

## LUKE 1:29-45

### THE FIRST PERSON TO WORSHIP JESUS

“[Mary] was greatly troubled at the [angel’s] 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 favour 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.’

“And Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’

“And the angel answered her, ‘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. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.

“In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.’”<sup>1</sup>

**W**e are witnessing a revival of pagan attitudes toward newborn and unborn children. To the Roman mind, life did not truly begin until the father of a child accepted the child as his own. In judicial language, the child was not a “person” until accepted by the father. A nurse would bring the newborn child to the father and attempt to lay the infant on the father’s lap. If the father received the child, the little one would be allowed to live. If the father spread his legs, allowing the child to fall to the floor, the child was not accepted. Children were disposable.

Today, whether an unborn infant lives or dies is exclusively a mother’s decision. The woman who chooses life for her unborn child will fight to carry the child to term. However, if she believes the child to be an unbearable inconvenience, she will argue for her “right” to have an abortionist slaughter the child *in utero*. As terrible as it is to witness mothers doing all within their power to murder their unborn child, it is more terrible still to witness the power of government threatening the unborn as politicians and governmental bureaucrats endeavour to facilitate the slaughter of the innocent. And that is precisely what is happening throughout most of the western world—politicians and bureaucrats united in an unholy war on the unborn.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Physicians in Great Britain are calling for a debate on permitting euthanasia of disabled infants.<sup>2</sup> Even the British Prime Minister has taken up the cause of killing infants who are disabled, claiming that such action demonstrates compassion for parents and even for society! The same discussion has recently been initiated in Canada.<sup>3</sup> The situation is reminiscent of the “compassion” of the Nazi regime that employed the notorious “T4 Medical Killing” program to rid the German nation of the burden of caring for “useless eaters.”<sup>4</sup>

Were it not shocking enough to witness physicians—healers who subscribe to the Hippocratic Oath—calling for the murder of disabled infants, now the Church of England joins in advocating that sick newborn babies be neglected and allowed to die!<sup>5</sup> In a concession to modern social views, the bishops’ argument, cloaked as compassion, appears to be based solely upon economic considerations for society and for the families of the sick infants. It is appalling that supposed men of God blatantly deny scriptural teaching; but in a communion that long ago jettisoned adherence to the Word of God as authoritative for faith and practise, perhaps we should not be surprised.

The trend to approve the murder of our own children is now evident also in our own nation. As an example, consider a report from the Alberta Provincial Health Ethics Network. That report, published in 2001, says, in part: “Although the Canadian homicide rate in general has declined to its lowest level in 30 years, there has been significant increase in filicides ... that coincide with the positive publicity for justifying filicides... Between 1994 and 1998, the number of children under the age of 12 murdered by their parents increased by 45% to 7.1% of all homicides in Canada (compared to 4.9% for 1974-1983). This sharp increase followed a decreasing trend from 1974 through 1993.

“...This epidemic of filicide appears to be uniquely Canadian. While filicides rose contrary to the general drop in Canadian Homicides, the American filicide rate dropped along with other forms of homicide. As a result, the most recent figures report that 80% of children murdered in Canada were killed by their own parents.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Allow Debate On Euthanasia For Seriously Disabled Infants Say Experts,” <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/healthnews.php?newsid=55885>, accessed 26 November 2011; Adam Wishart, “Are doctors defying nature by keeping premature babies alive?” MailOnline, 8 March 2011, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1364007/Are-doctors-defying-nature-keeping-premature-babies-alive.html>, accessed 13 December 2011; Ian Drury, “Cameron: Why I wouldn’t stop women having abortions if their babies were disabled,” MailOnline, 16 August 2008, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1045839/Cameron-Why-I-wouldnt-stop-women-having-abortions-babies-disabled.html>, accessed 13 December 2011; Benedict Brogan, “Cameron to back late abortions for babies with minor disabilities,” MailOnline, 17 March 2008, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-536554/Cameron-late-abortions-babies-minor-disabilities.html>, accessed 13 December 2011; Steve Doughty, “We must debate mercy killing of disabled babies, say top doctors,” Mail Online, 5 November 2006, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-414701/We-debate-mercy-killing-disabled-babies-say-doctors.html>, accessed 13 December 2011

