

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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Discernment 7 THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD By Rayola Kelley

We have been considering the natural spirit of man. True discipleship is what addresses the natural bent of the fallen disposition of sin. The "old man" is made up of the self life that needs to be denied, vain imaginations that need to be transformed, and the flesh that needs to be crucified. These three hindrances need to be taken care of in order for a disciple to follow Jesus into the life He is calling him or her into.



The putting off of the "old man" entails the great exchange. Man must exchange his old life with a new life of Christ. It is true there are those who try to mix the two, but such a concept is like trying to mix oil with water, the profane with the holy, the unclean with that which is clean. You end up with the oil separating from the water because they are made of opposing substances, the holy becoming profane, and the clean becoming defiled. Jesus made reference to this in *Matthew 9:16-17* in relationship to wineskins and garments. If a person tries to pour new wine into an old wineskin it will break, and if a person tries to patch an old garment with new cloth the tear is made worse. Such mixtures compromise the integrity of the new while destroying the old. Clearly, we cannot mix our old life with our new life.

The new man is endowed with heavenly life while the old man possesses the temporary life of this world.

It is the tendency of new believers to think that the old has something good in it; therefore, they try to patch their old life with religious activities. On the other hand, if they perceive there is something good about the old but desire the new, they try to tack what they consider to be the good of the old life onto the new, but in both cases the new becomes greatly compromised and defiled, while the old reveals that it is unable to bring any real lasting stability.

The "old man" has to be taken care of so that the spiritual man can be established. Man is either tied into the flesh and the world or he is taking on the life of Christ and becoming the spiritual man. *1 Corinthians 15:45-49* speaks about the earthly man and the spiritual man. We all start out earthly, but if we are born again of the Spirit of God we are translated from the earthly status to become the spiritual man that is able to interact with God. This translation points to a new creation where everything becomes new while the old passes away (*2 Corinthians 5:17*).

Man in his fallen state is bound to the earth. He is but dust in light of his ending, mortal in light of his present existence, and fading in light of strength and time. However, the spiritual man will live forever in a glorified state, and the more the spiritual man walks according to the next world to come the more the earth loses its grip on him. The problem with some Christians is that they are trying to hold on to the world while trying to be religious and spiritual. A person who tries to do this will fail to become a spiritual man who is taking on the likeness of Jesus Christ.

December is when we celebrate deity coming into the world. We all know the arguments about celebrating Christmas. Some will not celebrate it because it is a Catholic holiday and others feel it is proper to celebrate it as long as Christ is the center of their celebration. The truth is we should

celebrate Christ every day, but it does not hurt to mark the fact the He came by way of Bethlehem (the House of Bread) to become the Bread of life (*John 6:35*).

What we celebrate at such a time is not that He simply came but how He came. He thought it not robbery to cease to hold onto His sovereignty as God and allowed Himself to be fashioned as a man in order to become a servant to all (*Philippians 2:5-8*). His glory as God was veiled by humanity, and He came as a babe, a child, a son, and was born to a virgin in a stable (*Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7*). There were different responses toward His birth and life, and like Jesus' first advent we still see how the flesh responds to Him, how the world regards Him, how governments fear Him, and how wicked leaders despise Him.

It is vital that we understand how to discern man's reaction to Jesus in order to properly test our own attitudes. Much of our attitudes towards spiritual matters are based on the influence of the spirit that is in the world. Before I understood why Jesus' first coming was significant, I thought of Christmas in a sentimental way because He came as a baby, but we all come into this world as a baby. I never thought about why His coming was significant. Yes, I heard and read the angel's tidings to the shepherds on that night so long ago in *Luke 2:11*, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Even though I heard this tidging many times I was ignorant of the fact that He came to save me. I was blinded by fleshly sentiment, lost in a false sense of religious piety, and walking on the broad path of destruction.

Today there are many people who hold to the sentimental notion of Jesus as a babe, but that babe grew into manhood and became the savior of the world (people) by dying on the cross. Bethlehem makes no sense without Calvary and there would be no

Calvary without Bethlehem. He had to come our way as a babe in order to become the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (*John 1:29*). Bethlehem is the door but Calvary provided the way in which salvation could be wrought in man's life by faith in Jesus' redemptive work.

