

LUKE 2:21-40

DESTINATION BETHLEHEM—A BOY

“At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

“And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.’ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.’

“And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, 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.’

“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

“And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”¹

The Christmas story is so much more than the account of the birth of a child. If the Christ was only a great teacher, why should God celebrate, even sending angels to announce the birth? If the child was but a prophet, regardless of how great the prophecies He brings, could we really expect that God would set a star in His heavens to announce that birth? This birth was much more than the birth of another child—God sent His Son. And yet, in His birth Christ our Lord did share our condition.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Paul testifies of this birth, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” [GALATIANS 4:4, 5]. This is the apostolic statement concerning the Advent of the Son of God. This advent, this coming, this incarnation merits more careful study if we will fully appreciate what God has done.

GRACE WAS MADE OBEDIENT — “At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

“And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, ‘a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons’” [LUKE 2:21-24].

Struggling with how I was to shape the message, I questioned whether I should emphasise that grace was made obedient or whether I should stress that grace was made submissive. Do not miss the point that an obedient spirit is a submissive spirit. The Son of God submitted Himself to the will of the Father, becoming obedient to that same will. Don’t make too much of the fact that I am stressing Christ’s obedience; know that He submitted Himself to the Father in order to be obedient. This is clearly seen in the words employed when the Apostle wrote the Christians in Philippi, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” [PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8].

Think about the impact of these words. Though Jesus our Master is very God, He refused to cling tenaciously to His prerogative to reign as the God of Creation. Rather, He emptied Himself of all divine rights and made Himself a nobody. He voluntarily took upon Himself the nature of the most humble of all mankind. He was born a Jew, born under the Law and under Roman dominion. Though He had enjoyed the worship of angels and though He had the right to be called very God, He embraced death on the cross, presenting Himself as a sacrifice in the place of sinful man.

This is the marvel of Christmas, not so much that it is a celebration of family, nor a celebration of the triumph of good over evil, nor even a celebration of materialism. Christmas is a celebration of the love of God revealed through God becoming a man to share our life in a fallen world. The Hebrews letter presents a startling insight into the nature of Christ the Lord. In that letter we read, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” [HEBREWS 5:7-9].

Isn’t that the most astonishing thing you have ever heard? The Son of God learned obedience through submission! Having been demonstrated as perfect, He now calls to salvation all who obey Him. This is the basis for my continued call to obedience for all who will be saved. We are called to faith in Jesus, a faith which leads us to embrace Him openly and to identify with Him and to learn of Him.

Though Mary accepted her assigned role to bring the Son of God into the world, Joseph was given the difficult task of accepting what God had arranged though Joseph himself was not consulted. Let's admit an uncomfortable truth—men have a difficult time not being in control. This is an expression of our nature, though not necessarily a godly expression. Nevertheless, few of us men ever actually exercise control in every situation. Of course, our first responsibility is to take control of our own spirits.

Men, we are to be godly examples for our wives, controlling our own nature and sacrificing ourselves for our wives. Joseph is an excellent example of a godly man who, when the Lord had revealed His will, humbled himself and accepted the divine will. Joseph was to name the child that Mary was carrying, "Jesus" [MATTHEW 1:21]. Look at that verse, because it is important to remember the meaning of the name Jesus received. "You shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." He is the Saviour; hence, His Name was to be Yeshua, "The LORD saves."

Whenever a child was born under the Law, the mother was considered ceremonially unclean for a period of days. In part, this appears to have been a means to ensure that a mother had time to bond with the child without other demands being placed on her. There was, however, resident within the command a reminder that children were a gift from God. The family was being called to reflect upon the source of children. We know some biology, but we know little of life. The evidence for this is that many imagine children to be a blob of foetal tissue in the womb but somehow becoming human at birth. Even this arbitrary distinction is now being blurred so that we are uncertain what is human and what is not.

Let no hearer mistake the teaching of God that the child Mary carried was the Son of God from conception. In a similar fashion the infant that is carried in each womb is a child given by the Lord God. The Word of God is still accurate when it instructs us:

"Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the children of one's youth.
Blessed is the man
who fills his quiver with them!"

[PSALM 127:3-5]

When Mary's days of uncleanness were complete, the child was to be taken to the Temple where He would be presented before the Lord. At that time the child would be formally named. Since this first child was a male, He belonged to God. Thus, each firstborn male was required to be redeemed. The Law was quite clear. "The LORD said to Moses, 'Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine...'"

Then Moses said to the people... "When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD's. Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem" [EXODUS 13:1, 2, 11-13].

It is significant to note that Jesus said. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” [MATTHEW 5:17, 18]. In saying this, He anticipated Paul’s statement in GALATIANS 4:4, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law...”

GRACE WAS MADE VULNERABLE — “Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
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“And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, 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 2:25-35].

In Christ, grace was revealed as obedient (or submissive); but grace was also made vulnerable. Perhaps someone will argue that grace is always vulnerable; and in a manner of speaking that is true. Grace, because it is grace, can be rejected. Grace can be misrepresented and distorted to the wicked ends of those unwilling to receive that grace. All this depends upon what is meant by this term grace.

