

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

December 2017

The Facts of Christmas

Pastor Mark Matson
Pasco, Washington

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

John 1:14

THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, but not in Jerusalem, the city of the great king. The prophet Micah calls the small town of Bethlehem “little among the thousands of Judah.” Outside Bethlehem, simple shepherds gathered to share, talking about where the grazing is best, and where the best water was for thirsty sheep. It was a small market town, where necessary supplies for another day of life were bought.

Here Jesus was born, in Bethlehem among the lowly, in a stable where cattle were lowing. He was laid in a manger that a bossy cow licked clean with her coarse tongue.

God comes to us in fact. God’s Word brings to us facts.

Earth had heard the promise thousands of long years ago: “I will send the seed of the woman,” and “to Him shall the gathering of the people be.” *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15) The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. (Genesis 49:10)*

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

Galatians 4:4-5

- Born to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15). Fact.
- Born to die an ignominious death on a Roman cross (Matthew 27:50). Fact.
- Risen from the dead the Mighty Conqueror, sin and death had no power over Him (Acts 2:24). Fact.
- Sin was atoned for, the Law was satisfied, and we were reconciled to our holy God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Fact.
- The Child of Bethlehem is the greatest gift ever given (John 3:16). Fact.
- *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)* Fact.
- Jesus really is the reason for the season. Fact.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.



The Manger, Gerard van Honthorst

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. (Luke 2:1-20)

The Birth of the Savior

Paul Kretzmann

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 2:6-7

THE INFINITE SIMPLICITY OF LUKE'S ACCOUNT of the great miracle of the incarnation is worthy of special notice, since it serves to sustain the fact of the inspiration of the story. If he had written as an ordinary human author would, he would probably have been carried away by the indescribable glory of the miracle and declaimed in exulting rhapsodies of the event, which stands in the center of the history of the world. It happened, it came about, Luke merely states. And yet, the entire Old Testament stands behind these words; it represented the grand fulfillment of the wish and desire of thousands of believers of the ancient world, not only in Judea, but wherever the prophecies of old had become known.

While they were in Bethlehem, to which town God had directed their steps in such a singular way, it came about that the days of Mary, according to the course of nature, were fulfilled. The Son that had been promised by the angel was born. Mary herself took the Wonder-child and gave Him the first care. By reason of her poverty and on account of the absence from home she was not provided with the necessary clothing. So she wrapped Him in such scraps of clothing as were available and made a bed for Him in a manger, out in the stable, to which they had retired, since there was no room for them in the inn, in the great enclosure which was used as a place for lodging in Oriental towns. According to many commentators, the place where Christ was born was one of the caves or grottoes at Bethlehem, some of which are used for such purposes to the present time.



Some also dispute as to the manner of the birth, that Mary brought Him forth during a prayer, in great joy, before she was aware of it, without all pain; whose devotion I do not reject, since it may have been invented for the sake of the simple Christians. But we should adhere to the gospel, which states that she bore Him, and to the article of our faith, where we confess: He was born of Mary, the virgin. There is no fraud here, but, as the words say, a true birth...

When they came to Bethlehem, the evangelist shows how they were the lowliest and the most despised; they were obliged to yield to every one, until they, shown into a stable, had a common inn, a common table, a common room, and a common bed with the beasts. In the meantime many an evil person occupied the place of honor in the inn, and permitted himself to be honored as a lord. There no one perceives or knows what God performs in the stable...

Oh, what a dark night was over Bethlehem then, that the city knew nothing of the Light! How strongly God indicates that He does not regard what the world is, has, and does; and again, the world proves how thoroughly she does not understand nor realize what God is, has, and does.

(Martin Luther)

Note also: The God-man, who here lies before us as the firstborn Son of Mary, is at the same time the absolute miracle and the most inestimable benefit; God and man, the old and new covenants, heaven and earth, meet in a poor manger. He that, either secretly or openly, denies this truth can never understand the significance of the Christmas festival—perhaps never experience the true Christmas joy.

