

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 2018

According to Saint Luke

Luke, Chapter Two

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. 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. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. ~

Christmas

Pastor Ken Storm
Tapiola, Michigan

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

Luke 1:50

With these words, Mary the mother of Jesus began to prophesy, as the Holy Spirit revealed to her God's wonderful plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. That which God had promised already in the Garden of Eden was now to be manifested in His only begotten Son. So great is God's love that He could not bear to see mankind eternally separated from Him through the fall of Adam. Thus God, in Christ Jesus, would reconcile the world unto Himself.

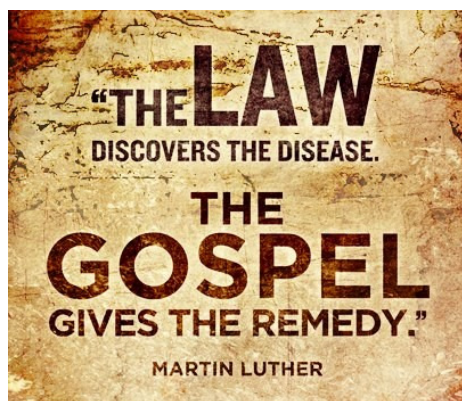
The beautiful Christmas story has been retold by believers throughout the years. It stirs one's heart with inward rejoicing to think that even after so many generations we can still embrace Bethlehem's Child as our personal Lord and Savior. Truly the same Spirit that prompted Mary's words, in her day, also lives in believing hearts yet today. Speaking of our Lord she said, "*And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.*" Thus we can confidently echo the words of the song writer Philip Bliss: "Brightly beams our Father's mercy from His lighthouse evermore..." The resulting message rings clearly: grace, mercy, forgiveness, faith, righteousness, peace, and joy witnessed by the Holy Spirit.

In our text we learn that God's mercy is from generation to generation upon those who fear Him. This fear we possess as believers is not a slavish or terrorizing fear that drives one away from our loving Heavenly Father but rather instills a true desire to cling to the promises in His holy Word. It can be likened to the relationship children have with their Christian parents wherein there is a fear of bringing agony and pain to the ones who love us and desire to lead us in the right way. We thus fear and love God because He first loved us and continues to love us. John in his epistle says, *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18)* Consider the great love of God for you and me in that He sent His only begotten Son into this sin cursed world on that first Christmas morning to bring eternal salvation for all who will believe. Then that perfect love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (Romans 5:5)

Can we ever comprehend the love and mercy which has been given us in Christ Jesus, the perfect and greatest gift of all? The obvious answer is no. But we must say with the Apostle Paul, *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)* Oh, the wonder of it all! Let us simply join our hearts with David and conclude by saying, *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. (Psalm 107:1)* Dear believer, the Christmas gift of salvation is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord who has forgiven all our sins and covered them with His own holy, precious blood.



May the blessedness of Christ in Christmas be revealed in greater measure to each of our hearts this year and let us pray earnestly for those who have not yet come to repentance and living faith that they, too, may know the true meaning of Christmas. May you have a most blessed Christmas. ~



FOR THE TWO CHIEF WORKS of God in men are these, to terrify, and to justify and quicken those who have been terrified. Into these two works all Scripture has been distributed. The one part is the Law, which shows, reproves, and condemns sins. The other part is the Gospel, i.e., the promise of grace bestowed in Christ, and this promise is constantly repeated in the whole of Scripture, first having been delivered to Adam [I will put enmity, etc., Gen. 3:15, afterwards to the patriarchs; then, still more clearly proclaimed by the prophets; lastly, preached and set forth among the Jews by Christ, and disseminated over the entire world by the apostles.] For all the saints were justified by faith in this promise, and not by their own attrition or contrition.

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession

Letter and Spirit

C.F.W. Walther

NO DOCTRINE OF THE EVANGELICAL Lutheran Church is more offensive to the Reformed than the doctrine that the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness in the sight of God, and eternal salvation, is obtained in no other way than by the believer's putting his confidence in the written Word, in Baptism, in the Lord's Supper, and in absolution. The Reformed, especially their theologians, declare that this way of getting into heaven is too mechanical, and on hearing the Lutheran teaching they denounce it as deadletter worship, citing the statement of the Apostle Paul: "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." 2 Cor. 3: 6. Again, they say; "What does baptizing with earthly water profit? The true baptism is baptizing with the Spirit and with fire." Again: "What is the benefit of eating and drinking the natural body and blood of Christ? The true food and drink by which the hunger and thirst of the soul is really stilled is the truth that came down from heaven." Finally, they say: "How can I be helped by a mortal, sinful man, who cannot look into my heart, saying to me: 'Thy sins are forgiven thee'? No; my sins are not forgiven except when God Himself speaks these words in my heart and makes me feel their force." That is the Reformed view.