Even though we have heard or read these responses many times when it came to Jesus' birth, let us consider them in light of what is happening today. *Luke 2:7* mentions the fact that there was no room in the inn for Jesus. How many times through the years in different plays did the one playing the innkeeper make a point by declaring that there was no room in the inn? In fact, there are songs written about this one response. The innkeeper was not being mean and according to some accounts the manger was part of the inn and wasn't all that bad after all. However, the innkeepers of the world would make some type of concession if they were entertaining known royalty and dignitaries no matter how crowded the inn was. And, if the circumstances were presented to those at the end by such individuals, there might have been some kind or loyal soul who would give way to such officials, but the reality is that Jesus was not recognized as the king because His parents didn't fit the description of royalty or as being important.

The innkeeper represents the world. The world with all of its activities and demands had no room for Jesus that night long ago. In essence, the innkeeper was doing the business of the world. Clearly, the demands of the world will always push Jesus into some small corner such as a manger, the ways of the world will always crowd Him out, and the claims of the world will eventually deem Him as a troublemaker, someone to be scoffed at, rejected, and discarded.

If you look around, you can clearly see the present world doing the same thing where Christ is concerned. The godless philosophies of the world are pushing even the mention of Jesus out of every arena. The demands of the world are swallowing up every corner to ensure there is no place for Christ to rule in a person's life. The ways of the world show contempt towards genuine faith, and the world

claims that only weak fools believe there is a God.

The question is should this surprise believers that the world is doing everything to wipe out the testimony of Christ? After all, the spirit of the world can operate as an anti-Christ spirit, a spirit that strives to replace the real Jesus with counterfeits and deny the existence of the one true God (*1 John 4:1-3*). Jesus stated the world hates Him and will hate those who follow Him. James tells us that if we are a friend of the world, we are enemies of God and the Apostle John clearly states that if we love the world, the love of the Father will not be in us (*John 7:7; 17:14; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15*). You can't love God and the world at the same time, yet how many of us allow the world to define how we look at the things of God? How many of us had a sweetness developing in our Christian life, but the cares of this world choked out the influence of His Word on our lives (*Matthew 13:22*)? What or who is taking center stage when it comes to our time, attention, energy, and strength?

The next person to consider was Herod. He clearly represented the spirit of the natural man that was greatly influenced by the spirit of the world that works in the sons of disobedience (*Ephesians 2:2*). Herod represented the kingdoms of this world, its idolatry, pagan ways, vain pursuits, temporary glory, and wickedness. Herod didn't care about Jesus. He would have had no idea Jesus even existed if it wasn't for the three wise men seeking him out to worship the King of the Jews (*Matthew 2:1-3*). In the end, Herod's indifference towards Jesus turned into hatred for Him.

Is this not true for the world we live in? For the most part, the world doesn't pay any mind to Jesus, but lift Him up as a standard of what is true, right, beautiful, pure, good, and just, the world's indifference will turn into hatred. Consider what is happening in the halls of Congress towards the Christians in Texas who lost half of their congregation because of an insane gunman. These Christians have been mocked for turning to God in their sorrow. They have been scorned for believing that although their loss and sorrow is great, in light of eternity it will be temporary, and they have

been sorely ridiculed for praying to a God who "let them down," trusting that somehow He will be glorified in such a tragedy. I hope the people from these different wicked congressmen's districts have taken note of the hatred that has been displayed by them towards God and His people and vote them out in the next election.

Herod pretended he wanted to find Jesus so he could worship him, but that was a ploy on his part to rid his world of any future competition (*Matthew 2:4-8*). After all, Herod was appointed procurator by Rome and saw himself as king, while Jesus was King. Herod was given power by Rome, but Jesus was empowered by heaven. Jesus didn't present any real threat to Herod's fragile kingdom or ego, but in his demonic paranoia, he could not let the baby Jesus live to manhood. He ended up becoming a tool of Satan and fulfilling a very sad prophecy from Jeremiah, when he had all infants up to two years old murdered (*Matthew 2:16-18*).