Also, the lowly birth of the Savior of the world coincides exactly with the nature of His kingdom. The origin of the kingdom was not of earth; one of its fundamental laws was to deny self and for love to serve others; its end, to become great through abasement, and to triumph by conflict: all this is here exhibited before our eyes. ~

THE STEP HE MADE IN LEAVING HEAVEN'S HIGH THRONE to be born in Bethlehem is a descent we cannot imagine, replacing the perfection of paradise with a world soured by sin and sadness. Jesus' birth gives us an indication of the amount and quality of His love and commitment ... No other faith can tell its followers: "Look into the manger and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has done to save you" (see Luke 2:15). Christianity—and Christianity alone— says, "We have a Redeemer who not only felt sorry for sin-sick souls, He actually took that sickness into Himself and carried it until it was gone and He could say, 'It is finished.'"

Rev. Ken Klaus, speaker emeritus of "The Lutheran Hour"



What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of Days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infant's bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

John Chrysostom

Love Came Down

Pastor Orval Wirkkala
Kingston, Minnesota

THE PSALMIST WRITES in *Psalm 133:1: Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!* He then describes the origin of love: It descends on mankind from above.

The Apostle John writes of this descent (1 John 4:1-13) in the person of Jesus Christ and concludes with three basic successive revelations: God is love (4:8b), He demonstrated His love by sending His Son down to earth (4:9-10), and that if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. (4:11)

As we approach the manger this Christmas, and as we sing and listen to the carols that speak of this descent of love which is unto all people, may we experience anew the joy that motivated and moved the Father and the Son to carry out the mission of mercy and love that was enacted 2000+ years ago and has brought life to as many as received Him. May we be drawn deeper into this oneness of love that the Father and the Son lived in and that was the essence of His prayer for us in John, chapter 17. The Son has not only declared unto us the name of the Father in bringing us the forgiveness of sin, He continues to declare His name so that we would be drawn deeper in this oneness of mutual love.

John 17:26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

The hour has come for two reciprocal acts: the Father will glorify the Son that the Son may glorify Him. Jesus accomplished the desire and will of His Father in bringing redemption to mankind by taking away our sin through His atoning sacrifice here on earth, and now Jesus looks to the heavenly part: bringing eternal life and glory to all to whom it is given through His resurrection and ascension! There is much depth in these verses which we will not attempt to plumb in this brief message, as we want to focus on what it means that Jesus has declared our Father's name unto us, and will (continue to) declare it so that the love that is between the Father and the Son would be in us and He in us.

In John 17:6, Jesus begins to speak of His name. The name of God means Word or revelation. It is all who God is in His Essence, in His Being, in His Existence.

In verses 7-10, Jesus speaks of the reality of how through the oneness of Their essence and Their purpose, the disciples have been brought to where they are one in Them. That is not to say that they are part of the Trinity, but that they have been brought into participation through the name of God, through the Word and by revelation. In verse 11, Jesus refers to this oneness, and He brings His deep request to His Father, to the end that all His successors would be guarded in this oneness. *John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through*

thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

Now let us move down to the last part of this chapter, as Jesus expands on the meaning of this oneness that He is praying for. *John 17: 20-26: Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

How do we understand this oneness of love that Jesus is referring to?

We stay on the simple truth: Love came down, The Word came down, God came down, Love came to rescue us, to redeem us.

1. Love/The Word came down and He alone determines who we are: either we are guilty outside of faith or we are righteous through faith.
2. As Christians, we come to others only through Jesus Christ. He bought us back; we have the gift through faith. He is our Peace, the One who brought us back to God.
3. In Jesus Christ, we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and are united for eternity.

He is for us, He came to be with us in the flesh, and He is now in us. His essence is Love, and the oneness that we live in is Love, the Word, Christ, God.

Whenever I approach the word love to define and try to explain it, I get a word picture in my mind. I see myself kneeling by Lake Superior with a cup dipping water out of the vast waters. Each cup that I scoop out is pure and clean, but as soon as I take the cup out of the water there is no indication of any less water in the lake. The love of God is so great, many have tried to describe it using earthly language to do so. The Apostle Paul put this into a few words, but yet encompassed what it means that "Love came down."

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

Let us think on God's love for us: Love came down. ~



GIVE ME A COMPASSIONATE HEART, quickly moved to grieve for the woes of others and to active pity for them, even as our Lord Jesus Christ beheld our poverty and hastened to help us. Give me grace ever to alleviate the crosses and difficulties of those around me, and never to add to them; teach me to be a consoler in sorrow, to take thought for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan; let my charity show itself not in words only, but in deed and truth.