<sup>3</sup> Dick Sobsey, Ed.D., “Altruistic Filicide: Bioethics or Criminology,” Health Ethics Today, Volume 12, Number 1, Fall/November 2001, <http://www.phen.ab.ca/materials/het/het12-01c.asp>, accessed 13 December 2011

<sup>4</sup> “T4 Medical Killing Program,” <http://www.remember.org/witness/wit.vic.med.html>, accessed 26 November 2011

<sup>5</sup> “Outrage as Church backs calls for severely disabled babies to be killed at birth,” The Mail Online, 12/11/06, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-416003/Outrage-Church-backs-calls-severely-disabled-babies-killed-birth.html>, accessed 26 November 2011

<sup>6</sup> Sobsey, op. cit.

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In Rome, at the time of Jesus' first advent, unwanted infants were often cast onto the garbage heaps or discarded onto the side of the roads. There, the infants might be eaten by roaming dogs, die of exposure or be taken in by charlatans of the vilest, most despicable character. Castaway children thus "rescued" might have their limbs broken or suffer other cruel bodily deformation at the hands of their "rescuers." Such severely crippled children would be the more effective as beggars throughout their toddler and childhood years, their deformities tugging at the heartstrings of compassionate donors who felt guilty at their own good fortune. The short lives of these unfortunate children would serve only as a means of enriching their benefactors!

Those who anticipated Messiah's birth considered the unborn human—potentially and actually. The people of the Book were conversant with the mind of God. Throughout the Old Covenant are found verses that speak eloquently of the humanity and personality of the unborn. God affirmed the personhood of the Prophet Jeremiah.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

[JEREMIAH 1:5]

The Word of the Lord recorded in **ISAIAH 49:1, 5** has relevance to this issue.

"The LORD called me from the womb,  
from the body of my mother He named my name...

...

"And now the LORD says,  
He who formed me from the womb to be His servant."

**PSALM 139:13-16** presents powerful statements revealing the person of the unborn.

"You formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there were none of them."

Since mortals are evidence of God's handiwork, and since each human being is "fearfully and wonderfully made," how much more marvellous is the knowledge that God became man! How incredible to know that God chose to share our fallen condition, and to know that He did so willingly!

Though the Lord Jesus was worshipped by angels, the unborn John was the first person to worship the Lord Jesus, and his mother, Elizabeth, was the first to lend her voice to praise of the Saviour. These were the first people in a never-ending multitude to worship Christ the Lord. Join me, together with John, in worship of the Son of God.

**THE REASON FOR CHRIST' ADVENT** — Why should it be necessary for the Son of God to be born into this sinful world? Why was it necessary that God must become man? Wouldn't it have done for the Lord Christ to stand in His unveiled glory and accomplish His will? Questions such as these are legitimate; they deserve an answer.

On one occasion, Jesus did appear in unveiled glory and His disciples who were with Him were unable to stand before Him. You will recall that it was "as He was praying" that "the appearance of His face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white" [LUKE 9:29]. Peter, James and John, the Apostles accompanying Him at that time, were startled out of their sleep; before His glory, they found themselves face down on the ground. We can infer from this incident that had Jesus appeared in unveiled glory, everyone would have fallen down, awestruck before His glory. It is impossible to stand in the presence of God in His glory. Each time the glorified Saviour is presented in Heaven, the saints, though in their glorified bodies, fall down before Him and worship [e.g. see REVELATION 5:8]

Nevertheless, it is a sorrowful fact that merely falling before the Saviour does not necessarily imply worship of Him as God. We know a day has been appointed when "Every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" [PHILIPPIANS 2:10, 11]. Either we worship the Son of God as our Saviour now, or we will be compelled to fall down before His glorious presence when He judges mankind at His return.

