harmony with God in his promised kingdom.—Matt. 6:10; Rev. 21:1-5

We are thankful that Peter was faithful to the commission Jesus gave to him to strengthen the brethren by giving them the assurance that Christian suffering is God’s will for them, and an evidence of divine favor! Thus, we can take to heart and rejoice in the words: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10 ■

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)

Reverence in the House of God

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”
—Luke 11:2

REVERENCE IS DEFINED

in the dictionary as a “profound respect mingled with fear and affection, as for a holy being or place, or an exalted thing.” This is in general line with the meaning of the various Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible to describe the proper attitude one should have toward the Heavenly Father. In our opening text the Greek word translated “Hallowed” means to be venerated or revered. Thus, in giving us the model prayer of which this verse is a part, the Master emphasizes the importance of proper reverence when we approach the throne of heavenly grace. This proper attitude of reverence in prayer should be manifested in all we say and do. Indeed, prayer itself should be a reflection of Christian desire and endeavor.

While there is an element of fear in true reverence for God, when we come to a proper understanding and heart appreciation of the love and mercy of God, there is no reason that we should dread him.

Fear, in the sense of fright, or dread, is “taught by the precept of men.” (Isa. 29:13) Our fear, therefore, is more of a sober examination of ourselves to be sure we are striving to the best of our ability to know and do the will of God. The apostle says, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”—Heb. 4:1

We are not to fear God as a vengeful, vindictive and merciless being. However, our love and respect for him—our reverence—should be a restraining influence in our lives to keep us from conducting ourselves in ways unbecoming as his child. Natural Israel had this lesson impressed upon them, and spiritual Israelites should not be less sober and reverent in their devotions. In Ecclesiastes 5:1 we read, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.”

To natural Israelites the “house of God” was the temple, or sanctuary, where, through the priests, God met with them. In the case of spiritual Israel there are two viewpoints of God’s house, and the spirit of reverence is important with respect to both. In the larger picture, all the footstep followers of Jesus constitute God’s house, each individual constituting a living stone in it. (I Cor. 3:16,17; II Cor. 6:16) In a more restricted sense we may think of God’s house as being the formal assemblies of his people, where, even if as few as two or three can gather together, they have the assurance of the divine presence. (Matt. 18:20; Luke 24:13-32) Here also the spirit of reverence is vitally important to

proper Christian growth, and to obtain the largest possible blessing.—Matt. 21:13; I Cor. 14:40; I Tim. 3:15

The Israelites were admonished to have great reverence for the Temple of God. Consequently, the devout ones more or less cherished every stone in that symbolic building. Should not we maintain a similar attitude toward the “living stones” in God’s spiritual temple of this age? (Eph. 2:19-22; I Pet. 2:5, *Revised Version*) To have such reverence means that in all of our associations with the brotherhood of Christ we will seek to conduct ourselves in a manner pleasing to God, and with the view of being the greatest possible blessing to one another. This means that our viewpoint as Christians cannot properly be a selfish, self-centered one.

While we have an individual standing with the Lord, it is also true that our place in the divine arrangement is that of one living stone among all the rest, so that God’s will for us is blended into his will for the others. God does not make a separate plan for each one of his people in an effort to fit in with individual whims and wishes. His plan is for the entire temple class, and our individual standing with him is in connection with the place he has for us in the temple. To keep this viewpoint in mind will help us to better appreciate our fellow members of the “body of Christ,” and to seek more earnestly to carry out God’s will in our association with them. (I Cor. 12:12,27) We will want to share the rich blessings of divine grace which the Lord has for all the temple class.

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

In Psalm 111:10 we read: “The reverent fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” (*Amplified Bible*) This means simply that only by properly realizing our own lack of wisdom, and being willing to be instructed by God through his Word, may we expect both to start and to make progress in the narrow way that leads to life. If we truly reverence the Lord we will want to be taught of him, not in a few things only, but in all things. This means that we will gladly set aside our own plans, as well as those of others, and accept instead the Father’s plan for us. We will gladly do this, knowing that only by obedience to every word that comes from God may we hope to please him whom we love and worship.

Viewed thus we see that reverence is not only the beginning of wisdom, but is the completion of wisdom also. To whatever extent, therefore, we fail to give heed to his Word, to that same extent we will fail to attain the divine understanding that is “from above.” This wisdom is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17) If, for example, we decide that for our own self-interest we will sacrifice purity in order to be peaceable, it would mean that we lack a proper reverence for God and for his ways. This principle holds true with respect to every detail of the Christian life.