The world will try to destroy any influence Jesus may have and might have on tender hearts, seeking souls, and tormented spirits. It is for this reason the Apostle John made this statement in *1 John 5:4-5*, "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.*"

The next group of people in the Christmas Story were those who believed the tidings concerning Jesus. The first ones to respond were the shepherds. The shepherds were, for the most part, considered insignificant in the culture, yet the Lord's angel declared the incredible message of a savior being born to these outcasts. The message had a profound effect on the shepherds because it was backed up by the very glory of heaven shining forth in the dark night (*Matthew 2:9-13*). But, consider that such individuals have nothing to lose in this world and everything to gain in light of the world that is yet to come. These shepherds obeyed and went to Bethlehem. (*Matthew 2:15*).

The shepherds were invited to come and see the Christ child. Likewise, every Christian believer has

heard some type of invitation from the Lord to come to Him. Whether the invitation is to those who are heavy laden, to those who are thirsty or hungry, or to those who are seeking, the invitation is the same, "Come unto Me, come and see."

What did the shepherds see when they sought out their new-born savior? They saw what the angel declared, "the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." They would see lowliness clothed in a child, purity in a babe, and promise and hope in an infant boy who one day would become Savior, and they believed. And, as lost sinners seeking a Savior, what are we invited to see? lowliness in the form of a sacrifice, God's Lamb being lifted on a cross out of love to die in our place in order to redeem us from sin and death's claims on us. The fact that we are believers clearly states that after hearing the Gospel and seeing His sacrifice and resurrection with our hearts, we likewise believed as the day star arose in our spirits and the Sun of Righteousness brought healing to our barren souls (*Malachi 4:2; 2 Peter 1:19*).

What were the shepherd's reactions? They became evangelists and made known abroad what they had seen and heard (*Luke 2:17*). Are we not commissioned to tell others about what we have heard and seen when it comes to Jesus Christ? In *Luke 2:20* we are also told, "*And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.*" Are we bringing glory to God and offering the sacrifice of praise because we have heard and seen the truth about Jesus and the salvation He offers to all who will come and see after hearing the "good news?"

The next group of people involved in the Christmas story were the three wise men. Many comment how the wise men came last, but what they fail to point out is that these three individuals recognized the sign that the King of the Jews was born and they sought Him out (*Matthew 2:7-12, 16*). From their own account that they gave Herod they had searched for two years. The wise men believed the sign and endured two years of searching until they found Jesus.

There are many people unknow-

ingly looking for Jesus. They desire only what Jesus can give them. They may seek the answers in things, activities, and pursuits, but in the end they are left empty because only Jesus satisfies.

We also live in an instant society. There are few who allow themselves to be inconvenienced for even an hour or two and even fewer if something takes more than a week or a month. Many lose interest along the way and end up dropping the ball instead of seeing something through to the end.

The Bible tells us we are to seek the Lord and live, and if we seek Him with all of our heart, He will be found by us (*Jeremiah 29:13; Amos 5:4-8*). The wise men sought the King of the Jews until they found Him. I was saved at 21 and all those years prior to my new birth experience I was seeking the answers to the questions of life, and when I found the Lord Jesus, I knew He was the ANSWER!

The wise men brought valuable gifts. At Christmas we are to celebrate the gift of eternal life, but have we brought valuable gifts to the Lord, gifts such as our lives, talents, and resources?

The wise men were wise because they knew how to read the sign and sought out the One the sign pointed to. Even the religious leaders of Jesus' day were not aware of His birth. Consider the signs today. They are pointing to Jesus coming again, but how many people are seeking Him out in preparation to see Him coming back in the clouds?

There are other people who are part of the Christmas story that we must not overlook. There is Mary, the one who carried the Lord Jesus in her womb. We must make sure that as Christians we are carrying the Lord Jesus in our hearts. There is Joseph, Mary's husband. He was entrusted with making sure that the life of Jesus was maintained and nurtured. Are we as believers nurturing the life of Jesus in us through obedience to His Word, fellowship in His Spirit, and worshiping in the most Holy Place?