How awesome is the scene that John witnessed and which he described. "The kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand'" [REVELATION 6:15-17]? That misplaced prayer in that day, the falling before Him as He comes in wrath, is but a harbinger of what is coming, for all the lost must one day appear before His Great White Throne.

As I prepared the message, I read again REVELATION 20:11-15. I saw something I had never noted before. Listen to the Word of God. "I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Notice that Death and Hades are "thrown" into the lake of fire. No one steps into hell; no one leaps into hell. At the last, all bravado is absent, and sinners are flung into eternal separation. How frightful is that thought!

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We forget that Jesus was born to provide redemption for this fallen creation. He came to provide atonement for sin. Here is a question to challenge your conscience. “Are you a sinner because you sin?” Or “Do you sin because you are a sinner?” Without question, we sin because we are sinners. In other words, what we are dictates our behaviour. Since we know that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23], it must follow that man is inherently sinful. If man is to please God, and if he is to enjoy sweet communion with God, God Himself must provide a means to put away man’s sin—sin is an integral part of our present condition.

We are taught that “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” [cf. HEBREWS 9:22]. Those who knew the prophecies of Messiah’s birth were familiar with Isaiah’s words. You have no doubt read his prophecy in the 53<sup>rd</sup> CHAPTER of the book that bears his name. Jewish scholars had for centuries puzzled over what was written.

“Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his stripes we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned every one to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.”

Again, take special note of VERSES TEN THROUGH TWELVE.

“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;  
he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for sin,  
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.  
Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.  
Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,  
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
because he poured out his soul to death  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

[ISAIAH 53:4-6, 10-12]

Seven hundred fifty years before His birth, the purpose of Jesus' coming was prophesied—He would provide His life as a guilt offering. His soul would be “an offering for sin”; but through that “offering” He would justify many by bearing their iniquities while making intercession for them as transgressors. Though angels would sing of peace on earth, peace would only be purchased through the death of that babe.

We must remember that Jesus was born to die. How startling must Simeon's words have seemed to Joseph and Mary! “This child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” [LUKE 2:34, 35]. With the coming of the Son of God, the purchase of redemption was set in motion; but the purchase price was to be the life of that child. God must taste death to redeem fallen man. This babe, “By the grace of God must taste death for everyone” [HEBREWS 2:9]. I caution you lest the gaiety of the season obscure the solemnity of His advent and you fail to remember that the Son of God became a man “to give His life as a ransom for many” [MATTHEW 20:28]. If He should fail to present Himself as a sacrifice, His coming is futile.

Have you thought of this? If Jesus did not present His life as a sacrifice, we have no reason to worship Him. If He did not bear our sin and take upon Himself our wickedness, our iniquity, our transgression, our sin, we are still under condemnation and we have no reason to worship Him.

Though He “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” [ROMANS 1:4], there could have been no resurrection without His death. Without His death and without His resurrection, there is no reason to worship Him. If He did not take our sin upon Himself and bear them away, why worship Him? If He has not provided atonement, why worship Him? He was divinely appointed to bear away our sin and purify for Himself a people, and by faith in Him we are that people.

**THE REACTION TO JESUS' ADVENT** — The entire world is divided into *saints* and *ain'ts*. Either an individual is submitted to the reign of God's Messiah in his life, or an individual is in rebellion against the Lord God of Heaven and earth. Those who looked to God for righteousness and mercy were prepared to worship at Messiah's advent. Those who thought themselves sufficient to provide for their own righteousness despised His coming. Either one is prepared to worship the Son of God now, or one has rejected Him and is determined that he would slay Him if he could.

Consider the world into which God sent His Son. The Apostle John wrote of that darkened world into which Jesus was born. “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” [JOHN 1:10, 11]. The Evangelist had earlier written of Him, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” [JOHN 1:3]. The world ignored the coming of God's Son. Even when they were assured that this was the Son of God, they acted as though He was not present.

There is a reason for the world's calculated ignorance of the Messiah. The Word cautions, “This is the judgement: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” [JOHN 3:19, 20].