Johann Arndt

Christmas

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello to each of you. It is that special time of year when we celebrate Jesus' birth. I hope we never tire of hearing this story as it is told over and over. I went on the internet and this is the first definition of Christmas: the annual Christian celebration of Christ's birth, held on December 25 in the Western church. I like that.

Why did Jesus have to be born? When God created the world and the first two people, Adam and Eve, it was a perfect place. You remember what they did to change this perfection forever? The devil tempted them and they yielded and ate of the forbidden fruit, and sin entered the world. Jesus had to come to save mankind from their sin. Jesus was to come as fully man, so we could know that He feels our infirmities and understands us totally, but also fully God as He and God are totally ONE. He came to do His Father's will, to come as a Baby and die as a Man to save all mankind from sin. He took the whole world's sin on Himself and those sins were nailed to the cross and washed away by His blood. Let us look into *St. Luke, chapter 2.*

IN THE TIME OF CAESAR AUGUSTUS' REIGN, he sent out a decree that all the world was to be taxed and all people were to return to the town of their birth. There, they would not only pay their tax but be counted as well. Caesar was trying to get a count of all the people in that land. They still take count today all over the world but we don't have to go to the town of our birth.

Joseph went from where he was living in Galilee to Bethlehem (the city of David), because he was of the house and lineage of David.

Joseph was to marry a young virgin named Mary, and he took his espoused wife with him. Mary was soon to have a Baby, a child conceived by the Holy Ghost.

It was a hard journey. Even if Mary rode on a donkey, Joseph maybe had to walk the whole way. It was not an easy trip. They most likely slept under the stars, and after three days they arrived in Bethlehem. Soon after they arrived, the time came for Mary's Baby to be born.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good

*tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.** (Luke 2:7-14)*

How afraid and surprised those shepherds were to see and hear angels in the field under a dark night sky, but after the angels had disappeared into heaven they realized the Lord had made known this news. *And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. (Luke 2:16)*

Oh, the wonder and awe that met their eyes when they found the Babe just as they were told! We do not know how long they stayed at the manger, but as they went back to their sheep, they told everyone they met about the Child. It was a wonderful experience, and the good news spoken by the angels WAS for all people. The news of the Child's birth spread and all people wondered at what they heard.

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:19) I just love that line; it's so quiet and heartfelt. Mary had given birth to an amazing Child.

I'm sure it was the most amazing thing anyone had heard and I'm sure there were those who had heard the Old Testament Scriptures read of this Babe that was to come. On this special day they are now making a connection and this very One has come. This little Baby would stir many hearts and cause many things to happen that had not happened before.

Today in the world the account of Christmas is not welcome, and in many places the name of God and Christ are being shut out. Businesses will not say "Merry Christmas" as they don't want to be connected or say the name of Christ in the word Christmas. They say "Happy Holidays" instead. Jesus has been hated from the beginning of time and that won't change while the earth remains. What can change is our hearts as Jesus loves sinners. I pray you children and dear readers will keep Christ on your lips and in your hearts this Christmas season

and all through the year. I pray you will not be ashamed of this little Babe who came to save you from your sin. Let's keep Christmas with Christ as the center and remember that precious Babe sent for us. Jesus loves each and every one of you and His desire is that all would be saved.

I want to wish you all a blessed Christmas.

God's peace.



Joseph Seeks Lodging at Bethlehem, James Tissot
Courtesy of Wikipedia

Let God be God

Philip Johnson

Excerpt, November 1962 CM

“I AM THAT I AM.” (Exodus 3:14) There is a continuing effort on the part of natural man to rationalize God, to make God more agreeable to man’s way of reasoning—a more sensible God whose demands are more in keeping with man’s own interests.

God brushes aside all of these efforts with the very definite statement concerning Himself, “I AM THAT I AM.” This not only sets Him above man in the concept of time, of birth and death, of beginning or ending, but also it is a statement of fact about His very nature. God is stating that He is God!



He is the creator of all things. He created you and me. The very reason with which you try to rationalize God was given you by God. Therefore, let God be God! Stop trying with your mind to make Him something He isn’t. He is your Creator. Don’t fight Him or try to explain Him away. You cannot with your own reason conceive of His nature, His personality, His power, His aims for the world of man.