Now, does this view agree with Scripture? By no means. In the Scriptural meaning of the term the "letter" is not something dead. The connection in 2 Cor. 3:6 shows, in the first place, that the apostle refers, not to the Word of God as such, but to the Law. That is what kills. On the other hand, the "spirit" signifies the Gospel. That is what gives life. Consider, in addition, that when the apostle says: "The letter killeth," he cannot mean that the letter itself is dead; for something that is dead cannot kill.

According to the Holy Scriptures, Baptism is not a mere washing with earthly water, but the Spirit of God, yea, Jesus with His blood, connects with it for the purpose of cleansing me of my sins. Therefore Ananias says to Saul: "Be baptized and wash away thy sins," Acts 22:16; and Jesus says to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God," John 3:5. He names the water first and then the Spirit, for it is by this very baptizing with water that the Spirit is to be given me. In Gal. 3:27 the apostle says clearly and distinctly: "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"; and in Titus 3:5-7: "Not by works

of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

According to the Holy Scriptures the Lord's Supper is not an earthly feast, but a heavenly feast on earth, in which not only bread and wine, or only the body and blood of Christ are given us, but together with these forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation is given and sealed to us. For, distributing the bread which He had blessed, Christ said: "This is My body, which is given for you; ... this do in remembrance of Me." By the words "for you" He invited the disciples to ponder the fact that they were now receiving and eating that body by the bitter death of which on the cross the entire world would be redeemed. He meant to remind them that they ought to break forth with joy and gladness because the ransom that was to be paid for the sins of the whole world was, so to speak, put in their mouths. Offering the disciples the cup which He had blessed, Christ said: "This is the cup, the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you." Why did He add the words "shed for you"? He meant to say: "When receiving the blood of redemption in this Holy Supper, you receive at the same time what has been acquired on the cross by means of this sacrifice."

Finally, according to the Holy Scriptures the absolution pronounced by a poor, sinful preacher is not his absolution, but the absolution of Jesus Christ Himself; for the preacher absolves a person by the command of Christ, in the place of Christ, in the name of Christ. Christ said to His disciples: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." John 20:21. What is the import of these words? None other than this: "I am sent by My Father. When I speak to you, My words are the words of My Father. You must not consider the humble form in which you see Me. I come in the name of the Father, in the place of the Father, and the word of promise that proceeds from My mouth is the word of My Father. Now, in the same manner as My Father has sent Me I am sending you. You, too, are to speak in My name, in My place." Therefore He continues: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." ~

FOR LUTHER BOTH LAW AND GOSPEL are the external word of God, but the Gospel is not the letter that kills but an efficacious means of grace, by which God give us his own Son together will all the grace, justice, and eternal life that belongs to him. It is true that Luther's Law/Gospel distinction—especially the notion that the way the Law helps sinners is by terrifying them so that they flee for refuge to the grace of God. But this agreement about the Law should not obscure a crucial disagreement about where to find grace, stemming from Luther's distinctive emphasis on finding the grace of God in the external word of the Gospel. For while an Augustinian sinner flees the terror of the Law by praying, a Lutheran sinner flees it by clinging to the promise of the Gospel. The one seeks grace by speaking a good word, the other finds grace by hearing a good word. These are two fundamentally different words, the one human, the other divine—the one our prayer, the other God's promise—the one fundamentally an inner word of the heart and the other an external word of grace.

Phillip Cary

Christmas

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

God's peace, Children,

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come."

We certainly can have joy at this time of year, as we once again read, sing and hear about Jesus' birth. It was so long ago but time does not change such a special story. Time does not and cannot change the Word of God.

Let's take a look at some verses way back in the Old Testament that prophesied of this child, this Messiah that would come, and these are not all of them:

**Genesis 49:10 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.*

**2 Samuel 7:16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.*

**Numbers 24:17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*

**Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

**Isaiah 9:6 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.*

Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, these prophetic words were spoken.