John's words present the most astounding truth—very God became man, and people did not recognise Him. The failure of the world to recognise Him was deliberate, however. Very God shone His glory on the soul of fallen mankind, and people rejected the divine light because they loved darkness. Like rodents and insects, fallen mankind has become so accustomed to the murky blackness of darkened lives that they resent the divine light. Knowing that they are wrapped in chains of their own lusts, they resent even the threat that their bondage may be exposed. The pain resulting from exposure of their pitiful condition is feared more than is the thought of divine judgement. Thus, they choose to die in their sin rather than face their own slavery.

It is the silly season. Courts in the United States have ruled that nativity scenes must contain secular elements in order to be legal. Hence, gnomes, Santa Claus figures, whitetail deer and other assorted lawn ornaments now jostle for space alongside of shepherds, wise men, sheep and camels to peer into a manger containing a replica of the Christ Child. Does this mean that we need to rewrite the accounts that Matthew and Luke have provided? Atheists displays, including a skeleton Santa nailed to a cross, are displacing nativity scenes in various venues,<sup>7</sup> and atheists are even erecting billboards that charge Christians with stealing Christmas!<sup>8</sup>

More commonly, the assault on Christmas and anything even remotely Christian consists of instructions to sales clerks, people taking phone orders for “Christmas” presents or school district employees to avoid saying, “Merry Christmas,”<sup>9</sup> lest it offend someone. Increasingly, people are compelled to say “Happy Holidays,” or some variant. The Holy Days are never specified, so you can accept whichever holy day suits your purpose. Or perhaps the assault on the Faith consists of the erection of a “Holiday Tree” to celebrate ... whatever anyone wants to make of the tree, removal of a nativity scene,<sup>10</sup> or replaces a Christmas concert with February fest or a Winter Festival.<sup>11</sup> One cannot read such accounts without realising the palpable hostility toward God's Son.

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<sup>7</sup> “Atheist Group Ousts Church Christmas Displays From Santa Monica Park,” KCAL 9 News, 10 December, 2011, <http://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2011/12/10/atheist-group-ousts-church-christmas-displays-from-santa-monica-park/>, accessed 14 December 2011; Rick Rojas, “Atheists get Santa Monica Nativity's display spaces in park,” Los Angeles Times, 12 December, 2011, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2011/12/atheists-takes-santa-monica-nativity-scenes-spots-in-park.html>, accessed 14 December 2011; “Atheist display: Skeleton Santa nailed to a cross,” msnbc.com and NBCWashington.com, 6 December 2011, <http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/news/2011/12/06/9247743-atheist-display-skeleton-santa-nailed-to-a-cross>, accessed 14 December 2011; Sara Israelsen-Hartley, “Atheists' holiday displays add controversy to Christmas,” Deseret News, December 8, 2011, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700205237/Atheists-holiday-displays-add-controversy-to-Christmas.html>, accessed 14 December 2011; Austin Cline, “Loudon County: Atheist Displays Will Outnumber Christian Displays,” <http://atheism.about.com/b/2011/12/09/loudon-county-atheist-displays-will-outnumber-christian-displays.htm>, accessed 14 December 2011

<sup>8</sup> “Atheist group angers Christians with billboard campaign, CNEWS, <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/World/2011/12/17/19136951.html>, accessed 17 December 2011

<sup>9</sup> Todd Starnes, “Nevada High School Stirs Controversy Over Ban on Christmas Greetings, Decorations,” Fox News, <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/12/21/nevada-high-school-stirs-controversy-ban-christmas-greetings-decorations/>, accessed 14 December 2011; Katherine T. Phan, “Oklahoma University Reverses Ban on ‘Christmas,’” Christian Post, Dec 22 2007, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/oklahoma-university-reverses-ban-on-christmas-30613/>, accessed 14 December 2011

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Christine Bouthillier, QMI Agency, “Nativity scene removed from Montreal-area town hall,” 5 December 2011, <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Canada/2011/12/05/19070881.html>, accessed 14 December 2011

No one is truly neutral concerning the Son of God. Either people hate Him, or they worship Him. Scholars ignored His advent, though they knew not only the time He would appear but also the place of His appearance. Nobles determined they would kill Him, but He came to *give* His life as a ransom. To the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus affirmed, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again” [JOHN 10:17, 18]. Religious people were ignorant of His coming. Together they blended their voices in a cacophony of calumny exposing hatred that would be satisfied only with His death.

