

## MATTHEW 1:18-25

### IMMANUEL! (PART II)

“The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel’

(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

**I** have long contended that Joseph is the forgotten individual in the account of Jesus’ birth. We are likely to hear more about Elizabeth and Zechariah than we will hear about Joseph! However, had Joseph not been endowed with a high degree of character, the Christmas story could have been quite different. Surely, the inclusion of Joseph in this story serves as a testament to God’s oversight of the momentous events that brought His Son into the world.

Every person named in the account of Jesus’ birth is vital to what was happening. Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John, who would be known as “The Baptist,” were not simply unexpectedly blessed by the birth of a child. This childless couple had prayed for God to bless their home with a child—and God answered. God didn’t just send a child, He sent an angel to announce that a child would be born to them. The angel announced to Zechariah, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared” [LUKE 1:13-17].

Mary was not incidental to the birth of the Christ; the angel’s message made this evident. “‘Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!’ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end’” [LUKE 1:28-33].

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

**MATTHEW 1:18-25**  
**IMMANUEL (PART II)**

In like manner, God knew that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. It was not an accident that Joseph would be confronted by this unexpected demand. God sought a man of character who would ensure that the child Jesus would have a protector in the home, a man who would model righteousness and character.

The heart of the nativity story is the birth of the Christ, the Son of God who came to redeem fallen mankind. However, we are living in strange times; religious people unconsciously and inexorably move away from the Faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. Let me give a few examples of what I'm speaking about. One song that is becoming increasingly popular at Christmas in the land of Spurgeon, Wesley and Whitefield is the John Lennon song, "Imagine."

Imagine there no heaven; it's easy if you try.  
No hell below us, above us only sky.  
Imagine all the people living for today.

Imagine there's no countries; it isn't hard to do.  
Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion, too.  
Imagine all the people living life in peace.

So, people celebrate the birth of the Son of God by imagining that the spiritual aspects of life are a figment of our collective imagination. I wonder why people that see this as a "Christmas" song would even want to celebrate Christmas.

"Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" has become one of the most popular songs to be sung at funerals—religious or otherwise! So, now, we don't know where our loved ones are going, but we will ensure that we all exit with a grin.

Life is quite absurd, and death's the final word  
You must always face the curtain with a bow  
Forget about your sin, give the audience a grin  
Enjoy it, it's your last chance anyhow.

...Life's a laugh and death's joke, it's true  
You'll see it's all a show, keep 'em laughing as you go  
Just remember that the last laugh is on you.

Among the churches, we are instructed with some of the most inane songs imaginable. "Mary, Did You Know" is one such marvel.

Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy will one day walk on water?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy has come to make you new?  
This child that you've delivered  
Will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know  
That your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?  
Did you know  
That your baby boy has walked where angels trod?  
And when you kiss your little baby  
You've kissed the face of god

This is rank nonsense taught as Christian doctrine! To question whether Mary knew that her son would be called “Son of God” is heretical. While I would not be surprised if an agnostic or an atheist wrote such a song, I am astonished when the song is presented as Christian. The fact that an angel brought the announcement is a significant heads up that the child was going to be someone unusual. The references Gabriel used would inform both Mary and Joseph that the child, Jesus, was something far beyond a child born in the natural way. Beyond all that, the angel’s revelation to Mary was, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” [LUKE 1:35]. Mary’s actions at the wedding at Cana demonstrate that she understood that Jesus was very God, Creator with power over all His hands had made [see JOHN 2:1-5]. Be very certain, Mary, and Joseph as well, knew—*knew*—that this child would be Immanuel—God with us.

**THE CENTRE OF THE ACCOUNT IS JESUS CHRIST** — It is easy to become caught up in the contemporary retelling of the Christmas story to such an extent that we forget what is going on. Modern church traditions have unwittingly reduced the first advent of the Son of God to an incidental occurrence in the story of salvation. Church leaders didn’t set out to ignore the Christ; however, they were so intent on making the story “fun” that they lost the child among the gifts.

I recall the account of a celebration of the birth of a child born to a wealthy couple. I don’t know if the story is apocryphal or if it was an actual news event, however, it sounds accurate. The couple invited their family, their many friends and associates to a party in honour of the child. As the guests arrived, the couple would take their coats and wraps and lay them on a bed. As more people arrived, some began asking to see the newborn child, sending the mother into a frantic search because she could not find her baby. At last, she found the child, smothered under a pile of coats and wraps that covered the bed where the child had been sleeping.