Now in the New Testament we read that the angel Gabriel came to a young virgin (just as the old prophecy said) named Mary, and told her that she was to have a son who would be the Son of God. Mary was very puzzled at hearing this, as she was not yet married. The angel told her this: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.* (Luke 1:35)

Mary accepted the greeting and said, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.* (Luke 1:38)

Time went by and as Mary drew near to her time to give birth, she and Joseph made a long journey to his birth town (Bethlehem) to be counted with the government there. It was a weary trip for Mary and upon reaching Bethlehem Joseph started looking for a place for them to rest, as Mary was soon to have her baby. Joseph could find nothing as there were many people that had arrived before them and all the inns were full. Finally they were shown to a stable.

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. (Luke 2:6-12)

Right after this the sky was filled with angels saying, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.* (Luke 2:14) Then the angels all went back into heaven.

The shepherds were glad of the news and immediately ran to find the baby Jesus. They found Him just as they were told. That must have been such a wonderful sight to see. The shepherds were so filled with excitement and wonder that on their way back to their sheep, they told everyone they met about the child.



And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40)

Today we still tell this wonderful story because we know that Jesus was sent into this world for us so that we might have eternal life. This story will always be dear and we can go back and read it for strength, time and again, and each time we see how much God loves each of us.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

May God's Son Jesus always be what Christmas means to you and that Jesus would not only be your focus at Christmas but all through the new year that is near.

Christmas blessings to you all.

God's Grace Received Must Be Bestowed

Martin Luther

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4-7

THESE TWO WORDS DESCRIPTIVE OF GOD, “kindness” and “love,” are indeed pleasant and consoling. They represent Him as offering grace, following us, ready to receive most graciously all who draw near to Him and desire Him. What more could He do? Note now why the Gospel is termed a gracious, comforting message concerning God revealed in Christ. What can be conceived more gracious to a poor, sinful conscience than what these words convey? Oh, how wretchedly the devil, through the laws of the Pope, has perverted for us these pure words of God!

These two words are to be accepted with their full and broad import. No distinction of person, as prevails among men, is to be made: for divine love and kindness is not secured by human merit; it is of God's grace alone and given to all that bear the name of man, however insignificant. God loves not what is characteristic of one person, but of all. He is partial not to one, but kind to all. Therefore a man's honor is perfectly maintained, and no one can boast of his worthiness, or need despair because of his unworthiness. All mankind may be equally comforted in the unmerited grace God kindly and humanely offers and applies. Had there ever been a meritorious individual or a work worthy of consideration, it surely would have been found among the doers of “works of righteousness.” But Paul rejects especially these, saying, *Not by works of righteousness which we have done.* How much less reason have we to think the kindness and love of God has appeared in consequence of man's wisdom, power, nobility, wealth and the color of his hair! The grace which cancels all our boasted honor, ascribing glory alone to God who freely bestows it upon the unworthy, is pure as well as great.

This epistle instills the two further principles of believing and loving—receiving favors from God and granting favors to our neighbors. The entire Scriptures enforce these two precepts, and the practice of one requires the practice of the other. He who does not firmly believe in God's grace assuredly will not extend kindness to his neighbor, but will be tardy and indifferent in aiding him. In proportion to the strength of his faith will be his willingness and industry in helping his neighbor. Thus faith incites love, and love increases faith.

Now we see how utterly we fail to walk in faith when we presume to arrive at goodness and happiness by any other good works than those done to our neighbor. So numerous are the new works and doctrines daily devised, everything like a correct conception of a truly good life is wholly destroyed. But the fact is, all Christian doctrines and works, all Christian living, is briefly, clearly and completely comprehended in these two principles, faith and love. They place man as a medium between God and his neighbor, to

receive from above and distribute below. Thus the Christian becomes a vessel, or rather a channel, through which the fountain of divine blessings continuously flows to other individuals.

Mark you, the truly godlike are they who receive from God all He offers through Christ, and in return accredit themselves by their beneficence, performing for others the part God performs for them. Psalm 82:6 is in point here: “I said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High.” Sons of God are we, through the faith that constitutes us heirs of all divine blessings. But we are also “gods” through the love that makes us beneficent toward our neighbor. The divine nature is simply pure beneficence, or as Paul here says, kindness and love, daily pouring out blessings in abundance upon all creatures; as we everywhere witness.



Take heed, then, to embrace the message of these words presenting the love and kindness of God to all men. Daily exercise your faith therein, entertaining no doubt of God's love and kindness toward you, and you shall realize His blessings. Then you may with perfect confidence ask what you will, what your heart desires, and whatever is necessary for the good of yourself and your fellow-men. But if you do not so believe, it were far better you had never heard the message. For by unbelief you make false these precious, comforting, gracious words. You conduct yourself as if you regarded them untrue, which attitude is extreme dishonor to God; no more enormous sin could be committed.