Perhaps it will be helpful if I pause to focus our attention on grace. Though most of us have a basic grasp of what is meant by the term “grace,” we struggle with the practical implications. An old definition of grace which stuck in my memory is known to many among us to this day—Grace may be said to be **God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**.

We are taught that “God is love” [1 JOHN 4:8]. Of course, this is true and the evidence of God’s love is revealed through His actions toward us when we were yet in our sin. Recall John’s teaching concerning the matter of God’s love toward us. “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” [1 JOHN 4:9, 10].

Identical instruction is found in Paul’s letter to the Roman believers. The Apostle has written, “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” [ROMANS 5:6-8].

Just as God loves His fallen creation, we must know that God also is holy. Therefore, Holy God cannot permit sinful people into His presence or He would no longer be holy. God judges all sin as exceedingly sinful and condemns sin in sinful man. Since we know that each of us is a sinner, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23], then it is evident that we must have a way to approach God. Sinful man cannot come into the presence of holy God. Should God reach out to sinful man, He would be sullied by our sin and He would no longer be holy. It is precisely at this point that grace comes into play.

God cannot permit sinful people into His presence. Neither can we make ourselves acceptable to God. Were we able to do so, we would have neither need of grace nor even need of God. If we could make ourselves acceptable, we would be equivalent to God and able to purify ourselves. In 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-21 Paul has written, “The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Let me put this truth in perspective by focusing attention on a portion of the Apostle’s Letter to the Ephesians. Paul has written, “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:1-10].

Though I do not deserve to be saved, I am saved by grace revealed in Christ Jesus. Though I have no right to serve God as a pastor, I have been appointed by God to serve His people, and this is because of God’s goodness to me. Though I have no right to share in the inheritance of the saints of God neither do I have any right to enjoy access to God’s throne, yet He showers me with His grace and gives me what I do not deserve. All this is grace. What is true in my own life is also true for each of you as you receive the Christ as Master of your life. No one can do anything to make God accept him or her, but in grace, God now extends mercy to each one in the Person of Christ the Lord.

It was a startling message that old Simeon delivered when the child was brought into the Temple. Surely we would expect that anyone seeing a baby for the first time would speak of the child's comeliness, or how cute the infant was. Simeon begins with a joyous paean of praise for God's mercy in permitting him to witness the presence of the child. However, his praise quickly turned dark. The grace of God has a dark side, for when that grace is rejected there remains nothing but wrath. The child must taste death in order to provide salvation for all who are willing to receive the salvation He will provide.

How would you respond if upon seeing your newborn child a preacher solemnly intoned that the child would be killed in the prime of life? What reaction would you have if upon presenting your newborn son for dedication the preacher held the child and said, "He will be killed before He is thirty-five?" Mary's child was "appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel." The old man spoke of the child's presence as disturbing for the entire nation. At best, Simeon's dark words seemed to point to a controversial life for the child before adding this final, dark prophecy. Of Mary, Simeon prophesied, "A sword will pierce through your own soul also" [LUKE 2:35]. What could these words mean other than a startling, violent, untimely death for Mary's firstborn son?

Few people in Israel understood that Messiah would give His life as atonement for sin. Of course, Isaiah's prophecy spoke of Him as "stricken, smitten by God and afflicted." It prophesied that God's Servant would be "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" [ISAIAH 53:4, 5]. However, in apparent contradiction of what was clearly stated, many Scriptures, the SECOND PSALM, among others, seemed to contradict this prophesy!

The thought of a suffering Messiah was foreign to the Jewish mindset. Their worldview was of a ruling Messiah; there was no room for a suffering Messiah. Nevertheless, such suffering would be necessitated before man could be freed from sin. Messiah would taste death for every man. With the advantage of divine hindsight, the Hebrews letter presents this humbling concept. "In putting everything in subjection to [Christ], [God] 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" [HEBREWS 2:8, 9].

It is at this point that I am compelled to ask whether you have yet received this truth. Have you accepted God's provision for your own sinful nature? Have you confessed that you are incapable to pleasing God through your own efforts? Are you now casting yourself on His mercies? At the point we seek His mercy God extends His grace to us. It is not so much that He is withholding His grace from us as that we are seeking another means by which we can make ourselves acceptable to Him. The great need for each of us is that we cease from trying to make ourselves acceptable to God and accept His love in the Person of His Son. In Him, the grace of God is revealed.

GRACE WAS MADE REAL — "There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

“And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him” [LUKE 2:36-40].

Earlier, I cited a passage from Paul’s Letter to the saints in Philippi. You will recall that Paul encouraged believers, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” [PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8].

Integral to the Faith of Christ the Lord are ideals that are foreign to other major religions. Among the ideals that are foreign to the great religions of the world are concepts such as forgiveness without precondition, humility and sacrifice on behalf of another. Such ideals lie at the heart of the Christian Faith; these ideals dictate our faith and practise. Not only are these concepts foreign among other religions—they are for the most part rejected by those religions.