To this day, and until His return, it will be evident that mankind remains united in hatred toward Him. But what can mankind do to rid themselves of Him? If you attempt to stone Him, He slips through the crowd and walks away. If you try to drown Him He will walk on the water. If you try to destroy Him in a storm, He commands the storm to hush and it lies down at His feet like a chastened puppy to lick His hand. If you try to crucify Him, He refuses to stay dead and the stone will be rolled away from the mouth of the grave. Try to ignore Him and you will hear a still, small voice that whispers, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in” [REVELATION 3:20]. You can’t get rid of Him!

There is coming a day when He will return to assume His rightful place as Judge of all. All who are willing to heed the Word have received the warning that cautions us, “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” [PHILIPPIANS 2:10, 11]. Why would you wait to worship Him? Why would you wait to confess His Name? Why would you wait to bow before Him? He is Lord. I’m not waiting; I’ll confess His Name now and gladly honour Him by bowing before Him to give Him the praise that is due His Name.

Perhaps many did reject Him at His coming, but it is comforting to know that there were many who rejoiced at His coming and received Him as the promised Lord of Glory. In the verses cited moments ago we see another response. It is true that the world did not recognise Him and His own did not receive Him; nevertheless, “All who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” [JOHN 1:12, 13]. It is true that men loved darkness, but there was another response to His presence. “Whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God” [JOHN 3:21].

Mary submitted to the will of God and became the one by whom the Son of God was brought into the world. Joseph responded with deepest humility before the message of the angel to obey the will of God. At His revelation, many of those whom the forerunner had prepared turned to Him, and the Baptist rejoiced in this knowledge. John testified, “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew Pearson, National Post, Dec. 2, 2011, <http://www.nationalpost.com/todays-paper/School+replaces+Christmas+concert+with+February+fest/5799609/story.html>, accessed 14 December 2011



The Evangelist continued with the testimony, “He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony. Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” [JOHN 3:29-36].

Long before the forerunner spoke those words, he worshipped the Son of God. John was the first to worship the Son of God, worshipping within his mother’s womb. The unborn child “leaped for joy” at the sound of Mary’s voice, and though his tongue was yet mute, he worshipped. I love to sing praises to the Son of God. I delight to lift my voice in praise to Him. I am confident that few instruments of praise are more beautiful than the voice of one who has been redeemed by the grace of God.

When unable to lift my voice in praise, I can worship the Lord, as did John in Elizabeth’s womb. In the midst of my trials and sorrow, I can leap for joy, as did the unborn child in the womb. I can always reveal the joy of the Saviour in my life.

The world can’t stifle worship in the Christian’s heart. Silence me as I perform my appointed tasks, and I will nevertheless make “melody to the Lord with all [my] heart” [cf. EPHESIANS 5:19]. Command the Christian to refrain from singing aloud and her heart will yet soar with joy. Joy is the precious gift of God to all who receive Christ as Lord, and the joyful heart cannot help exulting in joyous song.

Threaten the servants of God and they will go back “to their friends,” and together they will “lift[] their voices together to God” [cf. ACTS 4:23, 24]. Place the children of God under a judicial ban and they will leave the courts “rejoicing that they [are] counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name” [cf. ACTS 5:41]. Beat the followers of Christ and put their feet in stocks, and at midnight you will hear them praying and singing hymns of praise to Christ the Lord [cf. ACTS 16:25]. You can’t silence a “people who know their God,” for they will “stand firm” against those who oppose Him [cf. DANIEL 11:32], and they will continue to worship Him who has given them life. As a Christian, I must worship the One who loved me and gave Himself for me.