But if you possess faith, your heart cannot do otherwise than laugh for joy in God, and grow free, confident and courageous. For how can the heart remain sorrowful and dejected when it entertains no doubt of God's kindness to it, and of His attitude as a good friend with whom it may unreservedly and freely enjoy all things? Such joy and pleasure must follow faith; if they are not ours, certainly something is wrong with our faith. This act of faith the apostle in Galatians terms “receiving the Holy Spirit” in and through the Gospel. The Gospel is a message concerning the love and mercy of God so gracious as to bring with it to preacher and hearer the presence of the Holy Spirit; just as the rays of the sun bear in themselves, and transmit, heat.

How could Paul have presented words conveying more love and graciousness? I venture to assert I have never read, in the entire Scriptures, words more beautifully expressive of

the grace of God than these two—“Chrestotes” and “Philanthropia,” friendliness and philanthropy. They represent grace not only as procuring for us remission of sins, but as God ever present with us, embracing us in His friendship, ever ready to help us and offering to do for us according to all we desire; in short, as a good and willing friend, to whom we may look for every favor and accommodation. Picture to your imagination a sincere friend and you will have an idea of God’s attitude toward you in the person of Christ, though a very imperfect representation of His superabundant grace.

Now, if you steadfastly believe, if you rejoice in God your Lord, if you are alive and His grace satisfies, if your wants are all supplied, how will you employ yourself in this earthly life? Inactive you cannot be. Such a disposition of love toward God cannot rest. Your zeal will be warm to do everything you know will be to the praise and glory of a kind and gracious God. At this point there is no longer distinction of works. Here all commands terminate. There is neither restraint nor compulsion, but a joyful willingness and delight in doing good, whether the intended achievement be insignificant or

difficult, small or great, requiring short service or long.

Your first desire will be that all men may obtain the same knowledge of divine grace. Hence your love will not be restrained from serving all to the fullest extent, preaching and proclaiming the divine truth wherever possible, and rejecting all doctrine and life not in harmony with this teaching. But take note, the devil and the world, unwilling that their devices be rejected, cannot endure the knowledge of what you do. They will oppose you with everything great, learned, wealthy and powerful, and represent you as a heretic and insane. Mark you, you will be brought to the cross for the sake of the truth, as was Christ your Lord. You will have to endure the extremity of reproach. You must endanger all your property, friends and honor, your body and life, until thrust out of this life into eternity. In the midst of these trials, however, rejoice, cheerfully enduring all. Regard your enemies with the utmost charity. Act kindly, ever remembering you yourself were once as they are in the sight of God. Faith and love certainly can do it. Note this: the truly Christian life is that which does for others as God has done for itself. ~

Glory to God in the Highest

Pastor Nicholas Kandoll
New York Mills, Minnesota

GLORY

*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.** (Luke 2:1-14)*

For the purpose of taxation, the people had to register for the census, so Mary and Joseph had to go back to their own city and register. By the plan of God this all happened when Mary was pregnant with Jesus.

What happens next is often misunderstood because of the way people read modern themes into the text. We’re used to seeing hotels with “No Vacancy” signs, so we read “no room for them in the inn” and think all the hotels were full. We think Mary and Joseph were left in the streets because all the inns were full. What if I told you that wasn’t what happened? The word that is translated as inn is only found in one other place in Luke. If you were going to guess that it’s the same word used to describe the place where the Good Samaritan brings the injured man to, you would be wrong! It’s used to describe the upper room where Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper.

We also read the part where Mary lays Jesus in a manger, which is another word for feed trough, and infer that she had Jesus out in the barn with the animals. Take a look: Is there any mention of them having to go outside and into the barn or a cave? Nope. In those days it was common to have a room on the ground floor to house some of the animals. This helped heat the house and protected the animals. It also made milking a lot more convenient.

Now it makes sense! They got to Joseph’s family house and the upper guest room was full of other family members. So they went to the ground floor where it was private, and Jesus was born among the animals and laid in the feed trough. When I was little I remember being horrified that the innkeeper was so cruel to put a pregnant woman out on the street in the middle of the night. It wasn’t until somewhat recently I realized I didn’t have to malign the innkeeper! Mary and Joseph were not turned away from the inn. It’s much more likely that Mary sought the privacy of the lower, ground floor room, to have her baby. This makes sense, as I can’t imagine any woman would like to have her baby surrounded by her husband’s extended family.

