

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

The Wonder of Christmas

By Pastor Ike

December is a very meaningful month for me. It was 53-years ago this month that I came to know the Lord Jesus. Christmas took on a completely new meaning for me beginning that year. Like the apostle Paul, I knew "Christ according to the flesh, yet now" I "know Him in this way no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16). The next verse reads: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. That was my experience in December, 1970.

That began a long, so far, 53-year journey of pondering and searching out the incarnation. It has been like turning and observing the many glittering, fascinating points of a perfect diamond. The moral glory of Jesus, His humanity, and what a sinless human being looks like, continues to be an awe-inspiring study. Has that been true for you?

It certainly was for the early Christians. The first 7 church councils had to do with the person of Jesus. The God-Man is so complex and so above human comprehension that after hundreds of years of study and debate, their conclusion was: He's 100% God and 100% human.

When Gabriel comes to Mary, as recorded in Luke 1:35, and he tells her that the child to be born of her will be called, "the Son of God," there is no article before "Son." He shall be called "Son" of God. Unlike 1 Chron-

icles 22:10 where King Solomon is called a "son of God," the emphasis here is on His nature. He is Son of God by nature. It is His nature and not something that He received which qualify Him. He is God by nature. Since Gabriel says that He is holy, i.e., "...the holy child shall be called Son of God," He will be a child without sin. It is our nature to sin. It is His nature to not sin.

As you know from Luke 2, an angel of the Lord told the shepherds that Jesus had been born. They said, "for today in the city of David there has been born to you a Savior, who is Christ (the promised One; the Messiah) the Lord" (2:11). Luke 2:12-20 reads:

"This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly, there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us!" So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told to them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told to them.

I love verse 19, don't you? It occurs again in verse 51, but that is 12 years later. Let's

think about that for a bit. Fast forward from the birth of Jesus to this record that we have of Him in the temple at 12-years old.

- Jesus had become so trusted that they did not concern themselves with Him. He was perfectly obedient. For 12 years He had proven Himself trustworthy and 100% obedient to Mary and Joseph. As a result, they had implicit trust in Him. So, when He comes up absent, they are dumbfounded based on 12 years of perfect obedience.

J. Oswald Sanders, a missionary to China, wrote a book entitled: The Incomparable Christ. I recommend it to you. In that book are a number of poems encapsulating the person of Jesus. Here is one that relates to His childhood.

In summer days, like you and me
He played about the door,

Or gathered, when Joseph toiled,
The shavings from the floor.

Sometimes He lay upon the grass
The same as you and I,

And saw the hawks above Him pass
Like specks against the sky;

Or clinging to the gate, He watched
The stranger passing by.

And when the sun at break of day
Crept in upon His hair

I think it must have left a ray
Of unseen glory there -

A kiss of love on that little brow,
For the thorns that it must wear.

-A.B. Paine

- He also had at least 6 other half brothers and sisters according to Mark 6:3. It reads: "Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not his sisters (plural) here with us?" I wonder how that went growing up with sinful siblings. James, did you leave this pot outside all night? No, mom! It was Jesus! Or, mom, Jesus took my tablet! What did Mary think? Maybe she thought, "Yeah, right! Jesus always obeys. No wonder John 7:5 reads, "For not even His brothers were believing in Him." There was probably some tension there. In addition, they thought that Jesus was nuts. Mark 3:20-21 reads: And He came home, and

the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." This included His own family as you can read in verses 31-32.

- Mark 6:3 also says that He was a carpenter. Did you catch that? The Greek lexicon defines the word τέκτων m: one who uses various materials (wood, stone, and metal) in building—'builder, carpenter.' There is every reason to believe that in biblical times one who was regarded as a τέκτων would be skilled in the use of wood and stone and possibly even metal. You can tell just by the sound that it is related to our English word "technician." He was a craftsman. Since a craftsman of Jesus' day also worked with stone, He may well have carried mortar for the masons to build when he was young. How about that, brother Mahlon?

Now, let's consider these facts as we ponder the wonder of Christmas; i.e., that God became a human being. Jesus says to Mary at the temple when He was 12, "Did you not know...?" She did know...and so did Joseph. The verb "understand" in verse 50 means to piece things together. They were not able to piece it all together. I'm still working on that - piecing it all together. How about you? But Mary kept pondering it (v. 51). I trust that you are too.

All of this helps us understand the great truth of Hebrews 2:17, "He had to be made like His brethren in all things." Why? "so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God" and, verse 18, "He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."

Let's back up a bit. When Jesus was 5 or 6 years old, He would have attended the synagogue school in Nazareth. When a child was 5 or 6 years old, they went to synagogue school until they were about 10. There, they studied the Torah, the Tanach. The first book they studied was Leviticus. Since Jesus knew at 12, that He had to be in His Father's house, at what age did he come to realize that He would be the ultimate

burnt offering; the ultimate sin offering; the ultimate Fellowship offering and the ultimate trespass offering? We'll be studying Leviticus beginning next year at the end of February.