What was true two millennia past remains true to this day. The presence of the Son of God compels us to position ourselves. Either we stand opposed to Him or we worship Him as the Lord of life. Either we reject Him or we embrace Him. Either we are dead in trespasses and sins or we are alive in Him. Either we walk in darkness or we are in the light as He is in the light. Either we are lost or we are found. Either we reject Him or we receive Him.

**THE RESULT OF JESUS’ ADVENT** — If time was divided at His First Coming, time shall cease at His Second Advent. If mankind was divided at His First Coming, mankind shall be judged at His Second Coming. Throughout the years since His Advent, God has been at work visiting “the Gentiles, to take from them a people for His Name” [cf. ACTS 15:14]. That divine work has been accomplished through the creation of the churches of our Lord. “Obtained with His own blood” [cf. ACTS 20:28]; the congregations of the Risen Saviour are responsible to gather a people for His Name. We who are believers in this Living Saviour are charged to be faithful to His Name until He calls us to Himself.

In the smallest detail of life we are responsible to glorify Him. Our worship is not to ensure that we feel good about ourselves or even to assist us to feel good about Him. Our worship is to equip us to serve Him until He comes. We are called to devotion, to fidelity to His cause. We are called to declare His Good News to the peoples of this darkened world. There are many still in darkness that will respond to the light of His Word, if we will honour Him and remember the purpose of His coming.

Because the Son of God has come, churches today declare salvation to all who will receive it; peace is offered to all who will receive Him as King of life. Soon, He shall return in great power to receive His chosen people to Himself. Until that day, the people of God are charged to prepare themselves to serve Him through worship of the Living Son of God; and having prepared themselves, His people are responsible to proclaim His salvation boldly to the lost and dying world in which they live.

We have permitted ourselves to be conditioned to avoid unpleasantness in our relationships with others. Consequently, we avoid speaking of Christ and deny His claim upon the life of those who are lost. We don't want to offend, so we look for an easy way to witness of His claim. Our puerile efforts are silent evidence that we have failed to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. Our fear testifies that we are not Spirit-controlled.

We rationalise by saying that our lost friends and family members are not so bad. We console ourselves by thinking that perhaps they have secretly trusted Christ as Lord. We don't know if they are saved and we dare not risk the shaky relationship we imagine we have by asking about their relationship to the Lord Christ.

What would you think of a dentist who looked in your mouth and said, "Yes, you have a bad tooth back there, but you have a lot of good teeth and I don't want to make you uncomfortable, so we'll leave all of them alone?" Though we recognise that a dentist that acted in such a fashion is negligent and unethical, we fail to see that we are negligent and unethical because we fail to confront the lost in their sin lest we make them uncomfortable.

I might apply the same illustration to the preaching the Word and the requirement to confront the lèse majesté of the saints. If it is wicked to permit people to die in their sin, it is wicked for the minister of Christ to fail to confront the people of God about their sinful condition. We do not want our minister to deal with sin in the church lest he make people feel uncomfortable. There were good people in the church at Corinth but Paul did not overlook the evils in that fellowship. He dealt with them one by one, and only after dealing with their sin did he get around to the positive notes of giving, love and the resurrection.

What better time to confront the people of God about our failure to worship, about our failure to be obedient, about our failure to seek the lost, than at this Christmastide? The coming of Christ to save the lost, commemorated at this Holy Season, speaks powerfully of His Second Coming to judge those who are refuse His mercy. If the joy of His presence is seen in me, I will be compelled tell others. If the joy of His salvation baptises my life, I will speak of Him and I will worship Him. Having worshipped, I will serve Him through telling others of His mercy and of His grace.

Do you know Him? Does He reign in your life? Does your life give evidence of having worshipped Him? Have you any jewels to present before Him at His return? Because He has come once, we now live in anticipation of His return. Because He has come once, we must be busy doing the work that He has assigned. Amen.