This is an important lesson to remember: When we read the Bible we have to guard against our own preconceived notions influencing the way we interpret it. Instead, we do our best to let the Word speak for itself.

This Christmas season it is my hope that we all will remember that the birth of Christ happened because it was God’s will to make a way for our salvation. Jesus entered into this world, was laid in the manger, to save us from our sin.

God’s peace.

Not Dead Letters

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

WHAT HAPPENS TO MAIL THAT can't be delivered? If a piece of mail comes to your address but it's not yours, you might scribble "Not Ours" on the envelope and pop it back into your mail box for the USPS to deal with. If they can't figure out where it goes, it may end up in a dead letter office. Wikipedia says: "A dead letter office (DLO) is a facility within a postal system where undeliverable mail is processed. Mail is considered to be undeliverable when the address is invalid so it cannot be delivered to addressee, and there is no return address so it cannot be returned to the sender."

The Word of God contains many letters called epistles. These epistles are not Dead Letters. They have been sent to specific recipients. They are not undeliverable and their address is never invalid.

The Apostle Paul wrote thirteen letters in the New Testament

to the churches at Rome, Corinth (2), Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica (2). He also wrote four letters to individuals: Timothy (2), Titus, and Philemon.

There are eight general epistles in the New Testament. Some say the letter to the Hebrews was written by the Apostle Paul, but the letter itself doesn't state who wrote it. Letters were written by James, Peter (2), John (3)—he also wrote the Gospel of John—and Jude.

All the New Testament letters were written to Christians. If you're a believer in Christ, then the letters are for YOU. Some contain instruction for pastors, or husbands and wives, so all the material may not directly apply, but there is much sound teaching in them no matter your station in life.

The Apostle Paul says the Corinthian Christians ARE an epistle—a letter—written in the hearts of those who had served them, known and read by all people. They were clearly shown to be the letter of Christ, served by Paul and his fellow laborers, a letter written not with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God, not letters carved into stone tables like the Ten Commandments, but carved into tables of human hearts.



The Apostle was confident through Christ toward God, not that he and his workers had any ability in themselves, but their adequacy came from God. God had made them His capable ministers of His new covenant, which wasn't of the letter but of the Spirit. The letter (of the Law) kills, but the Spirit (of God) gives life.

*Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? **Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.***

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3

The epistles were written under divine authority for us, and they deliver the Law and the Gospel in turn to us. May the Holy Spirit give us ears to hear the Divine Epistles and make us epistles of Christ that are known and read of all people. ~

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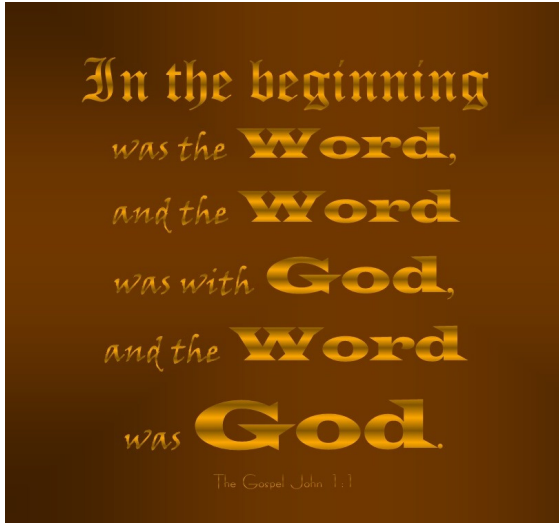
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The Mystery of Christmas

Pastor Chuck Bylkas
South Range, Michigan



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 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 1:1-14

AT THE CENTER OF THE CELEBRATION of Christmas is a great mystery. With the birth of Jesus, the Divine becomes human. In his Gospel, John speaks of this event as the Word becoming flesh. In the past, God spoke to us through the spoken word and the written word. But now, God communicates His great love for mankind through the living Word, Jesus Christ. Instead of sending another ordinary messenger, God comes and speaks to us in person. The writer of the book of Hebrews echoes a similar thought:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Hebrews 1:1-4

This passage teaches us that God took on human flesh not only to say that He loves us, but to demonstrate His love for us. Christ came for the express purpose of offering Himself as a sacrifice for sins. Not only did Christ cleanse us from sin by His blood, but He also conforms us into His own image. We now walk in newness of life, because of the death and Resurrection of God's Son. To paraphrase the church father Athanasius, "He became what we are, so that we might become what He is."

May God grant us grace to believe in the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation and celebrate the ...good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

Yours in Christ.

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