The psalmist expresses the proper thought of reverence saying, “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship [Hebrew: bow down, reverence] the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” (Ps. 29:2) To give unto the Lord that which is due

his name means obedience to his every instruction to the best of our ability, and to “tremble with awe-filled reverence at His word.” (Isa. 66:5, *Amplified*) Thus the divine will becomes the regulator of every detail in our life. To properly reverence the Lord, then, means that we will not question, nor attempt to sidestep, any of the instructions of his Word.

Every phase of the divine will is fundamentally important to us as Christians. Lack of respect for any part of it means not only that we are to that extent out of harmony with God, but also out of harmony with his people. The Lord will overrule in the case of any harm which may come to others by disobedience on our part, but he will not necessarily prevent us from suffering trial or loss ourselves. Human reasoning frequently seeks to find excuses for not obeying this or that detail of the divine will. The human mind perhaps assumes that God will make certain exceptions for us. It is irreverent to yield to such reasoning.

FOUR ASPECTS OF LOYALTY

The overall picture of loyalty to God’s will embraces in a general way four main aspects. These are, namely, (1) loyalty to the doctrine of God’s plan, beginning with the ransom, and including other fundamental teachings of the Bible; (2) loyalty to the high standards of Christian conduct set forth in the Scriptures, that we may be conformed to the image of Christ; (3) loyalty to the Lord’s instructions pertaining to zeal in the service of the Gospel message as ambassadors for Christ; and (4) loyalty to the Bible’s teachings pertaining to proper organization within the church, or ecclesia, arrangement.

A tendency to ignore the divine will along any one of these lines would indicate a lack of reverence for God, and something short of a full determination to please him in all respects.

It is not enough that we profess to be sound in the doctrine of the Scriptures. It is not enough that in addition to this, we seek to attain a high standard of righteousness in our personal living. It is still not enough that in addition to both of these, we also are zealously laying down our lives in God's service. In addition to all these, we should have respect for God's arrangements for the co-operative efforts in each local assembly of the Lord's people.

Some may find it comparatively easy to develop Christian character, yet shrink from the sacrifice involved in serving the Truth, thinking that they have done enough. Reverence for God's ways will keep us from yielding to the desires of the flesh in this connection. Others may delight in witnessing to the Gospel message, yet find it bothersome to keep their bodies under the control of the divine laws regulating Christian conduct. Reverence for God will lead these to a more resolute effort along this line, realizing that "to obey is better than sacrifice."—I Sam. 15:22

To believe and espouse all the fundamental teachings of the Bible also places a test upon the Christian. There may be reasons why some would prefer to omit certain of these. Yet, if they be foundational teachings of the Scriptures, reverence for God will help to cast down this desire of the flesh, and cause us to believe and freely discuss all of the basic truths of God's Word. Reverence for God's ways, however, should always inspire us to proclaim

his Word in kindness, and with a desire to uplift others rather than to exhibit our knowledge.

We may not be severely tested in connection with any of the first three aspects of loyalty, yet find our flesh rebelling against the fourth. The flesh might reason that some of the brethren in our locale are difficult people to mingle with and that we will be better off by ourselves. It may also be that we have permitted a personal ill feeling to develop against one or more in the ecclesia with which we should be cooperating, and on account of this not join in fellowship with them. Reverence for God and respect for his rules will prevent our making such mistakes.

Furthermore, the flesh may reason that the local ecclesia does not properly appreciate us. One may feel that he should be given more recognition—such as being elected an elder or a deacon, or to serve in some other official capacity. Perhaps a brother has served thus in the past, but has not been so chosen at the present time. These matters are severe tests, but are not scriptural reasons why any should separate from the saints. Indeed, it may be that the ecclesia has exercised poor judgment in not electing an individual to some official position, or in selecting him for a position which comes short of his real ability. However, it may be the Heavenly Father's will to permit the ecclesia to make this error in judgment in order that the individual involved be tested and perhaps prepared for some greater service later on. If one fails under the test, and leaves the class because of not being recognized, it is perhaps true that no mistake was made by the ecclesia.

In Psalms 84:10 David declares, “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” The Hebrew word *resha*, here translated “wickedness,” is from a root word *rasha*, which is translated “make trouble” in the text, “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?” (Job 34:29) The word *resha* itself means “morally wrong.” What the psalmist David is saying, then, is that to put ourselves outside of the house of God is morally wrong, and that one following this practice is likely to be, to a greater or lesser extent, a source of disruption and trouble. Speaking prophetically for the church, David says that he would rather accept the humblest position within the house of God than to be in this unfortunate position on the outside.

Isolated brethren who live in communities where there are no others of like precious faith with whom to meet and fellowship have made up to them by the Lord the blessings which they thus lose. However, where it is possible to meet together and cooperate as ecclesias, the Lord will grant the richest of his favors to those who are able to submerge their own preferences sufficiently to enable them to dwell together in unity with the remainder of the consecrated. If our spiritual vision is clear, we should realize that to be above humbling ourselves and cooperating with the brethren in harmony with the Scriptures would not be manifesting a proper attitude of reverence for the Lord and for his ways.