Something like that has occurred with the Saviour, I fear. While the Christian Apocrypha are rife with tales of the birth of Jesus, the earliest accounts of his birth outside of the Bible are from late in the second century.<sup>2</sup> The accounts of Matthew and Luke do not provide the fanciful additions that are witnessed in a modern creche. The Bible does not conflate all the visits as do the apocryphal accounts of Jesus’ birth. There was neither ox nor ass, an addition to the account justified by a tenuous appeal to ISAIAH 1:3. The shepherds and the magi are always seen together, though there was considerable time between the arrival of these two groups; moreover, we don’t know how many magi there were. The Christ was most likely born in a cave rather than a stable. We are more concerned to get modern expectations on board than being true to the Word.

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<sup>2</sup> See “Book of James, or Protevangelium,” “Gospel of Thomas” and “The Liber de Infantia, or Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew,” in Montague Rhodes James, **The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses** (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1924)

In short, the modern Christmas pageant is more a testimony to human imagination and the art of storytelling than it is a representation of God becoming man. I am always intrigued to discover that the first Christians didn't observe a commemoration of the birth of the Saviour. The sacrifice of Christ and His resurrection were at the heart of the Gospel message. Thus, early believers were fervent in proclaiming the resurrection of the Saviour. This zealous proclamation grows out of Paul's assertion, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:12-14, 20].

The commitment of the early Christians in proclaiming the Resurrection ensured that more than three hundred years would pass before we even find a mention of an observance of Christ's birth. Actually, among the first believers, the day on which a Christian died was viewed as more significant than the day on which he or she was born. A major reason for this situation is that the day of one's death is the day in which a believer is ushered into Heaven. Perhaps Solomon's words influenced this view:

"A good name is better than precious ointment,  
and the day of death than the day of birth.  
It is better to go to the house of mourning  
than to go to the house of feasting,  
for this is the end of all mankind,  
and the living will lay it to heart."

[ECCLESIASTES 7:1, 2]

When at last the observance of Christmas was introduced among the churches in the west, three services would be celebrated on Christmas day—a midnight service, a service on Christmas morning and another on Christmas night. "The texts of these services stress the birth of Christ, but in such a way that the birth is not isolated from the death of Christ and his coming again. These themes are present in the Christmas preface prayer which states, 'Grant that as we joyfully receive him for our redeemer, so may we with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our judge.' What is at the heart of Christmas is the gospel—the overthrow of evil and the establishment of God's reign in our lives and over a restored Creation."<sup>3</sup>

I realise that I'm providing more history than some might imagine necessary, but there are some points concerning our roots as the faithful which I believe essential. Christmas was not a major observance with the early church fathers. As I have already noted, the first mention of Christmas appears not to have been recorded until the fourth century. In part, this can be accounted for because these ancient believers sought to avoid any association with natal feasts of Roman emperors and pagan deities.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, when Christmas did begin to be observed during the fourth century, the hymns that were written and sung focused on the significance of the Incarnation rather than the event. An example of such a hymn is still found in our hymnal ("Corde natus ex parentis," "Of the Father's Love Begotten").

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Webber, **The Services of the Christian Year, vol. 5, The Complete Library of Christian Worship** (Star Song Pub. Group, Nashville, TN 1994) 156–158

<sup>4</sup> Cf. David L. Jeffrey, **A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature** (W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1992)

Of the Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He,

Even as late as the twelfth century, hymns were less concerned with the event than with the theological significance of His birth. As an example of such hymns, consider one which we still sing, "Veni Emmanuel" ("O Come, O Come, Emmanuel").

Since I have raised the issue of how the Christmas observance began, there will undoubtedly be some who contend we should not observe Christmas at all. These individuals imagine that Christmas (and Easter) are a compromise with pagan holidays. However, the earliest observance of Christmas, rather than being a compromise with paganism, was an answer to pagan idolatry. Douglas Wilson has correctly observed, "The early Christians began observing Christmas ... as an answer to pagan idolatry, not as a compromise with it, just as many modern Christians celebrate Reformation Day in a direct challenge to Halloween. When we have sealed our testimony for Christ with as much blood as they did, we might have the right to lecture them about their tendencies to compromise the antithesis. We chastise them for challenging pagan holidays with distinctively Christian observances, and then we, in a craven fashion observe all the holidays set by our modern unbelieving state.