He says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10) Let Him be what He is. Let Him work in you as He will. Look at Him from the light of Himself and not from the light of yourself, your nature, or your ambitions. You are in yourself twisted and warped and misled by a nature opposed to God. You are by nature selfish, self-centered, egotistical, one-minded, proud, haughty, self-willed. You cannot see beyond your own interests.

“Oh,” you say, “don’t tear down man so far. After all, these may be true to an extent but I do look to the interest of other people quite often and don’t always look for my own way.” If you believe you are so good, analyze for a moment why you overrode your own interests in any particular instance. Was it not to make a friend, gain approval, avoid a misunderstanding or a scene, or even just so you wouldn’t appear completely selfish—something in your upbringing told you it was the right thing to do and it made you feel good to be unselfish? In other words, you have done nothing except look after your own interests. You can’t get away from the self-centered nature of man.

That’s why we must let God be God. If you attempt to understand God or explain Him by your own standards, the picture will be warped. It will be warped by yourself, by your life experiences, your relation to other people. You may think God is harsh, unloving, aloof, narrow-minded, and judging, or

you may think of Him as a beneficent being that wouldn’t hurt a flea. You might not think of Him at all as a person but as some moving, impersonal force. Then again you might not be sure there is a God at all. Every individual has a conception of God colored by his own experiences and nature.

Therefore, let Him be what He is. He has His own attributes, His own nature, His own concept of time and space. He is above and beyond any human explanation. You who would think you can know God on His level within your own reason forget that you are yourself a creation of His will. You cannot thus tell God who He is or how He should behave or react to your problems or what He should do about them. Least of all can you direct Him in your own personal life.

You are what you are; you are where you are; you are doing what you are doing only because God has allowed it that way. This does not mean that He wants it that way. He may or He may not. You won’t know unless you let Him tell you. You won’t know until you let God tell you who He is, what He has done, and what He wants for man—you, in particular!

The agnostic says he doesn’t know if there is a God or may state that it is impossible to know if God really exists. Anyone who says this hasn’t sincerely sought to know. To an intelligent man who seeks the truth there are only two alternatives. God exists or He doesn’t exist. Man is either a believer or a non-believer.

The Christian evidences are available. Read them and study them for yourself. They are not only available in the unchangeable perfect laws of nature but in history itself. All point to a creator God who in the fullness of time appeared to man in the person of Jesus Christ. Know Christ and you will know God. Learn the attributes of Jesus and you will see the kind of God that made you.

God has not hidden Himself from man. It is man who, not wishing to face God, refuses to seek Him where He has revealed Himself, in His Word through Jesus Christ within the communion of believers. This is the kingdom He has established. This is His body in the world which will glorify Him through to the end of this finite period man calls time and then will be caught up as His bride to reflect His righteousness eternally.

You may have surrendered yourself to this extent. You have allowed God to be God in telling you who He is, what He has done for man, and how He has revealed Himself to man. This is the easiest part. You need only to exercise your intellect to arrive this far in knowing God. The final step is the most difficult for man. It is to allow God to be God in your own life. For this purpose He created you.

It is this step which requires faith. And only God Himself can give you the faith to take this step. A complete full surrender of the will is necessary; the acknowledgement of your rebellious, selfish nature which has manifested itself in any number of sins. You cannot go halfway, trying to give only a part of yourself to God while reserving part of yourself to satisfy the selfish inclinations of your nature. You will never know fully what fellowship with God means until you give all of yourself to Him, reserving nothing. This is repentance. This is the turning away from an old life to a new



life. Believe the Word of forgiveness freely proclaimed to you by His children in the name and through the blood of Jesus Christ. He will cleanse you of the guilt of the past and strengthen you in a new fellowship of faith.

God must remain the continuing force in your life from the time of your spiritual birth to the day you can lay aside this life for the complete and perfect fellowship He has promised. There are people who have been led by the Spirit of God to repentance and faith only to be disillusioned by the fellowship of Christians. They may find them too judgmental of one another, or not spiritual enough, or without understanding, or only partly faithful, or allowing tradition to stifle God's Word, too narrow-minded or too broad-minded. In these conflicting situations the new convert may be tempted to withdraw from fellowship or wander from group to group looking for the "ideal" church.