Then there was Simeon who had been waiting to see Jesus. Although he was older, he believed what he had been shown by the Spirit that he would see his salvation, and because

of belief, he was led by the Spirit to the temple on the day Jesus was dedicated. When he blessed the child, he declared, "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He went on to say, "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (*Luke 2:25-32*). Are we looking for the fullness of our salvation to be revealed to us by heaven? Are we being led by the Spirit into places of preparation and communion to experience the Lord in a personal way?

The final person is the woman named Anna. She spent most of her life in the temple. She fasted and prayed night and day. She lived in expectation of redemption coming. When she saw Jesus she instantly gave thanks to the Lord and went from the temple to tell others who were looking for redemption that it had finally come (*Luke 2:36-38*). Like Anna, are we living in great expectation? After all, Jesus stated when you see certain signs, "Look up for your redemption draws near" (*Luke 21:28*). And, like Anna are we telling others who are living in such expectation that Jesus our Redeemer has come and that He is coming for a church without spot or wrinkle?

Every year at this time I remember or reread the Christmas Story, not for sentimental value, but to rejoice that Jesus came. Even though there is so much commercialism, the old, old story of His birth, life, death, and resurrection never grows old, never loses its importance, and never changes. Imagine for two thousand years the events around Jesus' birth, the activities around His ministry, and the fulfilling of His mission to redeem mankind remains the same in spite of the vast influence of the spirit of the world upon the hearts and minds of people; the "innkeepers" of the world; and the "Herods" who have set out to destroy any trace of Him.

As believers we can thank God for the great gift of His Son and His Son for the incredible gift of His life, but we need to consider what we are giving back to our Lord as we rejoice in, and benefit from, His many blessings.

We at Gentle Shepherd Ministries want to take this time to wish you and yours a blessed **Merry Christmas**.

THE LAMB HAS COME, THE LION IS COMING

By Jeannette Haley

"For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

– Habakkuk 2:14

Once again we come to that time of the year when Christians pay special attention to the story of the birth of Jesus. And every year we are presented with new fictional twists and turns, suppositions and stories about this heavenly event. The historical and biblical account of the birth of the Lamb of God is "what it was, what it is, and what it forever will be." The Words of God, as recorded and properly translated for us in the KJV of the Bible, are TRUTH. One reason we find ourselves living in perilous times is because *"judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter"* Isaiah 59:14.

Truth will always be truth no matter what Satan and all of his lying demons say, or do to pervert, alter, or silence it. Truth is truth, and truth will continue to stand regardless of humanity's endless assaults against it. Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"* Matthew 24:35. How can His Word pass away when Jesus is the Word and He is, as Revelation 1:8 declares, *"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty"*? Therefore, we can believe the truth of the Word when we read Luke 2 verse 6, which says, *"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."*

When the Lamb of God came into the world as a baby He, was clothed by human hands with linen. The last "clothing" human hands wrapped the body of the crucified Lord with was fine linen, which represents righteousness. Thus, from birth to death the fine white linen was another representation of the holiness and purity of the Lord Jesus.

It is interesting to note that fine white linen curtains formed a barrier around the Tabernacle in the wilderness. (See Exodus 27:9-15.) According to the Bible History Web Site, "The outer court was enclosed by massive curtains which were 5 cubits (7 1/2 feet) high all around. 150 feet long on the north and south sides, and 75 feet long on the west, and 45 feet long on the east, leaving room for the gate. The curtains were woven from fine linen and suspended from the pillars, which were also 5 cubits apart.

"Five separate curtains were suspended round the courtyard. Two of them ran along the long side each being 100 cubits. The one at the west end was 50 cubits long while there were two short ones on either side of the front entrance each being 15 cubits in length.

"The plain white linen screen formed a barrier around the House of God. No Israelite could casually wander around the Holy building or stroll into the courtyard.