"We need to learn to define our days in a distinctively Christian way. We need to number them with Christ in mind. We need to learn how to celebrate Christmas as the beginning of the church year, remembering the Incarnation as the foundation of all that follows."<sup>5</sup>

From this historical excursus, it should be evident that the Gospel of Christ that is so often forgotten or even ignored in contemporary Christmas celebrations, was central to the earlier celebrations. Christmas was meant to build the faithful in their understanding of all that God has provided for His people in sending His Son to redeem fallen people.

Traditionally, the third Sunday in Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday, Joy Sunday. Christ's Advent was the cause of great joy. Throughout the Synoptic Gospels, joy is a common result at the Advent. Consider several instances. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, Elizabeth exclaimed, "When the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy" [LUKE 1:44]. The unborn infant, John, who would become known as "The Baptist," worshipped, leaping in his mother's womb.

Mary's own response to her cousin's exclamation of worship offered by her unborn child is recorded in the following verses:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

[LUKE 1:46, 47]

The angel announcing the birth of the Saviour to the shepherds, testified, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" [LUKE 2:10, 11].

Of the magi, we read the report that after they had left Herod and resumed their quest, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" [MATTHEW 2:10]. Knowing they were nearing the conclusion of their journey, they rejoiced—and theirs was great joy!

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas Wilson, "Defining Our Days," *Tabletalk Magazine*, December 2002: What Child Is This? (Ligonier Ministries, Lake Mary, FL 2002) 61

While the modern yuletide celebration is associated in the popular mind with gaiety, happiness, even being defined by frivolity as people party and anticipate receiving gifts, few people speak of the modern Christmas celebration as being marked by joy. Perhaps that is because joy is distinguished from happiness by permanence, and the world is incapable of giving permanence to anything. This is the reasoning behind John's cautionary words, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever" [1 JOHN 2:15-17].

Whereas happiness is derived from an old English word "hap," referring to one's situation in life, joy speaks of one's innermost condition despite circumstances. The distinction is vital. Happiness is dependent upon circumstances; hence, it is transient, ephemeral, fleeting. Just when you think you have achieved happiness, you inevitably find disappointment. Joy, however, is settled, permanent, enduring. Joy is independent of one's situation at any given time; joy reflects who one is rather than where one is. Joy is the natural expression of a heart that is content, a life that is fulfilled, an existence that is meaningful. Christians are expected to be joyous people.

The difference between happiness and joy is demonstrated through a conversation Jesus had with a woman of tarnished character. Jesus' disciples had gone into a Samaritan village to buy some food. Jesus, however, rested beside the village well. We read, "A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water'" [JOHN 4:7-15].

Witnessing this exchange, we are taught that the difference between happiness and joy is the difference between drinking the liquid we know as "water" and drinking of the Spirit so that we become a fount of refreshment for all who know us. Just as the need for water is renewed constantly, so the search for happiness will always lead us to seek for new avenues to quench the restless soul. Similarly, just as the water of life wells up in the life of the twice-born child of God, so joy is the constant mark of the redeemed individual. Let me state emphatically—joy is the heritage of the twice-born child of God. Joy is the indelible mark etched on the heart of the Christian. Thus, Christmas is not a mere season set aside in our year, Christmas is the state of life that characterises the one who follows the Saviour.

Jesus promised, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" [JOHN 7:38, 39].

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Joy looms large in the transformation we experience in Christ as Lord. Jesus promised, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” [JOHN 15:7-11].

Jesus promised His disciples, stunned at the thought that He would be leaving them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also, you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” [JOHN 16:20-24].

Even as He prayed in His High Priestly prayer for all who believe, Jesus sought joy for His people. He prayed, “Now I am coming to you, [Father], and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth” [JOHN 17:13-19].

It is significant that in the prophecies of the birth of God’s Messiah, Isaiah has written:

“The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.  
You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.”

[ISAIAH 9:2, 3]

It is significant because the joy is so closely associated with the One who was to come. We read:

“To us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

[ISAIAH 9:6]

The joy that was long promised by the prophets and in the writings of the Old Testament has come to fruition in Jesus, the Son of God. Joy, spontaneous, infectious joy should mark each Christian as we gather to worship. Joy should be the common identifier for every service of worship as the people of God gather. Joy should be the identifying mark of every Christmas celebration as we remember that God sent His Son to give His life as a sacrifice because of our broken condition. Now, God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son [see **1 JOHN 5:11**].