Failure from time to time in reverencing God and maintaining our loyalty to him along all lines

does not mean that we will fail to make our calling and election sure. God permits us to make mistakes in order that we may learn to trust him more fully and be taught to humble ourselves more completely under his mighty hand. (I Pet. 5:6) He may permit us to make doctrinal errors; character mistakes; manifest a zeal that is not according to knowledge; and he may permit us to err by complaining against or ignoring the will of the ecclesia with which we are associated, perhaps even to the extent of withdrawing from their fellowship. Yet later, when we have learned the necessary lesson, the Lord gives us strength to step back into the right way. All of us stumble at times along one line or another, but our merciful and loving Heavenly Father can, and will, pick us up again if our hearts are humble and in the proper attitude toward him.

DECORUM IN THE CHURCH

While the church of God embraces his people at large scattered throughout the whole earth, yet from another standpoint each assembly of the saints is looked upon by God as the church. Reverence in the house of God, therefore, includes a proper conducting of ourselves while enjoying the blessings of these assemblies. Many of us could doubtless be more watchful along this line to the mutual helpfulness of all. Having lost the fear of eternal torment and other God-dishonoring doctrines not taught in the Bible, and as a result having been brought into the liberty of Christ, let us be watchful that we do not become irreverent in our rejoicing over the Truth and the blessings it has brought into our lives.—Gal. 5:13-15

The Lord has promised to meet with his people when they come together in his name. Our reverence for his presence should cause us to conduct ourselves with dignity and soberness when meeting with his people. We should not endeavor to copy the formalism of churchianity in general, but we should avoid any carelessness in spirit which would be disrespectful to the Lord, who, according to his promise, meets with us when we come together.—Matt. 18:20

The Bible does not give us a list of rules to follow in these matters other than general statements such as: “Let all things be done decently and in order.” (I Cor. 14:40) However, it seems that a proper spirit of reverence for the Lord would lead us, when entering a room where a meeting is to be held, to greet the brethren respectfully and joyfully as time permits, and then to quietly take our seats and thus be attentively ready to hear the opening remarks of the one who is to conduct the meeting. Falling short in this regard is not, of course, the result of any desire to be irreverent, but is merely a matter of not giving proper thought at the moment. If all of us could give more attention to matters of this kind, we would receive greater blessings from our meetings.

WISE WORDS

Many years ago, a servant of the Lord penned the following wise words for our consideration. We quote them as follows:

“Order is heaven’s first law. We must lack reverence for our Heavenly Father and for our Master if we are less prompt in the Lord’s affairs than we are in our own.”

“Reverence is very becoming, since we have lost the fear that God will cast us into eternal torment.”

“Decorum is necessary in every place where God is worshipped.”

“We have God in the church today in a sense that he never was in Israel’s Temple. Wherever there is a meeting of the members of the church, the Lord has declared that he will be there.”

“Wherever God’s people meet, that building is made a holy place. Therefore, whoever approaches it should do so with a watchfulness of his feet. He should be ready to hear—to listen. All conversation should be of a kind that would edify—build up—along spiritual lines. Whatever conversation be carried on, it should be with reverence, not merely for the place, but for the occasion.”

“The Lord wants the quality of reverence to grow strong. We should show that our endeavors to do the Lord’s will are equal to the desires of our hearts. We are required to manifest character.”

“When godly fear is banished, the tendency is to less reverence. Special care in this respect is necessary.”

“Whoever has not learned the primary lesson of reverence has not made a proper start in his worship and service.”

“If we are indifferent to the rights of others we manifest that we are lacking in the spirit of love—the spirit of God.”

“Let us not only desire to do the Lord’s will, but if we do it his way we will hearken to the statements of the Word. Let us be amongst those who are careful to note and follow the Word of the Lord in every matter.”

“God now tests our professions of love and devotion and obedience most thoroughly by some of the smallest matters. No act of respect or obedience is too small. We should have the spirit of obedience.”

ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

The Scriptures do not set forth specifics as to the manner in which meetings of the Lord’s people should be conducted, nor of what type they are to be. However, whatever form the meeting may take, the one who conducts it represents the Lord, our great Teacher. The spirit of reverence should lead all in such an assembly to show respect by being attentive to the one conducting the meeting, as well as to all those who participate. This should be whether the gathering be in the form of a discourse, a study, testimonies, a devotional service, or even a business meeting. Proper thoughtfulness along this line will add greatly to the blessings of assembling together.