"The material that formed this barrier was fine white linen symbolizing righteousness. The symbolism is revealed in the Book of Revelation where, at the wedding of Christ with His bride (the church) who has made herself ready for the wedding. Her wedding dress will be made of fine linen: **Rev 19:8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.**

"The wall of fine linen around the tabernacle presented a barrier to those whose acts were not 'righteous before God' making sure that they would not have access to the courtyard. And, symbolically, this would have excluded every person in Israel."

So we see the Lamb of God, lovingly wrapped in grave cloths and laid in a lowly wooden manger and realize that this manger is a powerful identification with humanity, which is typified by the wood in the Tabernacle. Between the symbolism of the pure white linen, and the wood of the manger we have "Emmanuel," God with us, God incarnate. 1 Timothy 3:16 says, *"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."

A. W. Pink beautifully explains the powerful message of the manger. He said, "Jesus was laid in a manger because there was no room for Him. How solemnly this brings out the world's estimate of the Christ of God. There was no appreciation of His amazing condescension. He was not wanted. It is so still. There is no room for Him in the schools, in society, in the business world, among the great throngs of pleasure seekers, in the political realm, in the newspapers, nor in many of the churches. It is only history repeating itself. All that the world gave the Savior was a manger, a cross on which to die, and a borrowed grave to receive His murdered body.

"He was laid in a manger to demonstrate the extent of His poverty. *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).* How 'poor' He became, was thus manifested at the beginning. The One who, afterwards, had nowhere to lay His head, who had to ask for a penny when He would reply to His critics about the question of tribute, and who had to use another man's house when instituting the Holy Supper, was, from the first, a homeless Stranger here. And the 'manger' was the earliest evidence.

"He was laid in a manger to show His contempt for worldly riches and pomp. We might think it more fitting for the Christ of God to be born in a palace and laid in a cradle of gold, lined with costly silks. But as He Himself reminds us in this same Gospel, *"that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).* And what an exemplification of this truth was given when the infant Saviour was placed, not in a cradle of gold but, in an humble manger.

"He was laid in a manger to mark His identification with human suffering and wretchedness. The One born was 'The Son of Man.' He had left the heights of Heaven's glory and had descended to our level, and here we behold Him entering the human condition at its lowest point. Thus did the Man of Sorrows identify Himself

with human suffering.”

Luke 2:8 says, “*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night.*” This verse is rich with spiritual applications. First, we see that the shepherds were “*in the same country.*” Of course this “same country” is Israel, the covenant nation that the LORD founded, led, taught, watched over, kept, fought for, protected, chastised, restored, scattered, gathered together and wept over. It is the nation wherein the Lion of the Tribe of Judah shall sit upon the throne of David and rule forever. “*And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD*” Isaiah 2:2-5.

In the fields outside of Bethlehem, the City of David, faithful shepherds were steadfastly keeping watch over their flock in the night. Just as these faithful shepherds were protecting the sheep given into their care through the night, so too will faithful shepherds watch over the souls entrusted to their care through the darkness of the latter days. There can be no doubt that we are living in the times of great spiritual darkness, “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching*



ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” 2 Timothy 4:3, 4.

It was to the faithful shepherds that “*...the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid*” Luke 2:9. Faithful shepherds are given heavenly insight from the Lord. Faithful shepherds are not seeking great things for themselves, but only care for the spiritual welfare of the Lord’s sheep. Faithful shepherds will be rewarded with true revelations in the Word of God by the Holy Spirit, faithful shepherds understand prophecies and the signs of the times, faithful shepherds are watchful and protective, and faithful shepherds are entrusted with the commission to spread the truth of the Good News to the world, and to faithfully teach (make disciples to Jesus.) “*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*” verses 10, 11.

What the shepherds were hearing had been prophesied 730 years previously by the prophet Micah: “*But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth*” Micah 2:2-4.

What greater news could heaven proclaim? What greater joy could there be than that of the birth of the Saviour, which is Christ the Lord? The source of all true joy comes from above, and is centered in Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, not an emotional high of the flesh. Joy remains, regardless of our trials and tribulations, because the joy of the Lord is established in eternity. Happiness in this world can be elusive, but the joy that

comes from above remains as long as we believe Jesus who said, “*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full,*” John 15:8-11.