**GOD WITH US** — For years, various religious groups have laboured mightily to “Keep Christ in Christmas.” They were concerned that Christ was being excluded from Christmas. It is evident that these groups have had scant success in accomplishing their goal. It is obvious that society is moving steadily away from practising the Faith. The past ten years have witnessed a steady decline in affiliation with Christian communions, even as non-Christian religions and unaffiliated (atheists and agnostics) have increased in numbers and percentages of the population. What is worse, of those who profess affiliation with a Christian communion, somewhat less than half ever attend a service of worship at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

Increasingly, we live in a world that is traumatised if they witness someone praying. Wishing someone “Merry Christmas” has become almost an act of courage. There seems to be a concerted effort to reduce Christmas to a celebration of snow and to transform Easter into a fertility celebration. Even a holiday with religious trappings, such as Thanksgiving, is becoming “Turkey Day,” a day set aside for overeating and lazing in front of a television while watching grown men smash one another while fighting over a small ball.

Unfortunately, there is considerable evidence that there has been a generalised effort throughout society to exclude any evidence of religion from the public square. For anyone surveying the state of religion at this present time, it would be easy to conclude that society is going to hell, so we might as well stand aside and allow the world to rush to destruction. However, any Christian who adopts a view that accommodates such laissez faire attitudes toward the lost does a disservice to the Master who redeemed us and who appoints us to His service. Our Lord left us a charge that has never been fulfilled: “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [**MATTHEW 28:19, 20 NET BIBLE**].

Note the final words the Master spoke. “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The Name given to the Christ before His birth was Immanuel, “God With Us.” His promise to those who would be called by His Name was that He was always with us. When the disciples were first energised by the Holy Spirit, they were sent out into a world best identified as hostile. Jesus warned, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles” [**MATTHEW 10:16-18**].

Jesus also warned His disciples, “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you” [**JOHN 15:18, 19**].

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<sup>6</sup> See “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” May 12, 2015, Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>, accessed 16 December 2017



Here's the point of this observation. The Faith was born into a world marked by hostility toward the Master. Our spiritual forebears were appointed to perform heroic deeds when all mankind was opposed to them because of the message they carried. They were far more successful than we could ever imagine. Only a few short years after the Resurrection, Christ's servants were identified as "men who turned the world upside down" [see **ACTS 17:6**]. They accomplished these mighty feats in the power of the Spirit who filled each believer.

That same Spirit of Christ lives in each believer today. In the midst of a hostile world, we have been endowed with power to transform, with power to redeem, with power to stand boldly in opposition to wickedness and unrighteousness. If we are not so standing, it must be either that we have denied the Spirit of Christ or we are deliberately choosing to stifle Him. Jesus promised, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." He is Immanuel, God With Us.

Let me urge you today to look within your heart. If you are a Christian, if you have believed on the Lord Jesus and if you are a twice-born child of the Living God, this promise is given to you. Our world will not be changed through political action. In fact, political action will drain our energies as we attempt to do the work of the Lord in the strength of man. That has never worked, and it will not work now. Our world will not be changed by argumentation. What is needed is not a better argument; what is needed is a bolder Christian.

The Apostle testified to the Christians in Corinth, "I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved" [**1 CORINTHIANS 15:1, 2**]. It was Christ Whom Paul preached. It was Christ Whom those first disciples declared.

It was necessary to remind those sophisticated Corinthians, "I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" [**1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5**].

Christmas is a wonderful time for Christians to remind themselves that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" [see **1 TIMOTHY 1:15**]. Christ was born to set us free. Having conquered death, hell and the grave, the Risen Saviour appointed those who would follow Him to live boldly in His power. You, as a redeemed individual, are appointed to reveal the power of "God With Us." Having redeemed many, the Lord Jesus appointed redeemed men and women to accomplish His work of boldly declaring life through Him. The testimony of the writer of the Hebrew Letter, writing in **HEBREWS 2:5-18** is, "It was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that you care for him?  
You made him for a little while lower than the angels;  
you have crowned him with glory and honor,  
putting everything in subjection under his feet.’

“Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

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“For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,

“‘I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.’

“And again,

“‘I will put my trust in him.’

“And again,

“‘Behold, I and the children God has given me.’

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”

This is the call of Christmas. This is the expectation of Christmas. This is the hope of this dying world. Let God’s people say, “Amen.”