Some years past we witnessed a Pope extend an apology to the Muslims of the world for injuries inflicted by professing Christians during the Crusades. Whether or not the Pope can even speak on behalf of all Christendom is not the issue, (he cannot); however, the fact that he spoke as he did is consistent with the highest of Christian ideals. Humility and the concomitant forgiveness of those who have offended us are integral to the Faith of Christ the Lord.

Islam preaches, not a Saviour who emptied Himself and gave Himself as a sacrifice for sin, rather it preaches external obedience to Allah so that one need never say “Sorry.” What I would have you remember is that not once in the whole of Islamic history has a caliph or mullah apologised for the actions of Muslim armies as they killed and raped in Venice or in Spain! No Muslim leader apologises for murder in Paris, or in San Bernardino, or in London or even in Raqqa! The reason for this disparity in actions is that Islam makes no provision for acceptance of guilt or for offering an apology.

The Christian Faith assumes that those coming into the Faith are sinful and of the need to humble oneself to seek forgiveness from God whom we have offended. The Christian Faith changes bad men into good men through changing their hearts, whereas every other religion in the world endeavours to make good men better through external changes whilst ignoring the need for changed hearts.

When Christ came into the world, He not only made Himself vulnerable by placing Himself in danger from wicked men, but He did so deliberately. Not only is this true, but He calls wicked men to Himself in order to make them good through His transforming grace. Paul marvelled at this thought. “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever” [1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17].

On this basis, the Apostle was able to encourage the young theologian, Timothy. “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8-12].

The aged prophetess, Anna, foresaw the need for One who would be a Redeemer. She recognised the need of such a Redeemer because she realised that man is incapable of providing a means whereby he can set himself free from sin. Man is incapable of pleasing God through his own efforts. John warns, “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].

Let me return for a moment to the contrast between Islam and the Faith of Christ the Lord. The Muslim faith demands constant scrutiny of its adherents lest those same adherents fall into transgression against the various rules and regulations of the religion. Since their faith is essentially external, all temptation must be removed. Music is sinful since the words may induce desire in those hearing the words. Flying kites is frivolous and may lead to other activities which are even more wasteful of time. The feminine form is attractive to men, so women must be disguised in a portable tent to keep men from thinking about them. It would be unthinkable that someone would preach freedom among the Muslim nations. Consequently, Christians are sold into slavery in the Sudan. Christians are attacked and slaughtered in Indonesia, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq and Somalia. Christians are imprisoned in Saudi Arabia or beheaded if they are Arab Christians. Israelis are constantly threatened with extermination.

Contrast this situation with that of nations enjoying a Christian heritage. Christians also believe in slavery, but it is slavery to sin that terrifies the Christian. If you think sin does not enslave, speak to the alcoholic, to the one addicted to pornography or to the drug addict. In contrast to Islam, the Christian Faith holds each individual responsible for his or her own faith and conduct before God. The Faith of Christ presents freedom only for those willing to receive the gift of life in Christ the Lord.

You will recall an incident in the ministry of Jesus. He was engaged in one of His frequent dialogues with Jewish interlocutors. The account is recorded in John’s Gospel. “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” When these interlocutors protested that they were free, “Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’” [JOHN 8:31, 32, 34-36].

In the real world, sin does exist. God does not command us to attempt to eradicate sin through the political process; instead, He teaches that we are responsible to resist sin through the power of His Spirit as we receive His grace.

In the days and nights before they immolated themselves in commandeered airliners, it was revealed that the Islamic terrorists who led the attack against freedom by flying into the twin towers spent large sums of money on drinking and hiring young women to perform lap-dances. This appears to be a pattern for Islamic terrorists seeking to immolate themselves in the name of their blood-thirsty, demonic god. In these actions these individuals are not unlike many young Islamic students who come to the United States and Canada to study in the humanities and the sciences. Islam forbids activities that speak of excess and lewdness. Consequently, Islamic nations force such activities underground so that their youth will not be contaminated.

The terrorists felt they could let themselves go since their action of killing “infidels” would absolve them of all their hasty sins at the last of life. Nevertheless, the 9/11 plotters were icily precise in shaving their bodies of all hair and bathing themselves meticulously so that they would be ritually pure and prepared to carry out their murderous deeds in the name of their bloody god. This is the reason that few Muslim clerics condemn terrorist actions and those who do condemn their actions do so with muted voices for the most part.

The Christian Faith condemns sin, but the condemnation begins with condemning sin in the individual and then calling each individual to turn from sin to faith in Christ Jesus. In order to ensure that each individual can please God, God has provided a Redeemer. This is the Christmas message. Christ the Lord has come that man may have a Redeemer. This is grace. This grace allowing us to be obedient to God is revealed in the birth of God’s Son. This grace is seen as vulnerable so that man may have opportunity to accept or reject the offer of life in the Son of God. This grace is made real so that each one can be set free. No individual need live under condemnation—the Son of God has come to take our sin and Christmas is the celebration of that divine provision.

With the Apostle to the Gentiles, each of us can now rejoice and exult in God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” [EPHESIANS 1:3-14].

The joy of Christmas begins for each of us as we receive the life which God provides in the Son. In Christ the Lord we can each receive that glorious life. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [**ROMANS 10:9-13**]. Amen.