Then the angel said to the shepherds, “*And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger*” Luke 2:12. The Bible tells us that the Jews “seek a sign.” Therefore, the Lord, who knows us intimately, and is so very personal with us, gave the shepherds a sign—the sign of the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. This “*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*” verses 13, 14.

How awesome to it is to meditate on this magnificent sight! How thrilling it is to read of this heavenly visitation, and how much more thrilling beyond the telling it must have been for those shepherds! Of all the people in all the land, heaven came down and glory filled the skies that night in the sight of a few faithful shepherds! Sore afraid at first, yes! But God’s angels always say, “Fear not.” Why was this great pronouncement made to lowly shepherds, and not to the great and mighty men of Bethlehem, or to the prominent religious leaders? We can find the answer in the inspired words of Mary: “*And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; and he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry*

with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever” Luke 1:49-55.

Mary praised the Lord, and rejoiced in God her Savior. Sinners need a savior in order to be saved, and Mary was very aware that she was no exception. She humbly acknowledged that God is mighty, and that he had done great things to her. She declared His name to be holy. *“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable”, Psalm 145:3.* Only from such a position of humility and praise can a person be entrusted with greater truths from above. Then she declared the wonderful truth that God is merciful to those that fear Him in each generation. *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” Proverbs 9:10.* She knew He had revealed not only His faithfulness, but also His might and power in fulfilling His promises to those who fear and love Him. *“It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” Lamentations 3:22-23b.* She understood that He scatters those whose prideful hearts are filled with imaginations against Him. *“The ungodly...are like the chaff which the wind driveth away” Psalm 1:4.*

Mary declared that He brings down the mighty from the lofty places to which they exalt themselves, and He lifts up and exalts those whom the world considers to be unimportant and worthless. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” Luke 4:18.* When she said that He fills the hungry with good things, no doubt she spoke of the spiritually hungry, because that is the greatest hunger there is! If we hunger and thirst for God, He will fill us with the Bread of Life and the Living Water. But, those who think they are “spiritually rich,” who think that they

have a corner on religion, and who think they know it all but do not know Jesus, they will go away empty into outer darkness. And, lastly, she praised the Lord for His mercy in remembering Israel, and for fulfilling His promises to Abraham and his seed forever.

Then, *“...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 2:13, 14.* Peace on earth—lasting, glorious peace—is yet to come and fill the earth. In the meantime, God gives us peace in the midst of our trials and tribulations if we trust and obey. *Phillipians 4:4-7* says, *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* The Lord Jesus promised His disciples *“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.* *Colossians 3:15* says, *“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.”*

We can hold fast to the prophecy of the Lamb who has come, and the Lion who is coming in *Isaiah 11:1-4*, *“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”*

Continuing on with Luke’s account of events surrounding Christ’s

nativity, we see that the shepherds have left us an example to follow. *“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 to 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. 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 2:15-18, 20.*

The shepherds were the first evangelists to go forth with the Good News of the Savior, Christ the Lord. The question is are we who have come to Jesus for forgiveness of sins, and have been cleansed and made whole by the precious blood of Jesus, and who have received the promise of the Holy Spirit, and who have tasted the goodness of the Lord, are we telling the Good News to others as did the shepherds? Not only that, are we also proclaiming the glorious coming of the Lord? His Word will be fulfilled to the letter: we see the signs of His coming everywhere. *Revelation 19:11-16* says, *“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”*

As we look back two-thousand

years to the incarnation of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and as we celebrate and rejoice in our salvation, let us also remember *“that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof”*. (See Revelation 5:5.) May our joy be full because the Lamb of God came, and may our joy be full because the Lion of the tribe of Judah is soon returning to rule and reign over all the earth. Are you ready? †

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: *“I have a question about giving. The church I go to expects everybody to tithe, but I cannot find the Apostle Paul actually teaching on it. I also wonder about giving everything to the church when there are also missionaries and ministries that distribute the Word, evangelize, and feed the poor. How can you be sure you are being a good steward with what God gives you?”*

A: The Apostle Paul did not teach on tithing because he taught on the real attitude behind Christian giving in 2 *Corinthians 9*. Tithing was a Jewish practice that was done when the temple was still standing. It involved tithing animals and the first fruits of the land. The church used the concept of tithing to give some type of marker for Christians in relationship to giving to the church, but the Apostle established different markers.