A sincere Christian doesn't condone actions in the church which are not Christ-like in that they spread jealousy

and division, or stifle spiritual growth. Jesus would have His disciples be one as He and the Father are one. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:21) Seek in your own life to so know God that His Spirit will strengthen you to live obediently to Him as a Christian should live. In so doing you will not criticize but bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. Christ's command to do unto others as you would have them do unto you should always be foremost. When you err or fail in the Christian walk you want the children of God to encourage you and help you. You should do likewise.

Let God be God in your life. As He increases, your "self" will decrease. Before His death and resurrection Jesus prayed to the Father, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." (John 17:22-23) ~

How Do You Know if God Loves You?

Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT GOD thinks about you? How do you know if He's smiling or frowning? How do you know if God hates you or loves you?

Do you look around at your circumstances? If things are going well (the weather is nice, my health is good, there is peace in my family) then God must be pleased with me. On the other hand, if things are going poorly (the weather is nasty, I'm sick or dying, my family is fighting, there's not enough money, or whatever else has gone wrong) then God must hate me, or at least be mad at me. If we look at our circumstances to determine how the Lord feels about us, then we will always be unsure, uncertain, standing on shifting ground.

How do you know, then, what the Lord thinks of you? Do you consider your feelings? If I feel close to God then He must be happy with me, and if, on the other hand, I feel far from God, He must be angry. If we use our feelings to determine how God considers us, then, again, we will always be unsure, uncertain.

Dear saints, are God's feelings toward us as changing as our circumstances or as fickle as our feelings? No. These are all the devil's traps. The devil wants us to be unsure of God's love and uncertain of the Lord's compassion and mercy. The devil tempts us to think and say things like, "If God really loved me then He wouldn't allow this or He would give that..." But the Lord wants us to be sure about His great love for us.

How do we know if God loves us? In the midst of the changing circumstances and feelings in this life, we look to the unchanging truth of Jesus' cross. There we know, are certain, that God is love and that He loves us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." In the giving of the Son unto death we have an immovable monument of the Father's love. With our eyes fixed on the cross we can be absolutely sure, without any doubt, that God loves us.

So the next time the devil tempts us to think that God is far away, or that He doesn't care, or that the misery that you're going through means that God doesn't love you, send him packing with the certainty of faith which clings to Jesus' cross. In life and in death we know that we belong to the Lord Jesus, because He gave Himself for us on His cross. Amen.



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Corrie Karlsen, ALC Calendar Committee

Bearing Fruit

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.** And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Galatians 5:19-26

THE APPLE TREE STANDS IN the old orchard, branches heavy and covered with fruit. The farmer plucks the ripe apples with joy. There will be applesauce, and pies, and cider after the harvest.

Are we Christians like apple trees? Are we fruit-bearers, delivering a bumper crop of love, and joy, and peace for our Lord's harvest? We could see the verses above and compare the fruit of the Spirit to a crop of apples. We could feel a burden to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit by our own power. If we crucify our flesh enough, if we refrain from envy and provocation, we might feel we are bearing fruit for God's kingdom. On the positive side, if we *really, truly* walk in the Spirit, and have enough love, joy, and peace, we might think we're growing fruit.



The miracle of fruit-bearing is that the apple tree doesn't do any work at all! It simply grows where it is planted and does what its Maker created it to do. The rain falls and the sun shines, and the tree grows. Water and minerals are brought to its roots, and sunlight delivers the energy it needs to grow and thrive. The farmer tends the tree, pruning off

dead branches and damaged bits, training it to grow strong and healthy. And in its season, the Macintosh tree brings forth of its own kind, and not Washington Delicious apples, which brings glory to its Maker.

In the same way, we live where we are planted by our Maker, in our individual families, and we grow among the people in our individual communities. The water of life comes to us through Word and Spirit, and we are fed by the Bread of Life Himself. The true sun, the Light of the World, shines on us, giving us His righteousness. God the Father disciplines us, training us in daily repentance. And in our season, we bear fruit as we live out our personal vocations, bringing glory to God.

Our heart's desire is to bring Him glory by being loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, gentle, good, faithful, meek, temperate—all the "fruits" of the Spirit—but we do not bear this fruit of ourselves. The fruit of the Spirit is a singular fruit. We can't have one and not another. We can't have love, and no joy; patience, and no peace. The fruit is only an effect of the indwelling Spirit of God. It is a part of Him, and not a part of us.