The spirit of reverence dictates that we be as helpful to others as possible, not only in our individual relationship with them, but also in the general assemblies of the saints. Thus, for example, if a meeting is set aside for prayer, praise and testimony, it should be used as an opportunity to express briefly what the Heavenly Father has done for us, to thank him for our many blessings, and to tell of recent experiences we may have had in which we have seen the Lord’s leading and guidance. It is also a time to give ear and listen to others as they express their heart sentiments. Thus, the entire assembly is mutually built up in our “most holy faith.”—Jude 20

Just as we should be diligent in adding to our faith the qualities of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, so we should endeavor to be faithful in all the little things by which we can contribute to the greatest possible blessing of the brotherhood with whom we meet. (II Pet. 1:5-7) The expression quoted earlier, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God,” would seem to suggest that we should carefully consider all the details of what is involved in our meeting with those of “like precious faith.” (vs. 1) Thus, being desirous of doing all we can to be helpful, let us seek to conform our thoughts and words and deeds to this end.

Is it not more important now than ever before that we should give earnest heed to matters of this kind? The apostle admonishes that we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, and so much the more as we “see the day approaching.” (Heb. 10:25) Should we not also conclude that because our numbers may be smaller than they were in the past we should “so much the more” give attention to the many little details which will contribute to making our coming together more blessed, more reverential and more pleasing to our Heavenly Father? A similar thought is expressed by the apostle in Hebrews 12:28, which reads, “Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear.”

The increasing nervous strain and perplexity upon the whole world during these closing days of the Gospel Age are bound to have an effect upon the Lord’s people, making it imperative that they

give all diligence to maintain a dignified spiritual poise in all that they say and do. Only with God's help can any of us hope to escape being influenced by the spirit of the world, which has become increasingly irreverent in our day.

May we ever remember that we are the "sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." To this the apostle adds these important words: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself." (I John 3:2,3) Therefore, being children of God, let us seek to conduct ourselves as becometh those who dwell in his house, and when we pray, "Hallowed be thy name," may our words come from a heart that is bowed in reverence before him whose will reigns supreme in our lives. ■

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 Dorothy Grinsted, Adelaide, Australia—August 14. Age, 94

Brother Peter Hills, Sydney, Australia—September 18. Age, 77

Brother John Harmsworth, Melbourne, Australia—October 23. Age, 82

Brother Tadeusz Piątek, Olkusz, Poland—November 1. Age, 93

Sister Nancy Winkleblech, West Newton, PA—November 11. Age, 63

“I Wish I Knew What To Do!”

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SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are routed through the Pilgrim Department of The Dawn. Their visits are furnished free upon request. Write to: The Dawn Pilgrim Department, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752. A visit will be arranged whenever possible.

G. Balko

Buffalo, NY December 6,7

J. Mottie

Buffalo, NY December 6,7

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

R. Goodman

Chicago, IL December 31
 -January 1

A. Kopczyk

Chicago, IL December 31
 -January 1

CONVENTIONS

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

IBADAN, NIGERIA END OF YEAR THANKSGIVING CONVENTION, December 3,4—Contact C. Egbu.
Email: egbucaje@gmail.com

CHICAGO CONVENTION, December 31, January 1
—**IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE**—Double-tree by Hilton, 3003 Corporate West Drive, Lisle, IL 60532. Phone: (630) 505-0900. Contact C. Martire. Phone: (312) 925-5434 or Email: secretary@chicagobible.org

PHOENIX CONVENTION, January 14,15—**IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE**—Fountain Hills Community Center, 13001 N La Montana Drive, Fountain Hills, AZ 85268. Contact A. Mengos. Phone: (480) 390-3767 or Email: samengos@yahoo.com

AUSTRALIAN CONVENTION, January 20-22—BROADCAST ONLINE (MEETINGS.DIALPAD) ONLY

—Contact R. Charlton. Email: randscharlton@bigpond.com

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 18,19—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE

Holiday Inn Express, 2224 Auburn Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95821. Phone: (916) 923-1100. Contact K. Freer. Phone: (916) 879-4657 or Email: winnerwear@aol.com

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 4-6—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE

Holiday Inn Orlando-International Airport, 5750 T.G. Lee Blvd, Orlando, FL 32822. Contact R. Sconyers. Phone: (407) 923-8067 or Email: rsguitarman59@gmail.com

METRO DETROIT CONVENTION, May 6,7—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE

Milford Senior Center, 1050 Atlantic Street, Milford, MI 48381. Contact B. Johnson. Email: beckystevej@aol.com



As With Gladness Men of Old

*As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward beaming bright,*

*So most gracious Lord may we
Evermore be led by Thee.*

—William C. Dix

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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 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. 55