Paul reminded the Corinthians of a very important principle: *“He which sows sparingly shall reap sparingly and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully”* (2 *Corinthians 9:6*). We cannot out give the Lord, but our main responsibility is to be good stewards with what He entrusts to us.

The next marker may answer your question, *“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver”* (2 *Corinthians 9:7*). We need to give according to what is on our heart to give, whether it is to our church, missionaries, or ministries. Whether you are giving to the church, missionaries, or some other ministry, it must be for God's work. God needs to show you where the need is and how much to give, and you need to cheerfully respond in faith.

I realize that there is an emphasis from churches that you are to give to the church you attend because it is feeding you spiritually, but our allegiance should be foremost to God and His kingdom. We need to seek the Lord as to what we give, who we give to, and how much.

The Apostle Paul is clear that when you give, do not give grudgingly or because you feel pressured to give,

but you need to give because you love to give to the work of God. There are some who give out of show, others out of duty, and some because of a merit system they have set up in their mind. This merit system is based on the idea of giving in order to receive in like manner.

The problem with such a merit system is that what these people give is considered a sacrifice by them, but what they receive is perceived as a reasonable service and it is never really valued or rightly regarded.

Christians are to give liberally because what they possess is a matter of God's grace. Granted, they may have worked for it, but if God did not bless their work, they would find their “bags full of holes” and that nothing was truly being blessed and multiplied by God (*Haggai 1:6*).

The Lord gives to His people so they likewise will give on His behalf to others. We limit God by how we look at His grace and blessings. As a result, we are not a grateful people. Ingratitude looks at the glass half-empty and rarely sees the glass as being half-full because of His grace. They fail to see what they have and grumble about what they think they deserve. *James 1:17* summarizes it best, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”*

Avail yourself to be an open-ended vessel where God can entrust you with His blessings. As He pours into you, you will have the insight as to where to direct His blessings to ensure His work in the harvest field and His universal church. †

QUOTABLES

“Nobody knows more what a Christian should be than a non-Christian.” - Faye Moore

“If your righteousness does not come out of humility it's your own righteousness, not the righteousness of Christ. God has to count what we do as being righteous and it has to come from faith. People want everything they do to be counted for righteousness but if it doesn't come from God it's not true righteousness.” - Rayola Kelley

“Love without truth is false.” - Shahram Hadian

“Are you contented with nominal Christianity? If you are, I've nothing for you. Are you contented with popular Christianity that runs on the authority and popularity of big shots? If you are, I've nothing for you. Are you content with elementary Christianity? If you are, all I've got for you is to exhort you earnestly to press on toward perfection.” - A. W. Tozer

“Our rebellion against the infinite God requires an infinite penalty that we as finite creatures could never pay. We would be separated from God eternally. He could not simply make a ‘bookkeeping entry’ in heaven and forgive us, for that would violate His justice. God so loved mankind that He came down through the virgin birth and became a member of our race in order to be, on the Cross, the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Having paid the penalty in full demanded by His own justice, God can righteously forgive all who admit their guilt and accept the pardon He graciously offers.” - Dave Hunt

“If you don't get Jesus right, you won't get anything right.” - GSM

WISDOM OF A.W. TOZER

“Rules for Self Discovery:

1. What we want most;
2. What we think about most;
3. How we use our money;
4. What we do with our leisure time;
5. The company we enjoy;
6. Who and what we admire;
7. What we laugh at.”

“I want the presence of God Himself, or I don't want anything at all to do with religion... I want all that God has or I don't want any.”

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

Rayola Kelley

Even though there is much we contend with in the physical world, we must be aware that it is greatly affected by the unseen world. If we only consider the physical aspect of a matter, we will eventually end up in utter despair. We must believe and know that there is much that we cannot see or know because of the providence that governs the unseen. After all, it is the unseen that speaks of the miraculous. It is the unseen that gives us glimpses into the arena of that which inspires hope and allows us to walk in assurance when all seems hopeless.