Isaiah 53:10 reads: "If He would render Himself as a guilt offering." The same Hebrew word is used in Leviticus 5:15. It could also be translated "atoning sacrifice." There in that synagogue school, as Jesus was taught the meaning of the sacrifices, at what point did He know that He was the fulfillment of them all? Luke 2:49 indicates that He certainly knew at 12-years of age. With a perfect mind, a mind like Adam's, He would be able to memorize the entire Old Testament word-for-word and ponder it while He helped Joseph as a carpenter. With such a perfect mind, free from the noetic effects of sin, He probably realized at an early age that He came to die for His people. Maybe Joseph told Jesus what the angel had said to him; namely: "...for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). With such an understanding, He continued on the path which the Father had set for Him until it was finished! This is a wonder to me. Is it a wonder to you?

Not of flesh and blood the Son,
Offspring of the Holy One;
Born of Mary ever blest,
God in flesh is manifest.

Wondrous birth, O wondrous child,
Of the virgin undefiled,
Though by all the world disowned,
Still to be in heaven enthroned.
-Ambrose of Milan

All praise to Thee, Eternal Lord,
Clothed in a garb of flesh and blood;
Choosing a manger for a throne,
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone.
-Martin Luther

The wonder of Christmas is the wonder of the incarnation. That God would become a human being, a mere creature, and pay for our sins...it is so mindboggling. After 53 years, it is a wonder to me that the sovereign, all sufficient God who needs nothing, let alone, me, would go to such lengths to redeem me. Do you experience the same wonder?

The History of "Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne."

Emily Elizabeth Steele Elliott (1836-1897) was the daughter of an Anglican clergyman and the niece to Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871), the author of the famous hymn, "Just as I am."

Emily Elliott published a collection of 48 of her hymns entitled *Under the Pillow*, especially for use of those who were sick in either hospitals, infirmaries or at home.

"Thou didst leave thy throne" was separately printed, however, for the children and the choir in her father's parish, St. Mark's in Brighton, England. Like Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895), who wrote her famous hymn "Once in royal David's city" to explain the significance of the incarnation to children, Elliott wrote her hymn to clarify meaning of Advent and Nativity to children.

The text takes its theme from Luke 2:7, "but there was no room for them in the inn." The first four stanzas employ the technique of antithesis—placing the poverty of Jesus's birth in contrast to the splendor of heaven.

Elliott achieves this contrast by beginning in heaven with the first two lines of each stanza, and then hinging on "but," contrasts Christ's lowly estate during his life on earth. In heaven Christ had a "kingly crown," but on earth "no room" in stanza one. While the "angels sang" in heaven, Christ was born in "great humility" in stanza two.

While the animals all had homes, Christ wandered the "deserts of Galilee" in stanza three—a reference to Matthew 8:20. In stanza four, Christ came as the "living word" but was offered "mocking scorn" and a "crown of thorn" instead. The fifth stanza adds an eschatological tone, calling us to look to heaven where Christ will say, "There is room at my side for thee."

"Thou didst leave thy throne" accomplishes many things for children who sing it. First, the text places the Nativity event within the broader narrative of Christ's life. Second, like many hymns of the season, the first coming of Christ points to the Second Coming—a hallmark of the Advent season. Third, the author uses the refrain to pull the singer into the narrative, making this a hymn of personal commitment.

True or False

A fun thing to get your brain working

Guess which of the following are true and false:

1. Apples...not caffeine...are more efficient at waking you up in the morning.
2. Alfred Hitchcock did not have a belly button.
3. A pack-a-day smoker will lose approximately 2 teeth every 10 years.
4. People do not get sick from cold weather. It's from being indoors a lot more.
5. When you sneeze, all bodily functions stop...even your heart!
6. Only 7% of the population are lefties.
7. Forty people are sent to the hospital for dog bites every minute.
8. Babies are born without kneecaps. They don't appear until they are 2-6 years old.
9. The average person over 50 will have spent 5 years waiting in lines.
10. The toothbrush was invented in 1498.
11. The average housefly lives for one month.
12. Forty thousand Americans are injured by toilets each year.
13. A coat hanger is 44 inches long when straightened.
14. The average computer user blinks seven times a minute.
15. Your feet are bigger in the afternoon than any other time of the day.
16. Most of us have eaten a spider in our sleep.
17. The REAL reason ostriches stick their head in the sand is to search for water.
18. The only two animals that can see behind themselves without turning their heads are the rabbit and the parrot.
19. Most hospitals make money by selling the umbilical cords cut from women who give birth. They are used in vein transplant surgery.
20. The first Harley Davidson motorcycle (built in 1903) used a tomato can for a carburetor.
21. In most TV commercials advertising milk, a mixture of white paint and a little thinner is used in place of the milk.
22. Giraffes are 30 times more likely to get hit by lightning than people.
23. If coloring weren't added to Coca-Cola, it would be green.
24. A chicken once lived for 18 months without a head.
25. Wearing a tie can reduce blood flow to the brain by 7.5 percent.
26. Mount Everest isn't the tallest mountain on Earth.

SEE BOTTOM FOR ANSWERS

They are all TRUE.
Now go back and think about #16.