We are only branches of the one true Vine. Jesus said that if He abides in us and we in Him, we will bear fruit—much fruit. We may not see evidence of the fruit, but it is there. Without our awareness, His fruit is growing and ripening on us.

Jesus, the Vine, is the Source of our life. Without Him, we can do nothing. He is the fruit of the Spirit in us. When Jesus lives within us, we will bear the singular fruit of His Spirit. God the Father will draw us to His way and prompt us by His Word. He will prune us, trimming the stray ends and cutting off the non-productive shoots to keep the fruit-bearing branches healthy and vigorous.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)

The Holy Spirit that lives within us and prompts us, that corrects and teaches us, will do its good work. We can rest in the goodness and provision of God our Father, our Maker and true Vinedresser.

Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

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Send articles for publication to:
Lois Matson, Editor
Email: cm@apostoliclutheran.org
Phone: (360) 904-6951
Postal Mail to:
CHRISTIAN MONTHLY
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Battle Ground, WA 98604 USA

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Anders & Clara Sundqvist, Managers
THE BOOK CONCERN
PO Box 2126
Battle Ground, WA 98604 USA
Phone: (360) 896-7344
Email: books@apostoliclutheran.org

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America

www.apostoliclutheran.org

Western Mission: western@apostoliclutheran.org

Eastern Mission: eastern@apostoliclutheran.org

Foreign Mission: foreign@apostoliclutheran.org

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Almighty Frammer of the Skies

Thomas Chatterton

Almighty framer of the skies!
O let our pure devotion rise,
Like incense in Thy sight!
Wrapped in impenetrable shade
The texture of our souls was made,
Till Thy command gave light.

The Sun of glory gleamed the ray,
Refined the darkness into day,
And bid the vapors fly:
Impelled by His eternal love,
He left His palaces above,
To cheer our gloomy sky.

How shall we celebrate the day
When God appeared in mortal clay,
The mark of worldly scorn;
When the archangel's heavenly lays
Attempted the Redeemer's praise,
And hailed salvation's morn?

A humble form the Godhead wore,
The pains of poverty He bore,
To gaudy pomp unknown:
Though in a humble walk He trod,
Still was the man Almighty God,
In glory all His own.

Despised, oppressed, the Godhead bears
The torments of this vale of tears,
Nor bids His vengeance rise;
He saw the creatures He had made
Revile His power, His peace invade;
He saw with mercy's eyes.

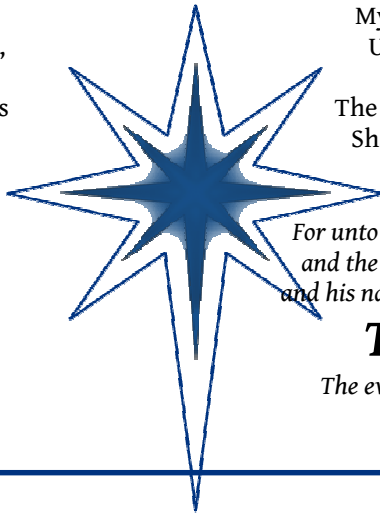
How shall we celebrate His name,
Who groaned beneath a life of shame,
In all afflictions tried?
The soul is raptured to conceive
A truth which being must believe:
The God eternal died.

My soul, exert thy powers, adore,
Upon devotion's plumage soar,
To celebrate the day:
The God from whom creation sprung
Shall animate my grateful tongue;
From Him I'll catch the lay!

*For 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.
Isaiah 9:6*



THE INN WAS FULL. No one would release a room to this pregnant woman. She had to go to a cow stall and there bring forth the Maker of all creatures because nobody would give way. Shame on you, wretched Bethlehem! The inn ought to have been burned with brimstone, for even though Mary had been a beggar maid or unwed, anybody at such a time would have been glad to give her a hand. There are many of you in this congregation who think to yourselves: "If only I had been there! How quick I would have been to help the baby! I would have washed his linen! How happy I would have been to go with the shepherds to see the Lord lying in the manger!" Yes you would! You say that because you know how great Christ is, but if you had been there at that time you would have done no better than the people of Bethlehem. Childish and silly thoughts are these! Why don't you do it now? You have Christ in your neighbor. You ought to serve him, for what you do to your neighbor in need you do to the Lord Christ himself.

Martin Luther

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

1 John 4:7-11