I recently read about such a matter in a church newsletter. It was a story about tasting the bitterness of the physical, only to be given hope by that which had no real explanation. At such times one must concede that some type of miracle took place, even if it took on a physical form to bring it about. This incident took place around Christmas. Here is my summary:

It was December 23, 1910 in eastern Czechoslovakia. A plague of diphtheria had hit the tiny village of Velky Slavkov.

A lone man walked against the wind in the shadow of the High Tatra Mountains with a can of black paint. The inevitable was about to happen again. He would have to mark another door with a black "X."

Inside the marked house a distraught woman was kneeling at her doorpost, weeping and praying in Slovak. The woman's name was Suzanne. Her sorrow went deep into the recesses of her soul. She and her husband Jano were now childless. Their five-year-old daughter had succumbed to the dreaded disease a week prior, but now she had to face two new coffins that would be the final resting place for their two precious sons who had also become the latest victims of diphtheria. They would be laid to rest in the frozen ground right beside their sister.

Tomorrow was Christmas Eve and the house would be silent even though haunting memories of what was would echo through the empty vacuum. Clearly, the house had become a tomb that was marked by the seal of death.

Jano was also weak from the illness. He mentioned that he might not see in the New Year. All seemed hopeless as the jaws of doom gripped the couple's sorrowful hearts.

However, the silence of the tomb was interrupted by someone knocking at the formidable door. Suzanna opened the door. An old woman appeared on the other side of it. Suzanna warned her of the deadly plague that had laid claims on the home. In spite of the warning, the old woman stepped into the house. Her instruction was simple. She held out a jar of kerosene oil. She instructed Suzanna to take a white cloth, wrap it around her finger and put it in the kerosene. Then she was to swab out her husband's throat, and then have him swallow a teaspoon of the oil. The old woman told Suzanna that it would cause him to vomit the deadly mucous. Otherwise, he would die. Upon her instruction, the woman exited the house to disappear into the cold night.

True to the old woman's word, upon following her instructions, Jano retched up the deadly phlegm and his fever broke. The curse of death was broken from the house and there was rejoicing that reached into the air towards heaven.

That Christmas there were no Christmas presents under the tree, but the jar on the window represented a gift of life for generations to come.

Jano and Suzanna shared the miraculous ingredients in the jar with others. Jano eventually immigrated to America and Suzanna later joined him with their eight children. They settled near the steel mills of Johnstown Pennsylvania. It was this couple's great granddaughter who wrote this Christmas story that was put into publication for others to marvel at the grace shown by the unseen hand of Providence. †

Jesus said, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. Surely I come quickly." —(Revelation 22:12, 13, 16, 20b.)

THE MIRACLE STAR

What was the star the wise men followed to find the infant Jesus? Some suggest that it was a comet. Others say it was the conjunction of two or more planets or stars. Do any of these theories offer possible explanations?

It's not a very complicated task to evaluate these explanations. All you need is a Bible and a map of the Holy Land. Matthew 2:1 tells us that the wise men came from east of the Holy Land. Verses 2 and 9 further tell us that these men had seen the star indicating His birth in the eastern sky. Despite the pictures on Christmas cards, they had not followed the star to Jerusalem. Once they arrived in Jerusalem, we learn in Matthew 2:9 that the star they had seen in the eastern sky moved to lead them to the Christ Child.

Matthew clearly tells us that the wise men went from Jerusalem to Bethlehem in their search for the child. Bethlehem is due south of Jerusalem. He also tells us that the star moved over where the child was. That movement is very unlike a star. In fact, the movement of the star was even more unstar like in that it directed them to a specific house!

These wise men from the East were accustomed to the sights of the night sky. They could tell the difference between a conjunction and a comet or a miracle star. This star was clearly created by God to announce the birth of the Savior of the world to the world He came to save!

— *Creation Moments*



"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, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." - Isaiah 9:6